A Study in Consumption of Interior Products and Identity

“I Am What I Have”

Authors:
Hanna Elfver
Hanna Thyr
Johanna Cser

Examiner: Setayesh Sattari
Tutor: Martin Amsteus
Subject: Marketing
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Abstract

The society of today has evolved to a consumption society and peoples´ lives have become continuously evolving projects. Today, a huge trend in personalized homes can be identified which express the importance that the homes express the identity of the residents. This together with that the Swedish market for home decoration has increased by 64% during the last decade makes it an interesting area to investigate. Based from these findings, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the connection between consumption of interior products and identity.

The method approach used for this research is of a qualitative nature, and three different focus groups have been conducted. To increase the response rate several in-depth interviews were also conducted. This has contributed to the empirical findings, which connected to the literature review has lead to the analysis and conclusions of this research.

The conclusions that were found reveal several strong connections between consumption of interior products and identity. In the process of decorating one's home the identity will inevitably shine through, much due to personal preferences that reflects the identity. Further, people seem to believe that others form judgements based on their home decoration, which also affects the connections between the identity and consumption of interior products.

Key words; Identity, consumption, consumption society, interior products, home decoration
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1. Introduction

This chapter provides the reader with an overall understanding of the concepts identity and consumption of interior products. It presents a background as a base for the subject as well as a discussion where the subjects are problematized. Further, the purpose of the thesis is presented. Finally, the delimitations and an outline of the thesis are presented in order for the reader to get a clear grasp of the thesis as a whole.

1.1 Background

A house is not necessarily the same thing as a home. A home is a phenomenon constructed by the people who live there, whereas a house is a material construction. Looking back a home, for most people, used to be a place for shelter, a place where you could feel safe and comfortable. Following a rapid change since the mid 20th century the home has evolved to a stage where individuals express their identities and where intimate parts of their lives take place. During the last decade it has become increasingly important, especially in the Scandinavian countries to make and maintain an attractive home and the homes stands for a large amount of the expenses (Gram-Hanssen, Bech-Danielsen 2004, Elitfönster 2012). Traditionally seen, Sweden is a country where people socialize a lot at each other´s which means that they often invite acquaintances into their private atmospheres. The style of peoples’ homes and the things the individual choose to have in it has become a manifestation of who they are consumption-wise. By consuming home decor products and by being creative in the home people expresses their identities (Elitfönster 2012). Belk (1988) states that when people surround themselves with products it is a way to communicate with their surroundings.

1.2 Problem discussion

Who we are, our identity and the way we perceive ourselves is something that we constantly create, change and mold. By consuming products that are believed accurate to their self image, people create themselves (Holmberg et al. 2009). The term identity is often perceived as whom people are, however a deeper explanation of identity is that it provides a feeling of who they are at the same time as it connects the individual with the social surroundings.
Chapter 1

(Hammarén, Johansson 2007). The identity is affected by different events in peoples’ life that can have an impact on their self image, for example one factor that can contribute is to grow up and move to an own place. Identity can therefore be seen as an ever-changing process that prepares the individual for the challenges he or she faces in life. It is more or less assumed that people create their identity through consumption, and by looking at what people consume you can tell alot about who they are (Ibid.).

The society of today has evolved to a consumption society and without consumption the society would stagnate. The concept of consumption is defined as and comprises stages as; the search for, choice of, purchase and disposal of products (Solomon et al. 2010). Solomon et al. (2010) defines a consumer society as a society where the social life is more organized around the consumer´s roles in the consumption system, rather than as previous more around our identities as producers in a production system. Peoples´ lives have become an evolving project that continuously develops and consumption has become a social act where there is as many reasons to consume as there are consumers (Holmberg et al. 2009). The basic need of consuming products, as to fulfil the need of hunger or to prevent from being cold, is no longer the main reason. The social and cultural factor is always present and affects peoples´ choice of products, when and why they need them (Ibid.).

The Swedish commerce and retail market is currently strong and the consumption has grown during several years even though economic instability have occurred on the market. During the last ten-year period, consumption has increased with two percent each year and Svensk handel (2011) forecasts that the positive increase will continue (CFK 2012, svensk handel 2011). It is not just the market as a whole that is growing, but more specific, the market for home decor. It increased by 64% between the years of 2001 to 2011 (CFK 2012). According to statistics from TNS Sifo Orvesto Konsument (the leading market research company in Sweden), the home decor consumption of the Swedish people amounts to 21 billion SEK each year. This can be viewed in contrast to the food consumption that amounts to approximately 25 billion SEK each year (TNS Sifo 2009).

The interest for home decoration in Sweden has grown tremendously which may be explained by the increase of the exposure of it in the media. In the early 1990´s there were only two home decor magazines on the Swedish market. However, in a period of only ten years the number of magazines grew to around 20 different magazines, and many of the largest
newspapers had appendices regarding this subject (Fuentes 2011). Also, during this period of
time, more and more television programs were dedicated to home decoration. This led to a
wider spread of home decoration, reaching those that did not necessarily seek the information
themselves (Gram-Hanssen, Bech-Danielsen 2004).

Today, a huge trend in personalized homes can be identified and magazines (e.g.
elleinterior.se, skonahem.com, husohem.se) expresses the importance of homes that say
something about the person that lives there. With this trend follows a stronger connection
between interior consumption and identity that has not been as evident before. In this way,
consumption can be seen as a way to communicate to others, in order to present individuality
and identity (Holmberg et al. 2009). Since consumers create their identity through
consumption of products it is interesting to see if this also apply when they specifically
consume products to their homes. It is also interesting to see if the way people decorate their
home expresses their identity and status and if their home is a reflection of their self-image.

Although there is much previous research stating the influence of consumer buying
behaviour on identity, there is little previous research regarding identity creation through consumption
that focuses on the area of home decoration. Most research focuses on areas such as branding
or fashion, and how this is affecting the identity or self-image. Research regarding
consumption and identity has been conducted for many years. In 1988, Russell Belk wrote
“Possessions and the extended self”, where he states that people consume to express who they
are and that our possessions are a part of the extended self (Belk 1988) This article is still
today one of the most cited articles within this field. Further, Tian, Bearden and Hunter
(2001) argue that people consume in order to distinguish themselves from others, in order to
feel unique. Many of the previous research are conducted between the 1960-90’s (Belk 1988,
Durning 1992) which is still valid, however not as up to date as one would please.

According to Belk (1988) it is not possible to reach an understanding regarding consumers´
consumption behaviour if there is no understanding for the role the possessions play on the
identity. Since there is little previous research conducted within the field of the connection
between consuming interior products and identity, knowledge is lacking regarding if
consumers can create their identity when specifically consuming interior products. This is
therefore chosen as the main focus for the investigation of this thesis.
Chapter 1

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to investigate the connections between consumption of interior products and identity.

1.4 Delimitations

The focus will be on the Swedish market and the Swedish consumption of interior products. The literature review will mainly focus on theories regarding identity and consumption. Furthermore the concept of consumption is defined as; “the way people search for, choose, purchase and dispose products” (Solomon et al. 2010). This means that the connections between consumption of interior products and identity that will be investigated concern the whole lifecycle of the interior products and not only the actual purchase.
1.5 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, structured as follows;

**Chapter 1:** Provides an introduction to the subject as well as a discussion around the consumption of interior products and identity which leads to the purpose. The chapter also includes the delimitations of the study and research gap.

**Chapter 2:** Presents the literature review, regarding previous literature addressing identity and consumption, which serves as the basis for the thesis.

**Chapter 3:** Presents a research model conducted in order to present how current theories approach the connections between the concept of identity and consumption of interior products. The research model contributed to the formulation of two research questions, which were used as a guide to investigate the subject further.

**Chapter 4:** Displays the chosen methodological framework, which explains how and why this study was conducted.

**Chapter 5:** Presents the empirical data, collected from the focus groups and in-depth interviews.

**Chapter 6:** Displays the qualitative analysis of the accumulated empirical data and the theoretical literature review. This to uncover and highlight underlying patterns and processes found in the collected data.

**Chapter 7:** Provides the main conclusions of the study and answers the research questions and the purpose of the research. The chapter ends with theoretical and managerial implications as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.
2. Literature review

This chapter contains theories that investigates and connects the concepts of identity and consumption. It aims to present existing literature of the subjects as well as provide definitions and an overview of the topics.

2.1 Identity

The identity of a human is what defines him or her as unique. It can be defined in two ways, either by self-definition or as defined by others. Since identity consists of many different characteristics it is a constantly developing process throughout life (Hammarén, Johansson 2007). Belk (1988) uses the terms "self concept," "sense of self," and "identity" as synonyms for how a person subjectively perceives who he or she is. What constitutes the self is a subjective judgment and something that constantly changes over time and therefore there cannot exist a standardized definition of what is included in the self (Ahuvia 2005, Belk 1988). The self-concept can in turn be divided into two parts, the ideal self and the actual self. The concept of how a person wish to be perceived is referred to as the ideal self whereas the more realistic assessment a person holds or lack refers to the actual self. Most cultures agree on that the self is also divided into a public self, a more outer self and a private, more inner self. (Solomon et al. 2010). This is expressed more deeply, by Sedlovskaya et al. (2013), who states that people have different degrees of the public and private self, whereas some are more public than private. Furthermore, they argue that the more comfortable people are in a public context, the smaller the distinction between the public and private self is, and the person therefore reveals a more authentic self.

2.1.1 Self-categorization

Relating to the self-concept is the self-categorization theory, which states that the self-concept rarely occurs only on objective criterions, but rests heavily on the comparisons between the self and others in the social environment. The self-categorization theory describes how an individual will perceive the group identity of people and how and why the individual wants to belong with that group. This supports the theory that there is a public identity as well as a
private (Reynolds et al. 2010). Schmitt et al. (2006) claims that there are several levels of identity activated by the social context and by including both the own self and other selves in the near social group, individuals self-categorize themselves. The individuals compares themselves to others within the group or with the group as a whole, and whether or not the social context encourages self-construction, there will be consequences for the individual. This determines whether or not the individual will be accepted within the group, or how they can adjust to do so (Schmitt et al. 2006). Reid (2012) explain that the group enable the individual with meaning, how to act and perceive other social contexts. Further, he states that the self-categorization theory explains why group members act of their own social agreement or disagreement (Reid 2012). The self-categorization theory also states, according to Reid et al. (2009), that actions carried out by representatives of the collective identity will have a direct influence on each individual. The collective self-definition is also superior to the individual self-definition, underpinning the importance of social influence. However, the closer the individual’s self-definition is to the collective self-definition, the more influence that individual will have over the entire group. The core idea of self-categorization theory is that people represent social categories, which depending on their context maximizes clarity, showing both similarities and differences within the group (Reid et al. 2009).

2.1.2 Extended self

Belk (1988) suggests that the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behaviour is that “we are what we have”. This means that our possessions sometimes are considered as parts of ourselves, regardless if it is intentionally or not. Belk continues by expressing the strong importance of our possessions for shaping our identity, by referring to that people is even buried with their possessions, which has been a ritual for at least 60,000 years.

