Supplier-Buyer Relationships within the Small-Sized Fashion Retail Industry
A qualitative study of relationship marketing within small-sized fashion retailers in Sweden

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Linnaeus University
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Hampus Henriksson  Marie Larsson  Cia Withorn
Abstract

Despite the vast research within the fields of buyer-supplier relationships and the fashion industry, a lack of comprehensive understanding concerning the connection between the two seems to be found. Research regarding long-term relations and key concepts in form of trust and commitment, are stated to be crucial in order to create a long-term relationship. However, the importance of these concepts application regarding small-sized fashion retailers was identified to be an unexplored area; thus, a research gap was detected. This highlights a need for further research of the characteristics of the buyer-supplier relationships within small-sized fashion retailers. The purpose of this study was consequently to investigate buyer-supplier relationships within small-sized fashion retailers. Furthermore, based on the literature review of the theoretical framework, three research questions were formulated. To gather empirical data, a multiple-case study was conducted and semi-structured interviews with four purchasing managers working in the fashion industry were performed.

This study discloses that the concepts of trust and commitment were identified as being of great importance, in order to maintain a long-term relationship between the parties. Further, several factors, e.g. communication, conflict resolution and identification were distinguished to have a significant impact on the character of a close relationship.

Finally this study concluded that the relation between the buyer and supplier is highly valued; with especially trust as a key factor. Both affective and calculative commitment was identified to exist, often depending on the size and dependence of the supplier. However, the prosperity of the business was ultimately argued to be the main reason for maintaining a partnership. Hence, the retailers preferred a close relationship, but sometimes accepted a transactional one due to their own customer demand.

Keywords: Relationship marketing, Buyer-supplier relationship, Trust, Commitment, Affective, Calculative, Small-sized fashion retailer,
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide
1. INTRODUCTION

This first chapter provides the reader with an introduction to the subject of the study. Firstly, relationship marketing, in the context of business-to-business and the fashion retail industry, is described. Secondly, the problem of the study is discussed and defined, and a more detailed perspective of the industry and its distinctions is portrayed. Finally, the problem discussion concludes the objective of the study and its delimitation.

1.1 Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing has received growing attention during recent years; the notion is described as an effective mean of attracting and retaining customers, including benefits for companies as well as suppliers in gained satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth (Pereira et al., 2012). The aim of relationship marketing is to build long-term relations that are mutually satisfying between buyers and suppliers (Grönroos, 1994). While moving from fixed transactions to collaboration and co-production of value between seller and buyer; the individual is in focus instead of the masses and interaction is preferred instead of one-way persuasion (Gummesson, 2002).

1.2 Supplier Relationships

Within the field of business-to-business (henceforth: B2B), relationships have emerged as an important area of managerial practice, where companies become trusted participants to increase the value between seller and buyer (Ulaga and Eggert, 2006). According to Frödell (2011), there is an ongoing search for criterions that distinguish effective relationships between buyers and suppliers. This investigation has been enduring for the last few decades, and has therefore been a natural step in the progression of supplier relationship management (Frödell, 2011). Furthermore, it is emphasized that a retail organization is not supposed to initiate close partnerships with all of their suppliers; instead it is recommended to differentiate the supplier portfolio and methods of working with them (e.g. Dyer et al., 1998; Frödell, 2011). Hence, the aim of long-term relations and partnerships with suppliers should be
contributions of inputs that are of high value and differentiates the buyer’s final product (Dyer et al., 1998; Frödell, 2011).

When engaging in a close buyer-supplier relationship on long-term, certain factors should be considered. Trust is described as one of the key factors concerning a close relationship, and is described by Woo and Phrud’homme (1996), as something that leads to enhanced business credibility and reconcile the buyer and supplier; leading to an increased performance between the two (Ganesan, 1994).

Furthermore, a long-term relationship can be comprehended from a perspective of affective or calculative commitment (Fullerton, 2003; Ruyter et al., 2001; Frederico and Parente, 2009). Affective commitment is described as the willingness to continue a relationship with the supplier, a want to maintain the relation and have a long-term focus (Gustafsson et al., 2005; Frederico and Parente, 2009). Calculative commitment on the other hand, occurs when a buyer has the need to continue a relation with their supplier; this is commonly referred to as adverse penalties that may arise in connection with the termination of a relationship (Ruyter et al., 2001; Frederico and Parente, 2009).

Additionally, according to Wong and Guo (2010) among others, the fashion industry is described as a very unpredictable and distinctive market; it would therefore be of interest to gain understanding whether the same factors would identify a buyer-supplier relationship, and furthermore, how these relationships are valued.

1.3 Problem Discussion

1.3.1 The Fashion Industry
The volatility of the fashion industry is characterized by short product life cycles; high customer demand unpredictability; tremendous product varieties; items’ sales of strong seasonality; uncertainty of forecasting demand because of a frequent changing market environment; as well as long supply processes (Fisher et al., 1994; Sen, 2008; Wong and Guo, 2010; Christopher and Peck, 1997; Fisher et al., 2000; Hsiao et al., 2002; Hines and
McGowan, 2005; Frederico and Parente, 2009). These characteristics have created patterns of relationships between suppliers and retailers with specificities that differ from more stable markets (Frederico and Parente, 2009). Moreover, it is claimed that the strategic building and establishing of supplier partnerships, is crucially important to be able to get new products to the market faster and more efficiently (Wheelright and Clark, 1992; Hines and McGowan, 2005).

1.3.2 Buyer-Supplier Relationships
Ryu et al. (2007) among others, identifies critical factors for efficient buyer-supplier relationships and alliances based on qualitative as well as quantitative data. Monczka et al. (1998) among others categorized these into different groups, which are more thoroughly explained in the theoretical framework in subchapter 2.1.1. However, even though prior studies have shown the possibility of strengthen a buyer-supplier relationship; success is not guaranteed by the fulfillment of these criteria (Frödell, 2011). Yet, one criterion that has been argued by several authors as crucial to strengthen the buyer-supplier relationship is trust (Dwyer et al., 1987; Mayer et al., 1995; Ruyter et al., 2001; Woo and Phrud’homme, 1999; Sullivan and Peterson, 1982). Trust is argued to give the buyer security and belief in their supplier (Dwyer et al., 1987; Mayer et al., 1995). Furthermore, it is considered as an essential part as to create a successful long-term relationship (Ruyter et al., 2001). It could therefore be of importance to investigate how trust is perceived to affect the relations between the buyer and supplier in the fashion industry, seen from the buyers’ perspective. Another factor found to be equal in both close and distant relationships was satisfaction (Harland, 1996). For instance, Harland (1996) found that satisfaction was equal in both close and distant relationships; it was therefore argued that the circumstances should decide what kind of relationship is the most appropriate. Hence, Frödell (2011) claims that relationships may be satisfactory whether they are distant and hostile or sincere and friendly. This should be regarded as surprising findings, since the general perception is that the closer the relationship, the greater understanding and the grander success (Frödell, 2011).

1.3.3 Buying Power and Uncertainty
Market conditions are argued to have an influence on the long-term orientation of relationships (Ryu et al., 2007; Frödell, 2011). These market conditions comprise the power that a buyer contains over the supplier (Frödell, 2011). It is furthermore argued that, in
relation to the power balance between the retailer and the supplier; a powerful buyer does not have the same incentive regarding the building of long-term relationships with suppliers as a less powerful retailer (Ryu et al., 2007; Frödell, 2011). Thus, Frödell (2011) claims that a long-term alignment from the buyer’s standpoint would most likely be applied by less powerful ones, who do not have the same wherewithal to ensure that their suppliers strive to fulfill their aims, as a more powerful buyer can use their influence to align suppliers with their strategy. Furthermore this can be identified through a calculative commitment where the buyer stands in a more dependent position towards the supplier, whereas on the contrary a more encouraging approach strives more towards an affective commitment.

Furthermore, Ryu et al. (2007) identify the uncertainty in the market as a condition that affects the buyer’s inclination to develop a long-term relationship with the supplier. According to Frödell (2011), organizations in a volatile market tend to hesitate more towards relationships with only a certain set of suppliers, since these suppliers may fail to deliver satisfactorily in a fast developing market. Based on a case study by Frödell and Josephson (2008), uncertainty is a key variable characterizing relationships.

1.3.4 Small-Sized Fashion Retailers

A small-sized enterprise is defined by the European Commission as an entity with less than 50 employees, a turnover under €10 million, or a balance sheet total less than €10 million (European Commission, 2013). Donnell et al. (2012) states that while in theory, fashion retailers may apply a range of marketing tactics to build closer relationships; knowledge concerning the relevance and application of such strategies for small-sized, enterprises is very limited.

Although the challenges regarding fashion buying and merchandising are defined as generic, relational implementation ultimately depends on the organizational context of the firm (Bruce and Hines, 2006; Donnell et al., 2012).

From a wider marketing perspective, the literature has focused on the differences between marketing practice in large organizations compared to smaller ones (e.g. Gilmore et al. 2001; Fillis, 2002; Donnell et al., 2012), where it is argued that small-sized enterprises typically are family owned or entrepreneurial organizations with a more collegial and less formalized internal system. Furthermore, limited resources (concerning finance, personnel, perception of function, skills and attitudes) may restrict the scope of marketing practice in these firms.
According to Gilmore et al. (2001), this can result in haphazard, informal, unstructured, and reactive activity.

It could therefore be significant to further investigate whether small-sized retail organizations utilizes relationship marketing as a strategy, and furthermore if it is considered as beneficial, as suggested by Gadde and Håkansson (2001) and later on by Hines and McGowan (2005), as well as Guercini and Runfola (2010). To choose a retail organization and investigate the relationship strategies towards the B2B aspect, might be considered as an even more crucial research, since it is stated by Egan (2000) as well as Doherty and Alexander (2004), that the application from this aspect has been minimal, despite its potential.

Particularly, research of relationship strategies in the specific context of the fashion retail industry is considered limited (Hines and McGowan, 2005). Consequently, there is a gap detected in buyer-supplier relationship strategies within fashion retailing in the literature.

Thus, it would be considered important to gain understanding whether a long-term buyer-supplier relationship, built on trust and commitment, is considered valuable to small-sized fashion retailers, this since prior research has not explored this area (Hines and McGowan, 2005).

1.4 Purpose
To lay the foundation of a deeper understanding of the elaborated problem, the purpose of this study is the following:

To investigate the buyer-supplier relationship within small-sized fashion retailers.

1.5 Delimitations
In order to measure the relationship between fashion retailers and their suppliers, the authors chose to restrict the concept of buyer-supplier relationship to a certain set of factors in order to make it measureable. However, it should be stressed that these are not finalized as the only factors that defines a buyer-supplier relationship.
Furthermore, the study of small-sized fashion retailers are limited to businesses located and headquartered in Sweden, due to convenience and accessibility when it comes to the data collection method. Moreover, the study only focus on the buyers’ perspective of the buyer-supplier relationship, and did therefore not gather any information of whether the suppliers experience the relations differently.

Finally, since trust and commitment stands out as crucial building blocks of a relationship as well as important parts of the current research field, this study adopts this perspective.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

1.6.1 Introduction
Chapter one discusses the development of relationship marketing within a buyer-supplier context, and, furthermore, in the fashion industry concerning small-sized retailers. Hence, a research gap is articulated; leading to the purpose of the study, with the chosen delimitations.

1.6.2 Literature Review of the Theoretical Framework
Chapter two presents the literature review of existing literature addressing relationship marketing within the buyer-supplier relationship, and its building blocks trust and commitment. The chapter also further explains the research gap that is the center of this study.

1.6.3 Conceptualization
In chapter three, the operationalization is presented, as well as the research questions, which are serving as the basis for the current investigation.

1.6.4 Methodology
This chapter contains a justification as well as clarification of the chosen methodological standpoints taken for this qualitative research and, furthermore, how the research has been conducted and performed to collect the empirical data.
1.6.5 Empirical Data Presentation

In chapter five, the empirical data, gathered from the four cases, is displayed. The data for each case is presented in accordance with the theoretical framework, which focuses on the character of a close buyer-supplier relationship, with trust and commitment as main additional concepts.

1.6.6 Data Analysis

Chapter six presents a cross-case analysis of the empirical data, where a comparison of the empirical data with the concepts of the theoretical framework is presented, to distinguish potential patterns and gain understanding of the buyer-supplier relationship.

1.6.7 Conclusions & Contributions

The final chapter concludes the research and, furthermore, discusses contributions on theoretical and managerial levels as well as the limitations of the study. Suggestions for future research conclude the thesis.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The chapter provides a detailed and distinct picture of the theoretical concepts relevant to the research questions and studies’ objective. The section begins with an introduction where seven factors regarding the efficiency of a seller and buyer relationship are described. Secondly, commitment and trust as main concepts are defined. Conclusively, a theoretical discussion will be presented.

