



A study of an international product launch in the Nordics

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The launch of a product is one of the key drivers for a company to gain top performance and at the same time it is the most costly phase of any product development. The processes of product launch have been researched well, still the human side of the product management launch has not enjoyed academic attention that much. (Di Benedetto, 1999). The main purpose of this study was to study the human side, which in this case is the target consumers of the case company product launch. A quantitative method was chosen, as the objective with the study to better understand consumers' perceptions of the product launch within the Nordics. The analyses were conducted with the data from a pre-and post-survey conducted by a third-part company. This study was set to understand better whether the launch reached the desired goals of the case company and to determine whether the launch was a success or not. The actual research questions being: (RQ1) how was the product launch perceived by the consumers? And (RQ2) are there differences regarding consumers' nationality and age group? The validity of the survey questions was not measured, but the author relied on the third-part company's quality of workmanship. Future studies could build upon specifically from previous research studies on branding, pricing strategies and product launch. The Nordic target consumers' perceptions of the launch were overall positive and the company's goals seem to have been achieved. The differences within the Nordic countries and age group were very small. However, it shows that there are still some differences in the in perceptions of consumers in the different Nordic countries as well as between age groups. Thereby the brand extension was a success within the Nordics, but whether the long term goals were achieved remains open.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The launch of a product is one of the key drivers for a company to gain top performance and at the same time it is the costliest phase of any product development. The processes of a product launch have been researched well, yet the human side of the product management launch have not enjoyed academic attention that much (Di Benedetto, 1999).

There seems not to be studies regarding international product launches on a regional level and especial not from a consumer point of view. To determine whether a product launch was a success or not, most studies are from a from a company's perspective.

This study focuses on a product launch by a case company on the Nordic market. To better understand the consumers' perspective of the product launch, a survey has been conducted. Next, the case company and the product launch are discussed.

1.1 The case company and the product launch

The case company is an international family owned and one of the world's leading manufacturer specialized in a specific area of consumer goods. The company has a long history within its field and is today presence in over 120 countries. When it comes to a product launch in this multinational case company, the overall responsibility of the strategic and tactical decisions lay on the global brand management team in collaboration with the other relevant departments as top management, finance, product, sales management as well as supply and logistics. As the brand management has the largest role on the product launch decisions, the marketing point of view is the main focus.

This study will focus on one product family of one of the case company's brand, which is their first ever international product launch preceded in 2018. The company designs, develops and manufactures their own products, which are sold globally through different distributors as retailers, e-tailers and wholesalers. The particular product of this study was first launched in a specific market, where it was developed by the local team for their market. As the product gained such a success it was decided by the company to go global with the product. The launch was decided to be launched at the same time for all the other

existing markets, which made the launch the first and the largest global launch ever for the case company.

As this particular brand is one of the market leaders of its field in the Nordics, one of the goals of the product launch for the company was to maintain the market position with this new innovative product launch. The main goal throughout the company was to gain growth with reinforcing the well-known brand image. Thereby expand via gaining new loyal customers; both distributors and consumers, as well as markets for the brand. Hence, enlarging the brand equity through a successful brand extension, which is in this particular study going to be determined from the target consumers' point of view within the Nordics.

1.2 The aim of the study

The main purpose of this study is to study the human side, which in this case is the target consumers of the case company product launch. The analyses will be conducted with the data from a pre-and post-survey for the target consumers of the launch, in order to understand the success of the brand extension perceived by the consumers. This study is set to understand better whether the launch reached the desired goals of the case company and to determine whether the launch was a success or not.

The main research questions are:

RQ1: How was the product launch perceived by the consumers?

RQ2: Are there differences regarding consumers' nationality and age group within the Nordic countries?

1.2.1 Delimitations

As the product launch is a real product launch, the company as well as the brand of the new product launched, both will be anonymous. The nature of the thesis might limit the analyses, as the product needs to be discussed on a general level.

Furthermore, the study is also delimited to a specific region, the Nordic countries, and a specific product category, and thus special characteristics of the Nordics and the product may influence the responses from the investigated consumers. Therefore, the results are primarily important for the case company, but can give some insights for other similar types of companies as well.

1.3 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured by starting with a literature overview of the strategic and tactical decisions of a product launch, which are the base and starting point for any product launch. The decisions include market information gathering activities, inter-regional co-operation, marketing mix attributes and branding strategy including brand equity and brand extension. Furthermore, the brand extension and equity will be discussed as well as the consumer behavior.

Moreover, the method used will be introduced and explained. The results of the pre- and post-survey of the product launch will be analyzed, in order to find answers for the research questions. Finalizing the study with a discussion and conclusions of the results. An illustration of thesis structure can be found in Figure 1.

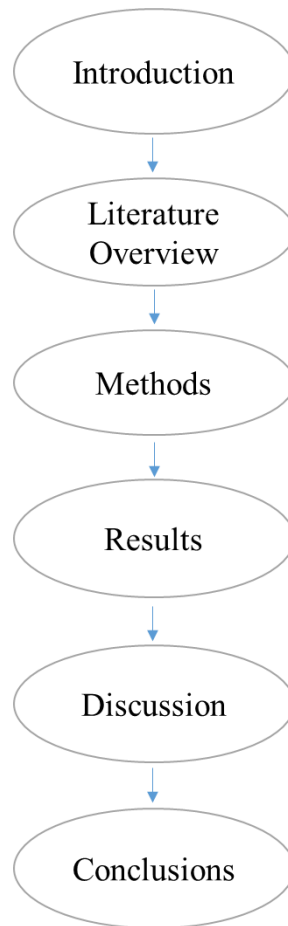


Figure 1. An illustration of the thesis structure.

2 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

“Just as reporters must answer a few fundamental questions in every story they write, decision makers in the new product development process must address five key issues: what to launch, where to launch, when to launch, why to launch and how to launch. These decisions involve significant commitments of time, money and resources. They also go a long way toward determining the success or failure of any new product.” (Hultink, et al., 1997 pp. 244).

The product launch is the costliest as well as the riskiest part of a product development process for any company. Even though a large part of profits is resulted from the product

launch, within years it often remains the least managed stage (Hultink, et al., 1997; Di Benedetto, 1999).

The new product development process is a topic that has been well researched, but has focused mainly on topics such as the complexity and uncertainty of a product development as well as speed of the product launch performance (Ahmad, et al., 2013). Additionally, several studies have focused on industrial companies, as for example Cooper (1979), Hultink et al. (1997) and Ahmad et al. (2013).

The human side of the new product launch studies have received very little focus. Even though it is a crucial factor for the success of the product launch. Important aspects are also how the people involved in the product launch project cooperate between different departments and manage decisions internationally. The differences between the markets and the customers are important aspects as well. Most studies are geographically limited and the complexity of the multinational environment has been unfocused. Therefore, multinational companies struggle in finding the balance between global efficiency and local adaptations of consumer products. (Bruce, et al., 2007).

2.1 Strategic marketing decisions

Two broad decision categories of a product launch have been identified with prior studies, which are strategic – and tactical decisions (Di Benedetto, 1999). The strategic decisions are the base and starting point for the new product launch process, in other words a clear defined marketing strategy is behind every successful product launch. The strategic actions are in line with the decisions during the new product development, as well as the new product launch. They answer often in the early stage of the process on the questions; what to launch, where to launch, when to launch and why to launch. They cover a large part of the path from product development to the product positioning. (Hultink, et al., 1997; Di Benedetto, 1999).

For this study, it is meaningful to examine which of the strategic decisions and actions were executed. As the product launch base relies on them and they have an effect on the determination of whether the result is a success or not.

Several research works have concluded from their studies that in a multinational consumer goods environment the internationally standardized decision-making patterns are more important for the product launch success, than the individual localization decisions. Furthermore, changing the strategic decisions is extremely costly and might even be impossible in the late stage of the product launch process (Di Benedetto, 1999). In this study, the product to be launched is an innovation of its nature. Therefore, the local level should be included on the strategic-decision making process as well. A clear marketing or branding strategy can be formed, when the markets and especially the needs of the end consumers are identified. This can and should be done through a market research (Di Benedetto, 1999).

Next, the market information gathering activities are going to be examined continuing with the summary of the strategic activities.

2.1.1 Market information gathering activities

The correct answers for the questions of a product launch; what, where, when and why are strongly dependent on a company's knowledge of their target market and most importantly their customers. The better the company recognizes their customer's needs, the more sales can be gained. The base of the marketing mix is formed by the company's capacity to gather, share and use information. Followed by the launch activities and decisions with positive effect on the new product performance. Prior studies showed that 80 % of the success cases are the cases, where the company had collected prior market knowledge more than average (Ottum & Moore, 1997).

The marketing information gathering begins simply by gathering relevant information. Several studies in the past has found, that the lack of market information is one of the main reasons for product launches to fail as for example; Cooper (1975) and Ottum & Moore (1997). There are several ways to gather information to meet the market needs, but one of the still growing trends is to include the customers. The customer roles can differ from being information provider to active co-creator or co-developer of the new product. The active role of the customers as co-developer is more likely within business-to-business (B2B) industry, while customers or consumers act more as information

sources in business-to-consumer (B2C) environment, for instance through product testing (Griffith & Lee, 2016).

The information gathering is followed by the information sharing, which has been reported to be a challenge for several companies. The gathered market information might be held within marketing department and therefore not shared outside the marketing department. Even though sharing information has a major role in a product launch success, it also correlates with the organizational processes and further to financial success (Ottum & Moore, 1997). Organizational processes within the company's departments, as well as across the borders and their role in this particular product launch will not be studied in detail due to its wide nature. Hence, the focus lay on the target consumers of the Nordics for this study.

