



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
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Shopping Bags

Consumers' Behaviours, Attitudes and Reflections



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Abstract

Background

In today's society shopping bags are in abundance. Yearly 500 billion-1,5 trillion plastic bags are used worldwide, with an explosive increase in recent decades. Practically everyone uses them and has one relationship or another to different shopping bags.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to study consumer behaviour and to deepen the understanding and knowledge of the underlying factors of why different behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags arise, as well as to analyse how brands, situations and other people impact the use and reuse of shopping bags.

Research questions

Which behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags can be identified? What role do brands play in how shopping bags are perceived? In what way do different situations and people have an impact on the choice of shopping bag?

Theoretical framework

In this section, several existing theoretical models are presented, some of which are brand image, brand awareness, attitudes, reference groups and multiple selves. No extensive research has been conducted within the area, but a few scientific articles were found regarding shopping bags, brands, usage, reuse and environment. These articles were used to analyse the empirical results.

Method

The methodology consists of qualitative research. Both in-depth interviews as well as focus group interviews were conducted.

Conclusion

It was shown that the material of a shopping bag was important, and that no bag provided a universal solution for all purposes. In addition, brands did have an impact on the perception of and attitudes towards a shopping bag, and the choice of shopping bag depended on the situation and the people you are surrounded by. Some environmental aspects towards shopping bags were also discussed, such as bringing your own bag to the grocery store. However, it was shown that the participants' intended behaviour not always was consistent with their actual behaviour.

Key words: shopping bags, consumer behaviour, attitudes, consumption, reuse, brands, brand image, reference groups.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The first chapter introduces the reader to the topic that will be covered in this thesis. The chapter starts with the history of the shopping bag, and continues with a problem discussion and the purpose of this study. This is followed by the research questions, definitions of a shopping bag and brands, and the essay's limitations.

1.1 Background

Consumption is the world economy's engine and in today's society shopping bags are omnipresent. We all use them, depend on them and consume them in great amounts. Recently Swedish media reported on a unique collection of 1,500 plastic bags being out for sale. The collection consisted of a woman's plastic bags, which she had collected since childhood. According to the woman, the bags were *"not only plastic bags, but something from which you can extract a piece of history"*. The demanded price was 10,000 SEK, although numerous buyers offered even more for her collection (Dagens Industri, 2015).

There has always been a need for carrying and transporting goods. Over time, the need has not changed much, but what have changed are the items we transport and the way we transport them. In addition, the carrying functionality is no longer the only purpose of a shopping bag. For almost two centuries paper bags have been used (O'Connor, 2010). On the contrary, plastic bags were not promoted in the US until the late 1970's, a market where the supermarkets at first were hesitant towards these bags. The quantity of between 500 billion and 1.5 trillion plastic shopping bags that are being used worldwide every year demonstrate an explosive increase since the 1970's. The extent to which different countries consume plastic bags differ substantially. The third world countries consume less than do the first world countries (Clapp & Swanston, 2009), though implementations of bans and taxes are becoming more common worldwide due to our consumer behaviour (Convery, McDonnell & Ferreira, 2007). A number of local, subnational and national governments have passed legislation to ban or restrict the use of plastic shopping bags the past decade. The reason is that plastic shopping bags are increasingly seen as an environmental hazard that threatens human and animal welfare (Clapp & Swanston, 2009).

All consumers have a relation to shopping bags, and attitudes towards purchasing, using and reusing them as well as thoughts about recycling them may vary. In Hong Kong, for example, the reuse of shopping bags is a common phenomenon, especially paper shopping bags (Prendergast, Wai Ng & Leung, 2001). In Sweden, plastic shopping bags are frequently used and their presence is often taken for granted, which is why this study is of relevance. For mundane activities like consumption we rarely contemplate why we behave the way we do and why we hold certain attitudes. Therefore, the aim of the thesis is to understand consumer behaviour and the perceptions and attitudes consumers have towards different types of shopping bags.

1.2 Problem discussion

Shopping bags are interesting as they can differ from one another in many aspects such as material, point of purchase, commodities carried in them between the point-of-purchase and the home, consumer attitudes, the extent to which the bag is reused and recycled, and the length of life cycle. However, little research has previously been carried out on shopping bags. The fact that goods and services are being consumed in ever-increasing amounts, with a worldwide yearly consumption of 500 billion - 1.5 trillion plastic bags, gives us a strong reason to further investigate this topic. It gives us an incentive to understand how consumers use and reuse shopping bags. There is no such thing as a perfect world and by addressing this topic we gain understanding and learn from the positive and negative aspects of it. Because of shopping bags' omnipresence, it is a field that fairly easily can be investigated.

Not always does the life cycle of the bag end after being used for transportation from the store to the consumer's home. Many people reuse bags for a variety of purposes. Because we are surrounded by shopping bags in our everyday life it is of relevance to know about what sort of bag is most likely to be reused, in what way it is reused, for how long it is reused and the frequency. Nonetheless, we must not forget the importance of people's perceptions of shopping bags and what attributes they think are most important. Insight in all these separate areas will contribute to a better overall picture of why a certain bag is reused. In order for a company to be able to design the optimal shopping bag, it is important to investigate the underlying factors in consumer behaviour.

Furthermore, the use and reuse of shopping bags can be seen as a form of marketing communication, and this will favour the company that the shopping bag comes from. In line with this, Prendergast et al. (2001) claim that shopping bags perform other functions except from just carrying the merchandise. This especially concerns bags with logotypes, as the manufacturers and retailers are provided with additional exposure and will be remembered when people can identify the brand (Mårtenson, 2009).

Mullin (1995) and Sayles (1996), mentioned in Prendergast et al. (2001), state that shopping bags can be perceived as a status symbol, a collective or a work of art, besides having functionality and being regarded as a form of promotion. It seems as if carrying certain shopping bags can have underlying meanings for some people, and that the reuse is not purely functional. Moreover, it seems as if the shopping bags can represent a symbolic value for a person, that a shopping bag may help create an identity and that a brand can "rub off" on a consumer through the reuse of certain bags as Park and John (2010) claim.

1.3 Purpose

Consumers might know what kind of shopping bags they use and how they use them. Despite this, they might not contemplate or understand why they behave the way they do, which is a reason why this study is of relevance (see figure 1.1). When understanding why consumers hold certain attitudes and act the way they do one can get a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour.

The purpose of this thesis is to study consumer behaviour and to deepen the understanding and knowledge of the underlying factors of why different behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags arise, as well as to analyse how brands, situations and other people impact the use and reuse of shopping bags. Furthermore, the aim is to make a contribution relevant for further research.

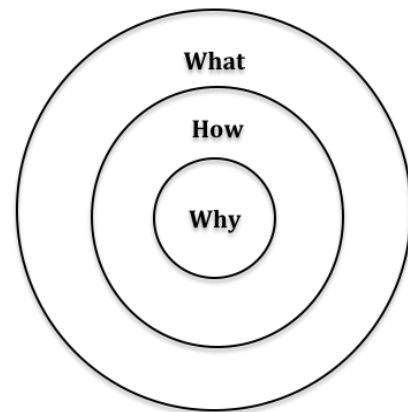


Figure 1.1 The what-how-why model (self-created)

1.4 Research questions

With the background of the problem discussion this thesis aims to study a small number of students aged 20-25, to obtain a deeper understanding of existing behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags, as well as what impact brands, people and different situations have on the choice of shopping bags.

Research question 1:

Which behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags can be identified?

Research question 2:

What role do brands play in how shopping bags are perceived?

Research question 3:

In what way do different situations and people have an impact on the choice of shopping bag?

1.5 Definitions

In the following paragraphs, some concepts used in this study will be defined and explained further.

1.5.1 Defining “a shopping bag”

In our opinion previous research provides definitions of a shopping bag which are too narrow. Therefore, our objective is to broaden the definition of the term shopping bag. A shopping bag is as a bag which, for instance, can be made out of paper, plastic, fabric or biodegradable materials. Previous research mostly discusses plastic bags, which is why it is important for us to extend the definitions to all materials, as all of these materials were discussed during the interviews. A shopping bag can be offered in various designs with varying features, depending on its purpose and what store it is provided by. The shopping bags do not necessarily need to be provided free of charge, nor does their primary function need to be to protect the product in the bag, but can also include functions such as being a part of an outfit.

The word shopping bag can be interchanged with both “packaging” and “package” according to Kotler and Armstrong (2010), who explain that the primary function of a shopping bag is to contain and protect the product. In line with this, Prendergast et al. (2001) also define shopping bags as a form of secondary packaging, made out of paper or plastic, provided by retailers free of charge to customers as a means of transporting merchandise. Similarly, Mullin (1995) in Prendergast et al. (2001) says that the shopping bags’ main purpose, as a package, is to transport and protect merchandise bought in retail stores.

Not only has the shopping bag been defined by researchers, but is also to be found in dictionaries. American Heritage (2011) defines a shopping bag as “*a strong bag with handles for carrying a shopper’s purchases*” and Wordnet (2003-2008) defines it as “*a bag made of plastic or strong paper, often with handles, used to transport goods after shopping*”.

1.5.2 Defining brands

A brand can be a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them (Smith, Graetz & Westerbeek, 2006). Its purpose is to identify and differentiate the products or services offered by a company. A brand serves as a signal to the customer about the source of the product, and protects a product in a certain product category from those produced by competitors. Furthermore, the concept branding explains the process of developing and managing a brand. Its objective is to create and maintain relationships between consumers and organisations. In this thesis, brands’ effect on perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of shopping bags is being studied. Due to this, other broader aspects of brands are excluded.

1.6 Limitations

1.6.1 Geographical limitation

The participants chosen for this study are, for practical reasons, students at School of Business, Economics and Law and the University of Gothenburg, who are living in the Gothenburg area, hence a limitation to Sweden and Gothenburg. We did not have the time or resources needed to broaden our study to the nation as a whole, nor were we able to study several countries and compare differences between them.

1.6.2 Limitation of the definition shopping bag

Shopping bags differ in many aspects such as material, length of life cycle and usage. In order not to make the study too comprehensive we chose to exclude bags such as backpacks, shopping carts (in Swedish: *dramaten*) and ladies' handbags.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical framework

Firstly, the essay's theoretical framework is explained. The second chapter also covers previous research, which has been done in the field of consumer behaviour and shopping bags, as well as theories and research done in other fields relevant for this essay.

2.1 Theories

The theories, concepts and terms, which can be linked to the study's results, are explained below.