2.1 Buyer-Supplier Relationship

The research of the relation between seller and buyer has always had great importance when it comes to relationship marketing (Hsiao et al., 2002). The buyer-supplier relationship is described as one of the most important parts in the supply chain, but also as an important element in marketing within business-to-business (Hsiao et al., 2002). To establish and manage an effective relationship it is of great importance to constantly nurture and develop the relationships (Jiang et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, the retail industry is characterized by high volatility, rapid fluctuations and unpredictable market trends; relations therefore play an important role in order to respond to these (Hsiao et al., 2002; Hoyt and Huq, 2000; Prajogo et al., 2012).

2.1.1 The Relationship Factors

In order to build a successful relationship amongst the buyer and supplier, seven key factors are considered highly important (Monczka et al., 1998; Krause, 1999; Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Ruyter et al., 2001; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Geyskens et al., 1996; Theron et al., 2008; Egan, 2000; Frödell, 2011; Prajogo et al., 2012). These notions are all aiming for a sustainable and developmental relationship between the buyer and supplier (Frödell, 2011).

However, it should be stressed that applying these factors on a buyer-supplier relationship does not guarantee a greater success (Frödell, 2011). Even though many
studies support these theories, other studies indicate other factors as drivers for a good relationship (Frödell, 2011).

Risk & Reward
Firstly, Prajogo et al. (2012) argues that buyers that are involved in a close relationship with their supplier, are more willing to share risk and reward. It is further described by Harland et al. (2003) that taking risks and gaining benefits is something that comes with doing business. Therefore, striving for some balance between risk and reward should be the aim for a business manager (Harland et al., 2003). How to manage this balance should depend on the acceptable level of risk taken, compared to the gain of reward as well as the organizations attitude towards it (Smallman, 1996; Harland et al., 2003). Some organizations are more likely to be risk-averse while others have a more risk-taking approach. The attitude against risk is described by Harland et al. (2003) to be affected by the nature of the business, but also by behavior and the individual style. Harland et al. (2003) further describe that attitude changes with the amount of experience, if an organization used to take risks encounters a heavy loss, the attitude is most likely to change after that experience.

Cost, Quality & Cycle-time
A relation between buyer and supplier with a long-term focus involves more activities concerning the coordination of the suppliers systems and capabilities, these factors are considered to have a positive effect on products cost, quality and cycle time when looking at a long-term perspective (Prajogo et al., 2012; Monczka et al., 1998).

Communication
Communication has an impact on the buyer-supplier relationship according to Frödell (2011). The information shared should both be depth and breadth, these parts connected to quality, participation and willingness to share is argued by Monczka et al. (1998) to have a big impact on the relation and information flow (Monczka et al., 1998; Frödell, 2011).
Conflict Resolution
Conflict resolution is referred to how the parties handle each other’s problems (Frödell, 2011). If the buyer is willing to help the supplier when they face a problem it shows the concern for the supplier and the supplier may be encouraged to enter a long-term relationship with the buying organization (Krause, 1999). The organizations could also face a problem together, the solution of the problem could lead to a winning situation for both parties, and how they solve the problem together could therefore be of big importance (Krause, 1999; Frödell, 2011).

Long-term objective
This factor refers to the identification the buying companies does for relationship development through specific commodities that is being offered, it also concerns more formal processes to identify appropriate suppliers (Monczka et al., 1998; Frödell, 2011). Strategic relationships should not concern all suppliers, Monczka et al. (1998) argues that before entering a long-term relationship an estimation should be made to investigate the capability of a long-term solution together as well as the willingness of a long-term cooperation (Monczka et al., 1998; Frödell, 2011).

Trust & Commitment
Conclusively, in the literature commitment and trust have frequently been identified as crucial building blocks of relationships (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Ruyter et al., 2001), where prodigious support has been found for the influence of trust on commitment to a relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Geyskens et al., 1996; Theron et al., 2008). However, even if commitment is undoubtedly connected with the notion of trust, Egan (2000) argues that it is not as clear which, if any, assumes precedence; it is not immediately clear whether commitment is the outcome of growing trust or whether trust develops from the decision to commit to one or a few suppliers. Yet, notionally they appear inseparable regarding the relationship marketing debate (Egan, 2000).

Thus, this chapter will further on mainly focus on these two variables as building blocks that the relation is dependent on, and not only as two factors of the buyer-supplier relation. Trust and commitment will therefore be measured separately, with distinct measurements, in this study.
2.3 Commitment

According to Gounaris (2005) as well as Ruyter et al. (2001) and Theron et al. (2008), commitment appears to be one of the most frequently cited variables in the relationship-marketing literature concerning buyer-seller relationships. While Garbarino and Johnson (1999) identify relationship commitment as a key-mediating construct in successful relational exchanges, Gouranis (2005) defines it as the desire for continuity, which is established by the willingness to invest resources into the relationship. Furthermore, Geyskens et al. (1996) states that commitment is defined as the motivation to stay with a supplier.

2.3.1 Affective and Calculative Commitment

Relationship commitment has been distinguished into two major dimensions, namely affective commitment and calculative commitment (Fullerton, 2003; Ruyter et al., 2001; Frederico and Parente, 2009). Affective commitment expresses the extent to which customers are willing to maintain their relationship with their supplier (Ruyter et al., 2001), hence it is defined as a general positive feeling towards the exchange partner, which indicates a relationship that is cultivated because buyers wants to do business with the partner (Gustafsson et al., 2005; Frederico and Parente, 2009). Whereas calculative commitment is a negatively oriented type of motivation (Ruyter et al., 2001) and refers to an organization’s motivation to continue a relationship with their current partner because it is not easily replaced, and acquires resources and outcomes that cannot be obtained outside of this relationship (Ruyter et al., 2001; Frederico and Parente, 2009). Thus, calculative commitment is usually found when a buyer needs to maintain such a relationship, due to high costs associated with its termination (Ruyter et al., 2001; Frederico and Parente, 2009).

2.3.2 Supplier dependence

A retailer’s supplier dependence is argued to increase when the product supplied is valued highly as there are no other choices available to acquire that product (Ganesan, 1994). Furthermore, the retailer’s dependence of the supplier is claimed to increase when the retailer obtains outcomes from the supplier that is considered important and
valued highly by the retailer (Ganesan, 1994; Frederico and Parente, 2009). Additionally, it is indicated that relationship commitment is associated positively with supplier dependence (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Frederico and Parente, 2009), which henceforth has shown a positive correlation between dependence and calculative commitment (Ruyter et al., 2001; Frederico and Parente, 2009). Since calculative commitment is based on considerations regarding cost-benefits, Frederico and Parente (2009) indicates that the more a buyer experiences exertions with the switching of a supplier, the more the buyer perceives the need to continue working with the supplier.

2.4 Trust
A study made by Ryu et al. (2007) showed that trust had a positive effect on the relationship among the buyer and supplier and that it generated in a long-term focus for both of them (Ryu et al., 2007; Frödell, 2011). According to Woo and Phrud’homme (1999), trust indicates the reputation for trustworthiness as well as a business’ credibility. However, in this study trust will be defined as the buyer’s feeling of security or faith in their supplier, based on the expectation that the supplier does not intend to lie, break promises or take advantage of the buyer’s vulnerability (Dwyer et al., 1987; Mayer et al., 1995). Further on, to measure trust in this study, the following aspects are considered:

Conflict resolution
Sullivan and Peterson (1982) describe the essence of trust as when there will be ways by which the two parties can work out difficulties such as power conflict, low profitability, and so forth. Hence, conflict resolution is considered an important aspect of trust.

Performance & attraction
Furthermore, Ganesan (1994) argues that trust leads retail buyers and sellers to focus on long-term benefits of the relationship, which eventually enhance the performance outcomes in buyer-supplier relationships, including firm competitiveness as well as transaction costs reduction (Noordewier et al., 1990).

Ryu et al. (2007) and Frödell (2011) further argue that there are two key factors concerning the trust factor, namely performance of the supplier as the first important
facilitator, secondly attraction between the buyer and supplier was argued to be an important factor in order to build trust (Ryu et al., 2007; Frödell, 2011). These factors combined, are stated as crucial factors in order to create a successful long-term relationship (Ryu et al., 2007; Frödell, 2011).

Loyalty
Furthermore, the literature describes the importance of loyalty regarding trust, it is suggested that a high level of loyalty leads to a motivation to have a jointly long-term focus (Ibáñez et al., 2006). Loyalty is described to be of greater importance when the relation is questioned and the buyer is confronted with switching decisions involving a high level of perceived risk and uncertainty (Ibáñez et al., 2006). It is though defended by (Moorman et al., 1993; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999), that trust solely has a direct influence on customer loyalty (Moorman et al., 1993; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Setó, 2003; Ibáñez et al., 2006).

Alignment & Identification
Trust may lead to a more positive motivation-foci because of a sense of alignment and identification with the supplier, which may stimulate to focus less on calculative reasons for attachment to a supplier firm (Ruyter et al., 2001).

2.5 Theoretical Discussion
Conclusively, prior research presents well-acknowledged factors that aim to build long-term relations. Thus, it would be considered important to gain understanding whether a long-term buyer-supplier relationship, mainly built on trust and commitment, is considered valuable to small-sized fashion retailers. This is further motivated since prior research has not explored this area (Hines and McGowan, 2005), as mentioned in the Problem Discussion, and therefore, a research gap has been detected. Additionally, small-sized enterprises are considered to, due to limited resources, restrict the scope of relationship marketing practice (O’Dwyer et al., 2009). Hence, the strategy regarding relationships may not be as clarified, yet it would be of importance to gain understanding if the presented concepts, nevertheless, are crucial within small-sized fashion retailers.
2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented definitions and reviewed existing literature on buyer-supplier relationships, where seven factors were distinguished as key notions to build a successful relationship. Two of these, namely trust and commitment, were further identified as building blocks of relationship, and where therefore more thoroughly reviewed. The five additional factors were chosen as key criterions to build a successful relationship. These findings, combined with the fact that research applied on small sized fashion retailer’s relationships toward their suppliers is lacking, provided the study with a gap where additional research is needed.
3. CONCEPTUALIZATION

Through the literature review, knowledge and understanding of the different concepts and what factors that determines a long-term relationship between buyer and supplier has been presented. Therefore, this chapter presents this study’s conceptual as operational definitions of the different concepts. Finally, the research questions are stated.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The tables below (Table 1, 2 and 3) contain the conceptual framework used for this study. Hence, it presents the conceptual definitions as the operational definition of the three chosen main concepts, namely buyer-supplier relationship, commitment, and trust. These models will further on function as the foundation of the conceptual measurements.

Table 1: Definition of concept: Buyer-supplier relationship

Authors’ own illustration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buyer-Supplier Relationship</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A close relationship on long-term between the buyer and supplier (Kalwani and Narayandas, 1995)</td>
<td>A concept of managerial practice, capturing the extent of the chosen retailer’s relationship with their supplier(s).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Definition of concept: Commitment

Authors’ own illustration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A motivation to stay with the supplier for long-term; a desire for continuity (Gouranis, 2005), which is either affective or calculative (Frederico and Parente, 2009)</td>
<td>A construct capturing the dimensions of the buyer's desire to continuity concerning the relationship with their supplier(s).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Definition of concept: Trust

Authors' own illustration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The buyer’s feeling of security or faith in their supplier, based on the expectation that the supplier does not intend to lie, break promises or take advantage of the buyer's vulnerability (Dwyer et al., 1987; Mayer et al., 1995)</td>
<td>A construct capturing the dimensions of the buyer's desire to continuity concerning the relationship with their supplier(s).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further clarify the definition of a buyer-supplier relationship, seven factors is used in order to measure the importance of these. These factors consist of the following:

- Risk & Reward
- Cost, Quality & Cycle-time
- Communication
- Conflict Resolution
- Long-term Objective
- Trust
- Commitment

The first five factors are comprehended as important in order to measure to what extent they are valued and regarded in the relation. The two last factors, viz. trust and commitment are seen as two building blocks that have a more crucial part in the relation. Therefore, these are considered as more highly valued concepts, and will therefore be measured through individual measurements. As for commitment, the following factors will be examined:

- Continuity
- Investment (resources)
- Positive motivation (affective commitment)
- Negative motivation (calculative commitment)
- Supplier dependence
Conclusively, commitment will be measured through the following factors:

- Identification & Alignment
- Conflict Resolution
- Loyalty
- Performance & Attraction

The aim is to provide a comprehensive outline of how the relation between buyer and supplier appears, from the buyer’s perspective, and furthermore, how the buyer values the proposed factors.

### 3.3 Research Questions

Founded in the purpose of this study, and furthermore developed through the literature review, a number of research questions have been stated. As mentioned, the objective of this study is to gain deeper understanding of the buyer-supplier relationship within small-sized fashion retailers, and furthermore, to investigate the effect of its building blocks (viz. trust and commitment). Moreover, the aim is to understand if the presented concepts are considered as important even though a relationship strategy may not be clarified within a small-sized fashion retailer. Hence, this study intends to gain deeper understanding regarding the dimensions of commitment as to the importance of trust in a buyer-supplier relationship. Thus, the following questions were formulated:

- **RQ1:** How do small-sized fashion retailers value a close buyer-supplier relationship?
- **RQ2:** How does small-sized fashion retailers value trust towards their supplier(s)?
- **RQ3:** How do the dimensions of commitment influence the relationship between a small-sized fashion retailer and their supplier(s)?