Finally, the gathered market information is to be put into practice. Ottum and Moore's study (1997) showed, that the product success is in stronger correlation with information usage processes, than information gathering and sharing processes. The authors also suggest that even though the marketing department is most likely responsible for the information gathering, the whole project team of the new product launch should be involved in analyzing the results. To conclude, all the market information gathering activities including gathering, analyzing and the usage of the information are all crucial in the success of a product launch. Additionally, it must be noted that the market information gathering activities can and should occur before, during as well as after the product launch (Di Benedetto, 1999).

Although Griffith and Lee (2016) reports that managers have to be conscious that sometimes great amount of information might lead to a situation, where contradicting results might rise and the knowledge is challenging to be beneficial in a meaningful way. According to the authors this can occur especially in the multinational companies, where local results are challenging to be deployed into a new product advantage. The study states that the information gathered from the customers leads to finding new product advantages, but too much cross-national information might depress the effect.

On the basis of previous academic studies, it can be concluded, that the effort and investment in the market information gathering activities effects product launch performance positively. The importance is on the deployment of the gathered information, which can be challenging, especially in international companies due to contracting information. This is linked to other strategic activity processes as for example organizational integration as illustrated in Figure 2 adopted from Griffith and Harvey (2007).

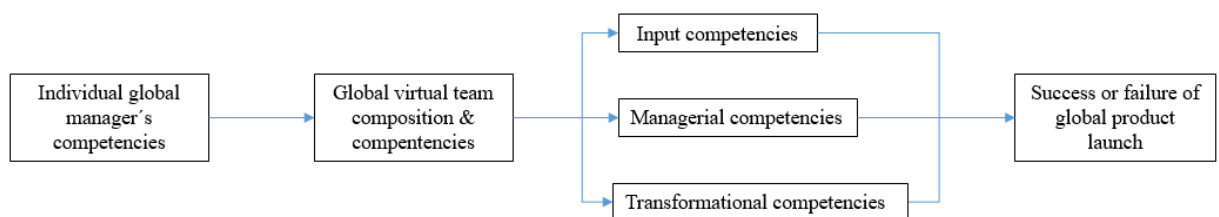


Figure 2. Global Virtual Team Competencies adopted from Griffith and Harvey (2007).

2.1.2 Summary of strategic activities

It can be concluded from above, that market information gathering activities and inter-regional cooperation's does have a positive effect on the product launch success. The study from (Griffith & Lee, 2016) proved, that both cross-national cooperation's and gathering information from customers have a positive effect on the product launch success. The effect is though decreased, when a company has a high level of multinational cross-national cooperation's. Due to the amount of information more intensive cross-national cooperation between countries is increased. This may lead to a position with overwhelming amount of information and even contradicting information, which is challenging for a company to transform the information to be beneficial for any markets. The Figure 3 visualizes the outcome of the study from Griffith & Lee (2016).

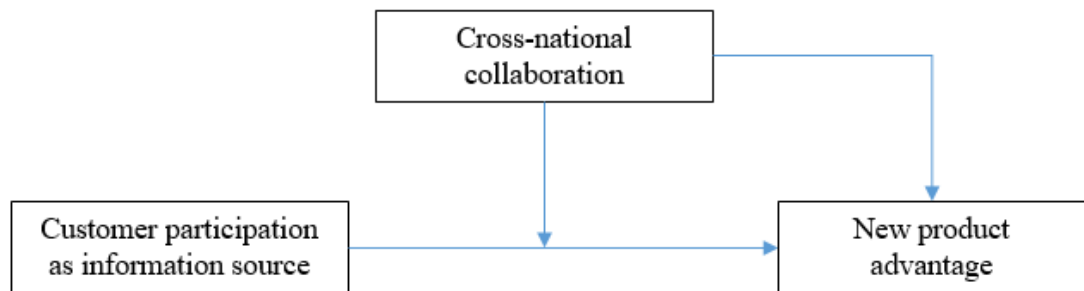


Figure 3. Conceptual model of the role of customer participation and cross-national collaboration on new product advantage adopted from Griffith and Lee (2016).

The individual effect of both cross-national cooperation and market research activities on the product launch is clear, but the activities together might result in another effect.

2.2 Tactical marketing decisions

As the strategic decisions answer on what, where, when and why to launch, the tactical decision answers to how to launch. Tactical marketing decisions consist of product-, branding-, pricing-, advertising- and promotion- as well as distribution decisions. These decisions can be and are modified during the product launch process, but often in the end of the process, hence it is more costly for the company (Hultink, et al., 1997). Despite that, the tactical decisions are often after the strategic decisions in the launch process, they are not less valuable. The product advantages as, price or added value through branding, are reported to be one of the most important determinants of the product success (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995). Besides marketing mix elements, the timing of the launch has an impact on the success as well. The hyper-competitive market has shorten the product cycles and made the launch timings even more decisive, but the local calendars in different regions might have an effect to find the optimal launch timing (Griffith & Harvey, 2007).

For this study, the tactical decisions have been divided into the following categories: marketing mix, timings and brand strategy. In addition, information gathering activities, brand extension and consumer behavior, will be introduced. Due to their importance for any product launch, but especially as well due to their relevance and effect for this particular study.

2.2.1 Marketing mix

Marketing mix as a conceptual framework is one of the most known marketing management paradigms. In academic studies Borden (1965) was among the first to define and use the term marketing mix. According to Borden, it is the marketing manager's responsibility to prepare a mix of marketing elements, which guide the process to the best possible results. Borden's marketing mix includes twelve elements from the product planning to fact finding and analysis. Still, the most used and known is the reduced version with four elements by McCarthy (1964). The four elements or as they mostly are called the four P's of marketing mix are product, price, place and promotion (McCarthy, 1964).

The four P's model is widely used, especially when wishing to effect on the consumer buying behavior, as a tool in tactical marketing planning (Constantinides, 2006). The model is an appealing tool for case analysis, as it is argued to be practical framework and easy to remember (Jobber, 2007). Nevertheless, the popularity and so called traditional four P's marketing mix has been criticized for not to include today's businesses diversity or requirements. For instance, Constantinides (2006) argues, that the requirements of different marketing branches and processes, as retail marketing and service marketing differs that much from each other, that they cannot be narrowed down to these four elements.

Furthermore, amongst other Kotler (1984) has argued that the four P's ignore uncontrollable major unforeseen factors, as political influence and being therefore internally focused. The interactive marketing channels, such as the fast growing marketing online is where the internal focus is an issue, as in the four P the customer is passive. The customer's role is important in the marketing process and even promotion. For instance, market research or ads are referred to a perception of information exchange, as both company's and customers perceptions are influenced by each other. In other words, people

involved in the marketing process influences remarkably and should therefore be included in the marketing mix in the same level as any of the four P's. Hence, the four P's can be extended and adjusted to fit the nowadays business world, cases and analyses. Still, there is no alternative model that could fully compensate the four P's (Yudelson, 1999).

In addition, Kotler & Keller (2016) also suggest that when it comes to marketing world of today, which is much more complex than in the 1960's at McCarthy time, the 4P's are simply not enough. Therefore, the authors suggest that in order to update the holistic marketing concept should include the today's elements as: people, processes, programs and performance. The "new" four P's applies to all within the company, which helps on the alignment that is crucial for a positive product launch.

The marketing mix is used in this study to gather the different tactical decisions together of this particular study. Still, in full awareness of that the mix does not describe the whole process or strategy of the product launch and taken that into a consideration. The tactical decisions do not take into account the quality of the product as a decision as in Di Benedetto's (1999) research, where the product is more a part of the marketing strategy instead. Still, the product itself cannot be excluded fully due to its nature.

Next, the marketing mix elements; price and product, promotion and place with their effect on the product launch performance will each be discussed finalizing with a summary.

2.2.1.1 Price and product

Price is mostly perceived as the desired index between profits and production costs. The choice is, either to go with a market penetration strategy with competitive price with low costs and price leadership position or skimming strategy with premium price and high added value for the customer (Di Benedetto & Calantone, 2007). Prior studies have very different results, whether the penetration – or the skimming strategy effects positively on the product launch performance. Hultink, et al. (1997) studies resulted in product launch success cases, where the prices were set close to the market level and failed cases with lower prices. When earlier Cooper (1979) studied, that the high price at the launch is

mostly cause of failed launch. Still, eight years later Cooper argues that the successful launch is with launching the product with lower price than the competitors. In addition, even later Garrido-Rubio & Polo-Redondo (2005) conducted opposite than Cooper, arguing that setting the launch price higher than the competitor's leads to a success case.

On top of the traditional and well-known penetration and skimming strategies Ingenbleek et al. (2013) argues pricing being more complex. On the background of that, they have formed a comprehensive framework. Ingenbleek et al. (2013) divides pricing practices in three categories: value-, competition- and cost-informed pricing. The information needed and quantified before the launch is these three categories and is moderated by the product advantage, the intensity of the competition and the cost of the product. The study claims, that choosing the right strategy has a remarkable effect on a positive product performance. For instance, when the competition is intense and product advantage high, the price is variable. In this kind of case, the company should use cost-based pricing to succeed in a positive product performance (Ingenbleek, et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to be aware that none of the pricing strategies can result in successful product performance if they are not aligned with the rest of the marketing mix (Di Benedetto & Calantone , 2007). Inadequate pricing can reduce product advantages and threaten the product launch investments, which is why several facts in the marketing mix needs to be considered when choosing the most suitable pricing strategy for that particular product launch. It is also important to choose the most suitable strategy that supports and is aligned with all the marketing communications, as advertisement and product features. For instance, when the product is genuinely better than average, the value-based pricing strategy is the one to follow (Ingenbleek, et al., 2013). And as Yoo, et al. (2000) alternatively states, whether the product to be launched is a high- or low cost, pricing should be used to differentiate the product.