2.1.1 Brand image

Nowadays it is not only about advertising when improving the image of different brands (Ehrenberg & Pyatt, 1973). Also enterprises, organizations and even individuals are involved in creating an image. The term brand image is the complex of associations that a brand has come to be surrounded by for an individual. The expression became commonly used among people in advertising and marketers a long time ago. It was found that consumers' perceptions of a brand do not necessarily correspond to the company's intended perception of it. Moreover, only to a certain extent do the actual physical properties of a product determine whether the product will be successful or not. Feelings and emotions can sometimes convince consumers whereas information and facts about a product that the sellers think are obvious, are not always considered reliable enough for the consumer. The authors argue that advertising can provide a product with psychological values, and it is therefore of relevance to study not only behaviour but also people's attitudes.

An image consists of associations and Ehrenberg and Pyatt (1973) mention that it may concern associations towards properties, such as when a particular brand is associated with the property of being colourful, premium priced or of particularly fine quality in relation to other brands. Nevertheless, it can also concern associations to individuals or groups of people. A person may link a clothing brand to elderly people, and then maybe think about elderly acquaintances who usually wear this brand. Associations may also apply to situations. Due to this, we cannot say that a brand image only concerns just the product. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that people's perceptions of a brand image must not be consistent with the image that the company have.

The associations that together constitute the image are based on, or derived from, experiences, which means that the image is created over time. Despite this, Ehrenberg and Pyatt (1973) say that it has to be made clear that these do not need to come from a person's own experience of a product. In contrast, a person can have a perception of an image of a brand even before they try the products. This image will represent one of the factors that determine whether the brand will be tested or not. Accordingly, it might be relevant to know what different kind of parts that may construct a brand image. These include the following:

- The brand's name, and possibly the name of the manufacturer
- Verbal information, advertising and other publicity
- Sales outlets, price, packaging, user
- Product appearance and properties. Own experience when using the product (ibid).

Yet, not all of these points need to be considered in the creation of a person's image of a brand. In some extreme cases, the consumer has only barely seen or heard of the brand. In these cases the image is instead based on the few given hints she or he received. Thus, a well-considered brand name may be significant for future success. Finally, although some associations are created at an early stage, these can still be modified when consumers become more familiar with the brand.

2.1.2 Brand awareness

The term brand awareness consists of brand recognition and brand recall (Lane Keller, Aperia & Georgson, 2012). Brand recognition is a consumer's ability to recognize a brand as something they have seen before. A consumer's ability to retrieve a brand from memory is described as brand recall. Brand awareness is crucial in creating a successful brand and to differentiate the brand from competitors. Furthermore, top of mind awareness is the brands a customer comes to think of first in a specific product category (Mårtenson, 2009). Linked to the brand awareness concept are also the knowledge of what a brand represents, the brand image, and the customers' own attitudes towards a brand (Mårtenson, 2009).

2.1.3 Attitudes

An attitude is a person's favourable or unfavourable feelings towards an object and tends to last over a longer period of time. Today, this definition is considered the most useful by researchers. Thoughts and actions towards an object are however also related to attitudes. Attitudes were described by researchers such as Triandi where feelings together with thoughts and actions are combined in the *tripartite model of attitudes* (see figure 2.1). This model describes attitudes comprising the three related components cognition, affect and behaviour. Cognition is a person's knowledge about an object, affect is positive or negative evaluations of an object, and behaviour concerns the actual or intended behaviour towards an object, in this case a shopping bag. Despite the fact that the *tripartite model of attitudes* is a somewhat old model, the concepts cognition and behaviour are closely linked to attitudes, and therefore the model is of relevance when discussing attitudes (Peter & Olson, 2010).

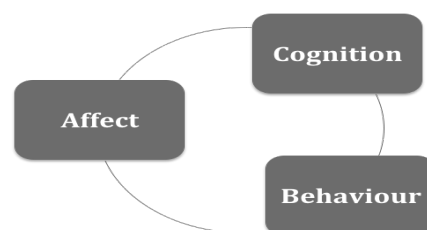


Figure 2.1 The tripartite model of attitudes (Peter & Olson, 2010). In chapter 4.5 it is described how knowledge (cognition), evaluations (affect) and actions (behaviour) are relevant concepts when analysing the results of this study

Moreover, Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard (1999) describe how the term attitude is a complex concept consisting of messages such as endorsement in commercials and social media, as well as brand observations used by primary and secondary reference groups. Primary and secondary reference groups are further explained in 2.1.4 Reference groups. Attitudes influence consumer behaviour and can for instance have an impact on whether or not consumers decide to recycle. Attitudes can become habits and are enhanced when actions are repeated. It is not possible to have an attitude towards an object without also having some sort of knowledge of it (Ehrenberg & Pyatt, 1973). This shows how the concept attitude is not only linked to reference groups, but also to brand awareness and brand image.

2.1.4 Reference groups

An individual, or group of individuals, who in a significant way affect a person's behaviour are called reference groups. Reference groups are of great meaning to consumers as they use them as sources of attitudes, opinions, values and behaviours. Consequently, reference groups provide consumers with frames of reference for how they perceive themselves (Bearden & Etzel, 1982, in Evans et al., 2008). Social groups can be divided into primary and secondary groups who influence consumers. Primary groups can be characterised as relatively small groups of family, friends or study groups at a university, while secondary groups, comprised of several primary groups, are for instance business students or all students at the university. In social groups it is inevitable that individuals experience conformity and behave in a way that corresponds with the socially acceptable norms. Whether an item will be consumed privately or publicly also has an impact on the extent to which the reference group influences the consumer. If a consumer is strongly influenced by a reference group and wants to have the same clothing or shopping bags, it can lead to the consumer trying to imitate the behaviour of that group (Solomon et al., 1999).

2.1.5 Dimensions of the self

The multidimensional concept of the self consists of four variants of "self", in private and social contexts. The different selves, described in Figure 2.2 below, can be expressed as an actual self, ideal self, social self and an ideal social self, and can be applied to consumption contexts. These different selves are not based on the consumer's actual personality, but on how they perceive themselves and what subjective thoughts and feelings they have about themselves. The self-concept is not innate, but created over a period of time. Dornoff and Tatham (1972) in Evans et al. (2009) explain how a consumer's behaviour in choosing stores is based on the consumer's self and the store's brand image.

	Actual self	Ideal self
Private context	How I perceive myself now	How I would like to perceive myself
Social context	How I think others perceive me	How I would like others to perceive me

Figure 2.2 The actual and ideal self in a private and social context (Evans et al., 2009, *Consumer behaviour*, p. 210)

As Solomon (2006) and Hawkins et al. (2007) in Evans et al. (2009) suggest, there is undoubtedly a lack of clarity within this area. However, they claim that it is reasonable to expect that the brand image of socially expressive products (jewellery) match more with the ideal self than the actual image of the self. Similarly, less socially expressive products (toilet paper) will match more with the actual self, than with the ideal self.

2.1.6 Multiple identities

A person is affected by and wants to affect other people. Since everyone interacts with different people in different situations in their everyday life, this theory explains how we can possess multiple identities depending on the current situation (Jamal, 2003, in Evans et al., 2008). Consumers' actions, thoughts and feelings may not be the same when being at work, seeing family or when meeting old friends in their hometown. These contrasting feelings can also be applicable to shopping bags. These identities can change over time and do not have to be the same during a consumer's lifetime. Marketers need to be aware of this and should focus on the experiential aspects and feelings when promoting products and services, according to Jamal (2003) in Evans et al. (2008).

2.1.7 Extended self

This concept explains how a person can value personal belongings to such an extent that these possessions become a part of ourselves. It can comprise items one loves, people, places and everything we consider as ours. The items we buy become a sort of extension of who we are (Belk, 1988, in Evans et al., 2009). According to Park and John (2010), by wearing or using a brand some people want to signal that they possess the same appealing personality traits as a brand. People who engage in this signalling behaviour of the self, feel more positive about themselves when doing it.

2.1.8 Summary

Now we have presented the seven different theories, concepts and terms used in this thesis. In the following paragraphs the previous research within the fields of consumer behaviour, consumer logistics and environment is presented. The theories and the previous research together make up this study's theoretical framework, which combined are useful tools for analysing the empirical results of the study.

2.2 Previous research

Extensive research has been done in the field of industrial logistics, however almost no research has been undertaken in the field of consumer behaviour and the consumer logistics of shopping bags (Granzin & Bahn, 1989). Because of the lack of a sufficient understanding of consumer logistics and its behaviours, Granzin and Bahn (1989) called for further research on consumer logistics, an appeal that sadly to a great extent has been overlooked by other researchers (Holmberg & Hagberg, 2013). Holmberg and Hagberg (2013) have studied how consumers use different forms of transportation and carrying means when

buying groceries. The aim of their study was to find out which of these that are mostly used among people. In the study, people were asked to rate how they usually get to the grocery store, with alternatives such as by car, walking, bike, public transportation, home delivery or cab. It is also described how frequently different types of carrying means are being used when grocery shopping. The alternatives they present are for instance new paper/plastic bags, reusable bags, old paper or plastic bags, or if they carry the groceries in their hands. It is found that a plastic bag was the first choice when buying groceries, however those consumers who travel by car when going to the grocery store prefer to buy paper bags.

Furthermore, another article was found, particularly interesting for our study. Prendergast et al. (2001) studied consumer perceptions of shopping bags in Hong Kong. The study was mainly qualitative and it discussed reasons for using and reusing shopping bags, the storage time and reuse frequency of them. The study also investigated if there were certain attributes that consumers expect from paper and plastic bags respectively, and feel are more important than others. The results showed that people prefer using and reusing paper bags to plastic bags, and that paper bags were stored for a longer period of time. It was also found that people's expectations of bags vary between these two materials. For instance, people did not expect paper bags to be waterproof, and an attractive appearance and a branded logo are more important on paper bags than on plastic bags. However, convenience was the most important attribute for both types of bags.

Moreover, several of the dozens of scientific articles found concerned an environmental aspect of the shopping bag topic. Some authors, such as Clapp and Swanston (2009) and Chida (2011), focused primarily on the relatively new legislation regarding plastic bags and sustainability, while some chose to focus more on reuse and consumers' intentions to bring their own shopping bag to the store, for instance Lam and Chen (2006), Chan, Wong and Leung (2008) and Yeow, Dean and Tucker (2014). Yeow et al. (2014) discuss ethical behaviours regarding the reuse of shopping bags. The study shows that there is a gap between consumers' attitudes and behaviours. Even though intentions to behave ethically exist, it does not always lead to consumers taking action. The authors mention how ethical behaviour has not become the norm, which is why it is a relevant area to study. In the conclusion of the authors' study, it is mentioned that individuals and institutions play an important role in achieving a behavioural change.