### 3.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, definitions of the chosen concepts, derived from the literature, were conceptualized and presented with its operational definition. Conclusively, three research questions were developed. These questions are regarded to enable subsequent investigation; hence, it allows for the purpose to be met.
4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains a justification as well as clarification of how the research has been conducted and performed to collect the empirical data. To motivate the most suitable methodological study, a discussion regarding inductive and deductive research as well as why a qualitative approach is preferred in this study. Further, a description of the method used to collect data, a presentation of the case organizations and respondents as well as a discussion concerning the appropriate method for the data analysis.

4.1 Research approach

4.1.1 Inductive vs. Deductive

When considering the relationship between theory and research, there are two types of opposites present, inductive research and deductive research. (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010) Regarding a deductive approach, the researcher uses existing theories within a field or area and then investigates these by collecting observations to find a confirmation or non-corfirmation of the original theory. (Bryman and Bell, 2011). An inductive approach, on the other hand, is described as where theory is the outcome of research, hence, the researcher uses observations and aims to discover patterns and regularities that will end up developing a general theory or conclusion (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010). In essence, deduction is the process where theory leads to observations or findings; induction operates the other way around, where findings and observations yield to theories (Cohen et al., 2011).

In this study, a deductive approach is regarded as the more appropriate choice due to the aim of reducing the existing research gap, but also since the empirical data will be analyzed out of existing theories.

4.1.2 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

When collecting material for a research, a Qualitative or a Quantitative approach defines how the research will be carried out (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A qualitative study involves data that has been collected to get a deeper and more complete understanding of a studied problem (Bryman and Bell 2011). The structure of the data
is less formalized and there is no need to draw general conclusions (Bryman and Bell, 2005). A qualitative research focuses on the generation of theory investigating the relationship between theory and research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The method helps to get depth in the information through approaches such as focus groups, interviews or observations. These methods are often applied together with a small amount of respondents leading to a well-executed investigation with great depth of a subject or a topic (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Zikmund et al., 2010). As a research method the qualitative approach has been criticized for being subjective, this referring to the researchers own interest in the data gathered for the study (Bryman and Bell, 2005).

A quantitative research is principally based on numbers and statistics; the results are measurable and can be referred back to numbers and facts (Bryman and Bell, 2005). The information gathered in a quantitative research covers a large amount of data with lots of respondents, the data is usually collected through surveys (mail survey, telephone interviews, questionnaires, etc.) with the aim to make generalizations based on the research (Bryman and Bell, 2005). A quantitative research is more formalized, structured and controlled in comparison to a qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2005).

For this study a qualitative research approach was chosen. As the qualitative approach advocates the depth in the study the focus on getting a deeper view on how the relations appears among buyer and supplier and whether they value a long-term relationship made it a suitable choice.

4.2 Research Design
A research design is described as the framework or blueprint when performing a research project; it provides a specification of the parts needed in order to obtain information that structure or solves research problems (Aaker et al., 2011). Three types of research designs are commonly mentioned when conducting a research project; namely Exploratory design, Descriptive design and Causal design (Aaker et al., 2011; Malhotra, 2010).

Exploratory research is useful when a researcher does not have a satisfying amount of information or understanding to proceed with a research, and is therefore often
conducted in the early stages of an investigation (Malhotra, 2010). Furthermore, it aims to increase understanding, knowledge and to provide a more coherent view of the research problem and research direction by gathering as much information possible regarding a topic (Malhotra, 2010). The process of exploratory research is flexible and performed unstructured, common methods are focus groups, case studies and interviews (Aaker et al., 2011).

As the name implies, descriptive research design is used to describe a phenomenon, usually market characteristics or functions (Malhotra, 2010). This design is useful when a research problem has a clear structure and requires knowledge within the researched subject. Furthermore, the process of descriptive research differs from the exploratory research’s flexible nature and tends to be pre-planned and structured (Malhotra, 2010).

Descriptive research design can further on be divided into cross-sectional or longitudinal research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Whilst cross-sectional studies collect samples from a population at one given time; either by conducting one single sample from a population once (single cross-sectional design) or by conducting two or more samples of respondents at one given occasion (multiple cross-sectional design) (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010).

A longitudinal research is conducted by measuring elements of a population repeatedly; it differs from cross-sectional design where the sample or samples remain the same over time (Malhotra, 2010). A longitudinal research provides deep understanding regarding a topic and the changes that take place over time (Malhotra, 2010).

Causal research investigates if one variable causes or determines the value of another variable (Malhotra, 2010). This design is suitable when the research aims to figure out the dependent and independent variables of a phenomenon, as well as determining the nature of the causal variables that are to be predicted (Aaker et al., 2011). Furthermore, a causal research design is implemented when the researcher has the required knowledge about a phenomenon to make predictions about the results when changing variables (Malhotra, 2010)

When deciding which research design to adopt for the current study, exploratory research was rejected mainly because of the existing amount of information and literature within the field of relationship marketing, but also since the problem of the
study is well developed at this point. This study does neither aim to investigate if different variables causes or determines each other, whereby causal research was excluded. The previous discussion regarding different research designs combined with a well-defined problem leaves descriptive research design as the most appropriate choice.

4.3 Data sources
When carrying out a research project, two types of data gathering are acknowledged; namely primary and secondary data (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010). Primary data is originated and collected by the researcher in order to specifically address a research problem, hence, the data is collected first hand and is thereby tailored for the specific purposes of a research project (Malhotra, 2010). Secondary data is described as information collected for purposes other than solving the specific research problem. It is divided into internal secondary data (i.e. information from inside a company, like annual reports and customer information) and external secondary data (i.e. information from ‘outside’ a company, like television, radio or social medias) (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In contrast to primary data, which tends to be time consuming and expensive, secondary data can be obtained quickly and is relatively inexpensive. The two types also differ in their time to process, where primary data takes longer time to analyze (Malhotra, 2010). Other advantages with secondary data includes assisting the researcher in developing an approach to the research problem as well as finding different insights to the problem and help interpret the primary data with more insight (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010).

However, it is essential to bear in mind that the secondary data is collected for other purposes than solving the research problem and might lack relevance and accuracy; therefore, it becomes important to sort out the most relevant information (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This study will be based on primary data through specific questions tailored for the research problem.

4.4 Research strategy
According to Yin (2009), there are five different strategies that research can be built upon; namely Archival analysis, Case study, Experiment, History and Survey.
Archival analysis is described as an observation method where the researcher investigates archives and documents, focusing both on contemporary and past events (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, since an archival analysis is built on secondary data, it is important that the data is evaluated for new research (Yin, 2009). A case study is defined as a detailed study based upon observations of an individual unit (e.g. an organization, a group of individuals or an event) (Bryman and Bell 2011; Malhotra, 2010). Generally, case studies answers questions that begin with ‘how’ or ‘why’ and the questions are targeted towards a limited number of events (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, case studies can be divided into single and multiple-case studies, where a single case study performs a study on an individual entity and a multiple case study focuses on more than one entity (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A multiple case study provides the opportunity of comparison and contrasting between different cases by investigating two or more observations of the same phenomenon but is on the other hand more resource demanding (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Yin (2009) argues that a single case study is more vulnerable to critique since all efforts are targeted in the same direction; thereby it is preferable to conduct a multiple case study to find a more convincing result (Yin, 2009). Experiment is a research strategy that aims to confirm, reject or establish hypotheses when investigating if changes in one or more variables results in different effectual outcomes (Yin, 2009). It focuses on contemporary events and answers questions of ‘who’ and ‘why’ (Yin, 2009).

History as a research strategy is preferred when there is no access or control to behavioral proceedings (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the researcher relies on historical documents when investigating, collecting and analyzing past events. Since history goes back in time, it does not focus on contemporary events (Yin, 2009).

A survey samples individuals from a chosen population with a view towards making statistical inferences about the population represented by the sample (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Furthermore, a survey involves direct questioning of respondents and obtains primary quantitative data (Malhotra, 2010).

When choosing the appropriate strategy for a research project, three factors are important to consider; the nature of the stated research question, the degree of control the researcher has over behavioral events and the focus on contemporary or historical events (Yin, 2009). Table 4 illustrates these conditions further.
This study focuses on contemporary events which therefore excludes the historical strategy, nor is the archival analysis relevant since the empirical investigation will focus on primary data. This study will neither be able to control behavioral events, whereby experiment as a strategy is rejected. This leaves survey and case study, although a survey could gather the primary data needed, the purpose of the study is dependent on tailored and detailed information from a few entities, not information that are to be used in order to make statistical inferences. The discussion stated above leaves case study as the most feasible method. Regarding this study, a multiple case study will be conducted.

### 4.5 Data collection method

Since this research applies a qualitative approach, quantitative methods have deliberately been excluded.

Researchers appear to agree regarding the data collection methods most commonly used when conducting a qualitative research as in-depth interviews, focus groups and observations (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010; Yin, 2009).

#### 4.5.1 Interviews

In-depth interviews are described as an unstructured and direct way of obtaining information performed on a one-to-one basis (Bryman and Bell, 2011). An
Interviewer questions a respondent in order to find underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings regarding a specific topic (Malhotra, 2010). Interviews are plausible the most used method next to focus groups within qualitative research (Malhotra, 2010). The most attractive benefits of interviews include its flexibility and adaptability as well as the opportunity to find both facts and personal opinions from a respondent (Malhotra, 2010). When conducting a qualitative research, there are two different categories of interviews to choose from; unstructured and semi-structured interviews where the difference is the level of structure present when interviewing a respondent (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Unstructured interviews reminds of an everyday conversation and tends to be flexible, informal and free flowing (Cohen et al., 2011). Questions are not normally pre-set, although they are not totally improvised since the researcher usually has a few topics that need to be covered (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Semi-structured interviews are more controlled with questions and topics to follow. However, not all questions are created before the interview, which allows follow-up questions and the flexibility to probe for details and discuss issues (Malhotra, 2010). There are also some disadvantages, or challenges, when it comes to in-depth interviews (Malhotra, 2010). Malhotra (2010) mentions three factors that a researcher needs to be aware of, firstly, the lack of structure requires a skilled interviewer to avoid the risk that gathered data becomes susceptible to the interviewers influence (Malhotra, 2010). Moreover, the length of the interviews combined with the fact that only one respondent can be interviewed at one occasion makes interviews both a resource demanding as well as a time consuming method (Malhotra, 2010). Lastly, the gathered data can be hard to analyze and interpret since many responses may not be taken at face value, there can be many different interpretations in how respondents express themselves (Malhotra, 2010).

4.5.2 Focus Group
A focus group is a discussion lead by a moderator in a non-structured manner with a small group of respondents (Malhotra, 2010). The purpose is to gather data and gain understanding by creating an informal forum where respondents feel relaxed in order to reflect and portray feelings and behaviors regarding a product, service or idea (Cohen et al., 2011; Malhotra, 2010). Focus groups encourage group interaction, where free flowing discussions can lead to unexpected findings that the researcher
had not planned for or dared to tackle (Malhotra, 2010). However, the key benefit is also the biggest challenge regarding focus groups since the group scenario might be intimidating to certain individuals (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Cohen et al., 2011; Malhotra, 2010).

The ideal group size is argued to be between six and ten members (Bryman and Bell, 2011), even if there are some differences regarding the upper number. Malhotra (2010) for instance proposes six to twelve members. However, a group with less than six participants is unlikely to generate the momentum and group dynamics needed for a successful session (Malhotra, 2010). On the other hand, a group of more than twelve respondents might be too crowded and split up into sub-groups with participants competing over getting their word said (Malhotra, 2010). Other drawbacks, besides previously mentioned, includes difficulties in analyzing and coding the data, due to the unconstructed nature of focus groups, biased moderators and gathering the respondents together at the same time (Cohen et al., 2011; Malhotra, 2010).

4.5.3 Observation
Observations involves the process of observing the behavior of respondents, the researcher participates in everyday situations of individuals or organizations in order to understand and record their behavior, the observations is usually conducted over an extended period of time (Kinnear and Taylor, 1991).

The most important feature regarding observations is the opportunity to collect ‘live’ data from naturally occurring situations, thereby securing primary data without relying on secondary sources (Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, observations also include the unique strength to measure what people really do contrasting to what they say they do in for instance interviews or focus groups (Cohen et al., 2011). The drawbacks of observations includes that it is costly in time and effort along with difficulties in interpreting and analyzing what the data mean (Cohen et al., 2011).

