Analysing online visual elements’ influence upon female perceived value

Mariana Fulleda, Anna Christina Reite
Report No. 2014.11.06

Degree of Master in Textile Management with Specialisation in Fashion Management

Supervisor: Jenny Balkow, Senior Lecturer, School of Business and IT.
Examiner: Olof Brunninge, Senior Lecturer, School of Textiles
ABSTRACT

Purpose - The purpose of this study is to understand female consumers’ behaviour within online shopping, in order to identify which features within three chosen elements, common within the presentation of women’s tops, reduce mental intangibility and stimulate perceived value.

Design/methodology/approach - A standard qualitative study approached through two methods of data collection; interviews and focus groups, from which specific patterns and concepts were identified during the development of conversations.

Research limitations - This study is limited to female students from The Swedish School of Textiles. The research will focus on three visual variables common within the online presentation of women’s tops.

Originality/Value - This study contributes knowledge to online apparel retailers, enabling them to optimise their website product display, thus increasing their competitive advantage. Our analysis of the chosen visual elements will contribute to a further understanding on how to reduce mental intangibility through visual communication. Additionally by acknowledging how to influence customers’ perceived value, online retailers will be able to trigger loyalty.

Keywords - Online Visual Communication, Garment Angle Views, Garment Display, Image Background, Utilitarian Value, Hedonic Value, Mental Intangibility.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................................. 0

TABLE OF CONTENTS .......................................................................................................................... 2

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................... 4

   1.1 Area of Research ............................................................................................................................. 4

   1.2 Background ..................................................................................................................................... 4

   1.3 Research Gap .................................................................................................................................. 6

   1.4 Purpose and Research questions ................................................................................................. 7

      1.4.1 Purpose of Study ....................................................................................................................... 7

      1.4.2 Research Questions ................................................................................................................ 7

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ......................................................................................................... 8

   2.1 Theoretical ground of the study ................................................................................................... 8

      2.1.1 The Stimuli-Organism-Response paradigm ....................................................................... 8

      2.1.2 The Consciousness-Emotion-Value Model ....................................................................... 10

   2.2 Reflections on grounded Theory ............................................................................................... 11

   2.3 Applied theory .............................................................................................................................. 12

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................................ 14

   3.1 Approach ...................................................................................................................................... 14

      3.1.1 Research Strategy ................................................................................................................... 14

      3.1.2 Research Design ..................................................................................................................... 14

      3.1.3 Sampling Method .................................................................................................................. 15

      3.1.4 Data Collection Method ...................................................................................................... 15

   3.2 Structure of the Study ................................................................................................................... 16

   3.3 Data Analysis Methods ................................................................................................................. 18

   3.4 Trustworthiness ............................................................................................................................ 19

   3.5 Methods Reflections ..................................................................................................................... 20

4. FINDINGS ............................................................................................................................................ 22

   4.1 Garment Angle Views .................................................................................................................. 22

   4.2 Garment Display Method ............................................................................................................ 24

   4.3 Image Background Style ............................................................................................................. 26
5. DATA ANALYSIS .................................................................................................................. 28
6. CONCLUSIONS ................................................................................................................... 30
7. REFLECTIONS OF THE STUDY ......................................................................................... 31
FIGURE LIST .......................................................................................................................... 33
TABLE LIST ............................................................................................................................. 34
REFERENCE LIST .................................................................................................................. 35
APPENDIX ............................................................................................................................... 39
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Area of Research

This research will explore the effect of online shops visual elements upon customers’ perceived value. The study will include the analysis of three different visual elements including, angle views, image background style and garment display method, and how each one of the visual variables influences the customers’ online shopping experience, ultimately reducing mental intangibility, creating value and hereby triggering purchases.

1.2 Background

Having an online store has been proven to be a powerful tool (Rigby, 2011); an additional channel that create sales at a high return rate. The return rate of investment for the online channel is around 17%, while physical stores have a 7% rate, plus the influential power of digital information is around the 50% of all purchases (Rigby, 2011).

Over the past few years people have been changing their consuming patterns, replacing physical stores for online channels. Rigby (2011) mentions that this mindset can be explained by several reasons: the extensive selection of goods, which in stores can be limited due to storage space and shelves cost; prices are sometimes better online and they can be easily compared, consumers enjoy the fact that they got the best price in the market; and finally due to convenience since they do not have to spend time, money and energy going all the way to the store. According to Svensk Digital Handel (2013), during the last quarter of 2012, online sales within Sweden increased by 17% compared to previous year, which reflects that people are adopting the online retailing channel into their daily activities.

Online retailers are aware that consumer may not stay for a long period of time browsing through a webshop if the first impression is not pleasant (Hyunjoo and Young, 2011). Visual communication plays an important role when it comes to evoking personal responsiveness, developing trust, and triggering consumer behaviour. Website design should provide relevant and abundant information of the product and retailer’s brand values, in order to reduce the perceived risk within online buying (Tsao and Tseng, 2011; McCormick and Livett, 2012).
According to the Consumer Decision Process Model (Blackwell et al., 2001), the process of consumers decision-making, from initial need recognition to post-purchase opinion, begins with environmental influences including culture, social class, personal influence, family, situation, as well as with individual differences such as motivation, involvement, knowledge, attitude, personality, values and lifestyle. The individual differences affect how consumers search for information to satisfy unmet needs, and how they finally decide on whether to purchase or not (Blackwell et al., 2001).

According to Lee and Overby (2004), customer value is the foremost driver of competitive advantage in the internet shopping environment. It has been established that there is a relationship between customers’ perceived value and their intention to purchase (Dodds et al., 1991). Companies and researchers have therefore been analysing the visual elements that create value for the consumer, which translates into satisfaction and may become crucial for brand loyalty (Eroglu et al., 2003; Lee and Overby, 2004). The concept of value is based purely in customer perceptions, instead of objective scientific notions; hence, understanding and creating customers’ value is a key concept in which marketing can have a major influence through strategy dialogue (Lee and Overby, 2004). Consumer value can be analysed through two different approaches: utilitarian and hedonic. Utilitarian value is the one associated to the rational experience, providing crucial information regarding the product and the services surrounding it (McCormick and Livett, 2012), which is expected to reduce perceived mental intangibility (Song and Kim, 2012). For this study the concept of mental tangibility is understood as the “degree to which a product can be visualized and provide a clear concrete image prior to purchase” (McDoubgall and Snetsinger, 1990). Since in online shopping there is lack of touchable elements that may help create a notion, for this study we will be referring to concept as reducing mental intangibility, instead of creating mental tangibility.

