STORYTELLING

Identifying the influence of
story characteristics on the
consumer attitude,
purchase intention
& consumer reputation
in the fashion industry

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry is moving very quickly. New trends are coming up daily and some brands even make up to 12 collections a year. This requires many introductions, a lot of advertising materials and an overwhelming amount of information for consumers. Brands use their own brand story to differentiate from others and attract consumers into the world of their brand, so called storytelling.
The purpose of this study was to find out which specific characteristics of a brand story should or should not be included. These characteristics were examined using the concepts of consumer attitude towards the content, consumer attitude towards the brand, purchase intention and consumer-based reputation.

The theoretical framework discussed story content that resulted in a set of story characteristics that are used for storytelling. A preliminary research in the form of a content analysis of 20 fashion brand stories indicated two possibly interesting characteristics. The preliminary research showed that in only 60% of the cases, the history and founders of a brand are mentioned in the brand story, even though literature describes the importance of a central character in storytelling. Furthermore, only 30% of the stories are written vividly while the literature describes this characteristic as highly important. These two characteristics were examined in the main experiment.

The main study consisted of an experiment in the form of a 2 (history versus no history) x 2 (vivid versus not-vivid) design that resulted in four different fictive brand stories. Respondents were asked to fill in a questionnaire after reading one of the four stories. The results of 141 respondents showed that mentioning the history and founders in a brand story has a negative effect on the attitude towards the brand, the purchase intention and the consumer-based reputation. No significant effect was found on the attitude towards the content of the story. Regarding vividness, no main effect was found on any of the four dependent variables.

It can be concluded that mentioning the history and founders of the brand is not the information that consumers want to know more about when reading the 'about' page of a brand. Hence, it is recommended not to mention the history and founders in brand stories. The literature describes the importance of a central character or person in a brand story, the findings of this research conclude that the founders should not be the central character. As the results somewhat contradict the literature available and this research is the first to explore story characteristics for fashion brand stories, the topic is worthy of future study.

This research was aimed on the fashion industry and it is therefore not recommended to generalize the outcomes of this study to other industries or products.

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I would like to thank my supervisors Joyce Karreman and Silvie Pothof for their support, critical reflections and academic and professional knowledge and experience. Furthermore, I would like to thank my family and Floor for their encouragement and support in this journey.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry is a quick and fast branch to operate in. New trends are coming up daily and some brands even make up to 12 collections a year. This requires many introductions, a lot of advertising materials and an overwhelming amount of information for consumers. This causes questions like: what is the right information to share with consumers to create a positive brand attitude and reputation? Because eventually, that is what brands want. A good reputation has many competitive advantages as it can reduce costs, it positively influences financial outcomes and creates consumer trust and loyalty (Walsh & Beatty, 2007).

To achieve and maintain a positive brand attitude, repetitive purchases and a strong reputation, a brand can use its own brand story that should be shared with consumers. Communicating this story with relevant and valuable information in a clear and credible way is the main task of Public Relations departments or PR agencies. The Public Relations Society of America describes public relations as *"a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their public"*. Public Relations is able to achieve this goal by using several tools, as for example brand storytelling (Mikáčováa & Gavlakováa, 2014).

Stories are described as *"emotionally and symbolically charged narratives; they do not present information or facts about "events" but they enrich, enhance and infuse facts with meaning"* (Gabriel, 1998 as quoted by Janssen, Van Dalfsen, Van Hoof & Van Vuuren, 2012). Storytelling or narration has been used since the beginning of mankind to better understand the world around us. It is a phenomenon that is fundamental to all nations, societies and cultures (Gill, 2014) and serves as frames or references (Janssen et al., 2012). This is why storytelling works as a way of transporting a message to the audience.