When deciding the most appropriate method for the study, careful consideration was taken, the qualitative approach of this study calls for tailored, primary data in order to fulfill the purpose and the research questions. Although it is important to bear in mind that no data collection method comes solely with advantages; every method has its
drawbacks. Considering focus groups, the drawbacks outnumber the benefits in the area of gathering respondents since a session with purchasers from at least six different companies at the same time is hard to carry through. Moreover, a discussion between purchasers and how their companies handle relations is not what this study aims to measure, since the objective is to investigate how companies separately are managing their relations. It is also important to bear in mind that the relationship strategies would be discussed among potential competitors in a focus group, which might affect the responses in a negative manner. Focus group was thereby rejected as a data collection method for this study. Observations is theoretically manageable for the purpose of the study, but is rejected due to the resources demanded and that the method is limited to a unique set of circumstances that occurs frequently (Kinnear and Taylor, 1991). Regarding interviews, unlike focus groups the respondent does not need adapt to other respondents and it is possible to conduct both on a location and at a time that suits the respondent. The flexibility of the method also allows telephone interviews if a geographical issue occurs, as well as matching the low financial sources of the study. Another important advantage is the possibility to probe for answers in order to reveal the desired information. Interviews are thereby the most suitable method for this study. Regarding the structure of the interviews, a semi-structured approach will be performed that allows respondents to develop their answers combined with the opportunity to use follow up-questions, adding more depth to the study.

4.6 Data Collection Instrument

4.6.1 Operationalization & Measurement

An operationalization is described as the process of turning specific concepts into comprehensive words in order to make them understandable and possible to measure (Bryman and Bell 2011; Cohen et al., 2011). By translating general research objectives or the purpose of a study into specific concrete questions, concrete answers can be given (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The operationalization process moves the general into the particular by translating concepts from the theoretical framework into words that can be investigated in surveys or questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that the words means the same thing for the
authors as for the respondents, this to prevent misunderstandings leading to false or inaccurate answers (Eliasson, 2010).

In order to make this research measurable, a link between the theoretical concepts and the empirical investigation will be shown through Tables 5, 6 and 7. The foundation of the operationalization scheme is built by the main concepts found and presented in the literature review. By operationalizing these concepts into understandable specific measurements, it will furthermore be possible to construct an interview guide with accurate question that will measure the intended concepts. Therefore, the operationalization involved finding or developing empirical indicators, to capture the significance of the encoded concepts in this study (Corbett and Le Roy, 2006). Furthermore, single or multiple indicators can measure each concept; it is however preferred to use multiple indicators due to drawback that single item construct may create (Churchill, 1979).

After making the theoretical concepts operationalized into workable concepts, the authors formulated interview questions, which were expected to measure the different concept to furthermore be able to answer the research questions as the purpose of the study. To facilitate the understanding link between the theoretical concept and the interview questions, three operational schemes are presented below in Tables 5, 6 and 7, which demonstrates what concept each question aimed to measure. Hence, the schemes show the three concepts buyer-supplier relationship, commitment, and trust, and furthermore, demonstrate the aspects of each factor are to be investigated.

Conclusively, the interview questions are to be found in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buyer-Supplier Relationship</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Question number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A close relationship on long-term between the buyer and supplier (Kalwani and Narayandas, 1995)</td>
<td>A concept of managerial practice capturing the extent of the decision maker’s relationship with their supplier(s).</td>
<td>Trust (Ruyter et al., 2003)</td>
<td>1.6, 1.1, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment (Ruyter et al., 2001)</td>
<td>1.6, 1.1, 1.4, 1.9, 1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Long-term objective (Kalwani &amp; Narayandas, 1995)</td>
<td>1.6, 1.5, 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Willingness to share risk and reward (Kalwani &amp; Narayandas, 1995)</td>
<td>1.1, 1.4, 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive effect on cost, quality and cycle time (Prajogo et al., 2012)</td>
<td>1.1, 1.2, 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communication (Frödell, 2011)</td>
<td>1.6, 1.1, 1.4, 1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict resolution (Frödell, 2011)</td>
<td>1.6, 1.1, 1.3, 1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Operational definition and measurement of Buyer-Supplier Relationship

Author’s own illustration
Table 6: Operational definition and measurement of Commitment

Author’s own illustration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Question number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual definition</td>
<td>Operational definition</td>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>Question number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A motivation to stay with the supplier for long-term, a desire for continuity (Gouranis, 2003), which is either affective or calculative (Frederico and Parente, 2009)</td>
<td>A construct capturing the dimensions of the buyer’s desire for continuity concerning the relationship with their supplier(s).</td>
<td>Desire for continuity (Gouranis, 2003)</td>
<td>2.0, 2.1, 2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Investment of resources into relationship (Gouranis, 2003)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive motivation (Frederico and Parente, 2009)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative motivation Rayter et al., 2001</td>
<td>2.3, 2.4, 2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supplier dependence (Ganesan, 1999)</td>
<td>2.4, 2.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Operational definition and measurement of Trust

Author’s own illustration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Question number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The buyer’s feeling of security or faith in their supplier, based on the expectation that the supplier does not intend to lie, break promises or take advantage of the buyer’s vulnerability (Dwyer et al., 1987; Mayer et al., 1995)</td>
<td>A concept capturing the extent of the buyer’s feeling of security towards their supplier.</td>
<td>Identification (Bayter et al., 2001)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alignment (Bayter et al., 2001)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict resolution (Sullivan and Peterson, 1982)</td>
<td>3.0, 3.6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loyalty (Ibáñez et al., 2006)</td>
<td>3.0, 3.2, 3.7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performance (Ganesan, 1994)</td>
<td>3.3, 3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attraction (Frödell, 2011)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

According to Eliasson (2010), the questions in the interview guide needs to be relevant concerning the research questions and only measure what is intend to be measured. Therefore, the variables require coverage in the research questions and shall also be applicable in relation to the purpose of the study (Eliasson, 2010).

4.6.2 Pre-test

According to Ghauri and Grönhaug (2005), pre-testing is an effective way of preparing the data collection. The researcher performs a formal practice test or a pilot study of the intended measurement instrument on potential respondents, from the population but not from the sample, or on other individuals like colleagues or supervisors in order to detect flaws or defects (Ghauri and Grönhaug, 2005; Zikmund et al., 2010). The pretest reveals if questions are understandable in order to avoid
misinterpretations and confusion at the time of, in the case of this study, the interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The pretest might also help in providing an indication on the time needed for each question as well as valuable inputs on the design of the questions (Ghauri and Grönhaug, 2005). By not performing a pretest, the researchers might risk irrelevant and misleading results (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In order to present an interview guide that had been tested properly, the authors consulted researchers at Linnaeus University and University of Leeds along with a former manager within the fashion retail industry. The aim of performing the pre-test were to make sure that the questions was easy to understand, that the language and structure used in the questions was appropriate along with receiving general feedback to improve the result of the interviews.

4.7 Data Collection Procedure

4.7.1 Sampling

“As much as you might want to, you cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything” (Miles and Huberman, 1994 p. 27).

Ghauri and Grönhaug, (2005) as well as Cohen et al. (2011) divide the sampling procedure into two different categories, probability and non-probability samples. The difference between the two is as follows; “in a probability sample the chances of members of the wider population being selected for the sample are known, whereas in a non-probability sample the chances of members of the wider population being selected for the sample are unknown” (Cohen et al., 2011 p. 153).

Probability sampling is usually practiced when conducting quantitative research and will thereby not be discussed further in this study (Cohen et al., 2011).

Non-probability sampling includes the element of selection, targeting and selecting a particular group that does not represent a wider population and is usually conducted in small-scale research where attempts to generalize is not required.

Moreover, this study will use a non-probability sample strategy, which provides the opportunity to select individuals or entities that are appropriate for one particular study, this process is also known as purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2011). A
purposive sample is preferred when targeting respondents who have distinctive knowledge about particular problems, issues or areas. Compared to a random sample, that most likely will include a sample that has little to add regarding a specific issue, a purposive sample is thereby well suited for this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) add that when conducting a multiple case study, an explicit sampling frame is needed; random sampling will not help.

4.7.2 Sampling Frame
A sample frame is a list of units from where the sample will be drawn. Looking at the sample size of previous similar research and financial constraints are two available strategies when deciding a sample frame (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Cohen et al. (2011) suggests that it is important that the sampling frame is dependent on the research purpose, the research questions and design along with the type of sample that is conducted. Given the focus of the study along with the delimitations, small-sized companies within the fashion industry along with cases related to the research questions and purpose provided a clear foundation for the sampling frame.

4.7.3 Sampling Selection
As previously discussed in the last two sections, the sample was chosen by the authors through purposive sampling. Additionally, the number of companies chosen was affected by financial and time constraints but also after their size (small sized companies according to the standards of the European Commission). Continuously, the sample was also chosen as retailers selling similar products to the same target groups. It is also important to bear in mind that there is no definite number regarding the sample size in qualitative research, the size is decided by ‘fitness for purpose’, in other words, until there is enough data to satisfactory answer the research question and purpose (Cohen et al., 2011). The aim of the study is neither to make generalizations about the whole fashion industry or statistical inferences, additionally, the number of respondents is generally lower in qualitative research than in quantitative (Cohen et al., 2011). Consequently, the authors decided the number of cases to four, since it turned out to be satisfactory during the process of the study.
4.7.4 The Sample
The entities chosen and used as the sample of the interviews in this study were; Fribergs, Kompaniet, Company 3 (anonymous) and Zebra, since these fulfilled the criteria of a small-sized company due to the regulations of the European Commission regarding turnover (European Comission, 2013), see Table 8 below. In order to find the most suitable respondent for the research subject, the companies were asked to propose employees managing supplier relations. That request lead to interviews with four experienced purchasers from four different companies, securing answers built on skill, expertise and understanding within the profession, and also as a quality mark for the gathered data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zebra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner(s)</td>
<td>Camino AB &amp; Lewek AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of employees</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover (SEK)</td>
<td>24 180 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of stores, locations</td>
<td>2, Helsingborg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established</td>
<td>1992</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Company presentation

Respondents of the companies were as follows;

**Fribergs**
Niklas Fong, purchaser. Experience: 5 years. Interviewed over telephone on April 25, 2013.

**Kompaniet**

**Company 3**

**Zebra**
Efty Kvist, decorator and purchaser. Experience: 25 years. Interviewed over telephone on April 22.
4.7.5 Data Collection Procedure
Prior to the data collection procedure, the interview questions were sent out to the respondents. This to make sure that the questions were understood, but also to provide the respondents with time to consider and prepare for the interview if certain questions required the interviewee to consult someone within the company.

At the time of the interviews, the respondents were recorded (agreed before the interview started) in order to give the interviewer possibility to focus on the respondents, their answers and probe for answers if needed as well as making sure that no answers were left out or important details missed. The open ended structure of the questions allowed and invited the respondents to both answer and talk freely about the subjects.

4.7.6 Data Analysis Method
Qualitative research generally creates a large amount of data including a lot of detailed information. It is essential for a researcher to bring structure and order of the gathered data by finding patterns, themes and regularities before conclusions and meaningful interferences can be drawn (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Miles and Huberman (1994) divides the process of qualitative analysis into the following three steps;

1. Data reduction - The process of selecting, simplifying, coding, focusing and transforming the gathered data so that the researcher can draw and verify conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Yin (2009) further argues that the aim with the data reduction phase is to screen irrelevant data to simplify the conclusion drawing (Yin, 2009).

2. Data display - Displaying the gathered data in an organized and compressed way instead of as an extended text by combining the words with the usage of matrices, charts and graphs.

3. Conclusion drawing and verification – The process of deciding what the data really means by noting and finding irregularities, patterns and propositions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Cohen et al. (2011) suggests that the analysis should start when the first data is
collected, as this helps the researcher to handle the potential problem of data overload by selecting out the most significant features for future focus (Cohen et al., 2011). Yin, (2009) along with Malhotra, (2010) further proposes that the analysis should rely on theoretical propositions where the objectives and design of the study is central.

The three-step analysis derived from Miles and Huberman (1994) has formed the foundation on how the data has been analyzed. In accordance with Cohen et al. (2011), the analysis started when the first data was collected, this to sort out the most important data (see empirical chapter) along with avoiding the risk of data overload. Furthermore, in accordance with the suggestion regarding theory from Yin (2009), the analysis was based on the literature review through the questions in the operationalization, this to satisfactory answer the research questions. Moreover, the characteristics of the research strategy of the study provided an analysis that compared and contrasted between different cases in order to find patterns and irregularities.

The gathered data from the interviews was transcribed word-for-word and served the foundation for the empirical material in the study. The reduction of the data was made in accordance to Miles and Huberman’s (1994) and Yin’s (2009) recommendations by selecting and indexing the text according to the literature review. This to perform an analysis where the data regarding e.g theoretical concept X is connected with relevant empirical data for concept X (Miles and Huberman (1994). When the data was compressed, the authors searched for patterns, regularities and irregularities along with comparisons between the cases in order to satisfactory answer the research questions in this study.