One of the issues with online retailing is customers often perceiving online shopping as being risky as a result of its intangible qualities (Tsao and Tseng, 2011; Song and Kim, 2012), as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Greater levels of interactivity will conduct to a more stimulating online experience, which decreases mental intangibility risk, and likely results in purchase and loyalty (McCormick and Livett, 2012). In order to meet consumer expectations retailers have to consider the importance of hedonic value in the online experience, meaning that either providing the basic garment information is not enough in order to generate a shopping impulse, or that hedonic value may help in perceiving utilitarian value (Fiore and Kim 2007).

This research will be based on how to reduce mental intangibility, and exploring the hedonic value with the use of visual apparel display, hereby stimulating customers
purchasing decisions. The conclusions will be relevant for retailers who are seeking to meet the constantly growing consumer expectations.

1.3 Research Gap

Because of the high return rates on investment online, retailers have recently been focusing on understanding the online consumer behaviour, and on creating a good online shopping experience (McCormick and Livett, 2012). However, according to Sánchez-Fernandez and Iniesta-Bonillo (2012) there is a lack of preliminary research on creating value within the context of electronic shopping. McCormick and Livett (2012) encourage further research regarding customers’ perceptions stimulated through senses, while Song and Kim (2012) reflect on having further analysis of elements that may reduce mental intangibility. It hereby becomes relevant to understand how these visual elements have an impact on customers within online shopping.

Utilitarian and hedonic customer values are both associated to the rational shopping experience (McCormick and Livett, 2012). According to Lee and Overby (2004), customer value is the foremost driver of competitive advantage in the internet shopping environment, hence why it is important to understand what elements in particular have an effect on customer value.

The study started by listing types visual elements common within many apparel online stores. Webpage background colour, image cohesiveness, catwalk video, zoom-in, garment angle views, garment display method, text colour and product image background are all examples of visual elements common within many online apparel stores. After revising the literature available of visual display, online consumer behaviour and values in online shopping, we discovered that some visual elements effect on consumer had already been studied; webpage background colour (Hong and Ying, 2009), product viewing such as catwalk, zoom-in and rotation (McCormick and Livett, 2012), overall “look” of internet site (Lee and Overby, 2004) and size of pictures (Song and Kim, 2012). We selected specific visual elements that awakened a genuine interest of understanding consumer behaviour through them, and due to the fact that between authors we presented different perspectives for every one of them. Finally, because of time constraints, we had to limit the scope of the study, since it would not have been possible to provide relevant data and analysis for all of the previously stated online visual elements. As a result three specific online visual elements, which had not been done much research on, were therefore chosen for this study; garment angle views, garment display method and image background style.
1.4 Purpose and Research questions

1.4.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand female online shoppers’ consumer behaviour on different types of top/T-shirt displays, in order to identify the key elements that generate visual responsiveness as well as utilitarian and hedonic value, hereby reducing mental intangibility. Gender differences can influence how online information is obtained and processed (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004; Richard et al., 2010), hence why this research will be limited to only females.

The research aims on creating a further understanding on the three chosen visual elements. By analysing this, we will be able to reduce mental intangibility for the customer, and enhance the visual communication of the webshop into stimulating consumer responsiveness, bringing the virtual purchase one step closer towards the physical one.

Answering three research questions, each one of which is related to one element, will enable us to state whether the chosen visual online store elements have an effect on female customers’ perception of a garment.

1.4.2 Research Questions

1. Will more garment angle views of women’s top reduce customers' mental intangibility and stimulate the perceived value, utilitarian and hedonic?
2. Which of the three selected garment display methods (human model, ghost mannequin or flat), reduces customers' mental intangibility more effectively and stimulates the perceived value, utilitarian and hedonic?
3. Which type of image background (plain or outdoor) will prompt a customer into clicking on the picture for further information, reduce customers’ mental intangibility and stimulate the perceived value, utilitarian and hedonic?
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section includes the analysis of two models by which this study is being supported; The Stimuli-O rganism-Response paradigm and The Consciousness-Emotion-Value model theory. The section also addresses a reflection on these theories regarding limitations and our motivation behind the selection of them. Both models are related to stimulating responsiveness through visual elements, and can hereby create hedonic and utilitarian value, later triggering a purchasing behaviour.

2.1 Theoretical ground of the study

2.1.1 The Stimuli-O rganism-Response paradigm

This model has been selected as part of the theoretical framework, based on the fact that relevant research to the study (Fiore and Kim, 2007; McCormick and Livett, 2012; Song and Kim, 2012; Rose et al., 2012) has been grounded on the Stimuli (S) - Organism (O) - Response (R) model.

The SOR paradigm is based on the assumption that the environment contains stimuli that is processed and analysed by every individual, resulting in either approach or avoidance responses, which ultimately creates an individual experience that later on will provide a perception for future responses over stimuli (Jacoby, 2002; Song and Kim, 2012; Vieira, 2013).

Fig. 1: S-O-R paradigm
Based on S-O-R theory by Jacoby (2002)

Due to the fact that within e-retailing stimuli such as scent, atmospheric feeling and touch are not relevant it becomes important to focus even more on stimuli such as product description and images. Physical tangibility is not available while shopping for clothes online, hence why product images are some of the main factors influencing customers perception of the garments. Mental intangibility can be defined as the difficulty in grasping a product mentally when physical tangibility is not there to ensure a clear representation of the product (McDoubgall and Snetsinger, 1990). With the help of product pictures customers can develop a three dimensional image within their mind, which can stand up for the mental intangibility present within online shopping.

The Stimuli (S) element present within an environment can be analysed through two different approaches. The first approach is related to the particular object being considered, while the second approach is caused by social and psychological factor in the surrounding environment (Parkinson and Schenk, 1980). Marketing use both approaches in order to provoke either enduring or situational involvement. Enduring involvement is related to a self-relevant long-term interest in the object, while situational involvement is produced by a temporary or a specific circumstance rather than an intrinsic interest in the object (Hyunjoo and Young, 2011).

In online retailing the object based stimuli can also be categorized into functional product viewing and aesthetic fashion information (McCormick and Livett, 2012). The product viewing includes personalised product viewing (the ability to control the way in which to view products, such as colour, brand, size filters, among others), zoom and multi-view (ability to manipulate product and view), practical information (garment instructions, such as: washing instructions, type of fabric and size information) and catwalk video (information regarding garment movement and real look) (McCormick and Livett, 2012). This is ultimately related to creating utilitarian value (Lee and Overby, 2004; McCormick and Livett, 2012). The aesthetic fashion information seeks to arouse enjoyment and inspiration, in order to enhance the shopping experience and create hedonic value to the customer (Lee and Overby, 2004; McCormick and Livett, 2012); this aspect includes trend information, styling and storytelling background (McCormick and Livett, 2012).