The purpose of this study is to find out if specific characteristics of storytelling can have a positive influence on the consumer attitude, purchase intention and consumer-based reputation. In other words, how can storytelling create that extra value for fashion brands that leads to a positive consumer attitude, intention to purchase and a more positive brand reputation? Which particular characteristics are important to mention in brand stories? Which characteristics create a more positive brand attitude? To date, no research has been carried out on the use of storytelling characteristics in fashion brand stories. As a result, the outcome of this study will be able to give industry specific recommendations for professionals operating within the fashion branch. The study will give insight in which story characteristics should or should not be included in a brand story. For that reason, this study strives to be the beginning of a checklist that contributes to the practical field of communication by

serving as a tool that can be used by communication professionals when writing content for storytelling. Furthermore, this study will add value to the domain of communication sciences and specifically storytelling, by investigating the role of story content and characteristics and their influence on the target audience.

The results of storytelling can include important benefits for organisations such as inspiring, motivating and persuading employees and consumers (Gill, 2014). Besides, storytelling is able to build a positive reputation (Mikáčováa & Gavlakováa, 2014). With this knowledge, this study will focus on the following main research question:

In what way do story characteristics influence the consumer attitude, purchase intention and reputation of a fashion brand?

It has been chosen to use storytelling within the frame of brand websites, as this is one of the main channels used to share a brand's core information and content. Besides, this channel is in full control of the brand, meaning that third parties as for example consumers cannot influence this information. In short, in this research storytelling can be seen as an internal formulated story for external use.

The following chapter will describe the constructs of branding and storytelling to gain more insight in the field of this research, followed by consumer attitude, purchase intention and consumer-based reputation which are concepts that are widely researched and closely related to each other. A positive attitude, increased purchase intention (Chiu, Hsieh & Kuo, 2012) and a positive reputation (Gill, 2014) are all known to be outcomes of effective storytelling. This research aims to identify which story characteristics of a brand story can influence these concepts. Besides, this research will only focus on the fashion industry. Furthermore, this chapter will gain insight in the relevant characteristics of a brand story as described by various researchers. The preliminary research outlined in chapter three will explore the story characteristics that are currently used within the fashion industry. The results of the preliminary research will lead to a set of possibly interesting characteristics that will be investigated in the main experiment. The used method, the research design and the research instrument will be presented in full in chapter four. The research design of the main experiment is in the form of a 2 (history versus no history) x 2 (vivid versus not-vivid) mixed analysis that creates four different fictive fashion brand stories. The stories are followed by an online questionnaire in which each participant answers questions based on one of the four stories. In chapter five the information gained by the main experiment will be analysed. This analysis will lead to results of the research. The results will then be reflected on and future steps will be discussed. Finally, recommendations will be given for organisations and brands within the fashion industry.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 BRANDING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

A brand stands for many aspects. It is not just a label or a tag line, it describes the mission and vision, values and goals of (a part of) an organisation. A brand distinct itself through a name, term, design, symbol or other features or combinations of these elements (Mikáčováa & Gavlakováa, 2014). The use of these elements to differentiate goods or services from its competitors is described as branding (American Marketing Association). Mikáčováa and Gavlakováa (2014) further state that it includes products, services, programs, culture and reputation. This makes branding an instrument that promotes everything concerned with the brand, like brand awareness, quality and satisfaction. McKelvey (2015) adds that brand differentiation comes from values like warmth, reliability and other human personality traits that can be used when building a brand.

Branding and communication techniques are a familiar phenomenon in the fashion industry. As other organisations, fashion brands have several resources and channels to communicate with their target groups (McKelvey, 2015). One can think of offline media like brochures, catalogues, magazines and newspapers or online media as for example the corporate website, social media and the blogosphere, whether it's paid, owned or earned media. Despite the overload of different types of media channels, not all are fully controllable by the brand itself and information is added constantly. To be able to keep the message to consumers close to the brand's activities and identity, storytelling can be used through own, controllable channels.