The price of the launching product can be inadequate from the company's, customers or consumers point of view, which is also important to be taken into consideration. According to several authors and studies as for instance Kotler & Keller (2016) and Hultink & Hart (1998), the customers do have a price in their mind, even of a new product, which is based on their expectations and knowledge. If the price is far away from the reference

price, it most probably results in negative feelings and price sensitiveness, which effects on the willingness to buy the product.

2.2.1.2 Promotion

The promotional elements can be among others advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, online marketing, sales promotion and public relations. The main purpose of promoting a new product launch, is to deliver the message of the new product to the target customers with desired goals, mostly profits (Bruce , et al., 2007). The investments in advertising and promotions have been argued to increase customer equity and a company's value in the long-term, which is one of the key targets of any positive product launch (Hanssens, et al., 2009).

Most companies, especially larger multinational companies, like the case company of this study is, is required to create marketing materials as well as activities on two levels; the customers of the company, which are the distributors in other words the sellers of the new product (retail chains, whole sellers and e-tailers) and the targeted users of the new product (end-consumers). Therefore, the launch strategy needs both B2B and B2C targeted marketing activities. The B2B marketing activities includes customer launch event, sell-in- and sell-out tools as premium visual merchandising, when B2C includes point of sales (POS), digital display media above the line marketing (ATL): print, out of home/outdoor advertising (OOH) and digital out of home/outdoor (DOOH), public relations (PR) and media partners. The promotion timing in this particular product launch study was left out as the price of the product was, as the launch date positioned on the same level on each market, without any additional campaign discounts in order to keep the market price on the same level in each region. The theoretical point of view of the common promotional tactics mentioned will be examined below.

B2C: The point of sales (POS) include among others displays standing or counter/table versions, where the product can be placed on a second placement in the stores, wobblers, sealing communication, banners, shelf-speakers and much more. The aim of the POS asset is to gain the target consumers attentions of the product and it's features, resulting to a positive purchase decision. According to Kerfoot, et al. (2003) this is even four times

more possible with a POS, than without a POS of a product. Online play a larger role in today's world than never before, where the end consumer and the companies can easily and directly be connected through such as social media pages. According to the statistics from statista.com released in January 2020 the social media users, which is 86,8 % of the population of the Nordic countries, were active users (Tankovska, 2020). Active social media presence increases among others brand loyalty. Therefore online management has a very important role today in the marketing mix.

Since 1897 with L.Frank Baum it has been agreed extensively, that visual stimulation is one of the most important element, when it comes to the retail industry. The new product of this study was launched on a worldwide known international day. Driven by robust 360 degrees multi-channel international marketing campaign with:

- Digital display media, above the line marketing (ATL: print, out of home/outdoor advertising (OOH) and digital out of home/outdoor (DOOH)).
- Point of sales (POS) in stores and online.
- Premium Visual Merchandising (VM).
- Public relations (PR) and media partnerships.

Aiming to visually reach the target group as positively as possible, with colorful assets.

B2B: Sell-in is a part of sales process, which is mostly driven by collaboration with the marketing/brand- and the sales team. The sales team has the main role in the sales process execution, as they are the firsthand contact with the retailers and wholesalers. The sell-in presentation can include a presentation of the new product, videos and other sales material in order to deliver the message, which are used in order to introduce the product on offer and finally to gain an order (Shapiro & Posner, 2006). Other important tactical technique of the marketing mix is the customer events, as customer targeted events. As with this case study product launch, the product was presented in a sell-in event for the existing key customers, in order to underline the message of the new product and to visualize for the customer how to launch it for the end-consumers. These events are seen important for all parts, as this is where the product can be seen, tested, touched and supported by the supportive material as videos, displays, and signs. In this way it is possible to show the sell-out tools, as well as the size of the company's investment for the launch. The event

shows the customers also how the company, and most importantly the brands present themselves (Blythe, 2002).

2.2.1.3 Place

Place is one of the four P's parameters of marketing mix, which on the other words is successfully managed distribution strategy. The product alone cannot sell itself, as has been argued by Di Benetto (1999). A well-managed distribution strategy with POS material for sales of the product at the final distribution channels, as well as aftersales, is needed in order to get higher market share. The most important distribution parameter for both retail distribution channels and the end-consumer, is the product availability. Accurate order and delivery processes, as well as back-services and invoicing are all needed, in order to reach good level of service and availability. If the company can fulfil these customer and consumer requirements, it is one of the desired distributors and has a good chance for a successful product launch (Hultink & Hart, 1998).

Distribution intensity is an important factor to be included in the distribution strategy. As stated by Carrido-Rubio and Polo-Redondo (2010), the wider distribution the product has, in other words the more retail distributors, it is more likely that the consumers can find it. Therefore, the product should be sold by as many as possible customers for the end-consumers to be found, to ensure the best possible distribution intensity and to ensure the success of the product launch. Intensive distribution strategy is common for low-cost mass-production and not critical for the consumers, which is why the consumers will not go to another distribution point just to find the particular brand. The company can avoid this to be happening by ensuring that the product is available for the customer in the place they are, in other words again at as many distributors as possible.

2.2.2 Summary of the marketing mix

It can be concluded, that a positive product launch needs an adequate price. The price needs to be in line with the brand image and product features, as well as with the current market situation, competitors and most importantly customer expectations.

The main purpose of promoting a new product launch is to deliver the message of the new product to the target customers with desired goals, mostly profits (Bruce, et al., 2007). The investments in advertising and promotions has been argued to increase customer equity and a company's value in the long-term, which is one of the key targets of any positive product launch (Hanssens, et al., 2009).

The product alone cannot sell itself as was argued by Di Benedetto (1999). A well-managed distribution strategy is needed, in order to get higher market share. The most important distribution parameter is the product availability. If a company can fulfil the customer and consumer requirements, it is one of the desired distributors and has a good chance for a successful product launch (Hultink & Hart, 1998).

2.2.3 Branding strategy

A branding strategy is the number and nature of the distinctive and common brand elements, which is also often called brand architecture. How to brand a new product is crucial, where companies can have three following main options; developing new brand elements for the new product, applying existing brand elements or combining new and existing brand elements. When the new product is launched by using an established brand, the product launch is called brand extension (Kotler & Keller, 2016). As it is in this particular product launch case, which will be further discussed later on in this study.

2.3 Information gathering- and sharing activities

Several studies show that on top of all the above introduced strategical and tactical activities related to a successful product launch any kind of information gathering is important as well. The information gathering among others could be market testing, customer feedback or advertising testing (Di Benedetto, 1999).

The product of this study was first launched in the market, where the product to be launched was innovated and originally targeted for. The product sold exceptionally, driven by the target market consumer passions for the particular products. In order for the

company to get an insight of another market, before the actual product launch and sell in, since the difference between the diverse markets are quite distinct, in one of the new markets the target consumers were sampled with the product. Hence, to gain an understanding of the role of the main features of the new product from their perspective. The feedback was very encouraging and positive for both of the showcases. Therefore focus group pre-launch short videos were shown by the sales to the existing distributors and customers in the new market at the sell in event. With the goal to get the product launched and listed at all the existing distribution channels at the same time on the international launch day. Additionally, the press release was arranged six months before the big launch, in order to ensure visibility in advance in the new markets.

2.4 Brand extension and equity

As mentioned earlier, when a company uses an established brand to introduce a new product, as in this case study, the product is called brand extension. It is typical, that 80 to 90 percent of new products in one year, and most successful new products reported by several sources, are actually brand extensions. The brand extension can also be called a sub-brand, which is the case when a new brand is combined with an existing brand. The existing brand that assemble a brand extension or sub-brand is the parent-, master or family-brand. The brand extensions can be categorized in two general divisions; line- and category extension. When the master brand cover the new product within currently serving product category, for example new color or package size, it falls into the line extension category. When in category extension the master brand is used to enter a different product category (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Among severe strategies a successful brand extension is important for any company to achieve economic growth and keep the brand existent (Njissen, 1999).

The brand extension is successful, when the master brand has favorable associations and there is a perception of a match of the extension product and the master brand. The match or as some researchers call it the fit, which has several bases; product- and non-product related attributes, which are related to user types or situations. The perceptions of the fit might be based on technical or manufacturing or surface considerations depending on the consumer knowledge. The consumers might also transfer positive associations from the

original product, but there may still be negative associations to the extension product. The successful brand extension should enable the brand further. On the other hand, unsuccessful brand extension may harm the master brand when there is a strong fit. Still, this does not prevent a company to launch more similar brand extensions. This said, Keller (2013) claim that vertical extensions can be challenging and most often require sub-branding strategies. The most effective marketing strategy for an extension emphasized information about the extension without reminding of the master brand. (Keller , 2013).