The organism (O) component is the second element of the S–O–R model, which represents individuals’ emotional reactions to an environment (Jacoby 2002; Vieira 2013). The organism’s reactions to surrounding is conditioned and classified as: Pleasure–Displeasure, explained by the level of enjoyment; Arousal–Non arousal, explained by the degree of physical activity and mental alertness or consciousness;
and Dominance–Submissiveness, meaning control versus lack of control over activities and surroundings (Vieira, 2013). For the matter of this study mental alertness or consciousness comes as a result of previous shopping experiences that may contribute into creating a concept and into reducing mental intangibility (Song and Kim, 2012).

Finally the responses (R) are categorized into approach and avoidance behaviours. The level of arousal will determine if the individual remains interacting with the website or decides to leave; the level of pleasure will develop into loyalty or non-return behaviour (Vieira, 2013). The approach-avoidance behaviour is the result of the stimuli provided by the retailer in the website, and has three components: a desire to explore the website as the environment, a desire to interact with the digital display and information and a reported satisfaction through purchase and loyalty (Vieira 2013), all of which form a feedback concept relevant for further situations.

2.1.2 The Consciousness-Emotion-Value Model

After revising relevant literature review of the field of study (Fiore and Kim, 2007; Fiore et al., 2005; Song et al., 2007), a second model was considered appropriate to support the findings. Holbrook’s Consciousness–Emotion–Value (C–E–V) model is explained by Fiore et al. (2005), analysing the consumption experience.

According to Fiore et al. (2005) consciousness is a state of mind, a cognition or belief, explained by mental processes, such as perceiving, analysing, understanding and remembering consumer’s products (Fiore and Kim 2007), as well as fantasies and expectations during the consumption experience (Song et al., 2007). When it comes to online visual display consumers are constantly forming cognitions through experiencing website display, text fonts and colour, product display and background images, among others. These concepts and beliefs enable mental activity, stimulating perceived tangibility grasped from the website (Fiore and Kim, 2007; Song and Kim, 2012).

The model describes that emotion not only includes likes and dislikes, but furthermore explores complex feelings such as pleasure, joy and excitement (Fiore et al., 2005; Wong et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2014). Visual communication is the traditional tool employed by marketing into evoking emotional responses from customers (McCormick and Livett, 2012), which is also related to creating hedonic value. Online stores intend to encourage consumers into browsing through their website, creating a pleasant experience where the process of shopping induces high levels of emotions (Davis et al., 2013). Visual elements such as: inspirational images,
styling ideas and social media, are associated with playfulness and stimulating a hedonic experience (Lee and Overby, 2004), resulting in positive attitudes and higher shopping satisfaction (Davis et al., 2013). The emotional response can either reinforce or contradict the cognition formed regarding the website, the brand or the products.

The last part of the model is value, interpreted as the net benefit obtained from the consumption experience, constituted by utilitarian value, such as relevant product information, and hedonic value, such as enjoyment or pleasure from sensory components during consumption (Lee and Overby, 2004; Fiore et al. 2005; Wu et al., 2014). Online retailers face a challenge when it comes to engaging consumer and communicating value, due to the everyday rising consumers’ expectations (McCormick and Livett, 2012).

Webshops need to present garments relevant information, in order to reduce mental intangibility, defined as the difficulty of grasping a product mentally (McDougall and Snetsinger, 1990), and hereby creating utilitarian value (Jones et al., 2006). Product display in online retailing is the most powerful tool that will allow the website to illustrate garments’ specific features as well as emphasize details, hereby providing a visual description that will allow them to mentally grasp the product (Song and Kim, 2012). And on the other hand, product display can also accentuates the hedonic value, by providing inspiration, styling ideas and possible scenarios, persuading the consumer into purchasing not only the product because of its possible features, but because of the lifestyle that it provides (Jones et al., 2006).

2.2 Reflections on grounded Theory

The S-O-R model has been evolving through time and has been adapted to the different market scenarios the along the way. Researchers of consumer behaviour models traditionally come from a business background, which has translated into a rigid and static model, based on a linear flow of boxes (Jacoby, 2002). This logical sequence or formula makes sense when it comes to scientific analysis, although for this type of study, which is based in social conduct, it may present some disadvantages. Due to this analysis, this study is based in a hybrid between the Reconsidered S-O-R model presented by Jacoby (2002) and the one presented by Vieira (2013).

Additionally research has found some flaws in the S-O-R model, due to inability of standardization of results (Parkinson and Schenk, 1980). On one hand the situational and the enduring involvement cannot be generalized to the population, as a result of each individual experiences and knowledge does not translate into the equivalent
behaviour between people (Parkinson and Schenk, 1980). While on the other hand, there is a lack scientific data when it comes to the relation between stimuli-organism into triggering a response (Parkinson and Schenk, 1980). This last fact has also been considered into the updated model presented by Vieira (2013), in which the response can be either approach or avoidance.

Separately the CEV model presents the similar disadvantages regarding the diverseness behind the cognition and the emotional aspects (Eroglu et al. 2003; Fiore et al., 2005). As has been mentioned the consciousness element has been formed by mental processes, which is not purely based on scientific facts, but also affected by personal experiences (Fiore and Kim 2007). Meaning that for the matter of this study, each individual forms their own cognition regarding visual element, and therefore creating a lack of comparability from one organism to another, which may result into different insights due to moderating person variables (Fiore and Kim 2007).

Hereafter the emotional aspect may represent inconsistencies, since it is simultaneously based on personal feelings (Fiore et al., 2005), which as has been mentioned, adds an unpredictable component to the equation. Furthermore, the purchase intention behind each individual can have an impact in the outcome, meaning that visual display stimuli may have a different impact when specific purchase or information search goals are set (Menon, and Kahn, 2002). Therefore the emotion variable may be highly inconsistent due to feeling and specific goals within each individual, making the model unpredictable and lacked of generalizability of findings.

After analysing the literature available of the S-O-R paradigm and the C-E-V model, and considering that this is a social study based in consumer behaviour, we consider it as appropriate to ground this study on. Given that this research is based in a social study, we acknowledge the discrepancies between respondents, and we embrace it in a matter that we will be able to obtain individual insights, relevant to the creation of knowledge and further understanding of consumers’ perception of value and mental intangibility.