Advertising and marketing are the well-known bigger departments but the field of public relations is becoming increasingly important in brand related activities. Through publicity, public relations is able to build brand awareness and affect a brand's reputation by creating value. By creating beneficial and pleasant interaction with consumers, a brand is likely to have a more favourable brand attitude (Young Chung, Lee & Heath, 2013). The Public Relations Society of America describes public relations as "*a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their public*". Thus it can be said that the main goal of the Public Relations department is to create beneficial relationships. Tasks of the public relations department in the fashion industry involve creating press releases combined with styled images to sell the product to the right target group. By cause of using magazines, newspapers and online channels, it is very important to have strong relationships with press and other media. Besides, public relations delivers the brand's message by organising launches, parties and events. This way of promoting relies strongly on 'word of mouth' as consumers spread the word through for instance social media channels (McKelvey, 2015). To tell the right brand story, organisations have to create a story around their brand that is interesting enough to be shared. That is when storytelling comes in.

2.2 STORYTELLING

Storytelling can be described as "*the process of developing and delivering an organisation's message by using narration about people, the organisation, the past, visions for the future, social bonding and work itself in order to create a new point-of-view or reinforces an opinion or behaviour*" (Gill, 2014 p. 3). This process of storytelling combines the branding values of advertising and the credibility of Public Relations (Mikáčováa & Gavlakováa, 2014). Pulizzi (2012), expert in the field of storytelling addresses the fact that storytelling is becoming a more important aspect for organisations and explains that storytelling engages with all stakeholders and improves reputation both internally and externally. It creates and strengthens connections through relationships and trust (Mikáčováa & Gavlakováa, 2014) creating awareness, meaning and empathy and provides more information to engage in the world of the brand (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013). Storytelling can be seen as a small part of branding that can be used both internally and externally.

Storytelling is successfully used since the beginning of mankind already but it is not just the message that makes storytelling a successful strategy. Schank (1999, as quoted by Woodside, 2010) explains that storytelling works, because the "human memory is story-based". It is easier for the mind to understand information in the form of a story as one can identify with some parts of a story. Besides, people tend to retrieve pleasure from repeating and reliving stories (Megehee & Spake, 2012). This way, storytelling can overcome consumer unwillingness to adopt and process information about a brand. Appealing stories lead to information processing, as the consumer is aroused (Fenger, Aschemann-Witzel, Hansen & Grunert, 2015). Gilliam and Flaherty (2015) found out that the triggers to tell a story are to inform, persuade and bond consumers. These findings agree with the Narrative Transportation Theory (Gerrig, 1993 as quoted by Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). The theory proposes that when hearing a story, people's attitudes and intentions can change because the receiver may feel empathy for the story character or plot. Hence, stories can either positively or negatively influence the consumer's attitude. Using stories leads to lower negative response and greater affective response (Escalas, 2007 as quoted by Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015), making the use of stories an interesting strategy to increase consumer attitude and reputation for example. These brand stories provide information to discuss among consumers, enabling them to create their own brand-related experiences and spread a positive reputation of the brand. The greater number of these stories is found on corporate websites (Janssen et al., 2012) and therefore controlled by the brand itself.

2.3 CONSUMER ATTITUDE & PURCHASE INTENTION

Consumer attitude and purchase intention are two widely researched topics that ought to be closely related. According to Spears and Singh (2004) attitude towards the brand and purchase intention are proven to be separate but correlated dimensions. As this research focuses solely on the external use of brand stories, consumer attitude is the key element of success. Telling the right brand story can lead to increased positive consumer attitude and purchase intention. Young Chung et al. (2013) suppose that attitude can be seen as the overall degree of favourability formed by (multiple) experiences with a brand. This is in line with Chang and Chieng, (2006) and Riefler (2012) as consumer attitude towards the brand (or consumer-brand attitude) is an overall evaluation of the consumer's perspective of a brand which can either be positive or negative. Characteristics of attitude include dimensions as good-bad, harmful-beneficial, pleasant-unpleasant and likable-dislikeable (Ajzen, 2001; Riefler, 2012). This makes consumer-brand attitude a set of evaluations or beliefs of experiences that can also influence purchase behaviour (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009).