Solomon et al. (2010) provides an explanation of how consumption of products contributes to the development of the identity by comparing it with how an actor plays a role. In order for the actor to play a certain role convincingly there are different tools they can use, e.g. a stage setting or adequate props. Likewise, a consumer learns that by using different products as props they can help to enhance the different roles they play. The products and external objects the consumers use to define their roles become so important and strongly attached that they become parts of the extended self (Solomon et al. 2010). According to Mittal (2006) the possessions can define a person because of two main reasons. Firstly, people spend so much time with their possessions, sometimes their whole life, that they therefore become viewed as
a part of the person. Secondly, the possessions are used in order to display the person's identity for others to see who that person is. Belk (1988) expresses that it is when people learn how to put the new product into use that the product really becomes a part of the extended self. The product can therefore be seen as a part of the extended self, even though it might be a temporary or intangible product, since it is the actual use of the product that creates a relationship between the consumer and the product. Peoples’ possessions can help to define the self and function as a reminder of who the person is (Belk 1988).

2.1.3 Self congruence
According to Evans et al. (2008) people tend to consume products that are in line with what they perceive as their self-image. The concept of self-congruence therefore emphasizes that consumers will choose and purchase products when the attributes of the products matches attributes of the self. This emphasizes a process of cognitive matching between the consumers’ self-image and the attributes of the products, creating strong evidence indicating how consumers will act and behave (Hosany, Martin 2011, Solomon et al. 2010). Consumers may believe that certain products and brands possess, besides the functional value, a symbolic meaning that enhance and strengthen their self-image and that they therefore consume them in order to achieve image congruence. This means that the meaning behind the product is as important as the function since it provides the consumer with both status and belonging. To define, enhance and maintain their self concept, consumers purchase and use products which allows them to do so (Evans et al. 2008, Hosany, Martin 2011). Ahn (2013) argue that it is important to understand the consumers’ self-congruence, since it helps to understand the match or mismatch between the product and the consumers’ perceived self-image (Ahn et al. 2013).

2.2 Consumption
Consumption can be seen as a process of the way people search for, choose, purchase and dispose products. Consumption is also a social, cultural and economical act (Solomon et al. 2010, Zukin, Maguire 2004). Starr (2004) expresses that consumption is used to, for example, satisfy consumers’ needs and senses, such as their taste or vision. Therefore, consumption is a highly individual area, where questions of individuals’ preferences and tastes are raised. Further, consumption can be used to express status and belongingness (Starr 2004).
2.2.1 The consumption society

As stated earlier, Solomon et al. (2010) defines the consumption society as organized around the consumers rather than around the producers. Consumption has been conducted at all times and has become so important that today it is an essential part of peoples´ daily life. Earlier, products were only produced in the amounts needed to fulfil the consumers´ basic needs, while today consumers want a wider range of products to choose from (Solomon et al. 2010). According to Bauman (2008), the consumption society has therefore evolved from the purpose of satisfy the needs of the consumers, to the purpose of satisfy the demands of the consumers (Bauman 2008).

Although the consumption society bases its purpose on the promise to satisfy the demands of the consumers, the promise of satisfaction will only remain seductive as long as the consumer is not completely satisfied and as long as the desire remains unfulfilled. If the consumption society manages to maintain their consumers dissatisfied the consumption society will flourish. The most explicit way to do this is by downgrade the products immediately after they have been introduced and has become desirable for the consumers (Bauman 2008, Evans 2008).

Belk (1988) claims that in the consumption society, products has received an increasingly important role in peoples´ lives. This is due to that products today are used in order to define who the individual are and how he or she wants to be perceived by others (Ibid.).

2.2.2 Materialism

The importance that people attach to their worldly belongings is referred to as the concept of materialism, and according to Goldsmith et al. (2011) the general definition of materialism is to reach material possessions and social renown. Further, Goldsmith et al. (2011) states that materialism can be seen as the importance that products play in an individuals´ life and that people who are seen as materialistic have an extreme concern for these products. Products that expresses status are often more likely to be valuable to materialists and by purchasing these products they aim to reach social status. The area of materialism influences different aspects of consumer behaviour, it states and shows how and why people consume (Solomon et al. 2010, Goldsmith et al. 2011).
2.3 Identity through consumption

Starr (2004) states that there are several ways that consumption is connected to identity. One connection is that a person’s preferences is reflected on material objects. By choosing certain products it signals how a person wants to be perceived by others as well as how the individual perceives him or herself (Starr 2004).

In each different stage in a person's life they use products, symbols and materials to address different identities, both collective and personal. Since identity and lifestyle are shaped by consumption, the actual act of consumption enables people to differentiate themselves socially (Schau et al. 2009). In the consumption of products some are chosen on the premises that they match our actual self and other products are bought to maintain a more desirable situation established by the ideal self (Solomon et al. 2010). Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen (2004) expresses that with the help of interior products and home decoration people expresses and develops their identity, and that people today are more conscious about their identity when decorating their homes.

As previously mentioned, a person’s identity is defined both by oneself as well as by others. Products and items such as clothing and furniture are objects that when seen by others in a context they contributes to define the persons perceived identity. A person's possessions together with their consumption behaviour is used by both the individual as well as by others, to determine the specific individuals personality based on his or her preferences and choices, for example how their home is decorated (Solomon et al. 2010). People often find it of great importance to be viewed in a good light by others and therefore often work hard to control what other think about him or her. This is managed by creating a good first impression and by making strategic choices when purchasing products that can represent who the individual are (Zukin, Maguire 2004). The way that these products are used by the consumer, influences others’ perceptions of the individual and in the same way influences and establish the individual's own self-concept and social identity. The attachment to a possession can be so strong that it becomes a way for the individual to maintain their self-concept. In this way Solomon et al. (2010) expresses that this strong attachment can become a security blanket used, especially in unfamiliar situations, to enhance and maintain the identity.
2.3.1 Why we buy

According to Durning (1992) material things are necessary for our spiritual as well as social and psychological needs and the attempt to satisfy ourselves with material things is due to that consumption now has become our primary goal of self-definition.

Consumption of products can be seen as a social way of interacting with others, expressing affection or a way to communicate our social status or how we want to be perceived by others (Holmberg et al. 2009). Through consumption individuals can position themselves as unique and stand out from others by differentiate themselves, which can arise because of a will to develop and enhance the identity. Products may be used as symbols of uniqueness and can therefore be especially attractive for people who seek to stand out from others. In order for a person to create a unique identity, he or she must create a personal style, expressed by products that represent the individual (Tian et al. 2001). Through consumption, people can identify themselves with groups that she or he wishes to belong to. Research shows that consumption has become a large part in identity seeking due to the increase of marketing, products, and the accessibility of information regarding other peoples´ shopping behaviours (Östberg, Kaijser 2010).

There are many reasons to why people consume and there are different factors that affects how people consume. First of all, the individuals own personal factors and living situations plays an important role. These are constantly changing, depending on at what stage in life the individual are. Age, gender, marital status, economic situation and personality are examples that contribute to the choices a consumer make when purchasing a product, and the choices are often reflections of these factors. Secondly, cultural factors are influential for the consumer, and according to Kotler et al. (2009), this is the most influential factor of all. The cultural factors consist of values and behaviours that are affected by others, eg. friends, family and the society, and has been learned during childhood. Since these factors are learned over time, they are considered to be the most difficult to influence and change. The consumers are also affected by different groups in the social environment, both by groups that the consumer are a part of, but also by groups the consumer wants to be a part of. These groups can be a way to create or enhance an identity, by showing the group belongingness. This is contributing to affect the consumer because he or she will consume according to the groups references (Kotler et al. 2009, Solomon et al. 2010, Evans et al. 2008).
The value of a product is not only measured in terms of what the price of the product is, but also based upon what value the consumer puts in the product. Depending on the value that the consumer put into the product, this will determine whether the consumer will make the purchase or not. The value can be created due to social or cultural aspects, such as how a certain social group values an object, and since different consumers wants and demands different things the value of a product is highly individual (Holmberg et al. 2009).

2.3.2 High and Low involvement

When a consumer is considering to buy a product, he or she is not necessarily evaluating every aspect of the product in terms of the level of involvement. In order to understand how much effort the consumer puts into the evaluation process, products are categorized into levels of involvement (Mishra, Kumar 2012). Low-involvement products are products often associated with a low price and with a low perceived risk if the consumer were to be disappointed after the with the product after the purchase. This means that the consumer puts minimum effort into the purchase decision. This could be products such as everyday goods. On the contrary, high involvement is often associated with a higher price and risk and could for instance be technological products or a sofa for instance. The purchase decision is complex and requires much effort from the consumer in terms of evaluation and comparison and criteria such as the brand image and reputation is of most influence (Solomon et al. 2010, Boonpattarakan 2012). Jung and Yoon (2011) states that the level of involvement refers to personal feelings that is of the individuals interest. When the consumer is involved in a purchase decision, he or she shows how much interest there is in the product, and the level of involvement also affects the consumer behaviour (Jung, Yoon 2011).

2.3.3 High and low perceived risk

According to Keh and Sun (2008) previous research states that there is a relationship between involvement and perceived risk, but it is yet unclear whether perceived risk is an antecedent or consequence of involvement (Keh, Sun 2008). However, the perception of risk is also strongly connected to consumer behaviour and function as an explanatory variable. A consumers action is influenced by his or hers perception of the situation, the presence of risk and expectation of loss (Keh, Sun 2008, Eggert 2006). The theory of risk states that the consumer behaviour will ultimately lead to consequences for the individual that cannot fully be anticipated and might be unpleasant (Simcock et al. 2006). Eggert (2006) also states that
perceived risk can be best understood in the consumers set of ‘buying goals’ connected to every purchase. The perceived risk is to what extent the consumer will be able to achieve these goals, and the consequences of not achieving those goals (Eggert 2006). The theory of risk is categorized into two types of perceived risk, the personal and the non-personal risk. The personal risk consists of the social and psychological risk, and reflects the pressure from social surroundings and the completion of the self image. The non-personal risk consists of financial, physical, functional and time risks, reflecting the pressure of money, whether or not the product will perform as expected or how time consuming the product or service might be. Depending on the situation, the risks are different in size (Eggert 2006, Keh, Sun 2008, Simcock et al. 2006).

Research conducted in western countries shows that culture is highly influential to how individuals respond to risk. Also, previous research has emphasized non-personal risks and according to Keh and Sun (2008) neglected the personal risks. Eggert (2006) stresses the importance of personal risks and consequences as the individual’s psyche translates any kind of risk into an uncomfortable feeling. Keh and Sun (2008) explains the concept of face consciousness as the individuals “desire to enhance, maintain and avoid losing face” (Keh, Sun 2008:124) in the social environment which inevitably affects the consumer behaviour. The face of an individual carries meaning and status not only for themselves, but to the social surrounding. Consumers having a high face-conscious consume as a social interaction, and approval by others is highly desirable resulting in a greater personal risk where consequences could be losing face and approval by others (Keh, Sun 2008). However, Simcock et al. (2006) states that the concern with how to be perceived by others is strongly connected to age. Further, he states that older consumers are more concerned with what feels good and less concerned with how things look and to be seen as successful. Younger consumers on the other hand are more driven by what the social environments expects. Simcock et al. (2006) argue that older consumer therefore perceive a lower social and personal risk than younger consumer.
3. Research model and research questions

In this chapter a research model together with research questions are presented to serve as a base for a further investigation.

3.1 Research model

The research model is a simplification of reality to uncover present relations and which factors that affects other factors, and due to the complexity of reality the research model needs to be simplified extensively (Maxwell 2012). The purpose of this study is to gain deeper understandings of the connections between identity and consumption of interior products, focusing on several factors influencing how we perceive our belongings. The literature review showed that theories such as self-congruence, the extended self together with why we buy and perceived risks indicate that there is a strong relationship between consumption and the creation of identity. The following research model (figure 1) has been developed as an illustration of how the concept of identity is connected to consumption of interior products. It will serve as a guideline in order to evaluate and investigate the influence both concepts have on each other.