Brand equity is the added value endowed to services, as well products for consumers. The brand equity is reflected by how the consumers think, feel and act, towards the brand, as does profitability, market share and prices. There are several perspectives, how the researchers have studied the brand equity, still the customer-based is the most common. Customer-based brand equity is positive, when the brand is identified and the consumers react to the product and marketing more favorable. When the brand is not identified and the consumers react to the product and marketing not favorable, then the brand has a negative customer-based brand equity. The customer-based brand equity has three key elements: 1) Brand equity arises from the consumer response differences. This is when the brand is a commodity and competition is based on price. 2) The consumer response differences are based on consumers brand knowledge (feelings, images, thoughts, experiences and beliefs) associated with the brand. Strong, unique and favorable associations with the brand and consumers must be created. 3) All marketing aspects of the brand are reflected in perceptions, preferences and behavior related with the brand equity (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The stronger the brand the greater revenue or growth (Coyne & Horn, 2009).

In addition, when a company's aim is high brand equity, the company should invest highly in advertising, set the price of the product high and ensure good image at all the retail distributors of the product. Whereas, if the company promotes its products for the consumers with low price offers that results in low brand equity as shown in Figure 4 adopted from Yoo et al, (2000).

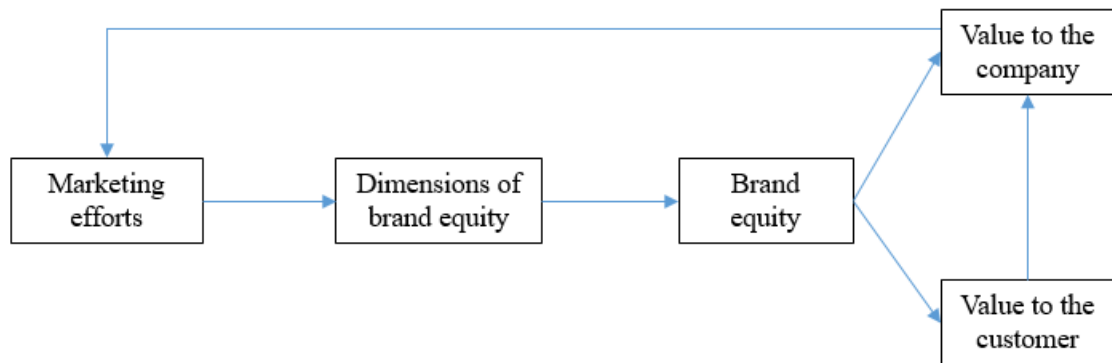


Figure 4. A conceptual framework of Brand Equity adopted from Yoo et al, (2000).

In order to reinforce brand equity, the brand has to constantly move forward towards correct direction with newness and compelling marketing. Following the conceptual framework by Yoo, et al. (2000), a structural model is where the marketing mix and the brand equity model is combined. As determined earlier, the brand equity includes quality, brand loyalty and brand associations. The empirical study of Yoo, et al. (2000), showed that the high brand equity is gained by high advertising spending, correct (not the lowest) price and good store image and high distribution intensity as illustrated in Figure 5.

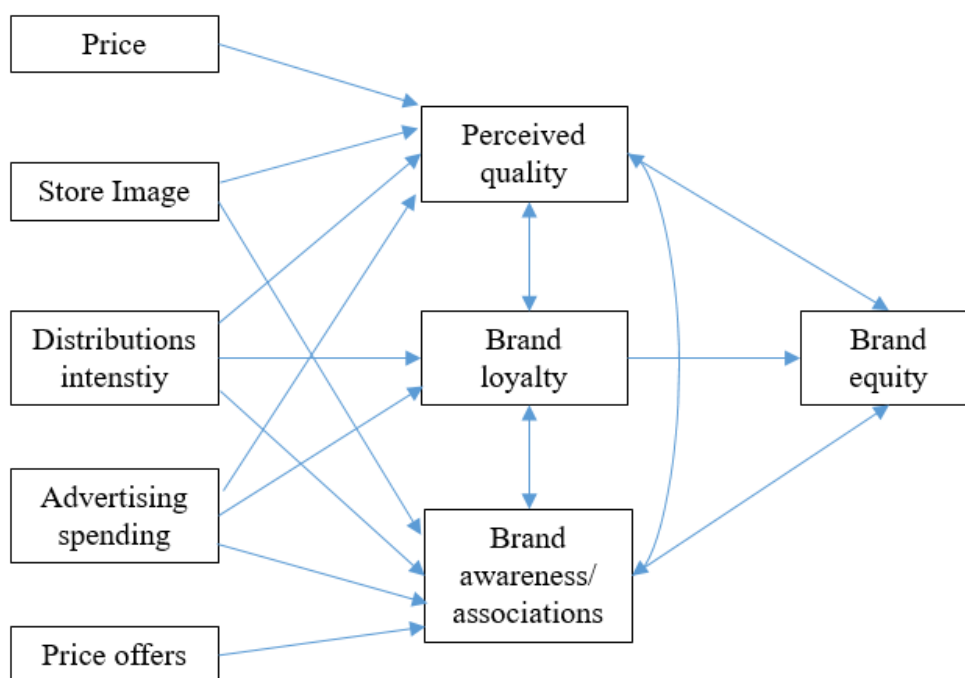


Figure 5. A structural model: Marketing Mix Elements and Brand Equity adopted from Yoo et al, (2000).

2.5 Consumer behavior

“All marketing decisions are based on assumptions and knowledge of consumer behavior” (Hawkins , et al., 2007 pp. 34).

The consumer behavior is a study of how individuals, groups and organizations select, buy, use and dispose goods, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants (Solomon, 2013). The cultural (culture, subculture and social class), social (reference groups, family, social roles and statuses) and personal (age, life stage, occupation, economic circumstances, lifestyle, personality and self-awareness) are factors, which has an impact on the consumers buying behavior. The cultural factors influencing most extensively the consumer behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The consumer behavior is influenced also by psychological processes as motivation, perception, learning and memory. Theory, as well as the reality of consumer behavior, must

be fully understood by the companies and especially the marketing department. The buying process is most commonly a sequence of problem recognition, information gathering, and evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behavior, also called the five-stage model of the consumer buying process (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Illustrated in Figure 6.

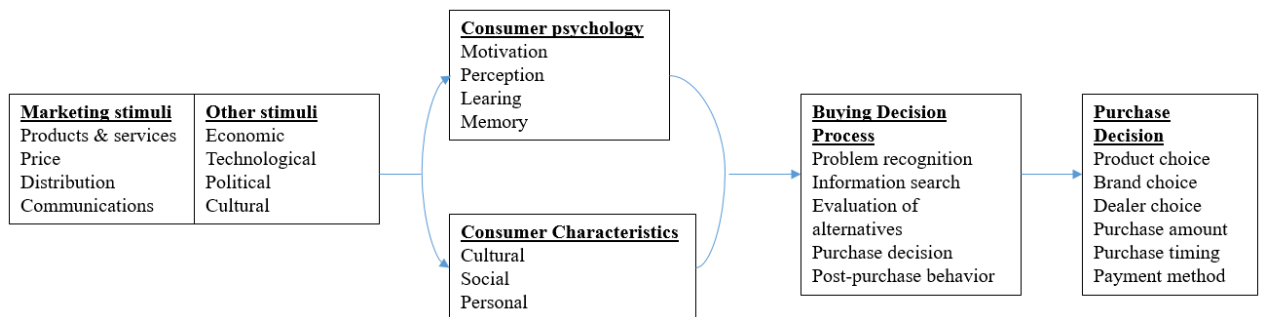


Figure 6. A model of Consumer behavior adopted from Kotler & Keller (2016) p 287.

The consumer behavior is and has been for several years one of the most interesting research topics, both academically and within field of marketing. This is for a good reason, as the knowledge of consumer behavior is a competitive advantage that can increase the company's value and performance by choosing the correct marketing strategies that fit the target consumers. The need to understand the consumers buying behavior is crucial in order to place the desired and successful product on the market (Belch & Belch, 2009). However, in today's world the technology and globalization have both pursued tools to read the consumers easier, but also at the same time the consumers are more active themselves, which they are even expected to be in today's world. Thus, the borders between the countries in the world are not as clear as before, but the cultural differences do still exist, especially between the different continents, even between countries for instance within the Nordic countries.

In the McKinsey article by Court et al. (2009) it was stated, that the communication has moved from one-way (marketer to consumer) to a two-way communication. The companies must both satisfy the consumer demand, as well manage the word-of-mouth communications. However, a more recent article by McKinsey by Charm et al. (2020), states that even deeper insight of the consumers is needed as the consumer behavior is changing faster than ever. Especially the year 2020 has forced everyone to change their habits and most probably believes as well. The behavioral science confirms that by identifying the consumers new beliefs and habits is the key to change consumer behavior. The actions that is recommended for the companies to change the consumer behavior on the long term are; reinforcing new positive beliefs, sustain new habits, shape emerging habits with new offers, align messages to consumer mindsets and analyze consumer beliefs as well as behaviors (Charm, et al., 2020).

2.6 Summary of the literature overview

The literature overview has gone through the two levels of decision making; strategic and tactical, as well as their subcategories relevant for this study. In addition, brand strategy including brand extension and equity with further discussion of the consumer behavior. Figure 7 summarizes the key components for a successful product launch of this study. As stated earlier, in this study the main focus is within the consumers, more specifically on consumers' perceptions regarding this particular product launch of the case company.