A favourable attitude can result in value added behaviour as for example repeat purchases or positive word of mouth recommendations. This influence is known to be the theory of planned behaviour as presented by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980, quoted by Riefler, 2012), which states that attitudes are formed upon beliefs which are derived from processing attributes. These influencers of attitude are product attributes (a product's physical composition or service requirements), non-product attributes (factors not directly affecting the product's performance, such as price, feelings, experiences and brand character) and relationship attributes (consumer-brand interaction) (Young Chung et al., 2013). A brand story is an important non-product attribute that can influence the overall brand attitude and is key to this research. The theory of planned behaviour (or belief-attitude-behaviour model) further explains that attitude is a mediator between beliefs and behavioural intentions (Riefler, 2012, quoting Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Also Spears and Singh (2004) have proven that the consumer attitude towards the ad (or in this research, the story) has influence on the consumer attitude towards the brand as well as on the purchase intention. Furthermore, Chiu et al. (2012) successfully proved that storytelling has positive correlations with brand attitude and purchase intention. They tested that certain story characteristics (authenticity, conciseness, reversal and humour) influence the brand attitude and the purchase intention. Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg (2010) underline that purchasing is an on-going process and does no longer only include the transaction of money for a product or service. The purchase experience can be explained as when a consumer interacts with a store's physical environment, its personnel and its policies (Hui & Bateson 1991; Kerin, Jain & Howard 2002 as quoted by Brakus et al., 2009). This includes the store's design, appearance and the commitment of the salespersons. Accordingly, the complete package of a brand and all its product, non-product and relationship attributes influence the eventual purchase intention of consumers.

2.4 REPUTATION

As storytelling has the potential to persuade, motivate and inspire employees, investors and above all, consumers (Gill, 2014) it can be a useful tool to create a positive consumer reputation. In general, reputation can be described as a collective perception of a brand and is an intangible asset that contributes to a competitive advantage and provides valued outcomes to a group of stakeholders (Gill, 2014). Huang-Horowitz (2015) adds to this description that organizational reputation is a stakeholders' evaluation of a story that reveals information about the organization's nature that gets repeated or circulated. This story contains key characteristics of a brand and is shared to create maximal (non-)economic advantages (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). Overall, reputation is based on perceptions coming from outside of the brand or organisation and can be seen as a form of feedback from customers and other stakeholders about the credibility of the identity of the brand. A good reputation is difficult for competitors to replicate and consequently, building a strong and solid reputation takes time. Consumer-based reputation is viewed as an evaluation by the consumer that is based on interaction, activities or received information (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). Graham and Bansal (2007) add to this that consumers summarize information about brands as a reputation judgement that can influence their purchase intentions.

Walsh and Beatty (2007) designed the consumer-based reputation (CBR) scale and identified that consumer-based reputation is built upon five constructs: Consumer Orientation, Good Employer, Reliable and Financially Strong Company, Product and Service Quality and Social and Environmental Responsibility. This scale is explained as a multi-dimensional attitude. As CBR is conceptualized as an attitude that is based on interaction (Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson & Beatty, 2009), it can thus be influenced by storytelling. The original scale consists of 28 items whereas the short scale only has 15. Both scales have equally good dimensional properties (Walsh, Beatty & Shiu, 2009). The short scale is designed specifically as many practitioners found the original scale very useful, yet too long. The consumer-based reputation scale can be used to determine overall CBR as well as a specific performance of each dimension. The advantage of scoring the separate dimensions is that a brand can see which particular construct of reputation needs more improvement and which areas should be targeted using marketing or public relations.

A positive reputation enhances the change of performing well in the future (Walsh et al., 2009). Experts agree that advantages of a good reputation are for example a more positive financial performance, increased consumer loyalty and a positive word-of-mouth behaviour (Walsh et al., 2009). Other advantages may include cost reduction, competitive advantage, and repetitive purchases.