4.8 Quality Criteria

To ensure the quality in your study through valid and reliable data, it is of big importance to have valid and reliable sources (Yin, 2007). Cohen et al. (2011) describes qualitative data analysis through honesty depth, the amount of data received and the value of the data (Cohen et al., 2011). The situation of how the participants are approached, and how dedicated the researcher is in the object of the research also affects the quality of the study (Cohen et al., 2011). The validity of the study can
never be stated as an absolute fact, in a qualitative study the respondents could have a lack of subjectivity, this referring to their opinions, attitudes and perspectives which gives the study a degree of bias (Cohen et al., 2011). It is also argued that the aim for the research should be to strive for minimalize invalidity and maximize validity (Cohen et al., 2011). In order to maximize validity the researcher always has to consider the objective of the research, this by defining peoples perspectives and see the meaning these perspectives gives to the research (Cohen et al., 2011). Validity and reliability are two main concepts referring to quality criteria (Cohen et al., 2011). Thus, the level of personal involvement and in-depth responses of individuals is argued to give the research an adequate level of validity and reliability (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher has an important role in the context of validity and is seen as a key instrument of the research (Cohen et al., 2011).

In this qualitative study, content, construct and external validity is used, together with reliability to assure the quality of the study.

4.8.1 Content Validity
To ensure content validity, also known as face validity, in a study the researcher has to ensure that the main purpose of the study is being covered (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

In order to assure content validity in the study and to prevent mishaps that could lead to an inaccurate result, the authors contacted a person with knowledge within the area of business research in order to receive comments and feedback on the operationalization scheme and interview guide.

4.8.2 Construct Validity
Construct validity clarifies what the constructs used in the study means (Cohen et al., 2011). In order to state construct validity it is important to ensure that adequate measures are created (Ghauri and Grönhaug, 2005). To confirm the construct validity it is of great importance having relevant literature, but also to demonstrate examples proving opposite facts (Cohen et al., 2011). When the evidence is balanced, confirmed and refuted the researcher can demonstrate construct validity (Cohen et al., 2011). In a qualitative research the construct validity must prove the importance of
the research for the participants, meaning that the researcher consider how the participants experience the situations in the research, the ability to see the situation through the participants’ eyes (Cohen et al., 2011).

In order to carry out a pre-test, the interview guide was firstly sent to a manager working in the fashion industry, secondly it was sent to researchers at Linnaeus and Leeds University, this to ensure that the questions were relevant and understandable. The construct validity was also secured by continuously sending the outline of the thesis to supervisors and fellow students who has given constructive critique and suggestions for improvements. The interview questions were also sent in advance to the respondents, this to give them a chance to be prepared for the questions and to ensure that they were understandable; the validity was thereby ensured. The interviews were furthermore recorded (with permission from the respondent), during the sessions, this to simplify the process of transcription.

4.8.3 External Validity
External validity refers to the possibility of generalizing the data to make certain that it can be applied to a broader population (Cohen et al., 2011).
In a qualitative study the main objective is not to make generalizations; instead, the importance lies in how well the study provides a distinct, detailed and profound description in order to allow others to decide whether they find the study generalizable to another situation or not (Cohen et al., 2011). It is also argued that in a qualitative research the interest lies in how generalizable the settings, people and situations are (Cohen et al., 2011).

Since the main objective was not to make generalizations for the study the objective has been to, through our multiple-case study, together with the cross-case analysis, enhance the external validity. The same interview guide has been used through all cases and the persons being interviewed have all had similar positions within the companies, which according to Cohen et al. (2011) is a motive for generalization.
4.8.4 Reliability

Reliability can be defined as the possibility to conduct a study all over again and get the exact same results as the previous study (Yin, 2007). Cohen et al. (2011) stresses the difficulty in exactly repeating a study, meaning that this is the strength of the reliability in a qualitative study, referring to the objective to refine, compare and validate the constructs in the study to minimize false and skew answers (Cohen et al., 2011).

To ensure reliability in this study, all the empirical material together with the interview questions are to be found in the appendix, this in order to make the study repeatable again. Motivations for all choices of which method to choose throughout this chapter are also to be found, this in order to give the reader an understanding of the choices and the possibility to, as Cohen et al. (2011) suggests, compare it with future studies examining the same field.

4.9 Chapter summary

This chapter presented choices and motivations regarding methodology of this study. The stances taken throughout the chapter have been made to increase the ability to meet the study’s purpose and answer the research questions. Conclusively, a multiple-case study was motivated, where four cases conducted the empirical data through semi-structured interviews. Table 9 provides an outline with all the choices made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research methodology</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
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<td>Research Strategy</td>
<td>Primary</td>
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<td>Data Collection Method</td>
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<td>Interviews</td>
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<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
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<td>Data Analysis Method</td>
<td>Multiple-case sampling, Four cases. Small-sized fashion retailers working with supplier relations.</td>
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<td>Quality Criteria</td>
<td>Data reduction, Data display, Pattern matching and conclusion drawing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Validity, Reliability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Research methodology summary
5. EMPIRICAL DATA PRESENTATION

In this chapter, the empirical data gathered from the four cases is presented. It will be presented in accordance with the study’s theoretical framework, namely the characteristics of a close Buyer-supplier relationship and latter on with focus on Commitment and Trust within these.

5.1 Case one – Zebra

Worth to be noted is that Zebra functions as an affiliated company to Cenino AB and Lewek AB, hence, the respondent discusses suppliers that have been involved with both of these, and therefore mentions long-term relations that have originally started through Cenino AB.

5.1.1 Buyer-supplier relationship

Zebra currently works with 56 different brands; however, some of the brands are represented by the same agent, hence, they do not cooperate with 56 different suppliers. Of Zebra’s current suppliers, 70% of them are considered to be close relationships. The respondent defines a relationship as something that is built on honesty and on a long-term perspective, which leads to loyalty between the two. The outcome of the relation is largely defined by the chemistry between the parties and is considered as very important. It is explained by the respondent that since the store is relatively small the relation is of big importance.

Long-term

Zebra have had some of their suppliers for 20 years, and states the importance of maintaining their current relations. The respondent claims that the industry is controlled by the prevailing fashion trends, although they have more stable relationships with some of their suppliers, the respondent mentions the importance of maintain a long-term relation even though the supplier had a poor season.
Communication

Communication is also a concept that the respondent refers to several times, meaning that it is an important factor to make the relation function. In order to maintain some of their relations for so many years the respondent states that good communication has been the reason for staying with the supplier for so long.

Termination of relationship

Regarding the termination of a long-term relationship the respondent claims that approximately 50% of the supplier relationships are replaced every year and the rest is kept. Several of their relations are kept due to the good relation between the two, the length of the relation combined with loyal suppliers are explained to be a crucial factor for the respondent. The relations that have been terminated, has mostly been due to disloyalty. Other factors that have affected the closure of a relation are when the outcome of the relation is questioned; the respondent mentions the importance of the feeling to strive against a common objective. The status of the brand also plays an important part when it comes to the maintenance of a relationship. The respondent mentions times when the relation with the supplier has been poor but the status of the brand is high. Times have occurred when the brands has sold well and the respondent has had to terminate the relation due to disloyalty, it is explained by the respondent as a disappointment but that it also can lead to new opportunities that had not occurred if the relation had not been determined.

Cost, Quality & Cycle-time

Regarding the effects a relationship might have on the products’ cost, quality and lead-time, the respondent again claims the importance of the relation, as an example the respondent mentions that the quality of the clothes might be a bit poorly, but if the relation is good you have indulgence with this. Hence, if the relation is good the products is usually kept in the store but might be sold to a lower price, if the relation is inferior the products will be sent back. However, the respondent did not identify the relation or them as a retailer, to have any effect on either cost, quality nor cycle-time of the products.
Conflict Resolution
When it comes to conflict resolution and if the closeness of the relation facilitates the solving of a conflict, it is argued by the respondent that a good relation definitely helps in those situations. Due to the good relation the buyer and supplier understands each other and understand why there is a problem and then it is discussed and solved together.

Risk & Reward
Zebra explains how they and the supplier can do favors for each other in order to gain reward among themselves. Zebra sometimes make use of having a good relation. The respondent explains that when there might be stated a certain quantity of clothes that they are required to buy, they can, in some cases, compromise with the supplier to buy a smaller order since the store is quite small and probably will not sell a larger order. Sometimes though, the respondent explains it to function the other way around as well, that a larger order than demanded is bought from the supplier in order to stay on good terms with each other.

5.1.2 Commitment
Regarding commitment to the suppliers the respondent explains that 50% of the relations are held because they want to. But some of the relations are held because they need to, this since they run a business and clearly need their suppliers in order to hold their position on the market. The respondent further argues that some suppliers might treat Zebra really bad from time to time, but they still need to stay loyal to them due to the current economic situation and dependence of the supplier.
Zebra further states the importance of understanding the supplier and their actions. In many cases the supplier might act in a way that Zebra does not support and therefore the relation has a bad outcome. The respondent discusses that they invest time and money in collaboration between the parties and therefore Zebra have to have an understanding for the supplier’s behavior even if they does not always support their way of acting.
Affective & Calculative Commitment

As previously mentioned, it is discussed whether Zebra keeps their relations cause they want to or whether they need to, and the respondent states that 50% of the suppliers is kept because they want to and the other half because they are dependent of the supplier and need to stay in the relation. Zebra declares that regarding how dependent they are amongst their suppliers; the money plays a prominent role. As an example Zebra can bring an unknown brand to the store and be promised to be the exclusive store selling it, but after a while they can see the brand in several stores. Zebra argues that this is an example of disloyalty and a sign of how much the money controls the market. The respondent believes that if the smaller brands had been loyal to them as a buyer, they had survived on the market for a longer time. Further on, the replacement of suppliers is discussed. The respondent claims that regarding Zebras suppliers, it depends on how the macro-economic situation appears; if the times are good it is claimed to be easier to replace the supplier, whilst if the times are bad the respondent explains that it is more safe to stay with a supplier you trust. When Zebra considers replacing some of their current suppliers they seek more loyalty; a supplier that not only has money and best location of the store in mind, but also think in terms that benefits them.

5.1.3 Trust

The respondent claims that trust is crucial in the relation, but on the other hand discusses the difficulties in having trust in a supplier. The respondent explains that 99% of the agents are interested in money, which makes it hard to trust the agents and suppliers. It is explained that when the supplier don’t have another choice they are loyal, but when they do, that’s when Zebra can see if they are loyal to them or not.

Identification & Alignment

To feel identified with your supplier is something that the respondent values highly. The style of the supplier is stated to be an important factor; the respondent explains that the appearance and the style of the seller can be a critical factor for how connected they feel with the supplier, the confidence in what they are selling can be determined due to that. The respondent further explains that it can function the
opposite way; if the supplier is not confident in what they are selling it could lead to a bad impression of the brand.

Loyalty
It is further discussed whether the respondent prefers to buy from a certain supplier due to the relation. The respondent argues that it works like that and discusses the importance of speaking the same language as their supplier. It is explained that if Zebra buys a large order from the supplier, the supplier will stay loyal to them and vice versa. The respondent further explains that Zebra occasionally have to buy products they do not have much interest in in order to get the good brands, and questions the importance of the relation through this action. The respondent also explains that they have to take and give in the industry, that it is not possible to buy small orders and believe that they can manage the relationship by that.

Performance
It is further on discussed whether the relation can enhance the performance for Zebras part. The respondent argues that if the relation is good between them, e.g. and the supplier contacts them when they get some products they feel is suitable for their store, the respondent can trust the supplier with what they will buy because the supplier knows it will be products that match their store. This is identified as an improvement for their store that definitely makes the buying process easier. The respondent also explains that it can work the opposite way; if Zebra has a supplier that does not know so much about fashion and trends but they have a good relation, the respondent will continue the partnership due to that.

When it comes to the performance for Zebra and whether they are satisfied with their suppliers the respondent states that they are pleased with how the situation appears today, it is explained to be preferable to cooperate with smaller suppliers to the extent it is possible, this since the relation is easier to handle. Finally the respondent explains that it would be preferable to work without agents, but as the situation appears they have to adjust to the market. When the brands grow it is not possible for them as a buyer, but if Zebra could decide they would work directly with the designer, without intermediaries.
5.2 Case two – Kompaniet

5.2.1 Buyer-supplier relationship
Currently, Kompaniet cooperates with circa 30-35 suppliers, to which there is a close and long-term relation with approximately 20 of these. To define a relationship of this character, the respondent identifies trust and reliance between both parties as the main important aspects. Furthermore, the business prosperity is what is considered essential; that both parties are satisfied with the performed operations and what is yet to come. Additionally, the respondent mentions the value of personal chemistry as a way to enhance trust, especially when suppliers are warm-hearted and careful when they manage and treat their customers through a stable and close contact. Conclusively, the respondent specifies that Kompaniet value a close relationship as a partnership that is seamless and with equal respect to one another.

Communication
Apropos communication, the respondent identifies this aspect as somewhat of a key within a close relationship. If both parties are loyal and respect one another, it is essential that the communication work in both ways, the respondent explains.

Long-term
The respondent confirms that most of their partnership has been on long-term, some as long as 30 years, and, furthermore, that the aim is always to keep a supplier on long-term. Therefore, the respondent means that the continuity of a partnership is valued highly.