2.3 Applied theory

In order to examine the effect visual communication has on customers’ purchasing strategies, the two theories, The Stimuli-Organism-Response paradigm and the Consciousness-Emotion-Value Model will be used as support of analysis of the research questions. The three visual elements that are being analysed correspond to the Stimuli given to the respondents, while the Organism is determined by female
students from the Textile School of Borås, and in which the Response will be considered the findings of the study.

On the other hand the Consciousness variable corresponds to each individual mental processes, the Emotion corresponds to the response given by each individual personal feelings and preferences, and the perceived Value will be analysed through the motivation behind the chosen alternative. This way the study will cover not only the choice of preference, but the motivation and reasoning behind it.
3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Following paragraphs will address the methods employed to reach the results in order to answer each research. A qualitative study was conducted in order to retrieve relevant data for analysis and for the development of final conclusions stating the visual variables effect upon customers’ purchasing intentions.

3.1 Approach

3.1.1 Research Strategy

An analysis based on qualitative research, obtained from was conducted in the hope of identifying which visual online store details reduce mental intangibility and increase customers’ utilitarian or hedonic value and develop into purchasing conduct. The visual elements included in the study were, image background (plain or outdoor), garment angle views (front, front/back, front/back/side/full body) and the garment presentation method (human model, ghost mannequin or flat). The list of garment presentation models originally included “mannequin”, but after revising several web-shops we concluded that a mannequin is not a presentation model common enough to be relevant for the study.

Qualitative research puts emphasis on words rather than quantification both in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012). The reason for having a qualitative study relies on the nature of our research questions. We seek to understand social phenomena through analysing the interpretation and perspective of added values in online visuals through the respondents (Bryman, 2012). Values depend on human perception and experience, meaning that they are outcomes of interactions constructed through individual experiences, which we understand as the constructivist approach of knowledge, linked to the core of our research.

3.1.2 Research Design

This qualitative research was conducted through a cross-sectional design. The research design corresponds to a study where the data is collected at a single point in time, from more than one case, and where the data is later analysed in order to detect patterns of association (Bryman, 2012). Cross-sectional studies are studies carried out at one time point or over a short period of time. It contrasts to longitudinal study, where the same group of subjects is studied over a longer period of time (Strickland, 2001). A cross-sectional study suits this study due to the fact that approaching the
same individuals in more than one period would not have a major impact on the answers provided for the study. And also, because of time limitations of the study, it would not be possible to meet the subjects in more than one opportunity.

3.1.3 Sampling Method

The study will focus on The Swedish School of Textiles (THS) students’ perception regarding online stores’ visual presentation of women’s tops. We selected to study students from THS, as a result of their knowledge, high level of interaction and closeness to the fashion industry, as well as for convenience and easiness of approachability reasons. Furthermore, we have defined females, considering that gender has been identified as the element with the biggest effect on shaping consumers shopping behaviour (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004); additionally analysing the selected visual elements through both genders’ perspectives would have enlarged the scope of this study, and due to time limitations it would not have been manageable, hence why this study was limited to female students of THS.

The respondents of the study were selected through a non-sequential purposive sampling and approached through interviews and focus groups. Purposive sampling signifies that sampling is seen as a series of strategic choices about with whom, where, and how the research is done (Given, 2008). Purposive sampling is the most convenient type of sampling for a qualitative study (Bryman, 2012). In relation to this research, purposive sampling fulfils the requirements needed to answer the research questions. As mentioned, the selected sample was non-sequential, in other words, it was a fixed sampling method, with a strategic purpose of understanding the perspective of a specific target group. A sample size 18 female students, was selected by location and time convenience. As the study developed, the semi structured interviews sample was reduced from 8 to 6 because of an unpredicted saturation and coherence of results. Whereas for the previous facts, we concluded that the sample is representative of the female population within THS.

3.1.4 Data Collection Method

Given the specific ethnographic characteristics of the respondents, semi-structured interviews provided a more in depth conscious answer, as well as word patterns to specific emotional values, furthermore two focus groups provided recurrence in word patterns as well as a more in-depth insight of knowledge, feelings and perceptions.

The aim was to answer the three research questions through two different data collection methods: 6 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups.
Semi-structured interviews refer to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that he/she can vary the sequence of (Bryman, 2012). The interviewer also has some liberty to ask further questions in response to significant replies (Bryman, 2012), which we considered important in case the interviewer wants interviewees to expand further on their answers. The study therefore also consisted of 6 semi-structured interviews, which gave a more in-depth understanding on the interviewee’s personal emotions and opinions upon the questions, without possible group-effects being current. It provided us with personal data not affected by the opinions and reactions of other participants’ presence.

Two focus groups were conducted, each of which involved 5-7 female participants. A focus group is a group interview in which there are several participants. Emphasis is put on questioning and discussing a particular, fairly tightly defined topic (Bryman, 2012). The focus group technique is a method that usually involves more than four interviewees. The focus groups conducted within this research consisted of 5-7 participants. For many years this method has been used in market research to test the response to new products and new advertising initiatives (Bryman, 2012). The focus groups offer us the possibility to study ways in which individuals collectively construct opinions regarding phenomena. Focus groups permit people to probe each others’ reasons of holding a certain view, hence why the researcher will end up with a more realistic view upon people’s opinions. Participants often argue within focus groups and are hereby forced to think about and possibly revise their opinions, hence why words spoken within focus groups are often more naturalistic. The nature of the focus group interaction enables participants to pursue their own priorities and use their own vocabulary and terms in treating the topic focused on. Participants are allowed to generate their own questions and speak out on issues they find worthy of discussion regarding the topic. (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006)

### 3.2 Structure of the Study

As mentioned, all data relevant to the study was collected from 2 focus groups, each of which consisted of 5-7 participants, and 6 semi-structured interviews. The focus groups and interviews were both conducted by one researcher, while the other researcher observed and wrote observatory notes on key topics, comments and reactions. The focus group meetings lasted approximately 40 minutes each, while the interviews lasted around 15 minutes each. All interviews and both focus groups were recorded and transcribed in order to facilitate analysis and revise on participants verbal comments, as some keywords may not have been noticed during the discussions.
During the focus groups, the participants were asked to fill in a sheet consisting of the same images presented on the screen, while on the interviews we engaged a verbal answer through conversation. Participants were asked to answer each verbal question by ticking their personal choice of appropriate answer on the sheet given, before they were discussed; while on the interviews the choice of preference was expressed verbally. This was done in order for us to obtain answers that had not been affected by the opinions of other participants’ presence; while in the interviews this variable was not present since they were conducted individually.