2.5 STORY CONTENT

Now we know that storytelling can positively influence consumer attitude and purchase intention and it contributes to a more favourable reputation. Storytelling is therefore of use for branding and reputation building (Chiu et al., 2012; Janssen et al., 2012). Many beneficial effects are possible for the brand when engaging in storytelling but the story should contain the right information to be of positive influence. This subchapter will give more insight in which characteristics are a necessity for brand stories to positively influence consumer attitude, purchase intention and consumer-based reputation.

Janssen et al. (2012) give a sum-up of the content that a corporate or brand story mainly contains. They state that such a story is most often presented in around 400 to 600 words, is written in a chronological order describing the past, present and future of the organisation and is congruent with the findings of Gill (2014). They further note that most stories (62,2%) are written in a third person perspective and are often supported with metaphors (80%) and illustrations (82,2%). Metaphors can enhance the persuasive effect of an advertisement, making it more memorable and creates positive attitudes towards the brand (Janssen et al., 2012). Looking at the structure of a story, Janssen et al. (2012) indicate a clear structure of a title, headings and paragraphs is used. Furthermore, they describe the importance of the uniqueness of the identity for a brand or an organisation, but also the similarity of the textual characteristics is of importance to distinguish corporate stories from other stories. These findings enable a framework which most corporate stories fit in, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 | Corporate Story Characteristics by Janssen et al. (2012).

Category	Characteristics
Style Characteristics	Positive adjectives
	Metaphors
	Third person narrative
	No direct form of address
Structure Characteristics	Headings
	Titles
	Paragraphs
Content Characteristics	Main theme: Identity story
	Mentioning core activities
	Use examples
	Mentioning founders
	Presenting figures
Genre	General approach
Lay-out Characteristics	Photograph
	Black and white text
	Background colour compatible with CVI

Besides the story characteristics of Janssen et al. (2012), other researchers have found additional story characteristics that may be of use to create more influential brand stories. For example, Pulizzi (2012; 2013) notes the importance of the sort of information that is shared. The information should be helpful and meaningful for consumers to better understand brands, organisations and products. Besides, it should be entertaining, otherwise consumers lack interest and are unwilling to adopt and use the information (Chiu et al., 2012; Pulizzi, 2012; Pulizzi 2013). Furthermore, Pulizzi (2013) explains that the shared content should be entertaining but helpful which makes it relevant and valuable. To make it lasting, storytelling should be on going in contrast to a one time advertising campaign. With repeating and enhancing the story, it will stay longer in the minds of the consumer. Gill (2014) describes the fundamentals to design effective corporate stories and states that an important base is the objective for the story and the ability for the target audience to comprehend the meaning.

Chiu et al. (2012) found out that when looking at the content of stories, four factors are very useful when engaging consumers through brand stories: authenticity, conciseness, reversal and humour. They explain that authenticity is based on the believability and the reality of the story. Conciseness is of importance because the story should be easy to keep in mind. There is neither time nor patience to evaluate detailed stories. Reversal reflects a plot twist or an unexpected action in a story. When readers find a problem solving capability they understand the brand or product benefits and have a more positive attitude. Finally, humour in a story can increase brand likability and may increase the transfer of positive affect. On products like fashion clothing, Chiu et al. (2012) conclude that all four, but primarily conciseness and humour are of main importance in brand stories for products and organisations such as clothing and fashion brands.

While humour is subjective and content cannot have a certainty of being 100% humorous, humour makes narratives memorable and as a result more effective than non-humorous stories. Eisend (2009), describes that the positive effect of humour has a cognitive explanation. Humour brings positive attention ability towards a brand and it distracts from consumers generating counter arguments. Besides, an affective explanation is that humour creates an overall feeling of happiness that influences the brand's overall evaluation.