Chapter 3 - Method

First, a general explanation of the advantages of qualitative research is presented. Thereafter, the processes of the conducted in-depth and focus groups interviews are described. Lastly, the study's trustworthiness and authenticity are discussed.

3.1 Qualitative research

For this essay a theory generating qualitative study was chosen. Within the qualitative field the focus lies on words rather than numbers, closeness to the informants rather than distance, and an interpretation and understanding of social environments through the eyes of the informants (Bryman & Bell, 2011). When using the qualitative approach the concepts trustworthiness and authenticity are applied to the study, where the term trustworthiness comprises four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, in Bryman & Bell, 2011). Another reason as to why a qualitative approach was used to gather data was that it could provide us with deep and intimate knowledge about, for instance, consumer meanings, behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As a primary source of information, in-depth and focus group interviews were conducted. No secondary sources were used for the empirical results in this study. The people participating in the in-depth and group interviews are in this thesis referred to as *interviewee* or *participant*.

The data gathered from the interviews is the study's primary data. The primary data combined with theories, concepts and scientific articles related to this field of study enabled us to strengthen the thesis' credibility and confirmability, and discern patterns among our interviewees, which could be categorized and linked to known general concepts within the field of consumer behaviour.

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) the advantages of focus groups, in comparison to quantitative research and one-on-one interviews, are the possibilities of gaining insight in and information about:

- *How* the participants question and challenge each other
- *How* individuals collectively create meaning (in different contexts)
- *Why* the participants have various attitudes
- Some topics the participants find interesting and relevant

Within the field of business it is common to conduct qualitative research and convenience samples. Qualitative research based on a convenience sample with 14 participants cannot lead to the study's results being generalized. According to Bryman (1989), mentioned in Bryman and Bell (2007), this type of study can however generate possibilities for the study to be used for further research.

3.2 In-depth interviews

Four in-depth interviews were conducted. Interviewing one person at a time provided a clear structure of the collected material. When having in-depth interviews, we did not risk that the interviewee's answers were influenced by the answers of a group. When responding completely based on own thoughts and feelings, we assured that the material reflected a more accurate picture of their reality. Since it is advantageous to be more than one interviewer (Braithwaite, 1985) both of us were present during all the interviews. This allowed us to intervene at any time needed, such as when a question could be developed further or to make the interview head in a different desired direction (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The initial idea was to have test interviews. The first in-depth interview did however turn out to provide us with so much useful material that we decided to use it as material for the study.

3.3 Semi-structured focus groups

The focus group methodology is a method where a group interview with a number of participants, usually at least four, is conducted. The group discusses topics, where the interviewer moderates in a rather unstructured fashion (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Five people participated in both of this study's group interviews.

The focus groups provided us with rich, detailed data that was processed and analysed. We found it favourable with focus groups since the participants both could see the actual bags in front of them and could discuss experiences with the others, which might made them think of aspects they would not have otherwise. We chose to have rather few people in each focus group, due to several reasons. Morgan (1998) in Bryman and Bell (2011) says that the normal size of a focus group is between six to ten members. On the other hand, Blackburn and Stokes (2000) in Bryman and Bell (2011) mention in their study with small business owners, that they found discussions with too many participants hard to handle, and therefore we did not see large groups as preferable. We also wanted not more than five people at a time, because then we could risk the participants talking at the same time and it would be hard to distinguish what was actually said when listening to the audio recording. Table 3.1 lists all the participants in this study and their name, age, living situation and sex.

Type of interview	Name of informant	Age	Living situation	Sex
In-depth interview 1	Pernilla	23	With parents	Female
In-depth interview 2	Sissela	22	With boyfriend and his brother	Female
In-depth interview 3	Johanna	23	Alone	Female
In-depth interview 4	Janne	23	With friend	Male
Focus group 1	Marie	22	With boyfriend	Female
	David	22	Alone	Male
	Egil	22	Alone	Male
	Elin	21	Married	Female
	Anthon	22	Alone	Male
Focus group 2	Elin	23	With fiancé	Female
	Victor	24	With brother	Male
	Erik	23	Alone	Male
	Johan	23	Alone	Male
	Andrea	22	Alone	Female

Table 3.1 Information about the interviewees who participated in this study

3.4 Sample

Four in-depth interviews and two group interviews, with five people each, were conducted. The participants were all in the age range 20-25 and both women and men were interviewed, equally distributed. Because of the time restriction and assumed difficulty of finding volunteers willing to discuss shopping bags for more than an hour, a convenience sample was made. The result thereof was that the participants were fellow students from School of Business, Economics and Law at University of Gothenburg. Despite this, not all of the participants knew each other, which was an advantage in order to create lively discussions. The groups were chosen to be relatively homogenous for different reasons. The closeness in age and having the university in common allowed the interviewees to participate in a relatively familiar and comfortable setting where topics could be discussed without any major difficulties (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Due to the time limit when writing a bachelor thesis, and our method being qualitative in-depth interviews and focus groups, the total number of interviewees was limited to 14 people. We have previously neither come across anyone having a burning passion for shopping bags, nor someone with a strong urge to talk about this topic. Therefore, we did not believe that it would be possible to find people on the streets, willing to participate in a two hour long interview about shopping bags. Consequently, the interviewees were acquaintances and fellow students at School of Business, Economics and Law at University of Gothenburg. Only one of the interviewees did not study business or economics, but did however also study at the University of Gothenburg.

Because of the time limit, the age range was narrowed down to persons between 20 and 25 years of age. A lower age limit of 20 years was chosen, as we figured even younger persons might still live at home with their parents. We assumed that people still living at home would participate less in the household chores and have less experience with shopping bags than do older people who have moved away from home. Another reason why the restricted 5-year age range was chosen was because of the aim of having somewhat of a homogenous focus group. When people are too far apart in age, there is a risk of having a focus group where the conversation is not easy-going, something which obviously is not desirable (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.5 Conducting the interviews

Upon request, the interviewees brought some shopping bags that they frequently used in their everyday life. Moreover, we brought approximately 30 shopping bags mainly provided by different grocery and clothing stores. These bags were shown when conducting the in-depth interviews and put on the walls when conducting the group interviews, to ensure broader discussions. In the beginning of the interviews, we started off with general questions about the terms packaging and shopping bags, and then continued with more focused questions based on the interviewees' answers. The interview guide, found in Appendix 2, was used as a support. Still, as we conducted semi-structured interviews, questions were not necessarily asked in this order while others were added spontaneously. All interviews lasted approximately one and a half hour and were held in Swedish. As Bryman and Bell (2011) mention the importance of considering ethical aspects, we asked for permission from the participants before audio recording the interviews.

When conducting the interviews it was found that there was an uncertainty about what the term shopping bag really was. During the group interviews, the participants could not really agree on the differences between a "kasse", "påse" and a "shopping bag". The interviewees who participated in in-depth interviews could not describe the difference either. Nonetheless, no problems occurred when discussing. However, they did agree on the fact that the words could be interchangeable in some situations and in others not. *"It's such an ambiguity what a shopping bag really is. It could be everything from a cheap looking plastic bag from ICA, to a very, very thought-through and nice shopping bag."* (Pernilla)

3.6 Processing the empirical results

With respect to ethical concerns, the interviewees were allowed to be anonymous (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The audio recording allowed us to listen to the discussions over again, in order to discover similarities and dissimilarities in attitudes and perceptions, and to write down important quotes. Neither the focus group interviews nor the in-depth interviews were transcribed fully due to the time limit of this thesis. The interviews were held in Swedish, but the quotes were translated into English to facilitate the reading.

3.7 Analysing interviews

All the information, such as quotes, contradictions and other important data, were gathered into one document, interview by interview, in the order they were held. After reading through this text several times and comparing it with relevant theories, we were able to distinguish four distinctive themes: material matters, recognizing brands, social aspects and environmental aspects. Under each theme, we put a number of related sub-headings. As we experienced a need for structure to facilitate the process, a new document was created where every written-down sentence from the interviews was categorized under the theme where it was best suited. The primary data was analysed with help from the theoretical framework.

3.8 Evaluation of trustworthiness and authenticity

When evaluating the quality of qualitative research the terms *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* are used, according to Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Guba & Lincoln (1994), found in Bryman & Bell (2011). The concept trustworthiness can further be divided into four criteria: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. From a qualitative standpoint one cannot say that there is only one definite truth about the social world that we live in. Instead, the qualitative approach allows us to describe how different individuals understand social realities in various ways.

The authors mention that by using triangulation, a method where qualitative research is combined with for instance a quantitative survey, the study's *credibility* could have been enhanced. Due to the time limit this was not possible, we do however encourage further quantitative research within this field as a complement to this study. The qualitative approach enabled us to study a smaller number of individuals and collect material with a large depth, rather than breadth. This strengthened the *transferability* of the results. During the process of writing this thesis, we asked for help from our supervisor and met with her on a regular basis to enable her to be a part of the research process and regularly read the drafts. To strengthen the *dependability* we asked our supervisor to share her opinion on the choice of interviewees, research questions and ways of analysing the gathered material. In addition, we asked her to proofread the interview guide and provided her with drafts of the interviews containing quotes, discussions, themes and contradictions, which enabled us to learn from the feedback we were provided with. By letting the thesis being audited we aimed to make the results as dependable as possible. The goal was to analyse the interviews as objectively as possible. The interviewees were encouraged to speak freely, discuss with each other, question each other and share their stories. The empirical results can to some extent have been affected by the interviewees' capabilities of expressing themselves, and our capability of understanding and interpreting the interviews. However, to the best of our ability, we tried not to let our personal values and opinions affect the interviews and results to ensure *confirmability*.

Regarding *authenticity*: we are aware of the fact that our study is limited and that the size of the sample is relatively small. Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Guba & Lincoln (1994) mention that there is a risk that the results do not give a fair picture of the populations' various opinions and beliefs, which we are aware of as we only conducted a qualitative study on 14 people. In addition, we acknowledge that the age range of 20-25 year olds does not necessarily correspond to the age of all students. However, the group interviews enabled the participants to get insight into other consumers' thought process and behaviours. All of the participants have been encouraged to read the thesis after being finished.

3.9 Self-criticism towards the study

A disadvantage when conducting group interviews is that the interviewees might experience conformity and change opinion accordingly. The persons who were chosen for the interviews were fellow students. This type of convenience sample can on one hand be a disadvantage when the interviewer knows the interviewees too intimately. On the other hand we saw it as an advantage in this situation, as we knew that these participants would contribute to an interesting discussion and not hold back. Students in a limited age category were chosen because people at the same point in life might find it easier to speak freely to each other.