![Figure 1. Research Model](image)

3.2 Research Questions

The purpose of the research questions is to detect what is desired to understand by doing a research (Maxwell 2012). Since the purpose of this study is to investigate the connections between consumption of interior products and identity, the research questions have been
founded in this and developed in the context of the theories in the literature review. The underlying purpose of the thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts of identity and consumption and how these are connected to each other.

Focus is upon the product category of interior products and the research questions aims at understanding how these are connected.

-RQ1: Does the way people decorate their homes express their identity?
-RQ2: Do people believe that they are judged by others based upon how they decorate their home?
4. Methodology

This chapter justifies and presents the chosen approaches for this study. First follows a discussion regarding deductive or inductive research followed by a discussion which justifies the choice of a qualitative research strategy. After is an explanation of the chosen data sources, the data collection method and a discussion regarding the proper way for data analysis.

4.1 Research approach

4.1.1 Inductive or deductive

There are two main research approaches for collecting data, referred to as the inductive and deductive. The inductive approach states that you observe a specific object or situation, without any knowledge to begin with. You observe patterns and create a hypothesis that eventually is confirmed and a theory is created. A deductive approach however, works the opposite way. The investigation begins with an existing theory about a specific interest, the theory is narrowed down into specific hypothesis that is observed and tested. This will eventually lead to a confirmation whether or not the theory is accurate and applicable for the research problem. The inductive approach is more open-minded in nature and exploratory in contrast to the deductive approach which is more narrow and concentrated at confirming or testing hypotheses. A study might come across as purely deductive or inductive, but most research involves both approaches at some point in the research (Bryman, Bell 2005, 2011).

The main research approach for this research is of a deductive nature since the purpose is to investigate connections between two concepts. Gaps in the existing research field carried the investigation further and as the deductive approach states, the research began with an investigation of already existing theories. However since studies are, as mentioned, rarely either one of the two approaches this research used inductive considerations in form of observing the consumption of interior decoration in the Swedish market.
4.1.2 Qualitative or Quantitative

Qualitative methods use a research strategy that emphasizes the value of words rather than the quantity of data and numbers which the quantitative methods does. The research strategy for obtaining qualitative data is often inductive and the researcher should be constructive when interpreting the information. The importance of the collected knowledge should rely on an understanding of the social reality of the participants, and how they perceive and understand this reality. In short, the qualitative data is the extraction of interactions between individuals in the society (Bryman 2002). It is argued whether this creates valid data or not since the qualitative information cannot reside solely in the absence of numbers. The term quantitative research on the other hand creates a statistical foundation from which generalizations and conclusions can be drawn and is often used to imply an approach towards business research. (Bryman, Bell 2011)

This research will take the approach towards qualitative methods since the purpose is first to investigate possible connections between identity and consumption of interior products and secondly to investigate why and how there is a connection. The investigation is, as the qualitative approach suggests, an investigation of the understanding of the social reality and society. Also, the qualitative approach provides a deeper understanding between the two concepts, and of consumers’ actions and attitudes towards the consumption of interior products. It allows for pattern matching and analysing. With consideration of the validity of the data, the qualitative approach is still the most appropriate way to reach the deeper understanding of the two concepts.

4.2 Research design

The research design is the plan created to be followed in order to answer the research’s aim and objectives, and to provide the framework needed to resolve specific problems. Subsequent research will be influenced and affected by the choice of research design and should therefore be chosen wisely. There are three types of research designs that can be followed throughout the method of collecting adequate data. These are exploratory, descriptive and causal research designs. Exploratory research design is carried out in early stages, when finding facts through research helps to clarify the research problem and direction. The descriptive research design describes characteristics about the studied subject or population and aims at understand how, when and why a certain condition occurs. Even
though the data itself is factual and systematic, the research cannot on its own describe what caused a situation. It can only collect the variables that are inflictng the situation. Which leads to the causal research design, where the researcher aims at investigate how one variable causes or determines the value of another variable. Causal research design can be conducted either through a longitudinal research, where the study is observed over long periods of time, or through a cross-sectional research, where data are collected from multiple cases at a single moment in time (Bryman, Bell 2005).

At early stages, the majority of all research is of exploratory nature when crystallizing the purpose of the study. This research developed further into a descriptive research design due to limitations in time and the aim at understanding the connections between the concept of identity and consumption of interior products, to answer how when and why questions. The descriptive research design was the most appropriate research design to use as a structured guideline, since it describes the characteristics of the studied subject. Causal design, as stated earlier, determines how one variable determines another and this is not the purpose of this research, but to gain deeper understandings. The descriptive research was chosen because the connection between identity and the consumption of interior products also aims at understanding how this connection is affecting each other.

4.3 Data sources

There are several sources for data which are categorized into two main groups, secondary data and primary data. The secondary data is originally collected for other purposes than the current research, but still possesses usable information for the researcher. Secondary data can be collected from both an internal and external perspective of an organization or subject of research, providing different angles on the same target (Bryman, Bell 2005). By using secondary information the researchers saves both time and money by not gathering the information themselves. Also, when using data collected by other skilled researchers, the data will be of high standard and good quality. The opportunities to compare the data to similar studies in other markets or fields are greater and more time is given to evaluate and analyse the data. This makes new interpretations possible and more available (Ibid.). However, limitations to the secondary data can make the use of the material restricted as the researcher may not be familiar with the material, it could be too extensive and key variables may be missing making the data quality uncontrollable. The researcher can therefore choose to collect
primary data for the research at hand. The material will then be collected for the purpose of the research and therefore have a focused aim towards the research, with adequate variables that are up to date. However, as with secondary data, primary data has disadvantages. It is time consuming, requires high costs and there is a risk of non-response amongst participants (Ibid.).

Secondary data is needed both in order to find insufficient investigations or research gaps as well as to formulate a research purpose. For this research, secondary information contributed with an understanding of the present market and relevant theories to investigate. Also, there was no accumulated secondary information that covered the right variables or focus needed to be satisfactory. Secondary information was used in this sense to motivate and justify choices as well as to support the primary data collected. Focus was on collecting primary data relevant for the research since no adequate secondary data could guarantee a reliable and valid result. Even though primary data is time consuming and costly, it is created for this specific purpose and provides current information. The primary data for this research was collected and presented through an empirical investigation by using the methods of focus groups and in-depth interviews.

4.4 Research strategy
Research strategy describes the way the research is conducted and aims to help the researcher in the collection of appropriate data. For the collection of data a selective evaluation is needed of the different strategies. There are five main strategies; experiment, survey, history, archival analysis and case studies. Yin (2009) has conducted a model which displays the importance of each condition.
Table 1. Relevant Situations for Different Research Methods. Source: Yin 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Form of research question</th>
<th>Requires control over behavioural events?</th>
<th>Focuses on contemporary events?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, Why?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, What, Where, How many, How much?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Analysis</td>
<td>Who, What, Where, How may, How much?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>How, Why?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>How, Why?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yin’s table helps the researcher to determine which strategy is more suitable for the present research project. Since the approach for this research is qualitative, surveys for a quantitative study was excluded out together with history due to the focus on contemporary design. Archival analysis was not appropriate as this research focus is mainly on primary data and the experience strategy was ruled out due to that the research do not require control over behavioural events. This leaves case studies as the appropriate choice. Case studies provide an intensive analysis of an individual unit, stressing developmental factors in relation to the context and relevant theory.

4.5 Data collection method

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) there are five main data collection methods, these are content analysis, surveys, observations, interviews, and focus groups. In a research with a quantitative approach the chosen approach is primarily surveys or content analysis. With a qualitative approach the best method for data collection is with focus groups, in-depth interviews or observations. (Bryman, Bell 2011)

As this research has a qualitative approach and the aim is to attain knowledge regarding behaviour, the chosen data collection method was focus groups and complementary in-depth interviews. These choices are based on that the research for this thesis wishes to obtain deep personal beliefs and underlying causes for different variables.
4.5.1 Focus group
A focus group is a form of data collection method in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions and beliefs towards for example a product or phenomenon. It is a technique for gathering data by using several respondents in a group interview. The main purpose of a focus group is to create an interaction between the participants in order to gain deep and unexpected reasoning that rarely emerge in, for example, a personal interview. The focus group is lead by a moderator, whose main task is to make sure to create an open discussion, where every participant gets to speak their mind (Christensen et al. 2010). In order to create a dynamic interview environment the moderator should follow a structure based on open questions to avoid unaffected responses. It is important to select participants that are the most suitable for the chosen topic and in order to avoid conflicts, the participants should be rather similar concerning social, economic and demographic factors. Also, the size of the group is important to consider. This to ensure that everyone dares to speak and to get a dynamic discussion. A recommended size is between five to fifteen participants, and the discussion should last for about one to two hours. If the focus group is carried out by more than one, it is important to decide who should be the moderator, in order to avoid confusion (Ibid).

4.5.2 In-depth interviews
In-depth, personal interviews are the most appropriate method for obtaining personal beliefs, opinions and values. The ability to probing makes it easier to uncover underlying causes. An interview should last 30-90 minutes. The positive aspect is that it has a rich dept of information and there is no group pressure. Negative aspects are that it is time consuming and expensive (Christensen et al. 2010).

4.5.3 Implementation of the focus groups and interviews
Three focus groups were conducted with different age groups. The focus groups were divided into groups with the ages 20 to 29, 30 to 39 and 40 to 60. This due to achieve homogeneity among the respondents and to make the group environment as comfortable as possible and to create the best conditions for a discussion. The focus groups each contained five to six persons.
The focus group was lead by a designated moderator which asked the questions. All questions were asked openly to encourage discussions and enable the moderator to ask probing questions. The discussions were recorded and the moderator made sure that everyone in the group dared to speak their mind and was heard. The focus groups were all conducted in a domestic environment to achieve a relaxed atmosphere. The discussions in the focus groups enabled further development of the questionnaire design for the complementary in-depth interviews.

In order to expand the depth of the collected data, additional in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 persons in the ages from 20 to 60, both women and men. The number of in-depth interviews was determined when the data collection felt saturated. The interviews was conducted in order to gain underlying personal beliefs and issues and to obtain answers from respondents who might not dare to reveal certain issues during the focus group due to group pressure. Of the 30 respondents who participated in the study 56% were women and 44% were men.

When gathering the collected data one question (2.6 where did you get inspiration for your latest purchase of interior products?) was removed due to that when summarising the data it was evident that it was not of relevance for further analysis in this study.