Likewise, experts in the field of evidence types in writing confirm that entertainment is an important feature in storytelling. One of the evidence types, anecdotal evidence, consists of a specific instance or examples in a narrative form and is the form of evidence that is best applicable in brand stories (Hornikx, 2005). Additionally, Braverman (2008) further elaborates that vividness, ease of reading and enjoyment of the text influences the persuasiveness, making this form of anecdotal evidence more persuasive as other types of evidence, which use for example a

numerical summary to enhance the information. The findings of Braveman (2008), Eisend (2009), Chiu et al. (2012) and Pulizzi (2013) correspond in such a way that the level of vividness or entertainment of a brand story cannot be left out when investigating storytelling characteristics. According to Sherer and Rogers (1984, quoting Nesbett & Ross, 1980), vivid texts are ought to have more impact on attitudes than not-vivid texts. They describe three dimensions of vividness: emotional interest, concreteness and proximity. Hoeken (2009) agrees with these dimensions and elaborates that emotional interest is caused by an event. Concreteness concerns the available detailed information about persons, acts and situations. The more details, the easier to empathize. Proximity describes how close the events in the story are to the reader. Again, the closer, the easier to empathize. Nesbett and Ross (1980) acknowledge that all three dimensions may have an independent contribution to the greater impact of vivid information. Both Sherer and Rogers (1984) and Hoeken (2009) agree on the fact that emotional information is the most important factor of vivid texts.

Gill (2014) remarks the importance of describing the people in and past of the organisation in the description of storytelling. The people in the organisation may be comparable to the founders of the organisation by Janssen et al. (2012). As the Narrative Transportation Theory (Gerrig, 1993 as quoted by Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015) explains, consumer attitudes and intentions can be changed because the receiver feels empathy for the character or plot. Hence, the use of a central character is of relevance for the recognisability and influence of a story. Hoeken (2009) explains that a so-called 'round character' is a character that we learn more about besides its name. It is expected that this extra information is valuable and of importance for creating sympathy for the character. Whenever a character is only mentioned by its name, it is called a 'flat character'. Mora and Livat (2013) add to this that stories need a central character with which consumer can identify and create a long-term relationship or bond with. Gensler et al. (2013) agree to this by stating that stories contain characters that create a plot, a climax and an outcome which help remembering the story of the brand. A character in brand storytelling could be the mentioning of the founders to be in accordance with Janssen et al. (2012).

2.6 CONCLUSION & PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

The theoretical framework has discussed several different characteristics of storytelling and the content of these stories. Storytelling is a PR strategy that has revealed to have a significant positive influence both internally and externally. This research will lay the focus on external use of storytelling only: the consumer.

Brand stories are able to influence the consumer attitude and change behavioural intentions like the purchase intention, and brand reputation in the mind of the consumers and other stakeholders (Huang-Horowitz, 2015). The influence depends

on several story characteristics. Literature describes that entertaining, relevant and valuable information should be communicated in a form of a story. A set of characteristics that should come back in the story contain a clear structure in the text, mentioning the core activities and a central character all packed in a main theme: the identity. All these elements should be written in a narrative form that should be easy to read and reproduce.

Nonetheless these characteristics are very general and broad and it is not clear which characteristics are currently being used or not within the fashion industry. To be able to find out whether these corporate story characteristics of Janssen et al. (2012) and the findings of Chiu et al. (2012), Hoeken (2009) and Pullizi (2012, 2013) among others are also relevant for the fashion industry, a preliminary research will be carried out. Within this research 20 brand stories of international fashion brands will be tested in a content analysis. The research question for the preliminary research is defined as:

*Which important story characteristics
are currently (not) being used in the fashion industry?*

The outcome of this analysis will be the fundament of the main research experiment. It is expected to find industry-specific results that help to better understand what characteristics are currently used or not used in fashion brand stories. Notable findings will be used in the main experiment of this research.

3 PRELIMINARY RESEARCH: CONTENT ANALYSIS

The goal of this content analysis is to find out which characteristics are currently being used or not being used within the fashion industry. This chapter will describe the method used to analyse the corporate stories and will draw a conclusion, creating hypotheses that will be the fundament of the main research experiment.