Chapter 4 - Results and analysis

In this chapter, the findings of the two focus groups and the four in-depth interviews are presented and discussed. The findings are divided into four main themes: material matters, recognizing brands, social aspects, and environmental aspects regarding shopping bags, as shown in the figure below. Each category is divided into sub-headings, which describe different areas related to each main theme. Under each of these, the interviewees' own thoughts are described followed by an analysis that links these thoughts to the theories, which are described in detail earlier in this thesis. The relationship between these themes is described at the end of this chapter.



Figure 4.1 In this order the four main themes are presented. The relationship between these is discussed in 4.5 Overlapping themes

4.1 Material matters

It was found that the material of shopping bags seemed to matter, and that the choice of material depended on the purpose. The perception was that plastic and paper bags not always were appropriate for the same purpose. In addition, depending on the design of the bag, bags made from the same material were useful in some situations, but in others not. However, beside the functional aspect, every interview also led to an inevitable categorization of what was seen as “nice” and “ugly” bags. During the discussions, the participants seemed to have an overall shared opinion regarding these aspects.

4.1.1 Choice of material depends on the purpose

It was shown that the interviewees preferred plastic bags to paper bags, at least when going to the grocery store. Most of them bought new plastic bags in the grocery store, and the most significant reason for this was that these were convenient to reuse as garbage bags. Their shape and size fitted that purpose well, and they were appreciated as almost no one bought special garbage bags on a roll. In their homes, most of the participants kept their plastic bags under the sink, whereas a common view was that paper bags from grocery stores were “mostly just in the way”. Some used one or two to keep recyclable material in, but otherwise, these had no other clear purpose once they had transported the goods from the store to the home. *“Sometimes I save them because I feel bad about throwing them away, but I never really find a good time to use them again”* (Johanna). Because of this, paper bags were generally often avoided in the grocery store. In addition, a shared attitude towards these kinds of paper bags was that they were uncomfortable to carry because they are big and heavy when filled entirely with groceries. In contrast, Elin S. was the only one who actually usually chose bags made of paper. She explained that she always travelled by car when going to the grocery store, which had an impact on her choice of bag:

The paper bags can hold more goods and are more stable when you put them in the car. Taking the car also allows us to go to the store not as often. We buy a lot once a week or even every other week, and then we only go down to the store again when we need to buy groceries, such as milk, that runs out fast. (Elin S.)

It was apparent that she, and the others, chose bags after their means of transportation. We find support to this in the article by Holmberg and Hagberg (2013), in which they discuss transport and carrying means of various kinds when buying groceries. They argue that plastic bags are most commonly chosen at the grocery store, and that paper bags are more often preferred among people who take the car than those who do not. Elin S. was the only one among the interviewees who took the car to the grocery store, but all of the others either walked or used public transportation, which explains their varying behaviour and perception of what is regarded as the best carrying means from the grocery store.

In the study by Prendergast et al. (2001), consumer perceptions regarding shopping bags were investigated. The authors found that paper bags on average are stored longer and reused more frequently than plastic bags, whereas bags made of plastic are replaced more often. However, it is not revealed by the outcome of that study what share of people's use of shopping bags consists of paper bags. In other words, we cannot tell whether or not only a very small share of all bags that are being reused are paper bags. Therefore, we need to be cautious when interpreting the results of their study. In fact, according to the results of our study, it seems as if the participants in general preferred using and reusing plastic bags in their everyday life and that these fulfil a greater purpose after they have transported goods from the store to the home.

Moreover, Prendergast et al. (2001) state that the attributes "convenient to carry" and "protection" are the most important attributes of a bag, regardless of being made of paper or plastic. This is consistent with what our interviewees mentioned being the main features of a bag. Moreover, the study also tells us that being waterproof is the third most important feature of a plastic bag, an aspect that on the other hand never was mentioned during any of our interviews.

4.1.2 Appearance

The nicer looking shopping bags were described as extravagant paper bags from exclusive stores such as NK, bags which preferably also had "nice" ribbon handles. It was possible to discern a pattern among the interviewees that it, at least to a certain extent, was important to be able to identify themselves with the brand and the shopping bag. However, this was only important in situations where others would see you reusing the shopping bag. A bag could always be used as a garbage bag regardless of if it was a "nice" plastic bag or an "ugly" plastic bag, such as those from a grocery store were. When asking what ugly and nice bags respectively look like, Janne could describe them without hesitation:

The more plastic-like, the uglier it is. The whiter and the more it looks like a plastic grocery bag, the more boring, ugly and ordinary it is. However, if you're using a shopping bag, which is made from paper or even a nice fabric, it's starting to look more like a proper bag and can be considered to be a nice shopping bag. That is criterion one. Criterion two is where the shopping bag is from, the bag's history. Take a t-shirt for instance, if it says you won the World Championship in boxing, that's a pretty cool t-shirt. Similarly, if you have a bag that shows that you've been someplace cool or if it has a cool logotype on it, you will convey a cool feeling. It's important what the shopping bag says: what does it say about you? (Janne)

The outcome regarding handles was that the interviewees associated cutout plastic handles with cheaper bags while woven handles were associated with more expensive brands. In spite of this, the interviewees' shared opinion was that the right choice of handles, pattern, size and design of the shopping bag was dependent on what the company produces and what the brand in general represents.

When talking to the interviewees about reusing shopping bags, an inevitable categorization of "useful" and "unuseful" bags also arose. If shopping bags could be considered useful or not useful largely depended on the situation and whether the bag could be considered a "nice" bag or an "ugly" bag. During the group interviews, there was a somewhat mutual opinion of the usefulness and unusefulness of specific shopping bags. Plastic grocery bags, for instance, were described as ugly, but useful for carrying home groceries, being reused as a bin bag and as a bag for the lunch box. The situations in which the plastic grocery bags were not useful or seen "appropriate" were when an additional bag was needed to carry books to and from the university or when going to a job interview. Paper bags from grocery stores and exclusive clothing stores, on the other hand, were described as very unuseful as bin bags, something that was largely due to their material, general size and design of handles. Nevertheless, in some situations where plastic bags were unuseful, the paper bags on the other hand were found to be very useful. It was described how a certain paper bag made of a thicker material, like those from NK or Gant, could in a positive way transform the whole purchasing experience and also when reusing the bag in other situations after the purchase.

Although the paper bags from supermarkets mostly elicited negative emotions, both in terms of reuse possibilities and appearance, it was found that the interviewees had nothing against paper bags from for example clothing stores. The ability to identify with the brand played an important role in whether or not a shopping bag would be reused and especially in which contexts it would be reused. Figure 4.2 summarizes attitudes towards different shopping bags discussed in this study.

	Situations where the shopping bags are useful		Situations where the shopping bags are not useful	
	Private consumption	Public consumption	Private consumption	Public consumption
Nice shopping bag	To store items in wardrobes	To carry items to a friend's house, to the university etc. For clothes for P.E (teenagers)	As a bin bag if made of paper As bin bag if plastic bag is transparent	For lunch box (sometimes) For groceries
Ugly shopping bag	Plastic grocery bag as bin bag Paper bag for recyclable material	When carrying home groceries For lunch box	As a bin bag if made of paper	When going to a job interview, or at work To carry books in at the University of Gothenburg

Figure 4.2 This figure describes situations where “nice” and “ugly” shopping bags are applicable, based on the interviewees’ answers

4.2 Recognizing brands

The concepts brand awareness and brand image is explained in the following paragraphs. A prerequisite for this study was the interviewees’ prior experience with handling and using shopping bags in their everyday life. The interviewees often expressed themselves as if they took other people’s knowledge for granted. This shows the power of brands and played an important role for the discussions, the information and paradoxes, which could be extracted from the interviews. The fact that the interviewees to a great extent had previous knowledge about shopping bags played a large role in their ability to express opinions, explain their own behaviour and the behaviour of others.

4.2.1 Brand awareness

“I rarely think about shopping bags”, “I didn’t think I’d have anything useful to say to you during this interview but it turned out to be a really interesting discussion” and “the way you use shopping bags is not something you contemplate in your everyday life” was said many times during the interviews. However, without getting any cues, all of the interviewees spoke freely about brands and their shopping bags. The most often mentioned were H&M’s, ICA’s and Systembolaget’s shopping bags. Bags from these stores were spontaneously discussed both in the in-depth interviews and the group interviews. The ways in which the participants spoke about these shopping bags were very similar.

The shopping bags' features, which were perceived as being common knowledge, were among others: colour, size, logotype, design of handles, material and common usage after purchase. In a very similar way, the interviewees also had a good sense of which bags other people were not familiar with and they therefore had to explain the design of. As mentioned in the method section, about 30 shopping bags were presented to the interviewees during the group interviews. A number of shopping bags were also presented to the interviewees during the in-depth interviews, but in these cases a smaller quantity of shopping bags were shown and later discussed. In the in-depth interviews, Systembolaget's and H&M's shopping bag were not presented until the interviewees had brought them up themselves. They could all describe the main features of these shopping bags even before seeing them, both spontaneously and upon request. The interviewees' descriptions were fairly homogenous regarding the most mentioned shopping bags' features such as colour, size, design of handles and which material the bags were made of. In addition, the interviewees gave an impression of easily being able to recognize situations where other consumers reuse these shopping bags. The bag from Systembolaget was described as a smaller bag in purple or green plastic, practical to put lunch boxes in to the university or for small bins. The ICA plastic bag was described as the "right" sized garbage bag with "good" handles. The different sizes of the shopping bags were discussed and it was agreed on that the small H&M bag was too small and that it was fairly hard to find an area of reuse for the bag after purchasing a small item at H&M.

Many interviewees mentioned how they actively tried saying no to a small bag in the store, even though it is given away to the customer for free. One participant explained that she did not want to cause a scene if an item had already been put in a bag, and in those cases she accepted the bag from the sales clerk even if she did not want it or had any use for the bag. The same person described the small H&M bags as "not usable for anything" and that "she was tired of them". If they had a small H&M bag at home, it was sometimes thrown away, and if an H&M or Systembolaget bag was reused in the home, they were always used as rubbish bags for the bin in the bathroom. The reason why smaller bags were only reused as rubbish bags in the bathroom, and not in the kitchen, was due to the general size of bins in bathrooms and kitchens. The fact that different bags were used for different bins shows the importance of the size of a bag regarding reuse. The way in which the bags were reused for bins was basically the same among all interviewees.