Termination of relationship
Regarding the termination of a relationship, the respondent refers to market shifts; as a retailer you continuously scan the market to discover the most coveted brands, but also the ones that will survive recessions in the market. The respondent describes this current time as a “gray area”, which is in between a recession and hopefully an economic prosperity. Kompaniet therefore prefers to only cooperate with brands that have a solid background, to ensure safe prospects in the beginning of a partnership.
When a partnership is terminated due to trust, the respondent discusses situations where there has been a breach of reliance; where the supplier either has maligned Kompaniet, or where the supplier has gone behind Kompaniet’s back and subjected them to operational tactics. In those cases, the respondent explains that the termination does not happen overnight, in the middle of a season, but usually for the subsequent season.

Cost, Quality & Cycle-time
Regarding the discussion whether a close relationship may affect cost, quality or cycle-time of products, the respondent argued that these factors are not being influenced. Essentially, it is more a question regarding the payment that will get you your products, the respondent explains, rather than a close partnership, since this part of the industry does not handle distribution or logistics to that extent.

Conflict Resolution
The respondent fully agrees that a close relationship with your suppliers enhances conflict resolution; furthermore, this is one of the main reasons to why Kompaniet aims to have close relationships. Once again, trust and reliance is mentioned as keywords to make the relationship work, and to dissolve conflicts.

Risk & Reward
The respondent describes the industry as volatile, where one has to change the product range every six month due to seasonality. Hence, the suppliers are exposed to quite large risks; and to minimize these and prevent dissatisfaction, close relationships are a valuable foundation.
Hence, concerning risk and reward, as something that one is more willing to engage to in a close relationship; the respondent mainly identifies this as when Kompaniet is engaged in a long-term relationship and the supplier has some sort of hardships during this time, but instead of terminate the relation, you weather the storm together. Though, the respondent enhance that these circumstances are dependent on that Kompaniet believes in the brand and that it will rejuvenate again.
5.2.2 Commitment

The investment of resources was firstly identified as every time when Kompaniet are purchasing from their suppliers. Secondly, the respondent recognizes the investment to be on a theoretical level, where the personnel are being educated about the brand and their products. Kompaniet values this kind of investment, since it is of importance that the personnel have a solid foundation and confidence regarding what they are selling to their customers.

Occasionally, Kompaniet collaborate with a supplier and promotes their brand through competitions or similar marketing activities, yet those kinds of activities are mostly managed and funded by Kompaniet.

Affective & Calculative Commitment

The respondent identifies Kompaniet to have both sorts of relationships; where Kompaniet is committed to the supplier because they want to, but also because they need to. The respondent describes the latter one as when they are subdued by a certain brand, which Kompaniet are required to buy from because their customers requests it, but where the relation is not very close. Furthermore, the respondent identifies this situation to occur with brands that have become larger and more influential over time.

From the beginning, the supplier was very dependent on Kompaniet as a buyer, but as they become more independent, and might have visions of internationalization, the respondent explains how it becomes harder to work and keep a close relationship with them. The respondent describes this experience as a feeling of dejection, where the supplier does not respect their background and from where the once started.

On the contrary, Kompaniet also have partnerships with suppliers that they have nurtured and bred from the very beginning of the brand, which makes it difficult to terminate the collaboration; mainly because of the close relationship. Hence, the respondent states that long-term relations with too much affective commitment, are not always to be preferred either.

Conclusively, it is up to Kompaniet to make an evaluation regarding the outcome of keeping a certain supplier versus terminate the partnership; the respondent describes this as a difficult consideration and an ongoing battle.

Regarding whether the replacement of suppliers would be considered as an easy or difficult process, the respondent argues that it would not be possible to replace
Kompaniet’s entire product range, however there are always parts that are replaceable; these mainly appear when your customer segment are shifting in some direction. Hence, a replacement is dependent on Kompaniet’s customer demand.

5.2.3 Trust
Kompaniet considers trust as an important aspect to have a working close buyer-supplier relationship. As previously mentioned, Kompaniet have been subjected to suppliers that have maligned them towards competitors, but they have also experienced competitors that have spread rumors across suppliers; the respondent describes this as an immature behavior in a well-respected line of business. When this occurs, Kompaniet has chosen to terminate the partnership, this since they have removed the most essential elements of the protocol, trust and respect.

Identification & Alignment
Regarding identification and alignment with a supplier, the respondent describes this as an important evaluation of how the brand is perceived when Kompaniet decides whether or not to engage into a partnership with a certain supplier. Furthermore, the importance of alignment and identification is stressed, since lack of this is described as one of the main reason (jointly with lack of trust) to why a partnership is terminated. The respondent explains that when you get to the point where their depiction of alignment differs too much, and they have grown apart, they usually do not continue doing business with one another; the importance of being able to function together is too crucial, they state.

Loyalty
Even though Kompaniet regards trust and reliance as the most crucial factors to build a close relationship, the respondent finds that Kompaniet aims to not become too committed due to trust. Kompaniet’s strategy is to select products from the suppliers that is their particular specialty; therefore, Kompaniet are not as affected by the relationship regarding the purchasing of products from their suppliers. The respondent further discusses whether to be more affective or calculative when buying from suppliers; where the respondent finds it to be more effective to have a more calculative approach. It is explained that they do not believe in buying with an
affective viewpoint, since this from a business perspective is not ideal. Yet, the respondent agrees that Kompaniet at some level prefers to buy from suppliers to which they have a trusted relationship, though the process of product selection is based on what the supplier and brand is known for rather than the relation.

Performance
Regarding Kompaniet’s own performance as their suppliers’; the respondent finds that keeping a close relationship to enhance their own performance, is one of the motivators to why Kompaniet keeps long-term relationships. Overall, Kompaniet are very satisfied with their suppliers performance as well, however, the respondent emphasize that in every ongoing relationship, negotiations are continuous.
5.3 Case three – Company 3

5.3.1 Buyer-supplier relationship
Company 3 (anonymous) is currently cooperating with around 30 suppliers, out of these, around 15-20 is considered as a close relation.
The respondent defines a close relation as a supplier that company 3 can exchange products with smoothly, since the close relation secures a more flexible communication between their suppliers and Company 3. Furthermore, the respondent argues that collaborations with suppliers are very important; also, that suppliers are keeping their promises is of great importance. However, the prosperity of the business and products is always prioritized; the respondent furthermore identifies those products that create a competitive advantage for Company 3 also enhances trust.

Communication
The respondent means that it is generally the same for all suppliers. However, their main problem concerns international suppliers who are located overseas, they generally lack offices in Sweden and their work is handled by some form of agent. It usually causes problems, especially when it comes to returns. In these cases, the respondent identifies the relation as more of a transactional one, since minor problems often becomes tedious. Compared to the ones Company 3 have good relations with, it is basically just to contact them immediately when problems occur, and they are way more helpful at those times.

Long-term
Company 3 have cooperated with many of their suppliers for a long time, some of them from the early start. The respondent explains how they value continuity, having good relations makes business flow easier, and by providing services for each other it is possible to find a win-win situation. Essentially, this concerns brands Company 3 have sold for a long time, the continuity in that builds a more stable and stronger relation over time.
Termination of relationship
The respondent discusses how Company 3 changes or replaces approximately one supplier each year, mainly because of the prevailing trends. The respondent explains that Company 3 do not switch if a brand makes a bad season since brands performs differently from season to season. If so, the respondent describes how Company 3 probably will buy a little less next time they are doing purchases. Also, the suppliers’ operational actions towards Company 3 can be a determining factor. The respondent reveals that sometimes, suppliers are operating behind their back by selling to competitors without discussing the matter with Company 3 first, which can be seen as disloyalty to Company 3.

Cost, Quality & Cycle-time
Concerning the effects that the relation might have on cost, quality and lead-time, the respondent claims they cannot influence the quality of the product per say, however, the respondent identified a different kind of handling of the products when the relationship was close with the supplier, for example, the returns could be handled smoother and Company 3 were compensated in more beneficial ways. The cost and lead time was stated to be more difficult to affect, the respondent argues that the bigger brands have too much power and that it is hard for them as a small store to start bargain about those parts.

Conflict Resolution
The respondent makes clear that conflict resolution is easier with long-term suppliers. A close relation includes discussing and solving problems that arise, if the relation is stable, problems tend to be solved more efficiently. The respondent means that it is easier to solve problems if the relation between buyer and supplier is good.

Risk & Reward
Regarding risk and reward, the respondent explains that some of Company 3’s suppliers assist with money when it comes to marketing campaigns. The respondent explains that those kinds of activities happens exclusively with the ones that Company 3 have cooperated with for a longer time frame and have a close relationship with.
5.3.2 Commitment
Company 3 invests both time and money in relations, mainly to strengthen and show interest in the relation. This by usually doing trips to different brands and suppliers, flying to London for some of their purchases is one example of it.
The respondent means that times are changing; when purchasing, visits from Company 3 are expected by the suppliers nowadays, especially concerning larger and more influential companies, whilst the large suppliers are not visiting Company 3 anymore.

Affective & Calculative Commitment
The relation with some suppliers or their sale staff can definitely be too personal, if for instance a salesman switches company, it might lead to purchases from Company 3 even if that was not included in the purchase plan, a good relation might be a liability in these cases. The respondent points out another aspect that is frequently occurring; some brands in the store are expected from the customers, when purchasing these, hence the brand becomes more important than the relation.

The respondent means that in around 95 % of Company 3’s relations, they are willing to maintain. However, the respondent explains that some brands are so large and influential, that they do not need Company 3, but since the customers expects certain brands, the choice is not Company 3’s in these situations. The respondent points out Burberry as an example, when Company 3 purchase from them, they have to travel to London and buy big quantities.

5.3.3 Trust
The respondent means that similar to all types of businesses, trust is something that has to work. Also, as mentioned before, in relations that lack trust, the respondent have seen suppliers go behind Company 3’s back which affects their loyalty and lead to termination of their collaboration. It happens that brands Company 3 sell exclusively shows up in the shelves of bigger retailers without their knowledge, which
the respondent explains affect the relation with that particular supplier, mainly in terms of trust and loyalty.

Identification & Alignment
Regarding identification with the supplier, the respondent recognizes the brand as most important; the relation comes afterwards. The respondent again mentions that they are expected to store some brands, regardless of the relation. The identification is usually with the salesman, the respondent explains that the purchasing process might therefore sometimes be hard too diverge from if the seller are switching brand or supplier.

Loyalty
Concerning Company 3’s suppliers and whether they prefer to buy from a certain supplier, the respondent argue that Company 3 sometimes buys products that they might not need or fully believe in, in order to maintain a relation, mainly to please the supplier and be undemanding.

Performance
According to Company 3, the most fundamental part regarding performance is whether the brand lives up to their expectations. However, Company 3 states that they are pleased with their suppliers and the relations that are being held today. However, things can always be improved, but all in all the respondent states that they are very pleased with the partnerships they have today.
5.4 Case four – Fribergs

5.4.1 Buyer-supplier relationship
Currently, Fribergs collaborates with approximately 20 suppliers, to which there is a close and long-term relation with circa 15 of these. The reason to rather keep relations close is, according to the respondent, to make the business process smoother. It is explained that the relation are easier to handle if you have a close relation with the supplier, if difficult situations or problems occur the respondent further explains that the supplier takes care of them for Fribergs because they value the relationship. The respondent emphasize how every relation is unique, if there was only one way to handle the partnerships, that would have been amazing, however, that is not what the reality looks like. Furthermore, the respondent stresses that this is not a simple process; building the relation and getting to that point in the partnership, takes quite some time.

Communication
Communication is, according to the respondent, what drives the whole relation forward. Furthermore, the respondent describes a communication flow between the parties as a requirement to have a working partnership. This mainly because Fribergs are not just buying products twice a year, but continuously; hence, communication is a valued part of the relation.

Long-term
Fribergs states to value a continuous relationship, where they have had some suppliers for 30 years. The respondent describes long-term relations as a source to security for the business.

Termination of relationship
However, Fribergs have also terminated relations, yet the main reasons has been that the brand has not sold well enough, and not due to trust issues or other difficulties with the relation.
Regarding the replacement of suppliers, the respondent acknowledges that this is an ongoing process where Fribergs constantly evaluates their suppliers. The importance
of weighting advantages and drawbacks of every supplier is of big importance the respondent means; therefore, it is an ongoing discussion. Furthermore, the respondent identifies that the replacement of a supplier is generally due to the stagnation of their brand.

Cost, Quality & Cycle-time
Apropos whether Fribergs perceives that a close relationship can affect cost, quality or cycle-time of products, the respondent rejects that this would be plausible; and refers to quantities as the main method that could affect these aspects, yet, even then, it is hard to influence.

Conflict Resolution
Regarding the topic whether a close relationship enhances conflict resolution, the respondent confirms that this is a valid assertion. Furthermore, the respondent identifies resemblance with this situation as with a dispute with a friend; the closer the relation, the easier to solve the conflict.