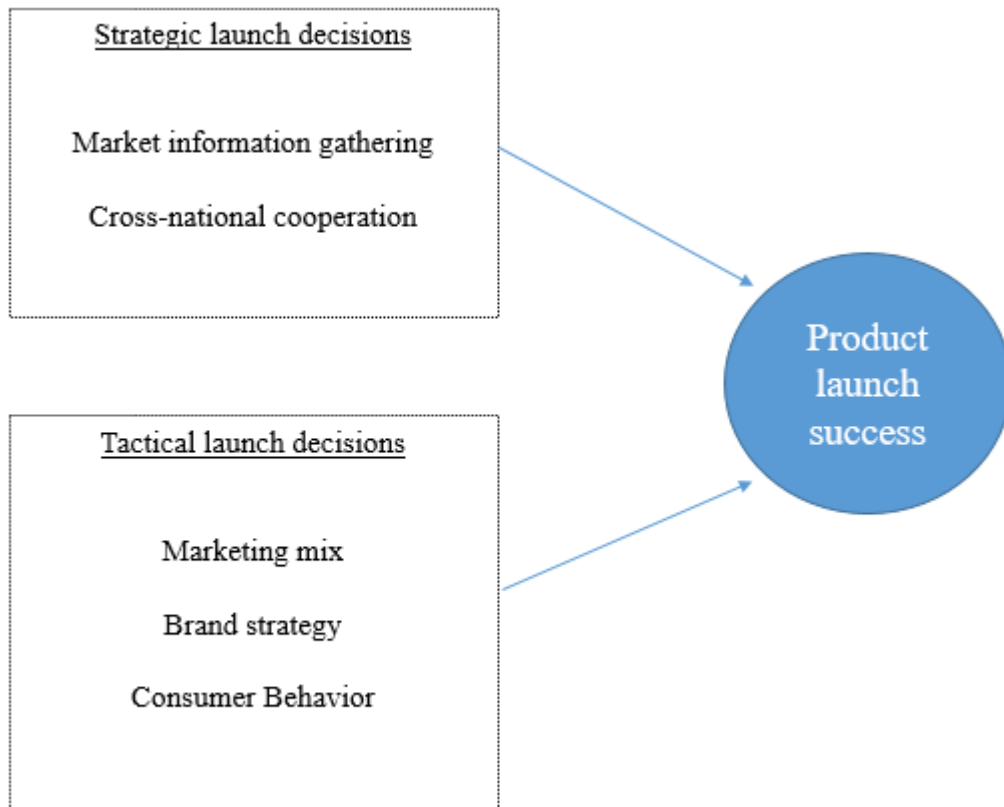


Figure 7. Components for a successful product launch of this study.

3 METHODS

For this study a quantitative method has been chosen, as the objective with the study is to better understand consumers' perceptions of the product launch within the Nordics. For that a large number of consumers from all around the Nordics is needed.

In this chapter, the process from data collection with the questionnaires to the quantitative analysis method will be described.

3.1 Data collection and description of data

This study is made in collaboration with a large well-known company within the field of consumer goods. The brand and marketing management team of the case company ordered from a large media company a pre- and post-survey of the target consumers within the Nordics for the new product launch. Therefore, the survey was originally conducted as a pre- and post-survey to interview the target group of the new product, which is why the questions of the survey were made by the third-party company.

The actual raw data, that is used for this study is originally gathered from the target group of the product launched. In other words, individuals measuring how they perceive the product, brand and the launch activities by the case company of this study.

The original survey made by the third-party company included 29 questions without the sub questions and with sub questions the amount of questions resulted in 99 questions. The survey was made by the third-party company with a computer assisted web interviewing (CAWI) system by email, resulting in a total of around 500 responses per country; 250 responses in the pre-survey and 250 responses in the post-survey in the local language. The raw data of the interview was delivered in MS Excel™ spreadsheet by the third part company for this study. The research questions were categorized, translated and coded in order to keep the brand and the industry for the study confidential.

For the purpose of this study 26 questions were chosen from the survey (see Appendix 1 for the chosen survey questions). The questions Q1-Q5 are showing whether it is pre- or post-survey and background variables of the consumers; pre- vs post-survey, age, region, nationality and current status or occupation (see Table 1). The questions Q29-Q49 evaluated the campaign and ad effect of the product launch, with subcategories; campaign awareness, cut through, ad liking, ad evaluation, product evaluation and change in purchase intention. The response scales for Q31-49 with Likert scale answers; (Q31) very positive (5), positive (4), neither (3), negative (2), very negative (1), (Q32-48) very much (5), some (4), little (3), neither (2), not at all (1) and (Q49) very likely (5), likely (4), neither (3), not likely (2), not likely at all (1). Do not know answers were excluded and

treated as missing values. The campaign and ad effect survey questions are the most relevant for the results of this study and in order to find the answer for the research questions.

The raw-data received from the third part company was gathered into a new MS Excel™ file. The data had to be carefully studied and categorized: The data was also coded, in order to be uploaded and analyzed in the IBM SPSS™ software.

The samples from all the four Nordic countries were categorized in pre- and post-survey data. In addition, the geographical background, age groups (target groups), nationality and occupation. The mail survey resulted in 2071 samples in total of the target group in the four Nordic countries as can be seen in Table 1. As the target group is only one gender, this has not been included in the analyses.

The data collection for the pre-survey was conducted during one week. The post-survey was collected after the product launch within the same time frame of one week, four weeks after the pre-survey.

Table 1. Sample characteristics per survey, age group, nationality, region and occupation (n=2071).

CHARACTER	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENT %
Survey (n=2071)	Pre	1035	50
	Post	1036	50
Age group	16-30	1029	49,7
	31-45	1042	50,3
Nationality	Swedish	527	25,4
	Danish	520	25,1
	Finnish	517	25
	Norwegian	507	24,5
Occupation	Student	510	24,6
	Employed	1195	57,7
	Unemployed	150	7,2
	Home going	53	2,6
	Retired	43	2,1
	Other	114	5,5

The method of CAWI (computer assisted interview) for reaching the consumers and using a third-party company's data does not allow calculations of the actual response rate. As it is not possible to access the data on how many target consumers actually received the link for the survey. Nevertheless, the sample size is large and ought to represent the target groups well. Thus, the survey results ought to be of good quality and represent Nordic consumers' perceptions of this particular product launch.

3.2 Statistical analysis methods

For the statistical analysis in this study IBM SPSS™ (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software version 26 was used. The SPSS software is widely used by researchers to perform quantitative analysis. The software is able to read and write data from statistical packages, databases and spreadsheets. The data can be characterized, managed, prepared and most importantly analyzed with different techniques. As the name refers, IBM SPSS™ is a software performing statistical procedures. (Pallant, 2016).

The data received from the third-part company was organized, categorized and coded in MS Excel™ and converted into IBM SPSS™ for analysis. The descriptive statistics are presented with the n-value, mean, median, standard deviation and a percentage of the respondents answering positively for a particular survey question. The n-value is the number of respondents for that particular survey question and mean is the same as the average, totaling all variables and dividing by number of cases. Median is the midpoint in a range of scores. Standard deviation (SD) is the most used measure of distribution, which is the average amount of variability in a set of scores or in other words the average distance of each data value from the mean.

The comparative analysis performed with the IBM SPSS™ for this study were T-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA). For this purpose, the normality and homogeneity of the variables used in the analysis was checked and verified.

The independent samples T-test is a parametric test that compares the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is a statistical evidence that the target consumer's means of this study are significantly different. (Hayes & Westfall, 2020).

ANOVA, which is also called the Fisher analysis of variance is the extension of the t- and z-test methods. It is a statistical method that separate the observed variance data into different components to use for additional tests and is used for three or more set of data to achieve information regarding the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Simply said, ANOVA gives a statistical test of whether two or more data set means are equal and generalizes the t-test beyond two means. The ANOVA's F-ratios is

equaling close to one when there is no true variance between the groups. (Kenton & Walters, 2021)

3.3 External and internal validity

The size of the sample is large as a total, as well for each country. Hence, the external validity, which in this case is the representativeness of the perceptions of the Nordic consumers that were in the target group of this particular product launch should be good. The third-party company is experienced in setting up similar surveys and thus the data collection procedure ought to be well performed and the questions stated of good quality. Nevertheless, the author was not able to control the internal and content validity (for instance the phrasing of the questions) of the survey questions and this can be seen as a limitation to this study.

4 RESULTS

The chosen research questions relevant for this study was examined and measured with the results derived from IBM SPSS™. A Nordic benchmark for the survey was set by the third-part company, which is based on their pre- and post-surveys for similar studies carried out in the Nordic countries.

As mentioned in the previous chapter the campaign and ad effect survey questions are the most relevant for the results and research questions of this study. These were the survey questions (Q29-Q49) that evaluated the campaign, ad and product effect of the product launch, with subcategories; campaign awareness, cut through, ad liking, ad evaluation, product evaluation and change in purchase intention. The results of these survey questions will be next presented by each research questions of this study.

4.1 RQ1: How was the product launch perceived by the target consumers within the Nordics?

The evaluation resulted in that 38, 7% of the respondents of the survey recognized the brand behind the ad. The ads of the product launch campaign were perceived very positive

or positive by the 59,2 % of the respondents. The ad made 49,6 % of the respondent smile and 37,6 % felt the ad was relevant either very much or some. (See Table 2).

The campaign provided call to action, as 40,7 % of the target group respondent that they want to try the product. The product was perceived different than what they usually know from the brand by 41,2 % of the respondents and the brand was perceived more positive by 51,8 % of the respondents. The lowest percentage of 24,7 % was the result of the ad making want to visit the brand homepage. Furthermore, Table 2 shows the mean, median and standard deviation values for each survey questions regarding the campaign effect and ad evaluation.

Table 2. The results of the campaign effect and ad evaluation.