A fundamental theory when analysing the interviews is the concept brand awareness. The empirical results we got from the interviews were to a large extent based on the fact that the interviewees had a high brand awareness, which means a high brand recall and brand recognition, concepts described by Lane Keller et al. (2012). The interviewees shared a common awareness for some brands such as ICA, Systembolaget and H&M. Top of mind awareness is the brands, in a specific product category, that the participants think of first (Mårtenson, 2009). Because ICA, Systembolaget and H&M are three large Swedish companies, it is no surprise that our interviewees were very familiar with these companies' shopping bags and that these therefore were easily recognizable and recallable. The bags were discussed

as if it was common knowledge to have high brand awareness towards these brands and all of the interviewees assumed that they shared approximately the same knowledge and recollection of the bags. The interviewees' ability to express their own and other consumers' habits show that they have a somewhat implicit understanding and knowledge of behaviour regarding shopping bags. Despite the fact that they could recall and recognize shopping bags and behaviour, as well as initiate long discussions about this topic, it was clear that the majority of the interviewees did not seem to understand that their discussions and stories could be relevant for researchers. In contrast, we did find the outcome of all the interviews really interesting and useful.

4.2.2 Brand image

It seemed as if it was important that shopping bags' appearance is consistent with the brand. Many of the interviewees said that it was important that the appearance of shopping bags should represent the brand and indicate what kind of products the company sells, and that they should match the image of the brand. This is in line with what is said about a brand in general. Egil said that the design of the bag from Gant fits well with what that brand represents, and because the company focuses on classy clothes with a consistent look, sold at a higher price, they do right by having bags with a uniform, expensive looking design. The bags are all mostly dark blue in contrast to the white brand name. All of the interviewees could easily recognize the brand from these attributes such as the blue colour, together with the white four letters in a distinctive font. *"It is enough that the shopping bag is blue and has four letters, you'll still see that it is from Gant"* (Pernilla). But first and foremost, everyone noticed the material. Gant's bags are made of a thicker kind of paper, and the interviewees all had a shared view that paper is regarded to reflect a brand of better quality.

Since Gant sells clothing at a higher price than many other stores, it is therefore not surprising that they can afford to develop and produce a slightly more extravagant bag. (Anthon)

As Elin H. expressed it, paper bags are produced at a higher cost, and therefore it is more appropriate for more expensive brands to invest in these. It would be perceived as a little odd if all cheap chain stores adopted the same concept with exclusively looking paper bags. One of the interviewees said that it would be "weird" if a regular grocery store would adopt the same idea, and that it is better if stores that sell clothes provide these.

I guess that when you purchase merchandise from e.g. NK, you expect the cashier to fold the garment neatly and properly so that no wrinkles appear. I suppose it is a part of their image and concept, to create additional value to the actual product. (Elin H.)

Anthon mentioned that this is neither necessary for grocery stores that sell food, nor for a store like H&M because the merchandise they sell is cheaper and of lower standard. When asking Pernilla about her thoughts about the several bags provided by Haga Hem, an up-market home decor store, she spontaneously said that their bigger paper bag had a font that fits better with the store brand. They had one big paper bag, one medium sized plastic, and one very small, also made of plastic. Pernilla prefers the paper bag since it better represents the range of goods offered by the store. She said that the rustic style of the products also is represented on that bag.

The men could not imagine carrying a shopping bag from a women's store like Raglady, the store which offers pink plastic bags, either in plain light pink or with a pink leopard pattern. Likewise, the women could not imagine carrying things in a bag from a pure men's store, at least not a brand like Dressmann. It was associated with older men, according to Elin, and she described their commercials as somewhat dorky and cheap. Though, in line with the women's opinions, the men could not imagine using this bag either.

The "right design" of a shopping bag seemed to depend on what products the companies sold. A shared view was also that the shopping bags' look should be consistent with the brand and brand image. The participants did have expectations of shopping bags, and as long as these were met, no dissonance occurred. The situation could otherwise lead to a damaged brand image. Brand image, according to Ehrenberg and Pyatt (1973), is all of the associations that a brand is surrounded by. For instance, a grocery store did not need to have shopping bags with an exclusive looking design and ribbon handles.

Furthermore, it was found that some shopping bags were not appreciated and would never be reused, even though their appearances were rather similar to more appreciated ones, as for example Peak Performance compared with Dressmann. As mentioned by Ehrenberg and Pyatt (1973) consumers' feelings and emotions can sometimes be convincing factors. Dressmann's ambition is to cover the total clothing needs for men of all ages (Dressmann, 2015), but despite this, the men could not imagine reusing it. This was due to the participants' affect, which includes evaluations (Peter & Olson, 2010) of the shopping bags. They experienced negative associations towards the brand as they could not relate to it. They therefore had a poor brand image of the company as a whole.

Not only did the brand affect the attitudes of the shopping bag, but it also seemed as if the design of a shopping bag could influence the participants' attitudes towards a brand. For instance, the interviewees who already knew of the brand Raglady perceived the store as "fancy", but those who had not heard of the brand before perceived the brand as a childish brand for girls. These attitudes were only based on the design of the shopping bag and illustrated how the cognition - consumer's knowledge about objects - influenced the consumers' attitudes. As previously mentioned, the participants spoke about how the image of a brand and their shopping bags should correspond to each other. This means that if they would see a "nice" shopping bag, the brand would most likely also be an exclusive brand.

4.3 The social aspects

It seemed as if the participants experienced an implicit acceptance regarding what was seen as suitable shopping bags for different situations and purposes. This third part therefore discusses behaviour that can be traced to other people's influence, which easier can be understood by using the concepts reference groups, multiple identities, actual and ideal self in a private and social context, and extended self.

4.3.1 Other people's impact on the choice of shopping bag

It was described how the interviewees were influenced by friends when reusing shopping bags. When Elin H. went to lower secondary school, everyone had a special bag from a company called Kompaniet to carry clothes and shoes in for the physical education (P.E.) in school. According to her, almost everyone felt like they had to have one. The material was nothing special, and the same bag could be used for a long time even though they eventually looked rather worn out:

When I went to lower secondary school, everyone had a particular bag. I'm from Kalmar and there is no NK in my city, but there is a store called Kompaniet, which is almost like NK, and everyone carried their clothes for the P.E. in their bag. You could not have another bag for this purpose, you always had it, even if it you had been using it for two months already and it had started to come apart. (Elin H.)

Furthermore, Andrea mentioned experiencing a similar behaviour in Gothenburg. She described how she had noticed teenage girls carrying bags from a company called Fiorucci. Their target audience could be described as primarily younger, trend-conscious women:

It has been like that here in Gothenburg too; you could see teenage girls everywhere with shopping bags from Fiorucci, the ones with little angels on them. These were used to carry clothes for their P.E. too I suppose. (Andrea)

This behaviour provides a company with free promotion, which Prendergast et al. (2001) also state. Furthermore, a couple of situations were described where reference groups in an evident way affected the participants' behaviour. On the other hand, other situations in which the "wrong" type of shopping bag was used led to a feeling of being labelled:

Once, I brought a grocery bag to a meeting, which my friend and I were going to. I had to bring this bag as I had to transport some items that had been given to me earlier that day in that particular bag. That was slightly socially awkward though, because it was a shopping bag from a grocery store. Then my friend told me “you really can’t bring that bag dude, we have a meeting with an important client”. Well, I knew that it didn’t exactly look exclusive or cool to carry this bag, it certainly didn’t. In these situations, you should preferably use a briefcase that looks good and if you necessarily need to bring a shopping bag you should choose a nice one. This one was obviously a typically ugly bag. I guess I was stigmatized by my surroundings when using it, which apparently can be a consequence if using the wrong type of bag. (Janne)

Moreover, one participant described how reference groups influenced her in her choice of carrying means, which led to a behavioural change. As she is a student, she tried to buy food from low-price grocery stores, but despite this, nowadays she would never reuse shopping bags provided by these stores for purposes in social contexts:

In our superficial consumer society it can easily be a matter of you wanting to use and be seen with the shopping bag that comes from the most expensive grocery store. I don’t really know which one is the most expensive, but that’s not really the important issue here. On the other hand, I do buy food from mostly Netto and Lidl, just because they’re more affordable. I actually do like these stores and didn’t have anything against them before. But since my friends said that I was looking like a homeless person when carrying around these bags, I guess I would choose a bag from at least Hemköp or similar if I had to transport items in a shopping bag. Oh, it sounds terrible, I am horrible person! (Johanna)

Furthermore, a shared view among all participants was that if a grocery bag would be used at a job interview, that situation would become awkward because of the “inappropriateness”. On the other hand, social groups had practically no influence on the behaviour in situations when bags were reused in a private context.

It seemed as whether a shopping bag was suitable for reuse in different situations or not was due to what the company behind the brand stood for, and if that brand image could be associated and was consistent with the surrounding group of people or situation. This is in line with what Solomon et al. (1999) say about attitudes: attitudes are a complex concept and primary and secondary reference groups influence consumers’ attitudes and behaviour. Moreover, in accordance with most of the interviewees’ answers, we can tell that even regarding shopping bags, people are affected by others’ opinions and perceptions of them. What is seen as appropriate is a social construction. The interviewees showed clear indications that their consumer behaviour was affected by others such as their friends, family and fellow students at the university. They used reference groups as sources of attitudes and valued shopping bags according to what others perceived as valuable. This is consistent with how Bearden and Etzel (1982) in Evans et al. (2008) describe reference groups, namely groups who provide consumers with reference frames for how

they perceive themselves. Some participants described how they only to a small extent cared about how others used shopping bags, but that they were well aware of what the socially acceptable norms were and that other people's opinions significantly could influence their attitudes, perceptions, values and behaviours. This is discussed further in the following paragraphs.

4.3.2 How we are perceived by others

Marie explained that she uses paper bags as wrapping paper around gifts when she is going to birthday parties. However, it could not be a bag from just any store. She explained that it looks more exclusive to bring the gift in a nice paper bag than in a bag from a grocery store. Despite this, it was revealed that if the actual gift comes from a store not as "popular" as the store the bag is from, an awkward situation may occur:

Maybe you should think twice before you choose bag to carry your present in. Otherwise, the person who the gift is for might get disappointed when she discovers that the gift is from another, less fancy shop. (Marie)

Furthermore, Elin H. described an interesting situation regarding shopping bags where the way other people act depend on their perception of you. She said that the service in some stores vary and are based on the shopping bags you carry and the clothes you wear:

I think it's very interesting how the service changes depending on which shopping bags you carry. If you are in Stockholm and go to NK [and get an NK shopping bag] and then to Svenskt Tenn, which also is a fairly exclusive store, then the sales clerks are very much like "May I help you with anything?" and so on. Because then they think that you will buy something in their store also. But maybe I bought a lot at NK so there's no chance that I will have money to spend in their store. Respectively, if you don't have any shopping bags at all and didn't buy anything, then they will treat you differently. I believe that if you've bought a lot in fancier stores you will get much better service. Other's perceptions of you also depend on the clothes you wear. And I'm a bit against that, I think it's a bit shady, but at the same time I do understand them because they do want to assist the best customers. (Elin H.)