The same interview structure was practiced for both methods; semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The reason behind using the same structure relies on facilitating the process of comparison and correlation between both methods. Eight sets of comparable apparel images were used for the study, the logic behind this number relies on time constraint limitations for the data collection methods, as well as the belief that through this amount we will be able to evidence respondents’ choice of preference and their motivation. Each set of images contained pictures of women’s tops, and aimed to state a clear preference from the respondents, by comparing them as follows:

- 2 sets of pictures comparing: Front image vs Front and Back image vs Front, Back, Side and Complete body image. The first set of images consisted of a basic white top, while the second set of images consisted of a more elaborate multi-coloured top.
- 3 sets of pictures comparing: Flat display vs Ghost Mannequin display vs Human model display. Each set included the same garment presented with the use of three different methods; flat, ghost mannequin and human model.
- 3 sets of pictures comparing: Plain background vs Outdoor background. Each consisted of two pictures of the same top presented with two different backgrounds, plain and outdoor.

During both data collection methods the images were presented on the computer screen, as that is how the pictures would originally be presented to customers shopping for clothes online.

In order to evaluate the type of views necessary to form a clear idea of a garment, the respondents were asked to imagine being interested in the top in question and decide

---

1 For additional information see Appendix 1.1: Garment Angle Views.
2 For additional information see Appendix 1.2: Garment Display Method.
3 For additional information see Appendix 1.3: Image Background.
whether one picture on its own would be enough to trigger the purchase. If one picture was not enough to trigger the purchase, respondents were also given the option of two and four different garment views. After deciding upon how many views of the garment would be necessary to trigger a purchase, the respondents were asked to explain their motivation, and to provide positive and negative feedback for each option. Respondents were also asked to define what kind of additional visual display methods help them give a more realistic image of the garment in question.

Following the discussion relating to garment angle views was the topic of garment display method. Respondents were asked to select the garment in each set that they found the most appealing, and then explain their answer; followed by their thoughts on positive and negative aspects for each of the three display methods.

Finally the respondents were exposed to the last set of pictures, which corresponded to the final visual element aimed to analyse. They were asked to select the image that will lead them into clicking and further review the garment, and then explaining their answer as well as give both positive and negative feedback on each of the background styles.

3.3 Data Analysis Methods

After the primary data was collected, the conversations occurring during the interviews and focus groups were electronically transcribed. The data analysed included naturally occurring discussions, observatory notes and the sheet provided for the focus group respondents, which enabled further understanding, analysis and even reanalysis, if needed.

The analysis of data collected pursued the identification of relevant themes and word patterns, regarding the motivation behind the choice of preference, emotions and other commentary. Concepts and key words verbalized by respondents, in respect to beliefs, perception, value, and positive or negative effects, were established and categorized.

The study focused on participants’ contextualized interpretations and perspectives. Concept and key words obtained from both methods, semi-interviews and focus groups, were correlated to each other through categories of visual elements and properties such as motivation, positive and negative effects.
### 3.4 Trustworthiness

Having a sample size of 18 female students and by using two different data collection methods the study proved to have collected significant data to represent the female population within The Swedish School of Textiles. The conclusions will be relevant for online apparel stores that include a female customer range. The study will be relevant for online fashion retailers wishing to reduce consumers’ mental intangibility and therefore increase utilitarian and hedonic values.

The credibility criteria involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable (Trochim, 2006). According to theories, online visual elements are actually proven to make consumers form cognitions (Fiore and Kim 2007), stating that visual elements of online stores do actually have an effect on the emotions of the purchaser. It has also been established that there is a relationship between customers’ perceived value and their intention to purchase (Dodds et al., 1991). By grounding our study in multiple research done within these topics, will provide this research, and our results with credibility.

In order to prove dependability one has to ensure that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process. Within this study, dependability was provided by recording and transcribing all interviews and focus groups conducted through the research, and by keeping clear and impartial data coding and results structuring process of all the data obtained.

Transferability refers to the use of thick descriptions of all methods so that the reader can judge its transferability to other fields (Bryman, 2012). According to Trochim (2006) a researcher can enhance transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context. This research confirms transferability by having a detailed explanation of the study’s scope, referring to each detail present within the entire data collection process, through a full description present in the structure of the study section, and analysis process, enabling the method to be conducted by other researchers.

Within qualitative research some assume that each researcher brings a unique personal perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of the study could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Bryman, 2012). Confirmability has been implemented to the study by not letting any personal values influence the conduct of the research or the data deriving from it. All data analysed is based purely on the transcriptions and recordings made during data

---

4 For additional information see Appendix 2: Quantifiable Data Obtained.
collection. The study has been conducted through a mutual cooperation, and both members of the research team agree on all qualitative data collected during focus groups and interviews. Even though both members have different perceptions regarding the subjects, the beliefs and preferences have been kept impartial.

According to Bryman (2012) conducting more interviews and focus groups does increase validity within qualitative research. However, taking into account the cohesiveness of the data collected during the interviews and focus groups conducted during the study, more interviews was not considered as necessary to clarify the sample’s answers.

3.5 Methods Reflections

A qualitative research strategy has some limitations, which are linked to the very nature of the method. To begin with, the connection between theory and research findings is somewhat more ambiguous, than in quantitative research (Bryman, 2012). As has been mentioned in previous sections, qualitative studies emphasise on social behaviour rather than scientific data, meaning that there is a considerable volatility in the data collection process, as well as in the findings, making it harder to replicate (Bryman, 2012). Finally, the main limitation would be that the findings cannot be generalize to a population outside of The Swedish School of Textiles, given that social behaviour cannot be quantifiable and diverse, making the findings subjective and purely open to interpretations (Bryman, 2012).

In order to reduce disparity in the results, the data collection methods were based in a fixed set of available options, from where the respondents selected their choice of preferences. We acknowledge that conducting a quantitative analysis would have decreased this type of variability. However, this study seeks to understand social phenomena through analysing the personal choice, through an insightful answer of each visual element; therefore a qualitative research was considered more pertinent. Also, within qualitative research we embraced the one-and-only different or “innovative” response, which in quantitative analysis would not be taken into consideration. Such innovative responses can be valid for further research and for the development of online visual communication.

For this study we could have chosen to conduct a case study instead of a cross-sectional, since through a case study it would have been easier to analyse the visual elements of a single retailer, limiting the research scope to the specific features of their website. We decided not to have that approach based on the awaken interest of analysing the specific visual elements selected, plus we did not want to bias the
respondents by exposing them to additional distracting elements, such as specific webshop and website design, among others.