4.6 Data collection instrument

4.6.1 Operationalization and measurement

An essential step in a deductive research is operationalization. This refers to the process where unclear concepts are defined and broken down into understandable words so that the concept can be measurable in form of different variables (Eliasson 2010). Further, the process of operationalization aims to show which theoretical concepts are relevant in the context of the thesis. These concepts should be defined in the clearest way possible, so that anyone who reads the concepts is able to understand and review them (Ibid.). Following tables displays the operationalization for this research.
Table 2. Operationalization Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept Identity</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-concepts</td>
<td>The self-concept can be divided into two parts, the ideal self and the actual self. The concept of how a person wish to be perceived is referred to as the ideal self whereas the more realistic assessment a person holds or lack refers to the actual self (Solomon et al. 2010)</td>
<td>Q3.2, Q3.4, Q4.1, Q4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-categorisation</td>
<td>The self-categorization theory describes how an individual will perceive the group identity of people and how and why the individual wants to belong with that group, supporting the theory that there is a public identity as well as a private (Reynolds et al. 2010)</td>
<td>Q2.4, Q3.3, Q3.8, Q4.2, Q4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended self</td>
<td>Possessions are considered as parts of ourselves and suggests that we are what we have (Belk 1988).</td>
<td>Q1.2, Q3.3, Q3.5, Q3.9, Q3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-congruence</td>
<td>Self-congruence emphasizes that consumers will choose and purchase products when the attributes of the products matches attributes of the self (Hosany, Martin 2011)</td>
<td>Q2.2, Q3.5, Q3.7, Q3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Operationalization Consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept Consumption</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The consumption society</td>
<td>A society where the social life is more organized around the consumer’s roles in the consumption system, rather than as previous more around our identities as producers in a production system. (Solomon 2010)</td>
<td>Q2.1, Q2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialism</td>
<td>The importance that people attach to their worldly belongings (Goldsmith 2011)</td>
<td>Q2.5, Q3.2, Q3.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Operationalization Identity through consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why we buy</td>
<td>Consuming products can be seen as a social way of interacting with others, expressing affection or a way to communicate our social status or how we want to be perceived by others (Holmberg et al. 2009).</td>
<td>Q2.1, Q2.5, Q2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High/low involvement</td>
<td>In order to understand how much effort the consumer puts into the evaluation process, products are categorized into levels of involvement (Mishra, Kumar 2012).</td>
<td>Q2.3, Q3.1, Q3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High/low perceived risk</td>
<td>Consumers actions is influenced by his or hers perceptions of the situation, the presence of risk and expectation of loss (Eggert 2006).</td>
<td>Q2.3, Q2.4, Q3.4, Q3.6, Q3.7, Q3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.2 Questionnaire design

The structure of the questions was divided into four sections. Starting point was general questions regarding interior decoration. Second part concerned questions regarding purchases and buying behaviour. Third part was questions of a more personal natures regarding the respondents own homes and the third were concerned with the concept of identity. The focus groups and interviews were ended with questions regarding gender and age. After the focus groups were conducted the questionnaire was slightly modified in order to gain access to more underlying personal beliefs of the respondents.

4.6.3 Pretesting

Pretesting was done in this case by testing the questionnaire on one respondent. This helped to structure the questions in a better order. Some questions were ruled out and other questions were further developed with some probing questions.
4.7 Data analyzing method

The main purpose of the qualitative analysis is to uncover and highlight underlying patterns and processes that are found in the collected data. This is done by paying attention to the pattern-controlling variables that explains the most of the content in the variation. Symbolic for the analysis of a qualitative research is that it focuses on the context and not specific words. The first step in the analysis is to first break down the collected data by reduction. Step two involves that by structuring the reduced data create patterns which are made available and clarified through visualization. The visualizations can be done by matrices and figures. (Christensen et al. 2010)

In the analytical chapter of this study the theoretical and empirical findings was connected to each other, in order to find underlying patterns and variables for further analysis. The findings has been investigated and discussed to be able to draw conclusions regarding the subjects. Also, the connections have been drawn between how the interior decoration of the home affects the identity creation and how these operate in relation to each others.

4.8 Quality criteria

4.8.1 Validity

Validity refers to whether the concepts that the study is supposed to measure or identify really are measured. In qualitative studies there are three main forms of validity; content validity, construct validity and external validity.

Content validity, also known as face validity is concerned with whether or not the measure reflects the content of the concept in question. This can be assessed by allowing experts to view and examine the representativeness prior to the collection of the main data. In order to obtain content validity the operationalization of this study was reviewed by authorities before it was used to conduct questions for collection of empirical data.

Construct validity involves the extent to which the operationalization measures the concept it is supposed to measure. This can be assessed by using triangulation which means the usage of more than one method or source of data so that the collected data can be cross-checked. It is also assessed by using proper referencing and by saving original transcripts. For this study the construct validity was maximized by using triangulation. This by adding in-depth interviews
Methodology

as a complementary method to the focus groups. The interviews were conducted until the answers were saturated. Original transcripts are saved and key informants have read the draft.

External validity concerns whether or not the results of the study can be generalized and if it can be generalized further than within the context in which the study was conducted. To assess this, the researcher can use replication logic in multi-case studies to find out where there can be opportunities for generalizations. An attempt to maximise the external validity for this study was made by finding and comparing the theories with patterns from the empirical investigation.

4.8.2 Reliability
Reliability is concerned with the stability of the measurement of a concept as well as with the consistency. Reliability can be assessed by repeating the study at a later time or by using multiple case studies like focus groups together with deep-interviews (Bryman, Bell 2011). For this study reliability have been maximised through multiple focus groups and additional in-depth interviews. The tools used in the gathering of empirical data are saved which makes it possible to replicate the study at a later point in time.

4.9 Methodology summary

Table 5. Methodology summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research methods</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research approach</td>
<td>Deductive, Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data sources</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research strategy</td>
<td>Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection method</td>
<td>Focus groups, In-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection instrument</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Three focus groups based on different age groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Method</td>
<td>Data reduction, Data display, Pattern matching, Conclusion drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Criteria</td>
<td>Pretesting, Triangulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Empirical investigation

This chapter presents the accumulated data from collected from the in-depth interviews and the focus groups. The empirical investigation is presented from the consumers’ point of view. Also, the presentation is stepwise in four blocks concerning, interior products and decoration, the home, consumption and identity.

5.1 Interior decoration

The structure of the focus group questions is divided into four blocks. The first block concerns general questions about interior decoration. The second block regards the consumption and the buying behaviour. Questions concerning the respondent’s personal home are asked in the third block, while the fourth block regards the concept of identity.

Generally seen, the respondent’s first thoughts regarding interior decoration concerns furniture and their functions, stores where they offer interior products as well as colours and materials. One respondent expresses that interior decoration is a beautiful home environment. Others mention that there are a lot of different opinions about interior decoration, and what is seen as good and bad taste. As one expresses, “the first thing that comes to mind when I hear the term interior decoration is the myriad of blogs and magazines featuring pictures of stark white interiors, mock patinated shabby chic furniture and sleeping cats”. However, for several respondents the thoughts go beyond the materialistic objects and expresses that interior is a feeling of comfort. The interior decoration conveys a message and shows who you are, and by having unique objects in your home you can show your personality.

Several of the respondents reckon that interior decoration is something that people come in contact with everywhere. It could be both in the own home or when visiting a friend, a store or in a public environment, since everything is decorated in one way or another. One respondent expresses that when visiting someone, you always check how it is decorated, because it says so much about the person living there. Mass media, such as magazines, commercials, internet and blogs, also plays a huge role regarding how people come in contact
with interior decoration. Some respondents claim to have an interest for interior decoration and do therefore actively seek the contact, while others say they come in contact with it in a more unintended way.

5.2 Consumption

The second blocks covers the concept of consumption and buying behaviour and the first questions that were asked concerned how the respondent purchased interior products and why. The two main approaches to how the respondents proceed when they purchase an interior product are by feeling, when they come across the object in question, or by careful considerations. The latter involves an extensive process with several steps; they find the object, then they memorize it or take a picture to remember, they think about it when they are at home to see if it will match the existing attributes in the home. Not until they have gone through all these steps will they make the purchase. Around half of the respondents agreed upon that they would never purchase an object on impulse, that they have not first taken it into careful consideration. The rest however, express that they have no problems with making impulse purchases, and says “this was nice, I will take it”. One respondent even states that it is the way she is with everything in life, “I want everything to happen at once, and this is something I also think reflects when I make a purchase for my home”. Even with this in mind, the respondent expresses that this might be the reason for why the outcome rarely reflects what she had in mind when making the purchase. Some respondents say that sometimes a products “just screams” at you and that the object is a must have. Others express the need and want for unique and personal objects, preferably with a history behind it. Another factor that arises is the involvement level in the purchase, more expensive products demands more thoughtfulness and more extensive search for information, as well as more discussions with a partner e.g.

5.2.1 Reasons for consumption

The respondents expresses that there are mainly two reasons for why they purchase interior products, either to fill a need or because of the function of the product. However, most of the respondents also express that they would not buy a product that they did not find attractive and suitable for their home. This is sometimes more important than the function. As one expresses, “interior decoration is so much more than just the function, it is about the details that makes the home a home”. Details is what makes the home personal and contributes to
make the home complete and comfortable, and also what makes it feel alive. Some participants find the purchase process amusing and since they consider interior decoration as their interest it is something that they are happy to do. As one expresses “I purchase interior products because I have a love for shapes, materials, textures and colours that are aesthetically pleasing”. Other reasons could be a need or want for renewal or that you constantly change objects in your home. This can lead to a trigger for more purchases, since you want to adapt what you bought with complementary products.

5.2.2 Purchase

When it comes to the actual purchase of an interior object, most of the respondents say that IKEA, Mio, Stalands and other large furniture chains is the main stores to go to when purchasing a larger furniture. When it comes to smaller and more details of interior decoration several respondents express that they rather make the purchase in smaller interior stores. As one respondent expresses “I buy my furniture at IKEA, unfortunately I have to add, since almost everyone I know have the same things”. She continues by adding “it would be nice to have something different that others would react to when they visit my home”. Another respondent thinks in the same way, her personal selection of furniture is what constitutes her home. “It is not fun when others have the same things as me. In my home I want to feel that it is my home, and if everyone else has the same furniture I will not feel that it is my personal home anymore”. Many of the respondents buy interior products online, either in online stores or at blocket or tradera (Swedish online auctions and second hand sites). Second hand and flea markets are also popular among the respondents. Many of the participants express that they like to make purchases from different stores, both from larger chains and smaller stores. In this way they can make their home more unique and different from other homes. Other comments that arise are that it does not matter which the store is, or which brand it is, what really matters is that they like the product and how it looks and feels.

When making larger, and more expensive purchases, such as a sofa the respondents say that they either want to buy it in a store (one of the larger chains, IKEA, Mio, Stalands etc.), or on blocket or second hand. Some say that they search the internet at first, but that they want to try it and be able to evaluate it in person before making the final purchase. Most respondents want to make a more thoughtful decision when making a larger purchase, however some say that they have bought a sofa on impulse. The most important for the respondents seem to be
the comfort of the sofa, and to be able to try it before making the purchase. Other factors they consider is the material, colour, size, model and that it will match their home. Many of the respondents say that the price is an important factor they consider. When buying a less expensive sofa it is easier to replace it if they get tired of it. Among the younger respondent the economic factor makes them consider buying a sofa on second hand to a higher degree. One argues that it might be determined on what stage in life you are, she gives an example from her life “when I was a student, I bought a sofa only because of how it looked, it was not comfortable at all, but it was green and that was the only thing I wanted”. The discussion continued around the area and another respondent adds that the sofa was the most impulsive purchase he had ever made, and that he would not have any problem with doing it again.

When making a purchase around half of the respondents take advice and help from friends or family members. Some say it is because they want confirmation from others that something looks good, or would be suitable for their home. Others say it is because they need the help because they do not know what fits well together or how to think when decorating. One say that she gladly take advice, because she loves to discuss and talk about interior decoration. Many states that they discuss with their partner, but not as much with people that do not live there. When trying to decide between two objects many are willing to ask for someone else’s advice, but in the end they say that the final decision is taken by themselves. Others say that they never, or rarely, ask for someone else’s opinions. This is because the most important is what they think about the product, not what others think about it. One participant say that she never has the time to ask for someone’s advice, since she wants everything to go really quickly, so if she sees something she likes, she purchase it.