Statement/survey question	N	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	%
What was your overall impression of the ads?*	2018	3,60	4,00	0,922	59,2
The ads stand out from other brands?*	1916	3,03	3,00	1,350	34,4
The ad makes me smile.**	1994	3,14	3,00	1,331	49,6
The ad is trustworthy.**	1786	3,50	4,00	1,099	56,9
The ad is relevant for me.**	1980	2,84	3,00	1,302	37,6
The ad makes me want to try the product.**	2001	2,88	3,00	1,343	40,7
The ad makes me want to buy the product.**	1977	2,71	3,00	1,280	33,2
The product is different than the usual product I know from the brand are.**	1812	3,03	3,00	1,256	41,2
The brand seems more positive.**	1953	3,35	4,00	1,198	51,8
The ad makes me want to visit the brand homepage.**	1994	2,44	2,00	1,259	24,7
The ad makes me want to know more about the brand.**	1981	2,74	3,00	1,277	34,6

*Scale: The level of impression of the ads: (5) very positive, (4) positive, (3) neither, (2) negative, (1) very negative. The percentage of the respondents answering 4 or 5.

**Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very much, (4) some, (3) neither, (2) little, (1) not at all. The percentage of the respondents answering 4 or 5.

The product launch campaign succeeded well in communicating the key message about the product such as “comfort”. As the product was perceived comfortable by 90,1 % and the product could make feel comfortable 80,5 % of the respondents. Additionally, the key messages, as “makes me feel free and unconstrained” was agreed by 87 % and “makes you feel good about yourself” by 73,8 % of the respondents. Still, most of the target group perceived the product as “basic” by 85 % and “modern” by 49 %, but not that “sexy”, as the extension of the agreement was at level 17,2 %. The lowest result of 16 % was in purchase lift. Thus, compared to the Nordic benchmark (14 %) set by the third-part company it was above the average. Furthermore, Table 3 shows the mean, median and standard deviation (SD) values for each survey questions regarding the campaign effect and product evaluation.

Table 3. The results of the campaign effect and product evaluation.

Statement/survey question	N	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	%
The ads convey that the product is comfortable.*	1992	4,49	5,00	0,895	90,1
The ads convey that the product is modern.*	1960	3,24	3,00	1,221	49,0
The ads convey that the product is basic.*	1979	4,26	5,00	0,958	85,0
The ads convey that the product is sexy.*	1984	2,3	2,00	1,128	17,2
The ads convey that the product allows you to be yourself.*	1944	3,97	4,00	1,087	73,8
The ads convey that the product allows you to feel free and unhindered.*	1974	4,35	5,00	0,961	87,0
The ads convey that the product can make you feel comfortable.*	1976	4,16	4,00	1,060	80,5
The ads make it more or less likely that you will buy products from this brand.**	1967	2,79	3,00	1,058	16,0

*Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very much, (4) some, (3) neither, (2) little, (1) not at all. The percentage of the respondents answering 4 or 5.

**Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very likely, (4) likely, (3) neither, (2) not likely, (1) not likely at all. The percentage of the respondents answering 4 or 5.

4.2 RQ2: Are there differences regarding target consumers' nationality and age group?

The results show that there is no statistical significant differences in the mean scores between the countries in seven out of eleven survey questions, when it comes to the campaign effect and ad evaluation between the respondents nationalities. In other words, the null hypothesis is mostly rejected as the probability-value (P-value) is higher than 0,05 (See Table 4).

However, there are four survey questions that resulted with a probability-value (P-value) less than 0,05. That shows that there is a significant difference in the mean scores between the countries. These were results in the following questions; whether the ad was perceived as trustworthy or relevant ($p < 0,001$) for the respondent and call to action ($p < 0,01$) as well as purchase intention ($p < 0,01$). When it comes to trustworthiness and relevance Finland had the lowest mean value (3,19 and 2,58), Denmark the highest on trustworthiness (3,48) and Norway the highest on relevance (3,07). The call to action and purchase intention with the lowest mean values in Denmark (2,75 and 2,58) and Sweden (2,74 and 2,63), but highest in Norway (3,05 and 2,85). Whether the brand seemed more positive, a small difference could be found in the mean scores with a probability-value (P-value) of less than 0,05, where Denmark had lower mean value (2,99) than the other Nordic countries (Sweden 3,14, Finland 3,25 and Norway 3,29). Despite the statistical significance, the actual difference in the mean scores between the countries is quite small.

Furthermore, Table 4 also presents the F-value for each survey question regarding campaign effect and ad evaluation value. The Levene test for homogeneity of variances was performed and was greater than 0,05 for each variable.

Table 4. The results of the campaign effect and ad evaluation per country.

Statement/survey question	Sweden			Denmark			Finland			Norway			F-value	P-value
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.		
What was your overall impression of the ads?*	519	3,15	1,247	503	3,21	1,21	500	3,39	1,201	496	3,26	1,226	1,285	0,278
The ads stand out from other brands?***	487	3,15	1,231	475	3,30	1,247	478	3,37	1,181	476	3,27	1,238	1,505	0,211
The ad makes me smile.**	508	2,97	1,394	494	3,13	1,369	497	3,11	1,316	495	3,18	1,315	1,702	0,165
The ad is trustworthy.**	421	3,23	1,294	477	3,48	1,229	462	3,19	1,159	426	3,42	1,215	13,832	0,000
The ad is relevant for me.**	499	2,85	1,341	492	2,81	1,329	494	2,58	1,214	495	3,07	1,287	18,642	0,000
The ad makes me want to try the product.**	506	2,74	1,348	494	2,75	1,346	502	2,99	1,324	499	3,05	1,329	4,877	0,002
The ad makes me want to buy the product.**	500	2,63	1,283	489	2,58	1,267	495	2,69	1,291	493	2,85	1,279	4,329	0,005
The product is different than the usual product I know from the brand are.**	434	2,90	1,320	472	3,05	1,258	475	3,05	1,267	431	3,04	1,212	1,862	0,134
The brand seems more positive.**	494	3,14	1,351	486	2,99	1,29	482	3,25	1,313	491	3,29	1,260	2,943	0,032
The ad makes me want to visit the brand homepage.**	505	2,48	1,302	498	2,40	1,214	493	2,41	1,266	498	2,54	1,254	2,432	0,063
The ad makes me want to know more about the brand.**	501	2,68	1,292	491	2,69	1,257	493	2,73	1,293	496	2,82	1,276	1,693	0,166

*Scale: The level of impression of the ads: (5) very positive, (4) positive, (3) neither, (2) negative, (1) very negative.

**Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very much, (4) some, (3) neither, (2) little, (1) not at all.

The survey questions regarding the campaign effect and product evaluation per country resulted all with a probability-value (P-value) less than 0,05. This shows that there is a significant statistical difference in the mean scores between the respondent's nationalities. The lowest mean value score was in Denmark for all other survey questions, except in the question of likeliness the ads making the respondent to buy the products from the brand. The lowest mean value (2,65) in this call to action questions was in Finland. Despite the statistical significance, the actual difference in the mean scores is quite small (See Table 5).

Furthermore, Table 5 also presents the F-value for each survey question regarding campaign effect and product evaluation value. The Levene test for homogeneity of variances was performed as well and was greater than 0,05 for each variable.

Table 5. The results of the campaign effect and product evaluation per country.

Statement/survey question	<u>Sweden</u>			<u>Denmark</u>			<u>Finland</u>			<u>Norway</u>			F-value	P-value
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.		
The ads convey that the product is comfortable.*	507	4,48	0,983	483	4,33	1,04	497	4,47	0,886	497	4,57	0,889	5,231	0,001
The ads convey that the product is modern.*	502	3,24	1,252	491	2,83	1,213	485	3,45	1,208	490	3,24	1,241	18,707	0,000
The ads convey that the product is basic.*	505	4,3	1,037	484	3,99	1,141	497	4,27	0,964	493	4,28	1,029	8,514	0,000
The ads convey that the product is sexy.*	506	2,51	1,174	492	2,22	1,068	492	2,58	1,156	494	2,43	1,149	9,303	0,000
The ads convey that the product allows you to be yourself.*	496	3,85	1,283	481	3,74	1,24	489	3,92	1,124	478	3,94	1,189	2,739	0,042
The ads convey that the product allows you to feel free and unhindered.*	506	4,43	1,025	488	4,22	1,1	488	4,23	0,994	492	4,35	1,007	8,353	0,000
The ads convey that the product can make you feel comfortable.*	510	4,36	1,059	487	4,15	1,171	495	4,17	1,028	484	3,71	1,262	24,203	0,000
The ads make it more or less likely that you will buy products from this brand.**	502	2,89	1,176	494	2,73	1,005	484	2,65	0,890	487	2,89	1,118	6,246	0,000

*Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very much, (4) some, (3) neither, (2) little, (1) not at all.

**Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very likely, (4) likely, (3) neither, (2) not likely, (1) not likely at all.

The results of the age groups show that there are no statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the two age groups, when it comes to six out of eleven survey questions regarding the campaign effect and ad evaluation. These are as standing out from other brands, purchase intention, the difference of the normal known products form the brand and the intention to find more about the product or brand. In other words, the null hypothesis is rejected as the probability-value (P-value) is higher than 0,05 on the results of these survey questions.

However, five survey questions; impression of the ads, trustworthiness, relevance, intention to try the product and more positive perception of the brand, resulted in a probability-value (P-value) less than 0,05. The age group of 31-45 scored lower mean value in all these five survey questions than the age group of 16-30. Thus, the magnitude of the differences in the means was very small (eta squared $\eta^2 < 0,01$). As this is in Cohen's (1988) terms a small effect, as he classifies 0,01 as small, 0,06 as medium and 0,14 as a large effect (Cohen, 1988). Furthermore, Table 6 shows the mean, median and standard deviation (SD) values for each survey questions and age group regarding the campaign effect and product evaluation.