3.1 METHOD

To be able to find out whether the corporate story characteristics of Janssen et al. (2012) are also relevant and used in the fashion branch, a preliminary research has been carried out. This study in the form of a qualitative content analysis, screens a number of brand stories of fashion brands found on their corporate websites, mainly under the heading of 'about us' or 'brand'. A total of 20 fashion brands have been chosen to analyse. These national and international brands are all familiar brands with shops and stores in the Dutch city landscape. While some brands clearly represent high street fashion, other brands are more luxurious though this has no further influence in the research. An overview of the brands and their websites can be found in Appendix A.

3.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The corporate stories were tested against the textual characteristics for corporate stories of Janssen et al. (2012), as presented in chapter 2.5. Additions have been made based on the literature. Chiu et al. (2012) describe the importance of conciseness in a brand story for product types like fashion clothing. Sherer and Rogers (1984) and Hoeken (2009) focus on the three dimensions of vividness of a brand story in order to have a greater impact. These additions are found to be of value for this particular research as it is very branch specific and are therefore added to the story characteristics of Janssen et al. (2012). Furthermore, Janssen et al. (2012) describe that the bigger part of all stories are between 200 and 600 words, which is a characteristic that is also added. These additions are marked with a *. To enhance the reliability of the research and to carry out an objective content analysis a second coder has done 20% of the research, meaning the person did the complete content analysis of four texts. As a result, 92% of the findings corresponded.

3.3 MAIN FINDINGS

The content analysis indicates some interesting results (Table 2). Notable is the fact that from the 20 chosen brands, there are a lot of similarities to be found in their corporate stories despite the brands having completely different brand values and content.

Style wise, all brands use positive adjectives, the third person narrative and have no direct form of address. Metaphors on the other hand, are used by only two (10%) brands. Clearly, this indicates a sector difference compared to Janssen et al. (2012) where they found 80% of the corporate stories in the industrial and consumer good sectors include metaphors.

When looking at the category of structure characteristics, all brands use headings, titles and paragraphs, which isn't remarkable as it eases reading. Additionally, 75% of the stories are between 200 and 600 words, which is relevant, as stories should be able to reproduce.

Important is the content of the stories. All corporate brand stories can be classified as identity stories, as all stories focussed on the identity of the brand or organisation and the story the brand wants to tell. All brands focus on their core activities, indicating what makes the brand specialized and unique. To support and clarify these statements, examples (75%) and figures (75%) are used. Figures often point at the number of stores, years of operating and the number of employees. Furthermore, founders of the brand are mentioned in 60% of the corporate stories, to enhance the story and underline the corporate's right to exist, as for example Michael Kors who is the founder of his eponymous fashion brand. More background information about him being the founder of the brand is described in the brand story.

Table 2 | Preliminary Research Results   *Characteristics added based on literature

Category	Characteristics	Total	Total %
Style Characteristics	Positive adjectives	20	100%
	Metaphors	2	10%
	Third person narrative	20	100%
	No direct form of address	20	100%
Structure Characteristics	Headings	20	100%
	Titles	20	100%
	Paragraphs	20	100%
	Number of words (200-600)*	15	75%
Content Characteristics	Main theme: Identity story	20	100%
	Mentioning core activities	20	100%
	Use examples	15	75%
	Mentioning founders	12	60%
	Presenting figures	15	75%
	Conciseness*	12	60%
	Vividness*	6	30%
Genre	General approach	20	100%
Lay-out Characteristics	Photograph	16	80%
	Black and white text	13	65%
	Background colour compatible CVI	20	100%

Though vividness is defined by the literature as a very important aspect of a story to increase brand likeability and the willingness to adopt the information, only 30% of the stories are written vividly. Combined with the conciseness of a corporate story, it means it can be read easily and is written in an entertaining way.