Finally a cross-sectional design suits this study due to the fact that approaching the same individuals in more than one period would not have a major impact in the answers provided for this study. As well as create a time management issue, meaning that due to time limitations of the study, it would not be possible to meet the subjects in more than one opportunity.

The downsides of a non-probability sampling defined by purpose and convenience, instead of a quantitative study with probability sampling, rely on the unlikelihood of generalization and replicability (Bryman, 2013).

When it comes to the data collection methods the semi-structured interview presents some advantages in comparison to other data collection methods, such as: specific insights from respondents past experiences, obtaining sensitivity to context of action, more ethical defendable and more in depth coverage of answers (Bryman, 2013). While according to Smithson (2000), one issue for the focus group moderator, and for analysis of the focus group data, is how to deal with one or several group member(s) dominating the discussion so that theirs is the only opinion clearly articulated. Additionally a focus group produces a large volume of data, which may be difficult to organize and analyse (Bryman, 2013).

In order to reduce the issue of one respondent controlling the conversation, they were first asked to choose their answer based on the available options, following by a verbal discussion on why they chose the answer they gave, during the discussion the moderator made sure that all participants presented their answer. During the semi-structured interviews this issue was not present, which is one of the reasons for choosing to complement our data collection method with them.
4. FINDINGS

The following findings correspond to the data collected through 6 semi structured interviews and 2 focus groups. The data has been categorized and organized, from recognized word patterns and reactions, into tables that represent an overall result of key concepts and motivations, regarding each visual element aimed to be analysed through the study.

4.1 Garment Angle Views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garment Angle Views</th>
<th>Front Image</th>
<th>Front and Back</th>
<th>Front, Back, Side and Full Body</th>
<th>More than four images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Top</td>
<td>Would be willing to purchase if the garment was &quot;loved&quot;</td>
<td>Two images is enough for a BASIC top</td>
<td>Everything has to be seen, even for BASIC garments</td>
<td>Too many images are difficult to browse through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No need to see the BACK of a BASIC top</td>
<td>More pictures does not add anything to the garment</td>
<td>The MORE pictures the better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not enough to trigger the purchase as the back cannot be seen</td>
<td>Two images does help, but it's not needed</td>
<td>More pictures makes the garment clearer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to purchase as an initial impulse</td>
<td>It is OK, but more is better</td>
<td>Too many pictures can discourage purchasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Concept</td>
<td>ENOUGH NOT ENOUGH</td>
<td>ENOUGH OK HELPS NEEDED</td>
<td>BETTER REALISTIC DISCOURAGING</td>
<td>DISCOURAGING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborate top</td>
<td>How the BACK looks like is main concern</td>
<td>Two images is not enough for complicated garments</td>
<td>More images are needed for detailed garments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Full Body picture especially shows off garment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Full Body picture is not needed, but it makes it more appealing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Concept</td>
<td>NOT ENOUGH NOT ENOUGH</td>
<td>NOT ENOUGH</td>
<td>NEEDED</td>
<td>HELPS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Garment Angle Views

From the first set of angle views available (basic tank top\(^5\)), the majority of the respondents answered that front and back pictures would be enough to create a clear image of the garment. According to the respondents, how many angle views are needed depends on the type of garment; for a basic top, a front and a back picture is enough. Even though front and back angle views would be enough to trigger a purchase, several respondents added that more angle views does definitely help in creating an even clearer and more realistic image of the garment. Many agreed on the quote “the more the better”. Although four angle views are “better” according to the respondents, it is not necessary for a basic top. In fact, some women stated that having too many angle views of a garment can be discouraging as they can be difficult to browse through. One stated that the side and full body angle views do not

\(^5\) For additional information see Appendix 1.1.1: Garment Angle Views, set 1.
“add anything” to the garment, hence why only front and back is perfectly enough. There were some respondents to whom a picture of only the front would be enough to trigger the purchase. One stated that for such a basic garment, the back does not have to be seen. Still, for the majority of the respondents, one angle view is not enough to trigger a purchase.

While most of the respondents stated that front and back angle views is enough to trigger the purchase of a basic top, for the elaborate top, almost all of the respondents chose the option of having four angle views (front, back, side and full body). In line with the respondents, all four angle views are needed in order to create a clear image of a detailed and elaborate top. All agreed that neither one (front) nor two (front and back) angle views is enough to trigger the purchase of an elaborate top. How the back of the garment looks like is a main concern according to one of the respondents, and because of the fact that the garment has many details, the side also has to be seen in order to get a clear image of the garment. The fourth picture (full body picture) had mixed opinions. According to some of the respondents the full body angle view “shows off” the garment exceptionally well, while for others, the full body angle view is not needed, even though it brings appeal. For one of the respondents, four angle views were not enough as none of them included the model’s head. According to her words, the model’s head and hair makes it easier for the picture to be analysed.

Based on this it seems relevant to state that for the basic top, having two angle views, one of the front and one of the back is enough to create an image of the garment, even though more angle views does make the image more clear and realistic. For the elaborate top, four angle views (front, back, side and full body) is a need as neither one nor two angle views is enough for the respondent to create a clear image of the garment. Even though for some, too many angle views could turn out to be distracting, the majority agreed that the more angle views the better.

---

6 For additional information see Appendix 1.1.2: Garment Angle Views, set 2.
7 For additional information see Appendix 2.1: Quantifiable Data Obtained - Garment Angle Views.
4.2 Garment Display Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garment Display Method</th>
<th>Flat</th>
<th>Ghost Mannequin</th>
<th>Human Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Concepts</strong></td>
<td>Displays BACK details</td>
<td>Might be enough for BASICS</td>
<td>REALISTIC - RELATABLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could be ENOUGH for some garments</td>
<td>Best option for BASICS</td>
<td>Very IMPORTANT to have human model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FIGURE FLATTERING</td>
<td>Shows garment FIT on body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows DETAILS</td>
<td>No purchase without human model display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Concepts</strong></td>
<td>SHAPELESS; piece of hanging fabric</td>
<td>WRONG IMPRESSION</td>
<td>Gives ideas on STYLING and OUTFIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNREALISTIC</td>
<td>COMPUTERIZED</td>
<td>Always goes for human model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIFELESS</td>
<td></td>
<td>Having human model should be a standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WEIRD</td>
<td></td>
<td>Enables you to IMAGINE yourself wearing the garment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Looks OLD/SECOND-HAND</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows the actual LENGTH of garment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COMPUTERIZED</td>
<td></td>
<td>FIGURE FLATTERING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You cannot see how tight the garment is</td>
<td></td>
<td>SAFER</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Garment Display Method