Risk & Reward
Regarding risk and reward, the respondent argues that this would mainly occur in a close relationship. This when giving enhanced market activities to a specific brand, partly due to the relationship prevailing.

5.4.2 Commitment

Affective & Calculative Commitment
The respondent could identify that Fribergs are having both relations to whom they are committed because they want to as well as need to. Some suppliers they hold on to, even though they think that they have stagnated or had a poor product line during the last season. If the brand is influential, and they do not want them to move to another retailer, they will keep them regardless. Additionally, Fribergs are expected by their customers to provide certain brands; hence, the need to be committed towards some suppliers increases. These suppliers are also the ones that Fribergs become more
dependent on, and will keep due to their influence and not mainly because of the partnership.

5.4.3 Trust
The respondent highlights the importance of trust by mentioning it as key variable regarding relations. It is further explained that it is basically impossible to work with a brand without having trust or confidence in them. Furthermore, the importance of personal chemistry is explained and how it connects with trust, professionalism and people. The respondent also explains the importance of relations when it comes to purchases, the personal characteristics of the supplier is of big importance. The respondent calls this the essence of purchasing; relations and flows.

Identification & Alignment
Regarding identification, the respondent confirms how identification and personal chemistry is an important aspect regarding the suppliers he meets, this mainly since it is easier to handle business with someone you like, according to the respondent.

Loyalty
The respondent means that Fribergs positively buys from suppliers because of the relation; a commitment towards the supplier is created through reliance. Furthermore, the respondent argues that suppliers perceive a beneficial situation by treating them well. However, the respondent does not think that is a characteristic for the fashion industry, nor buyer-supplier relationship; instead it should be applied to relationships overall.

Performance
Regarding performance, the respondent discusses how a relationship can provide advantages in how a supplier or a brand learns how to treat Fribergs, over time, they will learn how they operate and handle their purchases and can thereby adapt to the relation and their specific needs. The respondent mentions the visits of their suppliers as an example, the relations they have had for a long time knows what Fribergs look for and will show those products, they describe it as a learning process between the buyer and supplier.
5.5 Chapter Summary
Chapter five presents the empirical data resulting from the four interviews from the organizations Zebra, Kompaniet, Company 3 and Fribergs. The cases were presented individually, in accordance with the theoretical framework found in the literature review. To enable the data analysis in the following chapter, some of the empirical data has also been summarized and put in to tables in chapter six.
6. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents a comparison of the empirical data with the concepts of the theoretical framework, where the analysis matches and discusses potential patterns, to gain understanding of whether the empirical data are supported by the presented theories. In addition to this, the chapter presents a cross-case analysis of the empirical data. The analysis is based on the three main concepts: Buyer-Supplier Relationship, Trust and Commitment. Conclusively, the presented analysis functions as the basis for the answering of the study’s research questions.

6.1 Buyer-Supplier Relationship

To analyze the gathered empirical data and compare to the theoretical framework, below a table of the four cases’ definition of the factors of a close buyer-supplier relationship is presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zebra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer-supplier Relationship</td>
<td>Long-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate conflict solving</td>
<td>Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Seamlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Personal chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Terminating: disharmony &amp; not striving against same objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Summary of empirical data regarding factors of Buyer-supplier relationship

As seen in Table 6.1, there were some factors mentioned by 3 or all cases. Firstly, all cases found that a long-term objective was necessary to engage within a close buyer-supplier relationship. Furthermore, a more flexible communication was a factor that
defined the relationships in all cases; as were the enhancement of conflict resolution. All cases were also unanimous concerning the reason of termination of relationship; namely lack of trust or stagnated performance. Firstly, this provides a clear connection to the findings of Ruyter et al. (2001), as trust as a crucial factor to build a successful relationship, as well as Gansean’s (1994) theory regarding performance as a key aspect of trust would henceforth be connected to the significance to continue a close relationship. In three of the cases, seamlessness, identification and personal chemistry was identified as factors that characterized a close buyer-supplier relationship. This provides this study with an outline of what factors the cases considers as important, and also confirms part of the chosen factors for this study to be of significance. However, all measurements of the buyer-supplier relation concept will be presented and analyzed. Henceforth, an analysis regarding each measurement is presented below.

6.1.1 Risk & Reward
According to Prajogo et al. (2012), a close long-term relationship between the retailers and their supplier creates the willingness to share risk and reward. The findings in this research were supporting this argument, concerning Company 3 as well as Fribergs, the risk and reward mainly involved marketing campaigns, where the suppliers either invests in their marketing campaigns, as the other way around. The risk and reward also involved the quantities that a retailer was required to order from a supplier; Zebra described that the supplier could agree to a lower quantity because of the relation, yet in some cases, Zebra bought larger orders than preferred because of the relationship. Whilst Kompaniet identified the risk and reward as when they are weathering the storm together with a supplier that has some hardships, due to the relationship.

6.1.2 Cost, Quality & Cycle-time
Furthermore, Prajogo et al. (2012) suggests a positive effect on cost, quality and cycle-time on products by a close buyer-supplier relationship. However, the overall findings in this study did not support this proposal; mainly due to low buying power, the fact that these retailers does not influence distribution or logistics in the supply-
chain, and the overall characteristics of the industry; the retailers did not recognize these effects of a close relationship with their suppliers.

6.1.3 Communication
When it comes to communication, the interpretation and the meaning tend to differ between the cases. For instance, Fribergs identify communication to be the drive of the relationship, whilst Company 3 identifies a difference between national and international suppliers, yet is the importance of a flexible communication stressed. Kompaniet and Zebra on the other hand, identifies communication as important, yet hard to define how, however, speaking the same ‘language’ tends to be a cornerstone. Nevertheless, Frödell (2011) as well as Monczka et al. (1998) argues that communication is of big importance for the relationship, which is strongly supported in the case of Fribergs and identified in the other three cases.

6.1.4 Conflict resolution
Regarding conflict resolution, the respondents in all cases explained how conflicts becomes easier to solve with a long-term partner, an understanding of each others problems as well as the closer the relationship, the easier to solve problems served as key concepts. The findings in this study support Frödell’s (2011) findings strongly regarding the connection between conflict resolution and long-term relationships. It was furthermore argued by Zebra and Company 3 that loyalty is something both parts has to prove by help one another, in some cases larger quantities were purchased in order to stay loyal to the supplier. This could be supported by Krause’s (1999) argument that the buyer and supplier help each other out in situations where one of the parts might not benefit by helping the other, yet do this due to the relation. Moreover, Krause’s (1999) findings regarding problem solving between organizations, find support in this study in view of the fact that the respondents shared an appreciation of suppliers that helped them solve problems in a seamless manner.

6.1.5 Long-term objective
As previously mentioned, all cases had an aim to keep their suppliers on long-term; Zebra enhanced the importance of maintaining a partnership even though the supplier
had a poorly executed season, as did Kompaniet and Company 3. Furthermore, Fribergs described the long-term objective as a source of security for the business. All cases identified a long-term objective from both parts to be a key aspect when engaging in a partnership. Since Frödell (2011) as well as Monczka et al. (1998) found it essential to have a long-term perspective when selecting suppliers, the empirical findings fully support this argument.

All cases could also identify that termination of a close relationship was due to lack of trust or when the performance had stagnated, which provides an outline of what factors are crucial when to engage in a long-term relation.

6.2 Commitment

To analyze the gathered empirical data and compare to the theoretical framework, a table of the main findings concerning commitment is presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zebra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Long-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Investment: time &amp; money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Want vs. need: 50 % each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Money controls the market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Summary of empirical data regarding factors of Commitment

Regarding the motivation to stay with the supplier on long term, as a part of Gouranis (2005) definition of commitment, all cases agreed that this was always an aim; some had been kept for almost 30 years, which confirms Gouranis (2005) argument. The investment of resources, varied between the cases; Kompaniet identified this to be when educating personnel about certain brands and products, whilst the buying procedure, including business trips, was considered as an investment into the relationship to Company 3. However, the empirical evidence supports Gouranis’
(2005) theory regarding the investment of resources when being committed in a relationship.

6.2.1 Affective & Calculative Commitment

Since Frederico and Parente (2009) as well as Ruyer et al. (2001) distinguished the two dimensions of commitment, namely affective and calculative, this study aimed to investigate whether the retailers would identify their relationship leaning towards the one or the other. What was found was that all cases could identify themselves to be committed in an affective as a calculative way, depending on the supplier. The calculative commitment seems to appear when the customers are demanding a certain brand, and even though the relation is not as well as preferred by the buyer, the relation needs to be maintained. Company 3, Zebra and Kompaniet identified this to occur with large, influential suppliers, which might not value them as highly as customers as a smaller supplier might do. Hence, the empirical findings supported the dimension of calculative commitment, defined by Ruyer et al. (2001), as well as its correlation to supplier dependence, articulated by Ganesan (1994).

Regarding the other dimension of commitment, namely affective, which is defined by Frederico and Parente (2009) as a positive motivation, where the buyer wants to maintain the relation, which all cases confirmed to have as well, some of the respondents also identified disadvantages with this dimension. Whilst Kompaniet had a clear strategy where they tried to not feel obligated towards their suppliers because of an affective commitment, both Company 3 and Zebra gave examples of cases where they, because of an affective commitment, have stayed with suppliers.
6.3 Trust

In order to analyze the gathered empirical data and compare to the theoretical framework, a summary of the main findings concerning trust is presented in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zebra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhance performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identification: salesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crucial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard to trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Summary of empirical data regarding factors of Trust

Ryu et al. (2007) found that trust has a positive effect on relationships; the respondents of all four companies strongly support these findings by highlighting the importance of trust in their supplier relations. Along with the findings of Anderson and Weitz (1989) and Ruyter et al. (2001) conclusions regarding trust as an important concept in order to build successful relations the study presents clear evidence regarding the importance of trust.

Ganesan’s (1994) findings regarding trust and long-term relations also finds support where relations including trust can be built upon and provide beneficial long-term relations where purchasers and suppliers, as seen in the respondent’s companies, become partners for many years. In all cases, the companies had partners they have worked with for over twenty years. Given the findings in this study, a successful relationship tends to have the need of trust as a building block in order to become long-term.

Since trust according to Mayer et al. (1995) is defined as a feeling of security in their supplier, henceforth this will be analyzed through the stated measurements.
6.3.1 Conflict resolution
The connection between trust and conflict resolution, mentioned by Sullivan and Peterson (1982) seems to be highly relevant since all respondents mean that conflicts are easier to solve with long-term partners. In light of the findings regarding trust and long-term relations, this study finds support for Sullivan and Peterson’s (1982) statement regarding trust and conflict resolution.

6.3.2 Performance & Attraction
Ryu et al. (2007) and Frödell (2011) argues that there are two key factors concerning trust, supplier performance and attraction between the buyer and supplier. Regarding performance, the study presents diverse evidence. However, the respondent from Fribergs means that performance grows over time when suppliers learn how to handle their specific needs, the respondent from Kompaniet reveals that close long-term relationships enhance their performance when the supplier’s performance is capable. The respondent from Zebra distinguish a pattern similar to Fribergs where cooperation over time develops which increases trust and makes the buying process easier. Company 3 share that performance makes business flow easier. Summarized, all cases were unanimous about being satisfied with their close suppliers’ performance. The findings therefore distinguish supplier performance as an important factor in a trusting relationship. However, no clear evidence regarding the connection between trust and supplier performance were presented.

Regarding attraction, thorough evidence was not gathered through the empirical investigation, thereby do this study not present evidence that supports the importance of attraction in the same way as Ryu et al. (2007) or Frödell (2011). Moreover, the combination of these performance and attraction is, according to Ryu et al. (2007) and Frödell (2011), stated as crucial factors in order to create a successful relationship. However, these findings do not find the same support for the importance of attraction in this study, where other factors tend to be of higher importance.

6.3.3 Loyalty
The empirical findings support Ibáñez et al.’s (2006) findings that loyalty towards the suppliers is enhanced by trust. All the respondents were consistent in their answers.
and pointed out loyalty as a crucial factor in order to make the relation between them and the supplier work sufficient. As described by Ibáñez et al. (2006), loyalty is an incentive to maintain a long-term relation; the concept of loyalty could therefore be argued being connected to long-term maintenance. These statements can be supported seeing that all the respondents argued that the objective when entering a relation is to keep it on long-terms and loyalty was stated to be a determining factor to be willing to have a long-term focus.

Even though it was argued by all respondents to be a crucial factor, the view of loyalty differed from case to case; e.g. Zebra indicated the importance of loyalty the most; it was argued from their side that loyalty is the outcome from an honest and stable relation, which is something they are constantly requesting. Zebra also describe that their current suppliers would be replaced if more loyal ones were to be found, this could also be connected to the findings made by Ibáñez et al. (2006) about loyalty as a determining factor in situations where the buyer is confronted with switching decisions that involves a high level of perceived risk and uncertainty. Furthermore, Fribergs described loyalty as a key factor, leading to a more preferable relation between the parties. This could be supported by the theory proposed by Ibáñez et al. (2006) regarding the suggestion that loyalty leads to a higher level of trust, which in this case is connected to how you treat your suppliers, due to the level of trust.