Another participant described how one of the components in a person's image can be a shopping bag and contribute to how we are perceived by others:

The type of clothes you're wearing, the type of bag you use and the signals you give out affect how you're perceived by others. You will be perceived in different ways, depending on which cognitive schema people around you have and which image you've got. Other people's image of you depends on how you dress and how you act, and a shopping bag will be a part of that image, even if just a fraction. It's not the determinant factor, but it contributes to the overall perception of you as a person. Perhaps it's the natural course of events. (Janne)

How reference groups influenced the consumer's ideal self in a private context was not discussed extensively. However, the stories about how teenage girls use certain bags for the P.E. in school describe the ideal self in a social context, how people would like others to perceive them (Dornoff & Tatham, 1972, in Evans et al., 2009). They reused these shopping bags to signal to others that they are trend conscious and "a part of the group".

4.3.3 Multiple identities

It became apparent that the majority of our interviewees cared about what others would think when they were carrying a bag. The interviewees mentioned that some bags are accepted to reuse among people while some are not. Sometimes, the same bag could be seen as "cool" during some occasions, but not in others. Systembolaget is the company that holds a monopoly on selling alcohol in Sweden. The appropriateness of Systembolaget's little purple bag was also discussed to a great extent. It was agreed on that it was a socially acceptable bag to use at the university. Some were a bit more hesitant and some gladly used it:

Students drink, and everyone knows about it. It is a part of our lifestyle and the way we are at this age. Therefore, it is not seen as something strange to have that bag for the lunch box.
(Anthon)

However, the interviewees could think of many other situations where they would actively choose to not use Systembolaget's shopping bag. To use the bag in situations such as church, job interviews, kindergarten and when working with younger children was not acceptable, instead they adjusted to the situation and chose a different shopping bag. It was described how they felt unease when being around children when carrying a Systembolaget bag because of what it symbolizes and because they did not want to be associated with alcohol in those situations. One person explained how that bag could result in questions and speculations and that was the reason why they chose not to use that bag when they had the opportunity not to do so.

All participants expressed being influenced by reference groups, a group whose social perspectives are used by a consumer as a frame of reference for their own actions (Shibutani, 1955 in Evans et al., 2009). We could find a difference in behaviour between when a shopping bag was reused in public or private contexts. The interviewees' consumption of shopping bags was almost exclusively affected and influenced by others in situations when publicly consuming a shopping bag, but not when consuming it privately. The public situations, where reference groups significantly influenced the behaviour, were defined as places such as the university, the workplace, church or when going to a job interview. A situation where an inappropriate shopping bag would be used, was described as potentially awkward, embarrassing and stigmatizing. This was however never applicable when buying groceries. One explanation of why a grocery bag could not lead to such a stigma when grocery shopping, might be because of the fact that

buying food is a necessity. Both negative and positive associations towards the alcohol brand Systembolaget were described, which all that depended on the situation. The interviewees did not want to be associated with that brand image among children or in work contexts. As the same person acted differently at university, where they gladly used the bag, we can see that consumers have multiple identities. As described by Jamal (2003) in Evans et al. (2009), having multiple identities by using certain bags might prevent social disadvantages.

4.3.4 Expressing yourself through shopping bags

It was not only described how reference groups could influence behaviour, but also how shopping bags could affect the image of oneself. Both the male and female interviewees expressed how a shopping bag could be a part of an outfit. *“In one way it can almost become an accessory. If it’s a nice enough shopping bag, it can be something that you almost turn into a part of an outfit.”* (Pernilla)

The concept extended self explains how a person can value personal belongings to such an extent that these possessions become a part of ourselves: the things we buy become a sort of extension of who we are (Belk, 1988, in Evans et al., 2008). As Prendergast et al. (2001) suggested that shopping bags can, except for serving as a package, also be regarded as a form of promotion, a status symbol, a collective and a work of art. We can see clear tendencies of this in the views of the participants, as they in a public context cared about how they were perceived and used a shopping bag to convey a certain message about themselves. To use a shopping bag as a part of an outfit can also be linked to the dimensions of self, see figure 2.2 in chapter 2. The interviewees showed tendencies of an extended self when using shopping bags in a way that made the bags an extension of the consumer’s self. An example thereof was when Pernilla described how a shopping bag could be an addition to an outfit, extending the consumer’s personality through the shopping bag. Personalities of appealing brands can “rub off” on the consumers who wear the brand, in line with what Park and John (2010) says, but also that brands associated with negative attributes, such as Systembolaget and alcohol, could “rub off” in a negative way depending on the situation and surrounding environment.

4.4 Environmental aspects

Can shopping bags be subject of environmental awareness? This part of the analysis covers this study’s environmental aspects: recycling, reflections and awareness.

All of the interviewees expressed environmental awareness in one way or another, and they found that recycling in general was a positive thing to do, as it is a good cause for the environment. Some other clear tendencies could be seen of caring for the environment among some of the participants, which all involved shopping bags. Most noticeable was indeed the desire to use paper bags for recycled material, but also to frequently bring their own bag to the grocery store, and to avoid taking a bag, despite being given it free of charge, when purchasing a smaller item. Almost everyone saved bags made of paper and

reused them as containers for recyclable material such as cardboard, plastic, glass and metal. Some threw the paper bag away together with the rest of the recycled material, while some reused the bag until it no longer was in a good condition to reuse. This is what Janne said about recycling: *"I definitely do it because I can then proudly tell others that I contribute to something good, if it's something you should do then that's a first step."* (Janne)

Victor was one of the participants who frequently brought his own fabric bag with him to the grocery store. He said that he mostly did it due to environmental aspects, and that the price rarely is significant. *"It is definitely because of the environment I bring my bag. I save a crown every now and then, but that is not really something I think about"* (Victor). On the contrary, some expressed that it was "embarrassing" to bring your own shopping bag to the grocery store, especially if the bag came from another grocery store than the one you were at. Everyone agreed on that to bring your own bag when shopping for clothes was something completely unthinkable. Moreover, all of them had either heard of, seen or used bags made from recyclable plastic or bioplastic. One person spoke about bans against plastic bags in an African country. Another clear case of caring for the environment was when Johanna was working at Subway, and refused to hand out bags together with the sandwich to the customers:

I was a genuine environmental activist when I was working at Subway, because there you always have to give a bag together with the subs. But I refused to give out bags, I was a true environmental activist. My manager always told me to give them [the customers] a bag. Not a chance that I would give them a bag if they were going to sit there and eat, I refused! (Johanna)

Many of the interviewees were very clear on how they behaved and whether they brought their own bag to the grocery store or not. Janne, on the other hand, was more ambiguous in his response:

Yeah, I've done that. I do especially leave some room in my gym bag. But I always forget it, that's the hardest part. I do think "what the heck, I'm going to bring a bag", but in the end I never do it. It's not something you think about when you wake up in the morning all tired, you know. But my mum, for example, always brings a certain bag. I should start with that too, but I haven't. (Janne)

When analysing some of the interviewees' answers, we take help from the theory *Dimensions of the self* (Dornoff & Tatham, 2009), which describes the actual and ideal self in a social and private context. Victor and many of the others would in a private context like to perceive themselves as caring for the environment, even though they in other aspects behaved in the opposite way. For instance, Elin H. said that she sometimes travels by plane between cities in Sweden, but that she still would like to perceive herself as rather environmentally conscious. This concerns the ideal self in a private context: that you would like to perceive yourself in a certain way. On the contrary, Janne frequently recycled material as he wanted to be able to tell others about it. This describes his ideal self in a social context: he wanted to be perceived by others as someone who cares for the environment.

Despite that some of the interviewees expressed environmental awareness, it was not necessarily closely associated with the environmental aspects of shopping bags. Many spoke of bags made from recycled plastic but could rarely recall which brands' shopping bags were made from recyclable plastic. The H&M bag is made from recycled material, which is stated on the bag, but despite being a top of mind awareness shopping bag, the recycled material was not an aspect anyone could recall. Many of the interviewees expressed caring for the environment, but overall it was apparent that they put little thought into the environmental aspects of shopping bags.

Throughout the interviews the participants tended to voice more opinions on the brands, attitudes and consumption that did not regard any environmental aspects. The one who made the strongest suggestions that she cared for the environment also talked about the "extreme amounts" of shopping bags in her household. Additionally, she found it awkward to bring her own bag when buying groceries. When having large amounts of shopping bags at home, she implied being someone who was not actively trying to decrease the consumption of shopping bags or caring for the environment in this regard.

In the tripartite model of attitudes it is described how behaviour can be divided into actual and intended behaviour (Peter & Olson, 2010). It could be extracted from the interviews that the consumers' intended behaviours regarding the environmental aspects not always were consistent with their actual behaviours. For instance, Janne had intentions of bringing his own bag to the grocery store, but frequently forgot. The outcome is in line with what Yeow et al. (2014) mention in their study about reusing shopping bags, where they discuss ethical behaviours. They say that a gap is found between attitude and behaviour, and even though intentions to behave ethically exist, these do not always lead to actions among consumers. *"There is a significant difference between what consumers say about the importance of consumption-related ethical issues and their actual behaviour"* (Yeow et al., 2014, p. 89)

4.5 Overlapping themes

Many of the theories presented above overlap in many situations and ways. In this last paragraph we describe how the theories and results overlap. The following model explains how the different themes analysed are closely linked to each other:

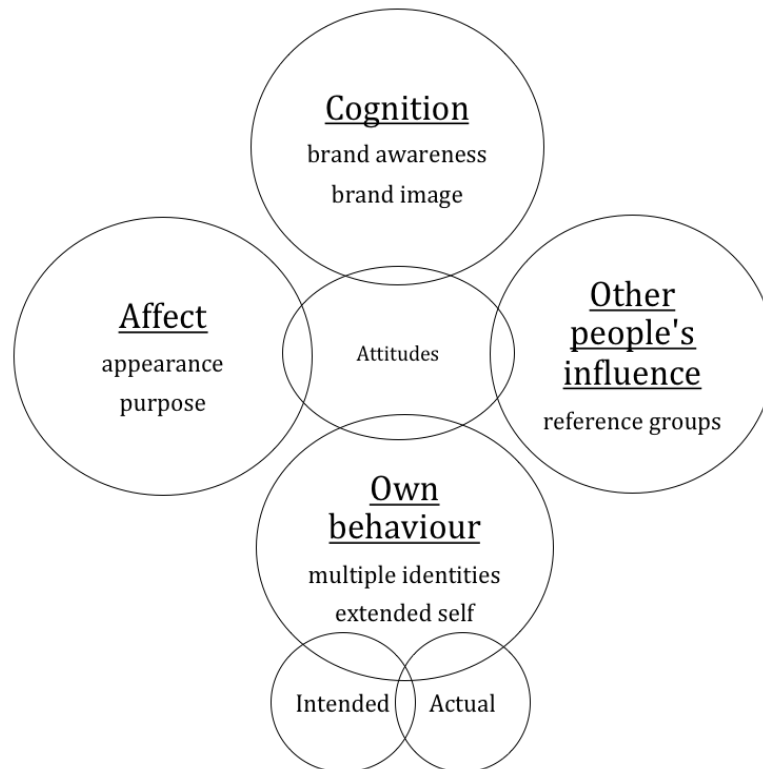


Figure 4.3 A self-created model, partially based on the *tripartite model of attitudes*, combined with the aspect of other people's influence. **(Peter & Olson, 2010)**

Figure 4.3 above illustrates our results of the study. The model is originally based on the *tripartite model of attitudes*, which contains affect, cognition and behaviour (Peter & Olson, 2010). A distinction was made between consumers' own behaviour, both intended and actual, and *other people's influence* was added as being a part of consumer's attitudes. The aim of this model is to highlight all the aspects that affect consumer behaviour. The model is described as follows. Cognition means the knowledge of shopping bags, which can be described with the theories brand awareness and brand image. Affect entails the participants' evaluations of shopping bags, evaluations which are formed when a consumer combine the knowledge, meanings and beliefs they have towards shopping bags. Affect entails the positive and negative attitudes that consumers hold towards shopping bags. These attitudes towards material, nice and ugly shopping bags, as well as useful and unuseful ones were described in the paragraph 4.1 Material matters. There were many ways and situations in which shopping bags could be used and reused, and it was found that no bag provided a universal solution for all occasions. The participants could also describe others' behaviours regarding shopping bags, and it was shown that reference groups such as family, friends and fellow students strongly influenced the participants' own attitudes and actual behaviour.

The participants' behaviours can be divided into two types of behaviours: intended and actual. The intended behaviour might be the same as the actual behaviour, however this was not necessarily always true. The participants' behaviour sometimes showed through multiple identities and extended selves. Furthermore, the environmental aspect of shopping bags touches all areas of the shopping bag consumer behaviour. The areas presented in the four larger circles do also overlap in many situations. For instance do brand image and the knowledge of brands affect social situations and can lead to consumers developing multiple identities and extended selves. We have found that the participants had attitudes both towards the object shopping bag and attitudes towards their own and others' behaviour.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion and recommendations

The thesis' last chapter will present a brief summary and the conclusion of the study, which was reached after thoroughly analysing the empirical results. The conclusion will be followed by our criticism to the restrictions of the study, recommendations, and suggestions for further research within this field.

5.1 Study design

This study consisted of in-depth and group interviews with 14 participants, aged 20-25. The participants were young adults and students at School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg, living in the Gothenburg area. The purpose of the study was to obtain a deeper understanding of consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards shopping bags. Because of consumer behaviour having a large impact on the economy and society, it is not only relevant to deepen our own understanding of consumer behaviour, but also to make a contribution relevant for further research. Consumers often know what kind of shopping bags they use and how they use them, but nonetheless they might not contemplate or understand why they behave the way they do or why they hold certain attitudes, which is another reason why this study is of relevance (see figure 5.1). The research questions were as follows: *Which behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags can be identified? What role do brands play in how shopping bags are perceived? In what way do different situations and people have an impact on the choice of shopping bag?*

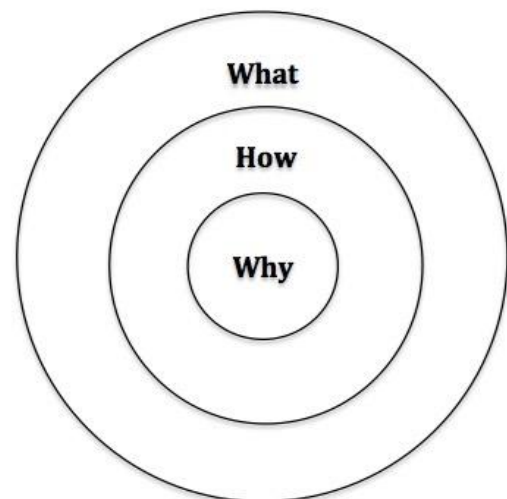


Figure 5.1 The what-how-why model

5.2 Conclusion

Research question 1:

Which behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags can be identified?

The results of this study show that there are many different behaviours and attitudes towards shopping bags. The aspects that were a part of the participants' attitudes and behaviours can be summarized as affect, cognition, other people's influence and their own behaviour, both intended and actual behaviour, this relationship is described in Figure 4.3 in chapter 4. Affect means the participants' evaluations of the shopping bags' appearance and purpose. Cognition is the knowledge of shopping bags and brands, which can be described as the consumers' brand image and awareness of brands. The participants expressed being influenced by others. Their primary (family and friends) and secondary reference groups (fellow students at the university) were strong influences on the consumption of shopping bags and the behaviour during use and reuse. It was also shown that the intended behaviour regarding shopping bag did not necessarily have to correspond to the actual behaviour. In addition, we could also see tendencies of shopping bags becoming a part of an extended self. Pernilla spoke about how a nice enough shopping bag almost could become a part of an outfit, thus a valued item.

Research question 2:

What role do brands play in how shopping bags are perceived?

The results from the interviews showed that the participants expressed that brands do play a large role in how shopping bags are perceived. Brands could contribute to shopping bags being divided into categories of "nice" and "ugly". For instance, shopping bags coming from stores that sold products at a higher price range were generally perceived as "nicer" to use and reuse than any other shopping bag, whereas those from cheap grocery stores were not "appropriate" to reuse in a social context because of what these brands were associated with. A typical nice bag was a paper bag from NK, and a typical ugly bag was a plastic grocery bag from Netto or Lidl. The participants' previous knowledge (cognition) and positive or negative evaluations (affect) of brands contributed to their overall brand image of different companies, which undoubtedly had an impact on their behaviour and attitudes towards the different bags. It was apparent that brands on shopping bags do indeed have a behavioural changing impact on how we perceive shopping bags.

Research question 3:

In what way do different situations and people have an impact on the choice of shopping bag?

Other people and different situations did strongly affect the participants' behaviour and choice of shopping bag. The interviewees showed clear indications that their consumer behaviour was affected by reference groups such as their friends, family and fellow students at the university. For instance, one interviewee mentioned how she in lower secondary school always carried her clothes for the P.E in a certain shopping bag, as everyone else in that school did the same. This indicates a behaviour of wanting

to relate to the norms of the reference group. Other situations were also described where other people had an impact on the choice of shopping bag. For instance, it was acceptable at the university to carry a bag from Systembolaget, as drinking alcohol when you are a student is a socially acceptable thing to do. However, these bags were not appreciated in all situations. This was manifested through multiple identities, meaning that a person acts differently depending on the actual situation and the people that person is surrounded by. For example, the same bag from Systembolaget was perceived as “inappropriate” to carry items in for a job interview or when being surrounded by children.

As mentioned, the interviewees were influenced by reference groups and had multiple identities, and we could also see examples of different dimensions of the self. For instance, Johanna explained how she a couple of years ago did not mind carrying items in shopping bags from grocery stores: her actual self in a private context was “an ordinary woman”. But as she was told by her friends that she could be perceived as a homeless person when carrying these bags, she started to reflect on her actual self in a social context, how she thinks others perceive her. The consequence of this was that she stopped using these bags, as her ideal self in a social context - how she would like others to perceive her - was not as a homeless person but a woman who could afford a nicer shopping bag.

Finally, the material was also often a determinant factor when choosing a shopping bag for certain situations. For instance, plastic and paper were not always appropriate for the same purposes. Plastic was better suited as bin bags, but paper was better suited for situations where you could be seen reusing the shopping bag. There are many ways and situations in which shopping bags can be used and reused, but it was found that no bag provided a universal solution for all occasions.

5.3 Recommendations

As a result of this study we can see that people do have strong attitudes towards shopping bags. The participants perceived shopping bags as either nice or ugly and useful or unuseful, despite the fact that they did not actively reflect on this in their everyday lives. Because this study does not cover all aspects of, for instance, consumer behaviour or branding, we would like to encourage other researchers to investigate this topic further.

As mentioned in the problem discussion, it is of relevance to investigate the underlying factors in consumer behaviour, in order for a company to design the optimal shopping bag. We recommend individual companies to use the results from this study, as well as to conduct their own market research on consumer behaviour and attitudes towards their own shopping bags, throughout the shopping bag’s life cycle. At the same time it is also relevant to investigate whether the attitudes towards the brand and the shopping bag correspond to each other, as our participants mentioned the importance of the design of a shopping bag being consistent with the brand image.

Finally, we recommend companies to investigate how consumers perceive a company's own shopping bags in comparison to shopping bags provided by companies within the same industry. For instance, exclusive clothing stores could study consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards their shopping bags, and then compare these results with the attitudes consumers have towards other exclusive brands' shopping bags.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

In this study we used a qualitative method where a limited number of in-depth and group interviews were conducted. Because of this, the results cannot be generalized for the whole population. Therefore, we see possibilities for further research within this area with the results provided by this thesis as a guideline.

For instance, one suggestion is to make comparisons between countries. Most retailers in developed countries provide shoppers with shopping bags to carry their merchandise (Prendergast et al., 2001). Since different policies regarding regulations between countries exist, differences in consumer behaviour regarding shopping bags most likely exist too. These potential dissimilarities in attitudes, perceptions and behaviour between countries are therefore an interesting opportunity for further research.

Moreover, since the empirical results in this qualitative study come from only semi-structured in-depth and group interviews, a suggestion is to conduct an ethnographic field study. When an interviewer is allowed to be invited to the informant's home and observe their everyday life or to come along when shopping, an even deeper understanding can be obtained. When using these more interpretive methods you get more insight into consumer behaviour, since the consumers are studied in their natural environments (Moisander & Valtonen, 2011). In other types of studies, such as in-depth and group interviews, informants might try to give "a correct answer" and instead of showing individuality they can show tendencies of conformity. Because of this, informants might perhaps not reveal how they actually behave (Graffman & Söderström, 2009). In field studies it is easier to get details that otherwise would have been difficult to obtain, perhaps because the consumers simply do not know how to express them. It can concern behavioural aspects that they have not noticed or reflected on before.