The most recent interior purchase made by the participants was because of a need to fill, something they had wanted for a long time, on impulse or because they wanted a change. Some participants said that their latest purchase was due to that they needed a complement in order to match other products. Others bought more interior details because of a want to make the home cosier or more personal.
5.3 The home

The third block were questions more directed towards the respondents personal homes, starting with a question regarding what their homes mean to them. The respondents largely agree with each other that the home is not just a house, that it means safety and a place to be yourself, a home is a part of your identity. One respondent draw parallels to the saying “my home is my castle” and says that the home is where you spend most of your free time and you always feel positive towards going there, “it is the most important place to thrive in”. Another respondent describes his home as; “it is my safe spot and a private space which I can shape according to my wants and needs”. Comfort and wellbeing is also terms that was of great importance for the participants, as one respondent express “I need things that makes me calm in order to thrive”. Opposite to what the others said, one respondent saw his home as simply a place to sleep in.

Several respondents express how they generally are pleased with their home, but that they still want to make improvements and changes. One respondent explains how she has an image over how the end result should be and how it rarely ends up the way she envisioned it. Others get tired of their possessions and the way they look, and are therefore not as satisfied as they wished to be. One respondents say; “it is supposed to happen something new all the time” whereas others feel limited by both economy and living situations in order to create the fully satisfactory home. For example one respondent expresses, “this is just a temporary apartment before I get my real home. Therefore I choose to decorate it with things I am not attached to which I can throw away when I find my dream home”. Other respondents think alike, and explain how they do not thrive in the current situation, due to failure in furniture decoration visions and absence of light, but have great expectations and hopes for the new apartment. Those respondents who claim to be as pleased with their homes as possible are closer to their vision of how the end result should be. As one respondent said “because it feels like a part of me”

On the question what is most important in the home, most respondents agreed upon that it is to have a clean and nice home. A clean home is important because the home should be a place to thrive and feel welcome in, both for guests and for those who live there. Other important factors are space for socializing with friends and family and good storage solutions. Too many things lying around create clutter which inevitably leads to stress. For one respondent
the most important thing is that the home is a safe place, the sense of having a central point in life. In addition to a clean home it is important that the interior decoration is uniform and exudes harmony and personality. One respondent explains that it is important that she is surrounded by her own, personally selected interior products that reflect her personality, “they are the tools I use to mold me and my everyday life, and there will be no home without them”. Several respondents expressed the importance of personal objects with sentimental or functional value.

5.3.1 Trends
Nearly all of the respondents claim that they do not actively follow trends or exchange things unless they can justify the replacement. However, they do express a desire to do so if they would have larger assets. One respondent express how she does not bother to change things, since it often requires a larger effort and more changes than the original idea. Others say that they become blind to flaws and no longer see how their home can be improved by new things. Also, there are respondents who make changes with small means, such as accessories and rearranging already existing furniture. However, the awareness of trends and the exposure to them is high and even though the respondents do not seek to follow them they express how they subconsciously is affected by them when they look for new things. One respondent express, “I can be inspired by and apply ideas or part of trends, but I do not care about following a trend”. One respondent say that she definitely follow trends, because she finds it amusing and it makes her feel good. One reason is in order to give new life to her home and because “a home should be living and follow one's own life rather than be a static thing”.

5.3.2 Satisfaction
When the respondents were asked if they thrive in their homes nearly all of them said that they do. At first they had trouble pinpointing what it is that make them thrive, but later recognized things as safety, the feeling of home and the home environment overall. Some respondents pinpoint things as light, location and size, however they all agree that there are more factors than the interior that influence the well being. One respondent express how she perceives her apartment differently depending on what type of mood she is in. Others explain that if they do not feel comfortable in their home, they will try to make it so by changing the interior decoration. Control over the home seems to be a contributing factor as expressed by a respondent, “I have all my belongings here, and I know how most things work. I know where
I keep all my things and I can decide when and if visitors are allowed in”. It is clear that the respondents’ belongings are strongly connected to the feeling of wellbeing and comfort, “everything I have has a story, my story. It consists of my memories. Perhaps it is the reason for why it is so hard to get rid of even the smallest thing”. Another respondent tries to elaborate the idea further, “I have things around me that I thrive with and like, and I have chosen them for a reason”. However, some respondents explain that they do not thrive. They feel limited by the space in their homes and expresses how their wants, needs and creativity are held back. One of these respondents express that change is necessary in order to thrive, and says; “if you do not like changes in your home, you might not like to change yourself”.

5.3.3 Visitor

When expecting an invited visitor to their home almost all of the respondents’ first thoughts were to clean the whole house, especially the bathroom and to clear away things. One respondent expresses that “I do not want to show others that I am messy and that I have a lot of things lying around. I want to be able to decide for myself what kind of picture I want to give to others regarding who I am. If the visitor is someone that I know well the mess do not bother me as much, they already know who I am”. She continues by adding “if it is a new acquaintance I have the opportunity to make a good first impression and I also have a chance to affect how they will perceive my identity”. One respondent explains how she sometimes hides certain interior products depending on who the visitor is. “If the visitor have an interest for home decoration I get the feeling that I need to show that I know how to decorate, since my decoration and the choices of products say a lot about who I am as a person. I want the visitor to get a positive picture both regarding my home and me”.

The older respondents thoughts, except for cleaning, turned more to questions like what will we eat? and will all the guest fit?, “I do not care about the interior, how it looks like or if the house is cleaned, because this is something I would never pay attention to when visiting someone else’s home”. When the moderator turned the discussion away from the subject of cleanliness and more towards an interior perspective the answers from the focus group with older ages were unanimous that they did not reflect regarding their home decoration. “Each and everyone gets to care about their things, some like it simple, others more cluttered, who am I to have opinions on that?”
One of the younger respondents expresses concerns that the home should reflect her age. “Right now I do not see myself as an adult so for now it is okay that my apartment feels a bit decorated for a teenager. If I had felt more like an adult I would have decorated it differently, with real furniture that would last longer and not just work for the moment”. Those respondents who feel secure and are satisfied with their home did not care what their guests thought about it, and says that it always fun to receive a visitor.

When developing the question to if a guest suddenly arrives uninvited instead, the respondents’ answers once again turn to the cleanliness of the home. If the house is in a mess several respondents would explain and apologize for it. “The state of the home says something about the person who lives there, it is about how you want others to perceive you”. It is easy to draw conclusions about the life situation of the residents in relation to the state of their home environment. When probing and asking the question, why it would matter if the house is in a mess, the answer is that “having a tidy house is good upbringing which would mean that if my house was in a mess my guests would think that I was not brought up in good way. To have a clean and tidy home lays deep in our traditions”. One respondent expresses that she would more or less feel panic and stress, “I am not comfortable with unexpected visitors, I want to be prepared”. Generally seen, the focus group with higher ages´ first spontaneous thought was “nice”, “visiting someone unannounced is nice, the fact that you do not always have to announce your visit” and ”nice with a break”. Their answers were not as focused on the interior.

5.3.4 Embarrassment

The next question was a personal question regarding whether the respondents have any objects in their home that they are ashamed of. One respondent answered; “yes, I have butterflies in my flowerpots and when I expect certain visitors I always hide them”. She elaborates that the reason is because “it might not look good, the visitors might not like them and hence not like me”. Another respondent says “I have a wallpaper of vinyl in my bathroom, which feels so 1970’s”. When she is asked to elaborate she explains that these kinds of wallpapers do not fit into a luxury bathroom with higher status. A high status bathroom has tiles on both walls and floor. “When others see my bathroom they would wonder why I have not prioritised that cost. But in fact I do not want tile and floor tile, I want wooden panel”. One respondent explains that her mother always buy souvenirs and novelties
which she do not really want on display but keeps them because of the love for her mother. “I display them when she comes to visit, other times hide them behind the curtains”.

Other things that bring up feelings of embarrassment are unfinished constructions or unwanted gifts from close friends that visits a lot. For one respondent the embarrassment would differ depending on the person that is visiting, “if the person that visit has the same aesthetic interest like me, I would not be ashamed of my things but if I were to invite a more upper-class person, which is the exact opposite from me, it would probably not feel embarrassed but it would feel a bit uncomfortable”. Another respondent express that “if I am ashamed of my things that means that I am ashamed of myself, then I have to decide whether to keep them or not”.

5.3.5 Others’ opinions

About half of the respondents feel that it is important what other people think about their homes. Those who said yes expresses that it is important because of the wish that they want their guests to feel welcome and find their home pleasant. One explains this further by saying that it is due to confirmation needs, “I wish this was not the case but it is always present under the surface”. She continues with the statement that “this is probably the down side of our consumption society”.

Some of the respondents realize that they never thought about the issue, but conclude that they behave as if they care about what others think, “obviously I care since I always clean and sometimes hide things in my home when someone is visiting”. “To invite someone to your home is the same thing as showing a part of who you are, this is me!, It becomes a first impression of how others will perceive me and sometimes that can feel a bit uncomfortable, what if they get a totally different picture of who I am? If the persons I invite home do not like my home it could mean that they do not like me”. Another respondent goes so far that she express that she feels that if she were to get criticism towards her interior decoration that would be the same thing as criticizing her personally. “If they do not like my interior decorations they do not like me”. On the contrary another state that she absolutely does not care about what other thinks of her home. However, she continues by adding that, on the other hand, she does not want to stand out from the crowd too much. The discussion continues further as one expresses that you probably decorate more for others than what you might
think, much in a subconscious level. “I also think it depends upon how secure you are with yourself and your identity, and at which stage in life you are”.

Those who did not care about what other think said that since they are satisfied with their interior decorations they do not care much about others opinions, “the only important thing is that I thrive in my home”. Some say that they do not care but that it is always fun to hear positive comments or receive feedback regarding the interior decorations. The older age group express that it was of more importance many years ago but today it is more important to have a home that you thrive in yourself.

5.3.6 Reflection

Almost all of the respondents say that their home reflects who they are. One expresses that it is a reflection because almost all of his interests are represented in the home. Another states that since you shape your home into the way you desire it to look like, it becomes a mirror of who you are. This is something that is discussed further, and several respondents express that when you choose furniture and colours that you like you automatically reflect who you are, and your preferences. One expresses that in her home, she can truly be herself and has the things that she wants and likes. She, for example, expresses that she loves glitter (as in crystals, diamonds, sequins etc.) and this is something that she has in her home. She continues by saying that she also love glitter on clothes, but that she would never wear it outside of the home because it would draw too much attention. However, she says “when I am home I can wear these clothes, at home I can come out from the closet”.

Some participants discusses that when you live together with someone, it is important that the home reflects both parts. This can however be difficult since you have to adapt to someone else's taste and preferences. One respondent states that her home is not at all a reflection of who she is. She says “our home is way more dull than I am. I am a very bubbling person and always have a lot of projects going on. However, I get stuck in dark, black clothes, and have a very neutral home. Although, I think I need that outer calm to function, because it is such a creative chaos in my inside”.