Table 6. The results of the campaign effect and ad evaluation per age group.

Statement/survey question	<u>Age group 16-30</u>			<u>Age group 31-45</u>			t/df	p-value	η^2
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.			
What was your overall impression of the ads?*	1004	3,41	1,201	1014	3,10	1,227	5,675/2016	0,000	0,003
The ads stand out from other brands?***	968	3,35*	1,192	948	3,19*	1,256	2,960/1914	0,465	0,002
The ad makes me smile.**	992	3,17*	1,328	1002	3,02*	1,369	2,623/1992	0,286	0,001
The ad is trustworthy.**	881	3,46*	1,178	905	3,20*	1,265	4,489/1784	0,000	0,003
The ad is relevant for me.**	987	2,94*	1,282	993	2,72*	1,317	3,856/1978	0,023	0,002
The ad makes me want to try the product.**	995	3,01*	1,335	1006	2,76*	1,341	4,072/1999	0,038	0,002
The ad makes me want to buy the product.**	979	2,75*	1,266	998	2,63*	1,296	2,055/1975	0,179	0,001
The product is different than the usual product I know from the brand are.**	864	2,99*	1,242	948	3,04*	1,286	0,855/1810	0,104	0,000
The brand seems more positive.**	967	3,30*	1,249	986	3,04*	1,351	4,507/1951	0,000	0,002
The ad makes me want to visit the brand homepage.**	990	2,56*	1,260	1004	2,36*	1,252	3,555/1992	0,810	0,002
The ad makes me want to know more about the brand.**	982	2,85*	1,272	999	2,61*	1,276	4,150/1979	0,306	0,002

*Scale: The level of impression of the ads: (5) very positive, (4) positive, (3) neither, (2) negative, (1) very negative.

**Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very much, (4) some, (3) neither, (2) little, (1) not at all.

The results of the age groups show that there are no statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the two age groups, when it comes to five out of eight survey questions regarding the campaign effect and product evaluation. These are survey questions of whether the product was perceived modern, basic, sexy, feeling comfortable and call to action (purchasing the product). In other words, the null hypothesis is rejected as the probability-value (P-value) is higher than 0,05 on these survey questions.

Thus, three survey questions regarding the campaign effect and product evaluation as comfortability, being yourself and feeling free and unhindered, resulted in with a probability-value (P-value) less than 0,05. And then there is a significant statistical difference in the mean scores between the two age groups. The age group of 31-45 resulted in lower mean value in all these three survey questions than the age group of 16-30. Thus, the magnitude of the differences in the means was very small (eta squared $\eta^2 < 0,01$) (Cohen, 1988). Furthermore, Table 7 shows the mean, median and standard deviation values for each survey questions and age group regarding the campaign effect and product evaluation.

Table 7. The results of the campaign effect and product evaluation per age group.

Statement/survey question	<u>Age group 16-30</u>			<u>Age group 31-45</u>			t/df	P-value	η^2
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.			
The ads convey that the product is comfortable.*	993	4,51*	0,919	999	4,41*	0,987	2,320/1990	0,016	0,001
The ads convey that the product is modern.*	974	3,14*	1,236	986	3,23*	1,259	1,607/1958	0,101	0,001
The ads convey that the product is basic.*	984	4,25*	1,017	995	4,17*	1,082	1,719/1977	0,179	0,001
The ads convey that the product is sexy.*	990	2,39*	1,143	994	2,49*	1,145	1,928/1982	0,720	0,001
The ads convey that the product allows you to be yourself.*	973	3,94*	1,176	971	3,79*	1,244	2,741/1942	0,001	0,001
The ads convey that the product allows you to feel free and unhindered.*	982	4,40*	0,976	992	4,23*	1,085	3,622/1972	0,010	0,002
The ads convey that the product can make you feel comfortable.*	985	4,15*	1,122	991	4,05*	1,186	0,368/1,999	0,368	0,001
The ads make it more or less likely that you will buy products from this brand.**	978	2,81**	1,048	989	2,77**	1,068	0,508/1965	0,508	0,000

*Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very much, (4) some, (3) neither, (2) little, (1) not at all.

**Scale: The level of agreement with the statement: (5) Very likely, (4) likely, (3) neither, (2) not likely, (1) not likely at all.

A t-test of the pre- and post-survey results resulted in no significant differences between all the investigated questions. Hence, the results seem to be dependent of the timing of the survey. The results of the t-test regarding pre- and post-survey can be found in the Appendix 2.

5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results of the study will be summarized and discussed in connection with previous studies. Followed by managerial implications, limitations and further studies and finally the conclusions.

As addressed in the introduction, the main purpose of this study was to study the human side, which in this case is the target consumers of the case company product launch. The analyses were conducted with the data from a pre-and post-survey for the target consumers of the launch, in order to understand the success of the brand extension perceived by the consumers. This study was set to understand better whether the launch reached the desired goals of the case company and to determine whether the launch was a success or not. The actual research questions being: (RQ1) how was the product launch perceived by the consumers? And (RQ2) are there differences regarding consumers' nationality and age group?

As stated earlier, the market information gathering activities and inter-regional cooperation's does have a positive effect on the product launch success. The study from Griffith & Lee (2016) proved, that both cross-national cooperation's and gathering information from customers have a positive effect on the product launch success. The results of this study showed that the product launch campaign survey reached out to 2071 women of the target group age, which seems a fair audience within the Nordics. The ads of the product launch campaign, as well as the brand, was perceived positive by more than half of the respondents. In other words, the case company seems to have been able to transform the information they gathered from the possible target consumers and market prior the product launch to be beneficial.

The main purpose of promoting a new product launch is to deliver the message of the new product to the target customers with the desired goals (Bruce, et al., 2007). The product launch campaign seems to have communicated the key message about the product such as “comfort”. Additionally, the key messages as “makes me feel free and unconstrained” and “makes you feel good about yourself” were agreed to by most of the respondents. Still, most of the respondents perceived the product as “basic” and half of the respondents as “modern”, but not that “sexy”. However, the key message of the product launch set by the case company was comfort, which was according to the survey results appealing for the target group. Therefore, the communication of the key message with the ads of the launch was satisfying.

As was argued by Di Benedetto (1999) the product alone cannot sell itself. A well-managed distribution strategy was stated by Hultink & Hart (1998) to be needed, in order for a brand to achieve higher market share. The campaign provided call to action, as almost half of the target group respondents wanted to try the product. The product was also perceived differently by 41,2 % of the respondents than what they usually know from the brand. If a company can fulfil customer and consumer requirements, it is one of the desired distributors and has a good chance for a successful product launch (Hultink & Hart, 1998). The results of this study, as well as the prior studies, showed that product availability plays an important role, especially for the future success of the product launch as well as for the target group of this case company.

Cultural factors influence most extensively consumer behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The results showed that regarding the campaign effect and ad, as well as product evaluation per country, there is a statistical difference between the respondents' nationalities. Denmark and Finland had the lowest results in the mean values compared to Sweden and Norway. This might anticipate that the brand is more known and has stronger perceptions in Denmark and Finland than in Sweden and Norway. However, the actual difference between all the four countries was very small.

The results of the age groups showed that there were no statistical differences between the two age groups, when it comes to the campaign effect and ad evaluation with statements, as standing out from other brands, the purchase intention, the difference of the

normal known products from the brand and the intention to find out more about the brand. Thus, the impression of the ads, the trustworthiness, the relevance, the intention to try the product and the more positive perception of the brand, resulted in a statistical difference between the two target age groups. However, there was no actual difference in the scores for the two age groups with the result of the campaign effect and ad as the magnitude of the differences were all small. The results regarding the campaign effect and product evaluation as comfortability, being yourself and feeling free and unhindered, resulted in a statistical difference between the two age groups, but the magnitude of the differences was small. However, the results of the age groups showed that there are no statistical differences in all the rest of the results regarding the campaign effect and product evaluation. The lowest mean score was mostly on the older age group, which could indicate that the launch was more aimed and relevant for the younger target group and that the older age group had a stronger perception of the brand. The results indicated that the nationality and age differences are still existent, but at least between the Nordic countries and within the two target age groups they were all very small.

The buying process is most commonly described as a sequence: problem recognition, information gathering, and evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behavior. This sequence is also referred to as five-stage model of the consumer buying process (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This is for a good reason, as the knowledge of consumer behavior is a competitive advantage, which can increase the company's value and performance by choosing the correct marketing strategies that fit the target consumers. The need to understand the consumers buying behavior is crucial in order to place a desired and successful product on the market (Belch & Belch, 2009). The results from this study regarding the purchase intention was quite low. However, compared to the Nordic benchmark set by the third-part company it was above the average.

5.1 Managerial implications

The stronger the brand the greater revenue or growth (Coyne & Horn, 2009). In addition, when a company's aim is high brand equity, the company should invest highly in advertising and ensure good image at all the retail distributors of the product (Yoo, et al., 2000).