When analysing the garment display method the respondents were more attracted to the human model, rather than to the other garment display options. The main reason for choosing a human model was the possibility of being able to imagine one-self wearing the garment, and that it is more relatable. Subsequently to this, the respondents mentioned that the human model is perceived as being realistic, in comparison to the other methods. The human model also gives a clearer image of how the top sits on the body and how long it is, it is hereby a safer type of display to relate to. One respondent stated that she would never purchase a garment online without it being displayed on a human model, another respondent added that having a human model should be a standard for all online apparel stores. What is exceptionally satisfying with the human model, according to many of the respondents, is the fact that it gives ideas on styling, and on what to combine the garment with.
One of the issues with having the garment displayed on a human model is the fact that it can prevent the garment from looking attractive if the styling is bad, or if the garment does not suit or fit the model in an appealing way. While being presented on a human model, certain body parts such as hair can cover and hide details of the top, hence one of the reasons to why a ghost mannequin is sometimes better when looking for the details of the garment. The ghost mannequin is often enough and even better for basic tops, according to some girls, as the difference between basic tops is all about very small details. Even though the ghost mannequin does elaborate details, many respondents stated that it often looks computerized, and can hereby give the wrong impression of the garment.

An advantage with both, the ghost mannequin and the flat display method is the fact that they do display the back of the top to a certain degree, an area that the human model would be covering up. The flat display method could hereby be enough for some of the respondents, especially if the garment in question is a basic garment, but the majority referred to the flat display as shapeless, unrealistic and lifeless. One stated that the garment presented through the flat display looked like a “piece of hanging fabric”, another respondent stated that the display method prevents the garment from looking new, reminding her of second-hand clothing.

Overall, even though the flat and ghost mannequin display method might be enough for the display of some basic garments, the human model was definitely the display method most favoured by the respondents.

---

8 For additional information see Appendix 2.2: Quantifiable Data Obtained - Garment Display Method.
4.3 Image Background Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Concepts</th>
<th>Outdoor Background</th>
<th>Plain Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More INVITING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catches your INTEREST</td>
<td></td>
<td>Easier to EVALUATE garment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to RELATE yourself to</td>
<td></td>
<td>CLEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better than not having any background</td>
<td></td>
<td>More CLEAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tells a STORY</td>
<td></td>
<td>More TRUSTFUL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting is more NATURAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>ATTENTION goes to the garment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More REALISTIC</td>
<td></td>
<td>Able to SEE the garment better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More HARMONY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps the garment come FORWARD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives idea on where you can wear the garment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks more FUN and POSITIVE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visually more INTERESTING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful ATMOSPHERE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Concepts</td>
<td>Everything going on is TOO MUCH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk of background not matching garment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be DISTRACTING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NOISY</td>
<td>Looks PHOTOSHOPPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coloured background can make the garment colour look different to what it actually is</td>
<td>Lighting is COLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background can be too far away from real life</td>
<td>Some garment COLOURS do not stand out from a plain background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having different backgrounds for every image on a webpage can be OVERWHELMING</td>
<td>If you have a black or white garment you need colour in the background to make it alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Takes ATTENTION away from garment</td>
<td>BORING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Image Background

While discussing the type of background within a garment picture it became evident that an outdoor background attracted the majority of the respondents more. According to the respondents, the outdoor background “tells a story” and herby catches your interest more easily. They referred to the outdoor background as being more inviting because of the fact that it looked more fun and positive. Having an outdoor background is visually more interesting and creates harmony as well as a cheerful atmosphere. Many respondents stated that the outdoor background is more realistic,
and is therefore easier to relate yourself to. It also gives ideas on where and in what situation you could wear the garment displayed. The main issue that many of the respondents who favoured the plain background had was the fact that there is sometimes too much going on in pictures with an outdoor background, and it can hereby be distracting as well as noisy. According to one of the respondents, if all garment pictures on the main selection page were to include an outdoor background, the overall style of the page would have to be very simple and clean. With an outdoor background there is a risk of the background not matching the colour of the garment. In fact, certain background colours can make the colour of the garment look different to what it actually is. One respondent stated that although the outdoor background is more natural, it can sometimes be too far away from real life.

Even though the outdoor background makes the overall picture more appealing, the plain background does make it easier to evaluate the garment according to many respondents, as a plain background makes the picture cleaner and clearer. The plain background enables you to “see the garment better” as all of the attention goes to the garment, compared to the outdoor background where the background can take the attention away from the garment. A plain background is hereby more trustful according to some respondents. Still, many referred to the plain background as boring and cold. Several respondents did not like the idea that the picture with the pain background looked “photoshopped”. According to some, a plain background can prevent the garment from standing out, especially garments with a colour of white or black. One stated that garments that are either white or black need colour in the background in order to bring the image alive.

Based on the words obtained from the data collected, it is evident that the outdoor background was the type of background favoured the most by the respondents. Because of the fact that, according to the respondents, the outdoor background was more inviting, the majority of the respondents would have chosen to click on the picture with the outdoor background, in order to find out more about the garment.

---

9 For additional information see Appendix 2.3: Quantifiable Data Obtained - Image Background.
5. DATA ANALYSIS

The findings from this study enabled us to conclude on regards to our three research questions, in which each one was related to one specific visual element.

For the **garment angle views**, we concluded that consumers’ perspective of mental intangibility, and utilitarian and consumer value depend directly on the elaborateness of the top design.

In the case of basic tops, front and back views are perceived as enough visual information, which translates into utilitarian value. Therefore, consumers may be able to reduce mental intangibility for such product with front and back views, which in case of “loved” will develop into purchasing behaviour. There was not much hedonic value found for this type of top, being so basic it is unnecessary to browse around through all the pictures. Even though the majority stated that more pictures is better, increasing hedonic value to a certain degree, more views available for a basic top can also be considered as time consuming and on the contrary it may saturate the consumer and furthermore discourage it from buying it.

In the case of an elaborate top the minimum types of views needed correspond to front, back, side and full body. The views of front, back and side for this type of garment are considered as purely utilitarian, where the customer can perceive the specific features of the garment. Meanwhile full body image is not considered to add utilitarian value; yet it was perceived as making the garment more appealing, as a result of showing off the entire garment and the styling options included in the presentation. This appeal is understood as a hedonic value perception, which can also reduce mental intangibility by providing the possibility of imagining the garment worn by the individual. Additional views may help grasping more information, or even creating hedonic value.