When asked if they find it important that the home reflects who they are, some respondents say that it is not. One expresses that she do not decorate her home in order to show who she
is. Instead they find the most important issue to be that they thrive and feel comfortable in their own home. This is however discussed further by others who say that if it does not reflect who they are they would not thrive. In the words of one respondent “it is important that it makes me feel comfortable and relaxed in a way that lets me be who I am”. Another expresses that if the home did not reflect her, it could be anyone’s home and that would not make her feel comfortable. This since when you decorate your home with products that you like it automatically shows who you are, so the home and who you are goes hand in hand. Another respondent goes further and expresses the importance of this matter, “if my home is in a real mess and chaotic the visitor will automatically think that my life is in a chaotic state”.

5.3.7 Attachment

When asked the question what they would save if their house was to burn down to the ground, the first instinctive answer for most respondents is their photos or hard drive due to the content of memories and information. If all photos were saved, many say that they were likely to rescue something they had inherited from a relative. This due to the emotional value and the fact that these objects cannot be replaced. Especially among the younger respondents, the answer is that they do not have a lot of objects with an emotional value. For some, it is an object from their childhood they would rescue, while for others it would be their camera, a book, shoes, or a certain pillow that cannot be found elsewhere. Others are surprisingly realistic and say that bills or credit cards are what they would save, this because they want to have control over these types of things. Although, with all these answers in mind, most participants say that there are very few things that they could not live without or that is not replaceable. They express that there is few materialistic things that they are so attached to, and therefore it is more important with for example their photos or an object with a sentimental value since these cannot be replaced in the same way.

5.4 Identity

The fourth and final block deals with the concept of identity. The questions that were asked are all concerned with how the respondents express who they are and what they think contributes to how others perceive them. Most of the respondents agreed upon that the main factor for how they express who they are is concerned with the clothes they wear. But there are also other factors influencing, such as the way they speak, how they behave and their interests. Some respondents answered plainly “by just being me”. One respondent say “I
express who I am by every action that I am in control of and to some extent in those that I cannot control. Everything I do is an expression of who I am. Even if I should pretend to be someone else, to some extent that in itself is an expression of me”. In the focus group with the ages 40-60 the respondents differed from the younger respondents by focus more on things such as honesty towards each other, friendliness and by being true to who you are.

Some respondents pinpoint that depending on what type of situation, activity or discussion they participate in also gives an idea to others of who they are. Other factors can also determine how others will perceive them, as one respondent express “how my home is decorated, the style and choices of products say a lot about who I am”. “One´s possessions often give a reference point to others, regarding who you are as a person”.

5.4.1 Affect others
All respondents agreed upon that you can affect the perception others have of you, by behaving in a certain way, how you dress and by purchasing certain products. One respondent expresses it as “you could wish to achieve a certain identity different to the one you have, you can for example, use interior products as tools to create a desired identity”. Another participant develop the idea further, by explaining that people can play a role as someone else, and send any message you want to people around you.

By purchasing certain products and by how one behave in social medias the respondent think that you can affect other´s image of you. One respondent means that if you are trying to affect someone you are no longer yourself. The discussion continues on to the fact that you can sometimes wish to achieve another identity than the one you have. The interior decoration can serve as a mean to portray and be someone that you are not.
6. Data analysis

Chapter six presents a qualitative analysis of the data presented in the previous chapter together with the theories discussed in the literature review. This is done to uncover and highlight underlying patterns and processes that are found in the collected data. It will be presented in a similar structure as the literature review and the three blocks of identity, consumption and identity through consumption.

6.1 Identity

6.1.1 Expression of identity

As stated earlier in this study, identity is what defines a person as unique (Hammarén, Johansson 2007). You can express your identity by the way you act, speak, move and dress. According to the findings of this study it seems to be a difference among the younger and older respondents regarding factors used to express their identity. The younger respondents seems to be more focused around factors such as how they express their opinions, what types of clothes they wear and how their home is decorated. The older respondents however, seem to be more concerned with areas around expressing honesty, friendliness and staying true to who they are. Conclusions drawn are that it may have to do with the idea that the older respondents have already gone through more developing phases in life. Since they already have experienced both ups and downs in the process of finding oneself, they might have found what brings actual value and relevance in life.

To reconnect to the statement that identity is a constantly changing process that we create and mold (Holmberg et al. 2009), findings in this study show that the reason people purchase and carefully chose interior products is because a home should be living and constantly follow one’s life. Just as the formation of identity is a developing process so is the buying behaviour, as we consume interior products for different reasons throughout life. As the example where one respondent bought a couch only because the colour spoke to her and where she did not
take the functionality into consideration. This might be something that would not work in later stages in life, since the different stages demands different types of settings and priorities.

With the connection to that a person’s home expresses their identity it is interesting to draw parallels to how a messy house could mean that others may draw conclusions that the person who lives there has an insufficient upbringing. This negative outcome can be seen as problematic since the norms of society states that people should behave in good manners as a result from a good upbringing. This can be connected to what Kotler et al. (2009) defines as cultural factors influencing consumers. Also, to show the home to a visitor without the chance to alter anything, creates a situation where you show the “naked truth” about who you are. People seems to be concerned with the ability to control which part of the self that is revealed to others and under which circumstances this occurs. Once again, people seem to have an apprehension of how other people evaluates them, based upon the appearance of the home.

6.1.2 Ideal and actual self

Further, the concept of identity can be divided into the actual self and the ideal self (Solomon et al. 2010). This contributes to that consumers can choose to express what image they want to reveal and portray to others. Findings in this study show what one respondent express as the style of a person’s home say a lot about who lives there, which can be seen as an expression of the resident’s actual self. The discussion continues on to the fact that people sometimes can have a wish to achieve another self-image than the one they have, which can be connected to the ideal self. This connection is identified in several of the data collected in the empirical investigation, where statements are raised such as “you could wish to achieve a certain identity different from the one you have, by for example, use interior products as tools to create a desired identity”. The interior decoration can serve as a mean to portray someone that you are not. By consuming products with underlying meanings and values, such as a high status, people can be associated with that particular status. Even though this is not their actual self, it can be an example of how people can express their ideal self. With the help of the ideal self, people can play a role as someone else, and convey any message they want to their surroundings.
6.1.3 Public and private self

Sedlovskaya et al. (2013) states that people have different degrees of the public and private self, whereas some people are more public than private. This is revealed in this study where one respondent has a high degree between her public and private self since she expresses that only in her own private sphere can she truly be herself. The identification is made when she expresses a strong desire to dare to show herself in public with “diamonds” on her clothes. The “diamonds” however, is a feature she likes in her home decoration but even here it is something that she only shows to carefully selected visitors. The interesting part is that this is something that she likes and has purchased, but chooses not to show for everyone. Does this mean that she is not secure in her identity? If she would have a lower degree between her public and private self, it would probably mean that she would have the courage to go out in clothes with “diamonds” and show, as Sedlovskaya et al. (2013) states, a more authentic self.

6.1.4 Self-categorization

To develop the discussion of public and private self further, the self-categorization theory describes how an individual will perceive a certain group identity of people and how and why the individual wants to belong to that group (Reynolds et al. 2010). Findings in the empirical data provide a discussion that people might decorate their homes with regards to others more than what one might think. The degrees to how much you actually have other people in mind when decorating might stand in relation to how secure you are in your identity. Another interesting parallel to self-categorization is that one respondent expressed that even though she is secure in herself when consuming interior products to her home, she do not want to stand out from the crowd too much. This can be viewed in context with the actual core idea of self-categorization theory, which is that people represent different social categories, showing both similarities and differences within the group. It also rests heavily on the comparisons between the self and others in the social environment (Reid et al. 2009). If her interior decoration where to stand out too much from her social belonging she would no longer share the same similarities with that group.

6.1.4.1 Advice from others

The identified reasons to why some people turn to others for opinions and advice regarding their interior decoration can be seen as an act to check with the social group they belong, or wish to belong, to. In this matter, big differences were identified between the respondents.
Some did not care as much regarding others’ opinions since the most important thing is that they approve of the product themselves. To continue on the topic that some people have a desire to check for others approval when it comes to their interior decoration, it was identified that the older respondents differed a bit from the others. The difference concerned that they had more considerations about others’ opinions when they were younger, but now the most important thing is that they thrive in their home themselves. In contrast to the willingness and efforts made to be a part of a social context, the complete opposite has also been identified as the desire to stand out with a unique identity. By the efforts to search for interior products in places where more unique items can be found people can be creative and decorate their home in a way that expresses their personal identities. In this way, their homes can become more unique and different from others. This desire to be unique can be reflected in how people use their products in order to feel unique.

6.1.5 Extended self

Findings in this study show that some people are so attached to their products that they become a part of their identity. This is what is known as the theory of the extended self. This becomes evident in this research, as one respondent explains that her personal selection of furniture is what constitutes her personal home. Her identity is so embedded in her couch that if someone else were to buy the same couch, this would make her home feel less personal. Even though another person is not actually taking her couch, she still feels like a part of her identity is stolen. This example shows that when a person’s possession becomes so strongly attached to their personality they become parts of their selves (Belk 1988). Further, this shows that Belk’s (1988) statement “we are what we have” is still highly valid today. As Mittal (2006) expresses, possessions can define a person because of two main reasons. First of all since people spend so much time with their possessions, sometimes their whole life, they become viewed as a part of the person. Secondly, the possessions can be used in order to display the person’s identity for others to see who that person is.

Another finding where the theory of the extended self becomes evident is in the example where embarrassment leads to the hiding of personal things. The interesting part in the hiding of personal objects is when people say that even though they like the products, they have a fear that others will not, and hence not like them for who they are. For some the connections between their home and their identity become so strong that if they were to invite someone
who does not like their home, it inevitably means that they will not like the person living there either. Which factor makes some people ashamed of things they love in relation to others’ opinions, while other people are so secure in the things they love? One way to try to explain this phenomenon might be that the latter are more secure in their identity, that they do not need to be confirmed by others in the same extent.

6.1.6 Self-congruence
As stated by Evans et al. (2008) people tend to consume products that are in line with what they perceive as their self-image. In the findings of this study this is evident where many express a desire to buy interior products that matches who they are in order to create a personal home. Several opinions are raised regarding this matter. Some express that the selected interior products should reflect the personality since they are the tools used to mold the everyday life. Others however, mean that they do not decorate the home in order to show who he or she is. Instead the most important issue is that they, and others, thrive and feel comfortable in their homes. This is however discussed further by others who say that if the home does not reflect who they are they would not thrive. As one respondent strongly express, if others consider her home as chaotic they will automatically think that her life also is in a chaotic state. Further it is explained that when a home is shaped as a person desires, it automatically becomes a mirror of who they are. This because the choices is based upon the persons personal preferences and tastes. Therefore, the home becomes a reflection of the person living there, regardless if this is intentionally or not. Viewed in relation to that consumers purchase and use products in order to define, enhance and maintain their identity (Hosany, Martin 2011), this becomes evident.