In order to reinforce brand equity, the brand has to constantly move forward towards correct direction with newness and compelling marketing. The empirical study of Yoo et al. (2000), showed that high brand equity is gained by high advertising spending, correct (not the lowest) price and good store image and high distribution intensity. Anyhow, the high brand equity needs consumers and as discussed earlier in today's world the technology and globalization have both pursued tools to read the consumers easier. Still, the consumers are more active themselves and today they are even expected to be. Thus, the borders between the countries in the world are not as clear as before, the cultural differences do still exist, especially between the different continents and even between countries, as the results showed also within the Nordic countries. The companies must both satisfy the consumer demand and manage word-of-mouth communications. A recent article by McKinsey by Charm et al. (2020), states that even deeper insight of the consumers is needed as the consumer behavior is changing faster than ever. Especially the year 2020 has forced everyone to change their habits and most probably believes as well. The behavioral science confirms, as well as the results of this study that by identifying the consumers' new beliefs and habits is the key to success. The actions that is recommended for the companies to change the consumer behavior on the long term are; reinforcing new positive beliefs, sustain new habits, shape emerging habits with new offers, align messages to consumer mindsets and analyze consumer beliefs as well as behaviors (Charm, et al., 2020). This would be beneficial for the case company to keep in mind in the future launches.

The key message of the product and the launch was comfort. This was perceived positive by the respondents, which indicate that the launch succeeded to communicate this for the target groups within the Nordics. However, the small differences in the results between the age groups and nationalities would be recommended for the case company to take into consideration in future product launches as early as possible at the strategical and tactical decision stages, in order to succeed in the future as well.

5.2 Limitations and future research

The CAWI interview questions were formed by the third-part company and may have had an effect on the results, as they were not optimized for this thesis study. The validity of

the questions was not measured, but the author relied on that the third-party company had conducted several of these types of studies before and that the questions were well formulated. Likewise, it can be a limitation that a third-party collected the data, which was a process the author had no control over. However, this might not have an effect on the end-results, as the research questions could be properly answered. Furthermore, it can be argued that if the questions had been made by the author, they would have had more direct relation with the theoretical framework, as well with the research questions of this study. Future studies could, nevertheless, build upon a survey specifically formed with questions and statements build from research previous studies on branding, pricing strategies and product launch.

The price was not included in this version of the survey. Thus, for future studies and surveys price should be emphasized. According to the literature price is a very important factor, when it comes to a success of any product launch.

There was no difference between the results of the pre- and post-survey. This could indicate that the post-survey of the same survey questions was carried out too close to the pre-survey and should be carried out at later stage from the product launch. Hence, the full result of the product launch success should be measured from a long term perspective in order to see the real brand extension and product launch success as well as the product performance. The survey could also be conducted before, during and after the product launch campaign, but also to be considered to measure in the long term, perhaps years after the launch. This would benefit the company, to see where the launched product stand for instance one or two years after the product launch. The company could then reconsider which decisions and actions to take, if it is an aim to keep the product on the market and on the desired level. The continuing market information gathering is almost crucial to stay in the market and succeed in today's world due to extremely fast changing consumer behaviors.

Further future recommendations could be for the company and future studies to ensure that the information gathered from the market (consumers and customers) and inside the company include all parties involved. This includes all parties both inside and outside the

company to be included in the information sharing processes, as well as in full chain of events.

5.3 Conclusions

The Nordic target consumers perceptions of the launch were overall positive, the company's goals seem to have been achieved. The differences within the Nordic countries and age group were very small. However, it shows that there are still some differences in the in perceptions of consumers in the different Nordic countries and between age groups. This is interesting, as it puts pressure on brands to take into consideration national and age attributes for product launches, also regionally as in this case within the Nordics. Overall, it can be concluded that in the short term, as the results analyzed in this study, were from the launch year, that the launch was perceived positive by the consumers. Thereby the brand extension was a success within the Nordics, but whether the long term goals were achieved remains open.

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APPENDICES

1. APPENDICES: SURVEY FRAME & QUESTIONS WITH CODES

<u>SURVEY CODING & THEORY FRAME</u>		
DATA REP & WEIGHT	CODERESP	unique number
	Q1	SURVEY
	1	Pre
	2	Post
	Q2	COUNTRY
	1	Swedish
	2	Danish
	3	Finnish
	4	Norwegian
	Q3	REGION
	1	North
	2	East
	3	South
	4	West
	Q4	AGE GROUP

	1	16-30
	2	31-45
	Q5	Which of the following best describes your current situation?
	1	Student
	2	Employed
	3	Unemployed
	4	Homegoing
	5	Retired
	6	Other
	7	Do not know
CAMPAIGN EFFECT/AD EVALUATION	Q29	Do you recall seeing this ad recently?
<i>campaign awareness</i>	1	Yes
	2	No
<i>cut through</i>	Q30	What brand do you think is behind the ads?
	1	the brand was recognized
	2	the brand was not recognized
<i>ad liking</i>	Q31	What was your overall impression of the ads?
	5	Very positive
	4	Positive
	3	Very negative
	2	Negative
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q32	To what extent do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The ads stand out from other brands?
	5	Very much

	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q33	To what extend do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The ad makes me smile:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q34	To what extend do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The ad is trustworthy:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q35	To what extend do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The ad is relevant for me:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know

<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q36	To what extend do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The ad makes me watn to try the product:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q37	To what extend do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The ad makes me want to buy the product:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q38	To what extend do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The product is different than the usual product I know from the brand are:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q39	To what extend do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The brand seems more positive:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little

	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q40	To what extent do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The ad makes me want to visit the brand homepage:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>ad evaluation</i>	Q41	To what extent do you agree with the following aspects of the ad? The ad makes me want to know more about the brand:
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>product evaluation</i>	Q42	To what extent do you think the ads convey that the product is comfortable?
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>product evaluation</i>	Q43	To what extent do you think the ads convey that the product is modern?
	5	Very much

	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>product evaluation</i>	Q44	To what extent do you think the ads convey that the product is basic?
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>product evaluation</i>	Q45	To what extent do you think the ads convey that the product is sexy?
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>product evaluation</i>	Q46	To what extent do you think the ads convey that the product allows you to be yourself?
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know

<i>product evaluation</i>	Q47	To what extent do you think the ads convey that the product allows you to feel free and unhindered?
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>product evaluation</i>	Q48	To what extent do you think the ads convey that the product...? ... can make you feel comfortable?
	5	Very much
	4	Some
	3	Little
	2	Not at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know
<i>change in purchase intention</i>	Q49	Do the ads make it more or less likely that you will buy products from this brand?
	5	Very likely
	4	Likely
	3	Not likely
	2	Not likely at all
	1	Neither
	0	Do not know

2. APPENDICES: THE RESULTS OF THE CAMPAIGN EFFECT AND AD & PRODUCT EVALUATION SURVEY QUESTIONS PER PRE & POST-SURVEY

Campaign effect/ad evaluation

Statement/survey question	Sur- vey	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	df	Sig.
What was your overall impression of the ads?	Pre	1002	3,24	1,239	0,354	2016	0,112
	Post	1016	3,26	1,209	0,354	2013	
The ads stand out from other brands?	Pre	967	3,25	1,242	0,762	1914	0,609
	Post	949	3,29	1,210	0,762	1914	
The ad makes me smile.	Pre	996	3,09	1,366	0,345	1992	0,649
	Post	998	3,11	1,335	0,345	1991	
The ad is trustworthy.	Pre	895	3,33	1,254	0,090	1784	0,055
	Post	891	3,33	1,204	0,090	1782	
The ad is relevant for me.	Pre	985	2,79	1,321	1,270	1978	0,064
	Post	995	2,87	1,287	1,270	1975	
The ad makes me want to try the product.	Pre	993	2,83	1,359	1,611	1999	0,032
	Post	1008	2,93	1,326	1,611	1996	
The ad makes me want to buy the product.	Pre	981	2,65	1,284	1,292	1975	0,830
	Post	996	2,72	1,281	1,292	1974	
The product is different than the usual product I know from the brand are.	Pre	903	3,02	1,280	0,354	1810	0,165
	Post	909	3,00	1,251	0,354	1808	
The brand seems more positive.	Pre	973	3,17	1,323	0,020	1951	0,423
	Post	980	3,17	1,293	0,020	1949	
The ad makes me want to visit the brand homepage.	Pre	993	2,46	1,279	0,059	1992	0,196
	Post	1001	2,46	1,241	0,059	1989	
The ad makes me want to know more about the brand.	Pre	986	2,70	1,281	1,026	1979	0,872
	Post	995	2,76	1,278	1,026	1979	

Campaign effect and product evaluation

Statement/survey question	Survey	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	df	Sig.
The ads convey that the product is comfortable.	Pre	994	4,44	0,982	1,271	1990	0,089
	Post	998	4,49	0,926	1,271	1982	
The ads convey that the product is modern.	Pre	977	3,16	1,252	0,866	1958	0,890
	Post	983	3,21	1,244	0,866	1958	
The ads convey that the product is basic.	Pre	988	4,18	1,071	1,484	1977	0,608
	Post	991	4,25	1,030	1,484	1973	
The ads convey that the product is sexy.	Pre	989	2,41	1,161	0,851	1982	0,176
	Post	995	2,46	1,129	0,850	1980	
The ads convey that the product allows you to be yourself.	Pre	970	3,85	1,241	0,684	1942	0,050
	Post	974	3,88	1,183	0,683	1937	
The ads convey that the product allows you to feel free and unhindered.	Pre	984	4,28	1,056	1,199	1972	0,221
	Post	990	4,34	1,014	1,199	1968	
The ads convey that the product can make you feel comfortable.	Pre	988	4,06	1,174	1,675	1974	0,803
	Post	988	4,14	1,136	1,675	1972	
The ads make it more or less likely that you will buy products from this brand.	Pre	977	2,83	1,094	1,541	1965	0,171
	Post	990	2,75	1,021	1,540	1952	