Kompaniet describe loyalty from an affective or calculative perspective and argue that a more calculative approach against the suppliers was preferred. Kompaniet claimed that they preferred this type of relation since it leads to a more business oriented focus, and not as (Ruyter et al., 2001; Frederico and Parente, 2009) argues that a calculative relation is established mainly due to the need for it. However, loyalty could in this case be seen as a crucial factor, but when determining whether to continue the relation with the supplier or not the decision was made with regards to several other factors as well.

6.3.4 Identification & Alignment

Regarding the statement by Ruyter et al. (2001) concerning identification and alignment and its affects on trust, the findings show that Kompaniet values the identification with the brand, to be aligned with their own approach and image, whilst
the residual cases values the identification with the salesman. Hence, the study presents evidence regarding the theory articulated by Ruyter et al. (2011); identification and alignment as an essential part of a relationship, especially found in the case of Kompaniet where lack of it might lead them to terminate suppliers.

6.4 Chapter Summary
Chapter six has presented a cross-case comparison of the empirical data gathered from the four investigated organizations. In addition to this, the data has been compared against the theories found when reviewing existing literature. This has resulted in previous research being both supported and questioned. In the following chapter, the main findings from this chapter are used to answer the research questions.
7. Conclusions & Contributions

In this final chapter, the main findings and conclusions based on the analysis and discussion in the previous chapter are represented. The three stated research questions are answered individually, in separate sections. Conclusively, the chapter provides the theoretical contributions this study has resulted in, a presentation of the managerial implications, a reflected discussion regarding the limitation of this research, as well as, suggestions for further research.

7.1 Conclusions

This study’s objective was to investigate the buyer-supplier relationship within small-sized fashion retailers. To do so, trust and commitment were identified as building blocks of relationships. Furthermore, five additional factors were chosen to measure the relationship, whilst trust and commitment functioned as main concepts and therefore measured separately and more thoroughly than the other five factors. Based on a review of the existing research, addressing buyer-supplier relationship and these antecedents, the following research questions were formulated:

- **RQ1**: How do small-sized fashion retailers value a close buyer-supplier relationship?
- **RQ2**: How do the dimensions of commitment influence the relationship between a small-sized fashion retailer and their supplier(s)?
- **RQ3**: How does small-sized fashion retailers value trust towards their supplier(s)?

Hence, in section 7.1.1-7.1.3, the conclusions of this study are presented to, simultaneously, answer the research questions.

7.1.1 Buyer-supplier relationship

This research shows that the selected small sized-fashion retailers value close relationships on long-term with their suppliers. This conclusion is primarily made due to the fact that the majority of their supplier-relationships were preferred and defined as close and on long-term. These relationships were mainly characterized by a flexible
and well-working communication, enhanced conflict resolution, seamlessness and identification. Furthermore, all cases identified that a long-term partnership were most likely to be terminated due to lack of trust or stagnated performance. Therefore, the factors articulated by Frödell (2011), Ruyter et al. (2001) as well as Kalwani and Narayandas (1995) provided a useful outline when defining the valued aspects of a close relationship.

However, not all factors within the buyer-supplier relationship were applicable on a small-sized fashion retailer. Since a small-sized buyer seems to lack greater influence, and since these are presumed as the last stage of the supply-chain, any positive effects on a product’s cost, quality or cycle-time, through a close relation was not recognized. Nevertheless, close relationships on long-term were identified as beneficial and highly valued, even though these aspects were out of the purchasers control to influence.

Additionally, worth to be noted is that the asked retailers all stressed how the prosperity of the business always comes first. Hence, if supplying a certain brand would provide in competitive advantage, a close relationship was not compulsory for the retailer to continue buying, yet it was always preferred.

7.1.2 Commitment
In this study, commitment was found to be strong concerning the motivation to stay with suppliers on long-term, and henceforth the investment of resources into the relationship, was identified in all cases. Yet, termination of partnership occurred in all cases as well; either because the suppliers’ products had run out of fashion or due to lack of trust. However, concerning the cases where suppliers have had a poor season, the commitment was rather what motivated the retailer not to terminate a supplier immediately.

Regarding the dimensions of commitment, namely affective and calculative, all cases identified both to exist depending on the character of the relationship. Supplier dependence, which occurred when the supplier was large and powerful, often resulted in a calculative commitment, where the retailer had to stay with the supplier due to
the brand and since their customers demanded it. Hence, the empirical findings supported the calculative commitment to be correlated with supplier dependence, as argued by Ganesan (1994).

Whereas an affective commitment seemed to be more common when the supplier was smaller and valued the retailer and their relationship highly. Yet, it was also stated that being affectively committed, sometimes makes it complex if the performance of the supplier has stagnated but the relation has grown strong, this makes it hard to terminate the partnership.

7.1.3 Trust
The findings identify trust as highly valued when it comes to relations between retailers and suppliers. Also, if retailers seek long-term relations, trust is seen as essential where none of the organizations lacks trust in their longer relationships. Furthermore, the study identifies a high awareness when it comes to the involvement of trust in the outcome of successful relationships. In all cases, loyalty was identified as a crucial factor. Continuously, trust was considered as an aspect that enhances conflict resolution between retailers and their suppliers, and thereby assists the ongoing process of cooperation. Regarding alignment and identification, the findings differ between identification with brands and identification with salesmen although the latter is more frequent. The findings differ in how identification impacts explicitly on the relationship, although it is concluded that identification and alignment enhances certain aspects of a relation in a positive manner and therefore is two essential factors in a trusting relationship.
Regarding performance, the findings identify supplier performance as important in long-term relations, yet no clear evidence regarding the connection with trust was identified.
Regarding attraction, the empirical data was not comprehensive enough to find evidence that supported the theory of attraction as a crucial factor in order to create successful relationships, as stated by Ryu et al. (2007) and Frödell (2011).
7.2 Theoretical contributions

This study has aimed for gaining deeper understanding of the buyer-supplier relationship by mainly consider trust and commitment as building blocks. Since this understanding has been gained by using measurements proposed by previous research, it can be presumed that this study generates a contribution to those theories by testing these in a new context, from a new perspective, namely the small-sized retailers within the fashion industry.

As can be seen in the analysis presented in the previous chapter, the theories presented were predominantly proven to correlate well with the result of this study. Particularly, the literature and theoretical proposals concerning trust, long-term objectives, communication, conflict resolution and identification were applicable as important factors of a close buyer-supplier relationship. Moreover, affective and calculative commitment was identified, where a correlation between calculative commitment and supplier dependence, as suggested by Ganesan (1994) were recognized.

Further theoretical contributions, are related to the fact that some of the theories presented in previous studies are not applicable with the context investigated. The main contribution of such is that the positive effects on cost, quality and cycle-time through a close relationship, as proposed by Prajogo et al. (2012) are not applicable to small-sized fashion retailers, mainly due to their position in the supply chain. Additionally, evidence was not to be found regarding Frödell’s (2011) theory concerning attraction correlated with as a crucial success factor.

7.3 Managerial implications

Based on the result of the study, a number of managerial recommendations can be provided. These recommendations are suggested to be used by managers of small-sized fashion retailers, for accomplishing better understanding of the complexity surrounding their already volatile market, and how other organizations handles this complexity. By doing so, managers may be able to make more valid decisions regarding their supplier-relationships in their own organizations.
- Firstly, managers are advised to take into account that the study is performed on a limited number of companies; the findings should thereby not be applied to circumstances outside of the aim and focus of this study.
- When aiming for a long-term relationship with a supplier, the presence of trust in the relation is highly recommended when implementing strategies for relationships by managers.
- Also, when managing relations within the fashion industry, an understanding of how loyalty is built, through deliberate actions such as providing exclusivity when it comes to different brands, is found to be crucial.
- Further, managers should keep in mind that the brand usually is more important than the relation in the beginning of a partnership, the brand or the product is generally selected first, and the relation becomes a building progress. It is therefore crucial that managers understand when actions and investments regarding a relation should take place.
- Due to potential resource limitations regarding small-sized companies, the study presents important factors connected to relationship marketing strategies that can be adapted and tested by companies in order to build stable relations, although - keep the first recommendation in mind.
- Finally, since it is found that both affective and calculative commitment exists in the retailer’s relationship portfolio, it should also be stressed that one may become too affective, which may in turn lead to hesitation of termination. When a supplier is stagnating, it is of importance to evaluate the relation as well as the performance, preferably separately, to decide whether to hope for improvement or to terminate the relationship.

7.5 Limitations
Major limitations of this study concern its qualitative approach where the relatively small number of cases, combined with the nature of qualitative research, restricts the generalizability of the findings to the organizations studied. The limited time along with financial constraints kept the study on the presented level, where more time and financial resources would probably have given the opportunity to make a more extensive and thorough investigation.
Concerning validity, the qualitative approach relies heavily on interpretation by the authors, which makes it impossible to fully or definitely exclude the element of bias or any subjective decisions regarding the study. This especially when it comes to the parts of analysis and conclusion drawing along with the data gathering process, where it is important to bear in mind that the authors were present during the data collection process, which might have effected the respondents answers. Also, the measurements of a buyer-supplier relationship are restricted to a certain set of factors. However, these factors are not considered as the only measurements of this concept. This has naturally affected the result by limiting it to those seven factors.

7.6 Suggestions for further research
For those interested in further research regarding small-sized fashion retailers, following suggestions is recommended:

Regarding reliability, the option to replicate this study is positively manageable. However, it is questionable if another researcher would make the same decisions regarding for instance interpretation of data or be asking the interview questions in the same way.

Concerning the study’s limitations, we suggest that similar research should be conducted with a larger number of cases and respondents in order to possibly increase the generalizability of the study.

A study could also be conducted in a similar way, but measure additional factors that are identified as important for a buyer-supplier relationship, but were not measured in this study.

By conducting a similar research with a quantitative approach, the possibility to develop hypotheses based on the findings and test them on an equal, however bigger, sample would increase the chance to present results that would be applicable within a wider range.

Further, the study is conducted on small-sized retailers. Performing a study on medium-sized or large enterprises, would give an interesting angle by comparing long-term relations and if they tend to differ when it comes to company size. Also, a comparison between all three sizes and thereby the opportunity to discover patterns and irregularities would be interesting.


7.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, this study’s research questions has been answered and discussed with regards to possible limitations. Further, the theoretical contributions, where the study contributes by testing previous theoretical propositions in a new context, namely within small-sized fashion retailers. Hence, the managerial implications have been addressed towards managers within this area. Conclusively, suggestions for further research, such as testing the result quantitatively, or with other or additional factors as measurement, were made.
LIST OF REFERENCES


# Appendix A – Interview Guide

## General information

**Position of the respondent:**

**Number of years of employment:**

**Number of years in the industry:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1</th>
<th>Buyer-supplier Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Define your close relationships. How many suppliers do you perceive having a close relationship with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>What do you think are important factors for a relation to become close?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Do you believe a product's cost, quality or cycle-time could be affected by a close relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Do you believe that it is easier to solve conflicts or problems by having a close relationship? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>What do you think is the reason to why you keep these relations close?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Would you say that you are more willing to share risks to gain reward with these suppliers? How/why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Would you say that trust and reliance is important to keep a close relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Would you say that the communication is better and valued higher with these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Would you say that the company could identify itself with its suppliers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>For how long have you had the same supplier?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>Have you terminated relations with your suppliers? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 2</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Do you value a continuous relation with your suppliers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Have you ever switched supplier, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Would you say that you are willing to invest time and money to get a stronger relation with your suppliers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Do you sometimes stay with a supplier because you need to (too valuable) and want to? How/why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Would you say that it is easy or hard to replace your suppliers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Do you have suppliers which products are valued highly and therefore hard to replace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Would you describe trust and reliance as an important factor to continue a close relation? Why/How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Would you say that a sense of alignment and identification is important? How/Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Do you prefer to buy certain products from a specific supplier due to the relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Could the possibility to improve your performance be a reason to why you keep long-term relations? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Would you describe your suppliers as attractive to you? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Are you satisfied with your suppliers performance? Do you think that this affect the level of trust?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Have you experienced that conflicts dissolve easier by having a trusting relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Would you say that the more you trust a supplier, the more you are willing to have a long-term relation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linnaeus University – a firm focus on quality and competence

On 1 January 2010 Växjö University and the University of Kalmar merged to form Linnaeus University. This new university is the product of a will to improve the quality, enhance the appeal and boost the development potential of teaching and research, at the same time as it plays a prominent role in working closely together with local society. Linnaeus University offers an attractive knowledge environment characterised by high quality and a competitive portfolio of skills.

Linnaeus University is a modern, international university with the emphasis on the desire for knowledge, creative thinking and practical innovations. For us, the focus is on proximity to our students, but also on the world around us and the future ahead.

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