Prendergast et al. (2001) mentioned how shopping bags could be regarded as a form of packaging. From our interviews, we could also extract that the term packaging had a number of similarities with the term shopping bag. For example, Andrea used bags in her wardrobe to protect and store items, and Marie used shopping bags as a secondary package around birthday gifts. They expressed in these contexts the importance of packaging, and why the attributes of the visual aspects were important. However, due to the need for limitation, we choose to leave this topic for further research, as we found other themes that we considered even more interesting. Our informants did not speak about or use shopping bags in a way to support the idea of using bags as a channel for strategic marketing. However, however from own experience we know that shopping bags sometimes are put on shelves in consumers' homes, and the

shopping bags' life cycle is extended. According to Prendergast et al. (2001), shopping bags can be seen as free promotion making the people carrying the bags walking billboards. Therefore we encourage future research regarding the significance of shopping bags' possibilities of promotion throughout their life cycle.

Because having to limit the material in this thesis, we unfortunately also had to exclude some of the environmental aspects of shopping bags. We hope to see further research within this area, and examples of studies that can be undertaken are: to what extent shopping bags are being recycled, which role shopping bags play when recycling materials (such as paper, plastic and glass) and how a plastic shopping bag ban would affect the Swedish society and how this topic would be addressed.

Lastly, we also encourage further research to combine qualitative research with quantitative studies, as the latter allows a broader sample, which to a wider extent provides the possibility to generalize the results to other groups and situations than those who have been present in the specific study, as suggested by Bryman and Bell (2011).

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Appendix 1 - A brief summary of the interviewees

All informants are between 20-25 years old and live in central Gothenburg. All of them are currently studying their third year at the University of Gothenburg. Below is a more detailed description of the interviewees, for example including their interests and what they plan to do after they have completed their studies.

Pernilla currently studies marketing and is an active member of the university's student's association. She is an outgoing person who enjoys watching Premier League.

Sissela has a couple of hobbies, including baking and crafting. She has lived in Germany and her goal for the future is to obtain a bachelor's degree in accounting.

Johanna studies political science and international relations and is the only interviewee who does not study at School of Business, Economics and Law. She comes from Lund but has lived in Gothenburg the past few years. She has a bubbly personality and she likes to travel.

Janne is a talkative man from Boden, who likes to watch football. He moved to Gothenburg to study, but as soon as he is finished with his bachelor's degree he is going to work in Stockholm.

Marie is an avid dancer and has previously worked as a dance teacher for children. She has specialized in marketing and is currently writing her bachelor thesis.

David, originally from Tibro, enjoys watching football and handball. Soon is he finished with his bachelor's degree in marketing, something he wishes to continue with during his master's as well.

Egil grew up in a suburb close to Gothenburg. He enjoys sports such as orientation and likes to eat Ballerina cookies.

Elin S. is a social woman who is studying her third year at the university, and plans to study a master this fall. She is an active church member, and just got a summer job at SCA.

Anthón is interested in football and handball, and comes from a place a few hours away from Gothenburg. He is currently writing his bachelor thesis and is planning to start his master this fall.

Elin H. studies her third year at the university. She comes from Kalmar and works part time at a bank. In her spare time she sees her family and friends, and works out a couple of times a week.

Victor is originally from the Swedish west coast archipelago, loves to travel and has previously lived in Oslo. He is an outgoing man, who enjoys several sports such as skiing and frisbee golf.

Erik is an entrepreneur who runs his own digital marketing business. In his spare time he plays the organ, speaks German and has recently completed an exchange semester in Germany.

Johan is an outgoing person whose hobbies include singing and playing instruments. He is about to complete his bachelor in accounting and lives in the city centre.

Andrea is a very social person who loves to sing and is a member of two choirs. She is about to finish her bachelor's degree in business, and this fall she is going to continue her studies for three more years at Chalmers.

Appendix 2 - Interview guide

The following questions were used as the foundation for our in-depth interviews and focus groups. The questions were mostly an interview tool, enabling us to organize ourselves, to get a clear picture of which questions could be of relevance during the interviews and which information we wanted our participants to provide to us. The interview guide was continuously updated during the course of the interviewing process.

The questions asked during the interviews were about packaging, logistics, use, reuse, storage, price, appearance, preferences, behaviour and environment. Firstly, questions about the topics in general were asked, which were followed by more specific questions about different situations and the interviewees' attitudes and behaviour. Lastly, the interviewees were encouraged to share other stories about shopping bags that had not already been brought up.

Packaging attributes

- When we say the word "packaging", what comes to your mind?
- How would you describe "packaging" of a product in general?
- What qualities does the best possible packaging have?
- What are your feelings about the main purpose of packaging?
- Have you ever saved the package of a product? If yes: what was the reason for saving that package?
- Which attributes does the optimal shopping bag have?
- What is important: protection, convenience, attractive design, or logo?

Logistics

- Which stores do you go to when shopping?
- How often do you buy groceries?
- How often do you: accept a shopping bag given for free, buy a shopping bag, bring your own shopping bag, bring a bag, just carry without using a shopping bag.
- How do you get to the stores when shopping and buying groceries?
- How do you usually get home?
- What do you do with the bags if they get too heavy to carry?
- If you notice that you are starting to get a lot of shopping bags, what do you do with them?
- If putting bags in a bag: which type of bag do you carry all the other bags in?

Usage, reuse and storage

- Can you recall situations when you use bags? (at home, work, school, university, in the city centre)
- Do you ever save shopping bags?
- Which types of shopping bags do you save and why?
- Which ones do you not save and why?
- Which shopping bags do you think you reuse the most frequently?
- Which shopping bags are useful after being used between a store and your home?
- Which shopping bags are not useful after being used for transportation between a store and your home?

- In which context and how do you reuse these different shopping bags? (university, work, grocery shopping, at home etc.)
- To what extent can a shopping bag be reused before it is thrown away, given away or break?
- Where and how do you store your shopping bags at home?
- Have you ever had shopping bags that you save but did not use? If yes: which ones? Why?
- For how long do you save shopping bags before they are being used or thrown away?
- What kind of bin bags do you use?
- Have you ever used bin bags on a roll, shopping bags from clothing stores or shopping bags from grocery stores?
- Can you describe which attributes a good bin bag has?
- What can be the (main) purpose of a shopping bag?

Price

- Did you ever have to pay for a shopping bag? If yes: where and why?
- Which shopping bags is it okay to pay for?
- Which shopping bags is it not okay to pay for?
- What is a reasonable price for a shopping bag?
- Can the idea of a reasonable price depend on the shopping bag? Why/why not?
- Can the idea of a reasonable price depend on where the shopping bag is from? (grocery store, clothing store, home decor store)
- Can the idea of a reasonable price depend on the brand? Why/why not?

Appearance

- What makes a shopping bag “nice” or “ugly”?
- Tell us how you differentiate between “nice” and “ugly” looking shopping bags?
- Which shopping bags are “nicer” or “uglier” than others? Why?
- Why are some shopping bags nicer or uglier than others? Which types of characteristics or attributes do they have?
- Tell us about situations where it is more suitable to use a “nice”-looking shopping bag?
- Tell us about situations where it is more suitable to use a “ugly”-looking shopping bag?
- Are shopping bags from exclusive stores always desirable? If yes: why and in what way? If no: why not?
- Can a shopping bag from a grocery store have nice characteristics? If yes: which ones? If no: Why not?
- Which difference does the brand on a shopping bag make?

Preferences and behaviour

- Are there some shopping bags that you prefer to use? If yes: how come you like that one better? If no: can all shopping bags be (re)used in the same way?
- Have you ever felt that a certain type of shopping bag is “your type of shopping bag”? If yes: which type of shopping bag? Why? If no: why not?
- Tell us about a situation where you might think “oh, I would not use that shopping bag”. What make you feel like that?
- Are there any types of shopping bags that you would never (re)use? If yes: what is the reason why you would not (re)use it?
- Are there any shopping bags that are more suitable in some situations, but not in others? If yes: give examples.

- Are there any shopping bags that are more suitable than others depending on what you need to transport in it or what the purpose is? If yes: give examples.
- Are there any differences between grocery bags if they come from i.e. Willy's, ICA, Lidl etc.?
- Are there any differences between shopping bags depending on if they come from a store, which sells budget or premium-priced products?
- What would it make you feel like if you used a shopping bag from NK or Fiorucci compared to a shopping bag from H&M or Monki? Why do you think that is?
- Has it ever mattered to you which brand name is on a shopping bag? If yes: give examples. If no: why not?
- Tell us about situations where some shopping bags can have higher status than others?
- Are there any shopping bags that would make you feel embarrassed to use in public? If yes: which type of bag? Which situation? Why? If no: why not?
- Are there any ways in which one could categorise shopping bag users?
- Have you ever been affected by others when using a shopping bag? If yes: give examples: If no: why do you not think that you get affected?
- Are there any bags that cannot be used in certain contexts? If yes: give examples. If no: are all bags equally reusable?

Environment

- What is your take on the environment in general?
- Do you ever do anything for the environment?
- Do you recycle?
- What is your opinion on the worldwide usage of shopping bags?
- How do you think the usage of shopping bags affect the environment?
- Whose responsibility is it to think about the environment regarding shopping bags (the stores of consumers)?
- Which type of bags is the best one from an environmental perspective?
- What is your opinion on the environment and your own shopping bag consumption?
- Can you describe a situation where you reuse a shopping bag?
- Are there any shopping bags that can be environmentally friendly? If yes: which attributes are important in an environmentally friendly
- Have you heard of biodegradable bags? If yes: where did you find this information?
- Would you be willing to pay more for shopping bags made from recycled plastic? If yes: why and how much more? If no: why not?
- Do you ever recycle shopping bags when they are no longer useable? If yes: how and where? If no: why not?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you said no to a shopping bag, even though it could have been given to you for free? If yes: which situation?
- Have you ever taken advantage of a situation where you could get shopping bags for free? If yes: which situation?

Summary

- Do you have any other thoughts or stories on shopping bags?
- Do you think that other people use shopping bags in a similar way or in a different way than you do? If similar: why? In different: in which way? Why?

Appendix 3 - The interview material: shopping bags

The shopping bags, which can be seen in the photos below, were shown to the participants during the interviews. All of the shopping bags were shown to the participants in the group interviews. For the in-depth interviews were a smaller number of bags chosen. The pictures are taken by us, so is the picture on the front page.