The analysis continues with the fact that the meaning behind the product is as important as the function since it provides the consumer with both status and belonging (Hosany, Martin 2011). In this study this becomes evident as one respondent express that a symbol of high status is for example having tiles in the bathroom. The interesting point in this statement is that she might consider going against her own preferences and chose to renovate like this only because of what the current norm say and not as she actually wants to. Even though she has a picture of what her social surroundings considers, she is so secure in her identity that her will outweighs others´ opinions.
## Table 6. Identity analysis summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical concepts</th>
<th>Empirical Findings</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>- A difference among younger and older respondents regarding how they express their identity.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>- People purchase and carefully chose interior products because a home should be living and constantly follow one’s life.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- A person’s home say a lot about who lives there, which is as an expression of the resident’s actual self. People can sometimes wish to achieve another self-image than the one they have, which is connected to the ideal self.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- A person can have a high degree between the public and private self, which leads to that only in the private sphere of a home the true self are revealed.</td>
<td>- A lower degree between the public and private self, would probably mean that one could reveal a more authentic self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-categorisation</td>
<td>- People decorate their homes with regards to others more than what one might think.</td>
<td>- The degree to how much they actually have other people in mind when decorating might stand in relation to how secure they are in their identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended self</td>
<td>- The identity is so embedded in some products that if someone else where to buy the same, the home feels less personal.</td>
<td>- When a person’s possessions become so strongly attached to their personality they become parts of their selves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The connections between the home and the identity become so strong that if people invite someone who does not like their home, it means that they will not like the person living there either.</td>
<td>- A lower security in the identity means that the need to be confirmed by others is higher. A higher security means the need to be confirmed by others is lower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-congruence</td>
<td>- Many express a desire to buy interior products that matches who they are in order to create a personal home.</td>
<td>- The home is a reflection of the person living there. Consumers consume in order to define, enhance and maintain their identity.</td>
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6.2 Consumption

6.2.1 The consumption society

Overall, the findings in this study highly agree with that consumption is an essential part of peoples’ everyday life (Solomon et al. 2010). The research shows that many are concerned with others’ opinions, current trends and what the norms in the society say. From the empirical investigation, this is shown when the respondents express a strong desire to receive positive confirmation regarding their homes. To quote one of the respondents “this is probably the down side of our consumption society”, which might be due to that we allow ourselves to be too influenced by others which affects our choices. Connected to Belk’s (1988) statement that products have received an increasingly important role when defining the identity and the desired perception from others, the analysis goes further. This by explaining that the pressure from the social surroundings may lead to that people purchase interior products for other reasons than to satisfy their own demands.

6.2.2 Materialism

The concept of materialism involves the importance and feelings that people attach to their possessions (Goldsmith et al. 2011). Theory also states that the value of a product is not only measured in terms of what the price of the product is, but also based upon what value the consumer puts into the product (Holmberg et al. 2009). This is a fact that becomes evident in this research, as the reasons to why some products would be rescued from a fire, is that people have embedded so many feelings and affections into them. These products are often things that are not replaceable, because of its sentimental value. For one respondent the feeling of comfort and wellbeing is so connected with her objects since they possesses both memories and stories that she has a hard time to get rid of even the smallest things. Seen in the light of Goldsmith et al. (2011) this is a person labelled as a true materialist, due to the deep concern for these products. Furthermore, as one respondent explains as her current living situation is only temporary, she has chosen to decorate it with temporary furniture and interior products that she is not especially attached to. The actual separation from these objects will therefore not be as hard, since she has not embedded any feelings into them. If feelings and values were attached into these products it might lead to that she feels like she is throwing away parts of herself.
Table 7. Consumption analysis summary

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialism</td>
<td>-The feeling of comfort and wellbeing is so connected with objects since they possess both memories and stories that it is to get rid of even the smallest things.</td>
<td>-When throwing away a product it feels like throwing away parts of the self.</td>
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6.3. Identity through consumption

Schau et al. (2009) makes the connection that people in each different stage in life use products, symbols and materials to address different identities. This becomes clear as the research shows that the way one respondent purchase interior products and decorate her home is a reflection of how she is with everything in life. She explains that “I want everything to happen at once, which also reflects when I make purchases for my home”. One additional connection between interior and identity is as another respondent express that if a person do not like to make changes in the home environment, it most likely shows that the person do not like to change her or himself either. Parallels in this matter can be drawn to, since a person has a certain identity it influences the choices in life, which in turn will reflect how the person decorates their home. This is strengthen by Solomon et al. (2010) who says that a person’s possessions together with their consumption behaviour is used by both the individual as well as by others, to determine the specific individuals personality. Certain materials and products have underlying values embedded in them, such as status and belongingness which reveals the person’s opinions and interests.

As lifestyle and identity are shaped by consumption and since this is an ongoing process (Holmberg et al. 2009), certain changes throughout life should be able to identify. As people gets older the reasons for consumption might evolve from earlier stages in life. In this research, this is an evident fact and the examples that were identified are that the older respondents now care more about hospitality when expecting a visitor. The younger, on the
other hand, were more concerned with issues such as the appearance of the house. Another
difference between the life stages is that the frequency of consuming interior products might
decrease. In this case due to that the respondent becomes “blind to the reality”, they become
so used to their home environment that they do not longer see a need for change. This might
be because the home environment has become a part of the identity, which is an attachment
that Solomon et al. (2010) explains as a security blanket used to enhance and maintain the
identity.

6.3.1 Why we buy
According to Holmberg et al. (2009), consumers believe that some products are aligned with
their self image and therefore consume these products in order to enhance or strengthen their
identity. Also, material things are necessary for our social and psychological needs in order to
satisfy ourselves, and hence, consumption have now become our primary goal of self-
definition (Durning 1992). The respondents participating in this study express how they
purchase interiors for mainly two different reasons, functionality and need. However, the
decisive factor is that the product is appealing to the consumer and that it is suitable for their
home. Conclusions drawn from findings in this research, such as the fact that the reason for
why the respondents purchase interior products is because a desire to renew their home.
Perhaps this can be due to that the respondent's identity has evolved and that they therefore
have new needs and interests to fulfil.

According to the findings in this study, consumers are divided into two parts, one part where
they accept help from others when buying interior products and are concerned with what
others think of their home. The other part do not care about others’ opinions as they are more
confident in their own self image and rarely asks for others’ opinions. This provides this
research with a two folded outcome. Theory states that consuming products can be seen as a
social way of interacting with others, expressing affection or a way to communicate our social
status or how we want to be perceived by others (Holmberg et al. 2009). This is partly true
when it comes to the findings of this investigation, as only half of the investigated
respondents interact with others in their consumption of interior products. This is analysed in
the context of whether there is a connection between the insecurity of the identity and the
confirmation needed from others. Conclusions is drawn that the respondents that are most
insecure in their identity are the ones that have most concerns about what others think about their home.

Theory also states that through consumption the individual can position her or himself as unique and stand out from others by differentiation, which could arise because of a will to develop and enhance the identity. Products may be used as symbols of uniqueness and can therefore be especially attractive for people who seek to stand out from others. In order for a person to create a unique identity, he or she must create a personal style (Tian et al. 2001). In this study, this is connected to the other part of the respondents who only follows their own opinions and never considers what others might think when they are consuming interior products. By this they can create a highly personal home with both uniqueness and a clear connection to their strong identity.

By receiving approval from others before a purchase, consumers gain a guarantee to identify themselves with the group that they wish to belong to. Research shows that consumption has become a large part in identity seeking due to the increase of marketing, products, and the accessibility of information regarding other peoples’ shopping behaviours (Östberg, Kaijser 2010). Also, findings in this study shows that by constantly changing products in the home can trigger more purchases, since you want to adapt what you bought with complementary products. This shows that the home is an ever evolving environment, connected to the constant development of the identity.

**6.3.2 High and low involvement**

As mentioned earlier, when a consumer is considering to purchase a product, he or she determines how much involvement that is necessary in order to make a successful purchase or how involved they are with the product (Mishra, Kumar 2012). According to this research those respondents who are more pleased with their home environment are more involved with their home and belongings, which makes the level of involvement high. One consumer expresses “because it feels like a part of me” which indicates a high interaction and involvement as he engage deeply in his home. He controls which objects that should be temporary and which products that never will be added into his home.
The low involvement products are associated to low perceived risk and price, which minimizes the effort of involvement (Boonpattarakan 2012). Approximately half of the studied respondents confessed to purchasing interiors on impulse, spending minimized effort on evaluating the purchase. They decided their purchases purely on positive feelings. The other half however stated that they always put maximum effort and involvement into the purchases. It is evident in the findings of this study that a person’s identity or characteristics in their personality, is highly visible in the involvement level of a purchase. This shows a clear connection between the identity and the actual purchase phase of the consumption process.

High involvement is connected to higher risk and price (Boonpattarakan 2012). A high involvement product in terms of interior products could be a sofa, as were discussed in this study. The respondents have according to this research a tendency to, when it comes to larger and more expensive products, involve themselves extensively into the purchase. Consumers go through an extensive process with several steps before making a purchase. However, according to the findings of this study there are some exceptions. One respondent explained how he has bought a sofa on impulse and probably would do it again. The findings of this research also shows that the higher involvement level is strongly connected to a higher risk, since when a person put a lot of money into a product, he or she wants to be absolutely certain that the outcomes are positive.

It is also stated that the level of involvement refers to personal feelings of the individuals’ interest. As the consumer is involved in a purchase decision, the individual’s interest in the product determines the level of involvement and also affects the consumer behaviour (Jung, Yoon 2011). As this study is looking into the whole consumption process of the product, the interest and involvement in the product is continued even after the purchase. The respondents view their home as a place where you spend most of your time in, creating a place for them to thrive. The involvement level the respondents have in their home is high in terms of personal feelings and interests. According to their wishes they change and shape their home to be as accommodating to their needs and wants as possible. The respondents also have a request for their home to be personalized, which makes them even more engaged in their interiors.
6.3.3 Perceived risk

The perceived risk expresses how the consumer weighs benefits against disadvantages before purchasing a product (Eggert 2006). Depending on price, this research shows that the respondents are more willing to buy a less expensive product on impulse or to exchange things on a more regular basis in their homes, as they perceived the risk to be smaller. Also, the respondents are well aware of risks associated to their social surroundings and how interior decoration is perceived. They are also aware of that their interior decoration can lead to judgement by others. Eggert (2006) explains the perceived risk as the consumers’ “buying goals” and according to this study the reasons behind the respondents’ purchases were originally a need which they transformed into a goal of filling that need.

6.3.3.1 Personal risk

As Simcock et al. (2006) express, personal risk involves the pressure from social surroundings to maintain one’s self image. According to this study, this also happen in real life. The respondents are to some extent removing or rearranging belongings in order to prevent or minimize personal risks. This since it is believed among the respondents that the perceptions that other people have of their belongings will also reflect upon their identity. This means that the opinions that they will have of the objects will be the same as the opinions they will have of the object’s owner. The perception cannot be guaranteed to be positive and therefore creates high personal risk when allowing a visitor into the home. A majority of the respondents investigated in this research are well aware that by making a good impression they minimize the personal risks and therefore controls the perceived image they are sending out to others of their selves. Therefore they keep a clean house when expecting visitors that they do not know well. Several respondents are however not bothered with their housekeeping if they are aware of that their perceived image will not be downgraded, this is therefore associated with low personal risks. The findings in this study supports that a majority of the respondent are, to some extent, aware of their own identity in their belongings. If the interior decoration is contributing to a higher perceived personal risk in contact with others, the respondents are more likely to hide certain products prior to a visit in order to minimize the risk. Due to the fear of conveying the wrong image of themselves, one extreme case shows how it is believed that the dislike of an object will also mean the dislike of the owner.
Generally the consumers in age group 40 to 60 seem more confident in their own identity according to the research and do not experience the personal risk as an effect of a visit in the same extent. Respondents who generally feel more secure and satisfied with their home experience lower personal risks. Conclusions drawn from this is that these respondents probably are more secure in their home, and hence themselves. It can also be due to that they do not believe that their home convey who they are, or because they do not care about how others will perceive them. They do not believe that their identity will be judged on the basis of their home. Also, when receiving an unexpected visitor, a majority of the respondents experienced an increasing amount of personal risk. When they were not able to control the circumstances of the visitor the respondents felt discomfort and sometimes stress. This could be due to that the respondent in these situations are not able to control what they show to others based on the same preferences. However, according to this research, consumers in the age group 40 to 60 have a tendency to be more unaffected by the personal risks associated to unexpected visitors. Overall, approval by others is highly desirable resulting in a greater personal risk where consequences could be losing face and approval by others.