When it comes to **garment display** the main reason for choosing a human model is the possibility to imagine oneself wearing the garment. This idea of picturing the garment on the individual, enables reducing mental intangibility. The utilitarian value perceived through this type of display method included aspects such as realistic idea of the garment; it is easier to relate to due to a more natural approach, the fit on the body, the actual length of the garment and is perceived as less risky. On the other hand, the hedonic value was noticeable through styling ideas that served as inspiration making the garment more interesting, by giving the perception of “human interaction” lacked in online stores, and by being figure flattering. Both perceptions of values result in a reduction of mental intangibility, since the customer will not only
be able to imagine the garment, but also picture it in a day to day context. An additional risk was recognized, for this type of garment display method, the customer may find an easiness to relate to the human, by representing a more natural aspect, yet the customer can also find it difficult to relate to the specific model physical features, such as hair colour, eyes colour or skin complexity, triggering a non-arousal emotion, which leads into a non-purchasing behaviour.

Finally with the **image background** the outdoor background was more likely to attract the customer into clicking for further analysis of the garment, but only if the background colour enhanced the garment into looking appealing. Therefore, if the colour or the scenery combination did not complement the garment it could lead into non-arousal emotion, which discouraged the individual intention. The outdoor type of image background accomplished to evoke more positive feelings than the plain image background, in this way the organism arousal turned into hedonic value. The outdoor background was described as being inspirational, storytelling, alive, styling appealing and inviting, all of which are key elements of the hedonic experience. Additionally, the outdoor background image provided some key utilitarian values including: a realistic approach, relatable, lighting perceived as “real” and a background/garment colour combination able to enhance the garment. Both values complimented into reducing mental intangibility, by giving the individual the possibility of not only grasping how the garment looks in a full body image, but also by providing the image of how it will look on real day activities.

On the other hand, the plain image background was recognised as clean, focused as well as clear, which made the image easier to trust. All of these features are related to utilitarian value and to reducing mental intangibility. We did recognise that for some individuals this perceived value may trigger the purchasing impulse.
6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis it can be stated that the garment angle views of a women’s top displayed within an online store does reduce customers’ mental intangibility. Additionally by increasing the types of garment angle views does stimulate customers’ utilitarian and hedonic value, as long as each picture contributes with a new dimension.

When it comes to garment display method results reflect that the human model does reduce mental intangibility more effectively, since it seems more natural to relate to another human being. Consequently, by having a human model the website does increase both utilitarian and hedonic value, through presenting the garment with additional features.

Finally, we concluded that both types of image background provide certain levels of value. The outdoor background proved to stimulate customers’ hedonic value by being more inviting, while the plain background demonstrated to prompt utilitarian value by displaying a clearer image of the garment. Furthermore the outdoor background reflects a more realistic atmosphere, hereby reducing customers’ mental intangibility.
7. REFLECTIONS OF THE STUDY

There is still a great extent of research that can be done in regards to visual elements’ presence within online stores, their contribution to customers’ value perception and how they ultimately have an effect on purchasing decisions. As mentioned in the research gap, the study started by listing a set of visual elements common within online apparel stores. While some of them have been subject to research, others are still pending on analysis.

The study could also have been conducted through a quantitative research strategy. A quantitative method would possibly have provided the research with more clear numerical data. Nevertheless, one of the aims for this research was to create a further understanding of customers’ perception of the three chosen visual elements. Through a quantitative method we would not have been able to obtain detailed information on why the elements affect customers the way that they do, hence why a qualitative method was considered as more appropriate. A mixed-methods research would have provided the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, but taking into account the time constraints for this study, doing either qualitative or quantitative research was considered as more applicable. E-retail is still developing, ergo it is important to embrace the one-and-only different or “innovative” responses, which in quantitative analysis would not be taken into consideration.

This study was limited purely to female students at The Swedish School of Textiles, which limits the possibility of generalising the results to other online apparel customers. Nonetheless thanks to the knowledge and expertise in the fashion and textile industry, the perceptions and input provided by the respondents were highly profound and insightful. The limitations of this study leads to a recommendation that doing further research based on samples from other geographic areas, and on females not studying within the field of fashion, would provide further evidence to verifying the conclusions of this research.

One researcher reflected that if the study’s structure was to be redesigned it might have been better to only conduct interviews for the data collection considering the matter that they gave a more in-depth understanding of how the visual elements influence perceived value. The other researcher had another opinion, expressing that the data collected from the focus groups was more useful, as it partly derived from respondents having to defend their picture choice during discussions with mixed opinions, hereby creating stronger opinions. It is hereby very good that both authors had different perceptions, since it kept impartial the data collected, therefore we are satisfied that both data collection methods were conducted.
Finally, during the interviews and focus groups, respondents were asked to mention other online store visual elements that enhance their shopping experience and perceived value. The respondents mentioned numerous elements that have the potential to affect customers’ perceived value. 360 degree rotation, catwalk video, close-up, zoom-in, return policies, model with or without head, mix of display methods, cohesiveness of pictures, models with different body shapes, and models with different skin complexion are all examples of elements mentioned by the respondents, and are hereby a good source for visual topics to do further research on within the subject of online visual communication.
FIGURE LIST

Fig. 1: Jacoby, J., 2002. Stimulus-Organism-Response Reconsidered: An Evolutionary Step in Modeling (Consumer) Behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 12 (1), pp. 51-57
TABLE LIST

Table 1: Garment Angle Views - Data collected by researchers during interviews and focus groups, May 8 - May 14, 2014.

Table 2: Garment Display Method - Data collected by researchers during interviews and focus groups, May 8 - May 14, 2014.

Table 3: Image Background - Data collected by researchers during interviews and focus groups, May 8 - May 14, 2014.
REFERENCE LIST


APPENDIX
1. Pictures presented to respondents during interviews and focus groups
1.1 Garment Angle Views
1.1.1 Set 1
1.1.2 Set 2
1.2 Garment Display Method

1.2.1 Set 1

1.2.2 Set 2

1.2.3 Set 3
1.3 Image Background

1.3.1 Set 1

1.3.2 Set 2

1.3.3 Set 3
2. Quantifiable Data Obtained

2.1 Garment Angle Views

**Basic Top**
- Front Image Only: 6%
- Front and Back: 5%
- Front, back, side and full body: 56%
- More than 4 images: 33%

**Elaborate Top**
- Front Image Only: 0%
- Front and Back: 6%
- Front, back, side and full body: 94%
2.2. Garment Display Method
2.3 Image Background