There is another way to see the personal risk, that of not presenting the right products in the home. This research shows evidence of how consumers display interior products that they to some extent are ashamed of or do not like, in order to please others. One respondent explained that she brings forward gifts from her mother, when she visits, that she never has on display otherwise. The personal risk of not showing the gifts from others are high, and the consequences for the consumers psyche is of great importance since it translates into an uncomfortable feeling.

To minimize the potential risk prior to a purchase half of the respondents researched explained how they took advice from others. This could be an attempt to minimize both personal and non-personal risks as it is expressed that they seek approval from others if their purchase of interior will be suitable or look good in their home. The other half claims not to take any interior decoration insights from others, which could imply that they experience the risk lower than other respondents.
### Table 8. Identity through consumption analysis summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Theoretical Concept</strong></th>
<th><strong>Empirical Findings</strong></th>
<th><strong>Analysis</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity through consumption</strong></td>
<td>- The way a respondent purchase interior products and decorate the home is a reflection of how she is with everything in life.</td>
<td>- A person’s identity influences the choices in life, which in turn will reflect how the person decorates their home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why we buy</strong></td>
<td>- Purchases interiors for mainly three reasons, functionality, need and appealing factor.</td>
<td>- People purchase interior products as the identity has evolved and therefore have new needs and interests to fulfill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One part of the consumers accepts help and has concerns what others think.</td>
<td>- Consumers who are insecure in their identity have the most concerns about what others think about their home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The other part does not care about others opinions and never asks for help.</td>
<td>- Consumers can create a highly personal home with both uniqueness and a clear connection to their strong identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Constantly changing products in the home could trigger for more purchases, in order to adapt the purchase with complementary products.</td>
<td>- The home is an ever evolving environment, connected to the constant development of the identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High/low involvement</strong></td>
<td>- Respondents more pleased with their home environment are more involved with their home and belongings.</td>
<td>- Satisfaction with the home environment makes the level of involvement high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Identity is highly visible in the involvement level of a purchase.</td>
<td>- This shows clear connections between the identity and the actual purchase phase of the consumption process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Respondents change their home to be as accommodating to their needs and wants as possible</td>
<td>- The involvement level in the home is high in terms of personal feelings and interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High/low perceived risk</strong></td>
<td>- Removing or rearranging belongings in order to prevent or minimize personal risks. Perceptions others have of someone’s belongings will reflect upon their identity.</td>
<td>- If the perception cannot be guaranteed to be positive it will create a high personal risk when allowing a visitor into the home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Consumers in age group 40 to 60 are confident in their own identity and do not experience the personal risk as an effect of a visit.

- Consumers display gifts of interior products that they are ashamed of or do not like, in order to please others.

- Respondents who generally feel more secure and satisfied with their home experience lower personal risks. These respondents are more secure in their home, and hence themselves.

- The personal risk of not showing the gifts from others are high and the consequences for the consumer translates into an uncomfortable feeling.
7. Conclusions and implications

In this chapter the conclusions and main findings from the analysis is presented. The two research questions are in turn discussed and answered. The chapter ends with theoretical and managerial implications as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

7.1 Discussions

This study has focused on investigating the areas of identity as well as the reasons behind consumption. It has further been connected to the area of interior products and how these factors are assumed to affect each other. The purpose of the study was therefore to investigate the connections between consumption of interior products and identity. In order to assist the investigation two research questions were conducted with the help of the literature review. These questions were formulated as follows;

RQ1: Does the way people decorate their homes express their identity?
RQ2: Do people believe that they are judged by others based upon how they decorate their home?

After conducting this research it is evident that there are several strong connections between consumption of interior products and identity. One major factor influencing the connection is the social factors. These include that others’ opinions will have an effect on how people act and behave. When decorating the home people tend to take other people’s opinions into consideration, in different degrees. Findings in this study show that what other people actually think of one’s home influences how they will decorate. However, people also tend to have concerns with that they will be judged by others, sometimes without actual proof of this happening. People might not have any opinions or prejudices regarding one's home at all. To be influenced by others might lead to that people consume in order to impress others, instead of consuming for their actual preferences. This might end up with a home that do not express or reflect the real identity. This statement helps to answer the second research question that people actually do believe that they are judged by others, which shows that there is a strong connection between the identity and the consumption of interior products.
Findings in this study also reveal that the home is considered to be an important place where people can feel safe and they therefore put a lot of time and effort to thrive and feel comfortable. In order to feel comfortable many has expressed a desire to put their own imprint on their home to make it unique. By consuming products that you appreciate and feel for, you automatically consume in line with your self-image. This will inevitably lead to that your home environment reflects your identity. In order to fully be secure in revealing the home, and hence the true identity, a person need to have a certain degree of self-confidence. As the findings of this investigation show, those that feel insecure in their identity have a tendency to hide things in their home, and by doing this they also hide a part of their identity. This can be seen in contrast to those people who are more secure in their identity and who are less affected by other people’s opinions regarding their homes. In accordance to these conclusions the first research question, regarding if the way people decorate their home expresses their identity, has evident answers.

Conclusions were also drawn that there is differences in how older consumers and younger consumers perceives their home. The study shows that older respondents feel more secure in their identities which at the same time show a strong connection that they are not as concerned about others’ opinions regarding their homes. Assumptions made from this is that people at the same time as they grow older and develop their identity, for example through consumption, they also become more secure in it.

Interesting for this study is to see where the line between the identity and the interior products is drawn. Some people seem to associate themselves so strongly with a possession, that if someone is criticizing their possession they are also criticizing the owner of the product. The attachment between the self and the product seems to be lower if the person is more secure in his or her identity. Even though they can identify themselves with an object, they do not consider the product to be a part of them. The ability to separate oneself from a product seems to be higher for these people, which leads to that they are not offended by critique in the same degree. The persons with a lower security in their identity however, seem to be more attached and identifies stronger with products. In this way, they sometimes use products as a security blanket to enhance the identity, and potential criticism is affecting them harder. The most interesting part is that many seems to associate themselves with what seems to be products
Conclusions and implications

without statements, and by receiving critics for their belongings leaves the feeling of being criticized themselves.

Other interesting conclusions drawn from this investigation is whether the identity or the consumption comes first. As Holmberg et al. (2009) express, by consuming products that are believed accurate to the self image, people create themselves. The identity is therefore considered as an outcome of the consumption, and hence, the consumption controls the identity. If it is also said that you chose products that are in line with your identity (Solomon et al. 2010) this means that you already have an identity that controls what you purchase. This creates somewhat of a contradiction between the different theories regarding which factor that leads the other. The final conclusion of this study is therefore that there most certainly are many strong connections between consumption of interior products and identity. However, to reconnect to the statement that you create your identity through consumption, we want to alter this statement by saying that through consumption of interior products you instead of create an identity, enhance and develop it.

7.2 Theoretical and managerial implications

The purpose for this study has been to gain deeper understandings and find underlying meanings within the area of interior decoration and identity. The existing theoretical implications reveal that there are several connections between consumption and identity. This study contributes with another perspective, regarding which role interior products play on the connection. The theories presented in the literature review have been proven to correlate well with the findings of the empirical study. When applying the main findings with the theories in a context it is evident that they are well applicable. Our contribution however reveals a broader perspective, where the creation of the identity is altered into developing and enhancing the identity when consuming interior products. This because people cannot consume in order to create an identity without taking their already existing identity into consideration.

Our main managerial recommendation for this research is for people with a connection within the area of interior design to gain a deeper perspective and awareness of its connections to identity. This can contribute to new ideas and further understandings regarding consumer behaviour.
7.3 Limitations

The main limitations of this study are due to the restrictions in time and resources needed for conducting it. Further, up-to-date sources regarding the literature review is a limitation. Most research seems to be conducted in the 1970-1990’s (or earlier). These sources seems however, well valid today. The absence of theoretical implications regarding the area of interior decoration contributed to that the literature review is more concerned around consumption overall, rather than in this specific field. This area is instead focused on in the following chapters.

Also, since this is a qualitative study it lacks in regards to the smaller sample size compared to the ones that a quantitative study can contribute with. This restricts the ability to make large generalisations of the findings and somewhat the reliability since, generally seen, statistics today are to some extent more reliable. However, this study instead aimed to focus on the underlying meaning of the findings. Also, when conducting a focus group the first answer from one respondent can sometimes give ideas and block answers from others. This first idea sets the tone and focus of the answers to the questions, which can contribute to that the respondents becomes limited in their own opinions.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

For future research, a quantitative study could serve as a foundation for a broader investigation, which could contribute to that more generalisations of the findings can be drawn. In order to increase the reliability the study could be replicated at a later point in time.

Another interesting angle on this topic could be to turn the focus around. Instead of asking question to the respondents regarding how they feel about their home decoration, the questions could instead turn more to how they perceive others’ homes and what they believe that the interior decoration says about the person living there.

In this study there are several mentioning about peoples security in their identity and whether they have a strong identity or not. The next step for this research could be to investigate further what contributes to the fact that some people are more secure in their identity than others.
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Chapter 8


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9. Appendices

Questionnaire

1. Interior decoration
1.1 What comes to your mind if I say/mention interior decoration?
1.2 Where do you come in contact with interior decoration?

2. Consumption
2.1 How do you shop for interior products, what goes through your mind?
   2.1.1 Why do you purchase interior products?
2.2 Where do you purchase interior products?
2.3 If you where to buy a sofa, where and how do you purchase it?
   2.3.1 Do you seek information before you make a purchase?
2.4 Do you take help and advice from others when you decorate your home, or purchase interior products?
2.5 What did your latest purchase of interior products consist of?
   2.5.1 What was the reason for the purchase?
2.6 Where did you get inspiration for your latest purchase of interior products?

3. The home
3.1 What does your home mean to you?
3.2 Are you satisfied with your home?
   3.2.1 Yes - why?
   3.2.2 No - what do you want to change?
3.3 What is important to you in your home?
3.4 Do you follow current interior trends? Do you often replace (or re-furnish, re-decorate) things in your home?
   3.4.1 Why?
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3.5 Do you thrive in your home?
   3.5.1 YES - What makes you thrive in your home?
   3.5.2 NO - Why not? What would make you thrive/feel comfortable?

3.6 What is your first thought/feeling when you expect a visitor?
   3.6.1 (If saying to clean the house) How do you reflect about your home decoration when expecting a visitor?
   3.6.2 How do you feel/ what is your first thought when someone turns up uninvited, unexpectedly at your home?

3.7 Do you have any object/s in your home that you are ashamed of?

3.8 Is it important what others think about your home?
   3.8.1 Why?

3.9 Would you say that your home reflects who you are?
   3.9.1 Is it important that it reflect who you are?

3.10 If your house was to burn to the ground, and you were able to save only one material possession (not person or animal and your photos have been saved already), what would it be?

4. Identity
4.1 How do you express who you are?

4.2 What do you think contributes to how others perceive you?

4.3 Do you think that you can affect others´ image of you?
   4.3.1 YES - How?
   4.3.2 NO - Why not?

5. Sensitive Questions
5.1 Age
5.2 Gender