A general approach was used to write the corporate stories, meaning the stories are not written according to the rules of a specific genre.

Lastly, the layout characteristics. Pictures and photographs are often used to illustrate the information. Black and white text is most clear and easy to read. Though some brands choose for grey, no other colours where chosen for the text. The background colour is always consistent with the corporate visual identity.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Brand stories are used to describe the company or brand. A clear 100% of the brands describe their core activities in their brand story to share their unique identity. Describing core activities can partly be done by for example describing the history of a brand and mentioning the founders that are facts that differentiate one brand from another.

The mentioning of the founders can be seen as an aspect that makes a company recognizable. Stories need a central character and the founders could perform this role. However, not all brands include this characteristic. The use or non-use of describing the history of the company and mentioning the founders seems to be a divider between the brands as 60% of the brands does mention history and so, 40% does not. Integrating the history and the company's founders is what makes the brand unique and might be of importance to enable customers to engage with a brand and create a positive consumer attitude towards the brand. As storytelling is used to provide information to discuss among consumers, enabling them to create their own brand-related experiences, mentioning the history and founders of a company or brand might be that piece of valuable information that consumers are looking for when reading about a brand.

Mentioning the founders of a brand is anticipated to have a positive influence, based on the knowledge that sharing relevant and valuable information is most effective. Besides, Gill (2014) states the importance of mentioning the history among others in the definition of storytelling. Moreover, a story needs a central character or plot to evolve around. Because only mentioning the names of the founders is ought to be insufficient to identify with, besides it being too little to manipulate, this story element will be extended by elaborating on the history of the founders and the company. As 60% brands do and 40% brands don't mention this, it might be valuable to find out whether this information is important in brand stories and if it contributes to a more successful brand story.

This conclusion leads to the first selection of hypotheses that can be drawn from the preliminary research that will be tested against four selected dependent variables of the theoretical framework:

The presence of the history and founders in a brand story positively influences:

H1 a: *the consumer attitude towards the story content.*

H1 b: *the consumer attitude towards the brand.*

H1 c: *the consumer's purchase intention.*

H1 d: *the consumer-based reputation of the brand.*

As previous research (Chiu et al., 2012; Pulizzi, 2012; Pulizzi 2013) has pointed out, the use of vividness has a positive influence on the consumer attitude and behaviour. Hence it can be expected that the result of this research experiment is similar. Despite the literature describing the importance of the use of vividness in stories, only 30% of the researched brands wrote their stories vividly. Most stories describe the brands achievements using enumerations and numbers to construct their statements, making the stories not-vivid. These findings lead to the second selection of hypotheses:

The presence of vividness in a brand story positively influences:

H2 a: *the consumer attitude towards the story content.*

H2 b: *the consumer attitude towards the brand.*

H2 c: *the consumer's purchase intention.*

H2 d: *the consumer-based reputation of the brand.*

Based on the findings of the literature, it is expected that both the use of vividness in the story and mentioning the history and founders of the organisation being the central character and plot of the story, will have a positive effect on the four selected dependent variables. This results in the hypothesis being stated positively.

4 METHOD

To find out whether the characteristics of vividness and history and founders influence the consumer's attitude, purchase intention and reputation an experiment has been performed. This chapter will give insight in the research approach, the executed pre-test, the research design and the instruments.

4.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

A preliminary research in the form of a qualitative content analysis was conducted to find out what specific textual characteristics are used within the fashion branch. The outcome suggested two characteristics that have been tested. Subsequently, a quantitative research in the form of an experiment has followed, which made use of a questionnaire answered by consumers. This questionnaire included a corporate story about a fictive clothing company. The results of this research indicate if the used characteristics have a causal relationship with the customer attitude towards the content of the story, the brand attitude, the purchase intention and the consumer reputation. Based on the findings, a branch specific advice can be given.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is an experiment based on the content analysis of the preliminary research. The model that is used during this research can be found in Figure 1.
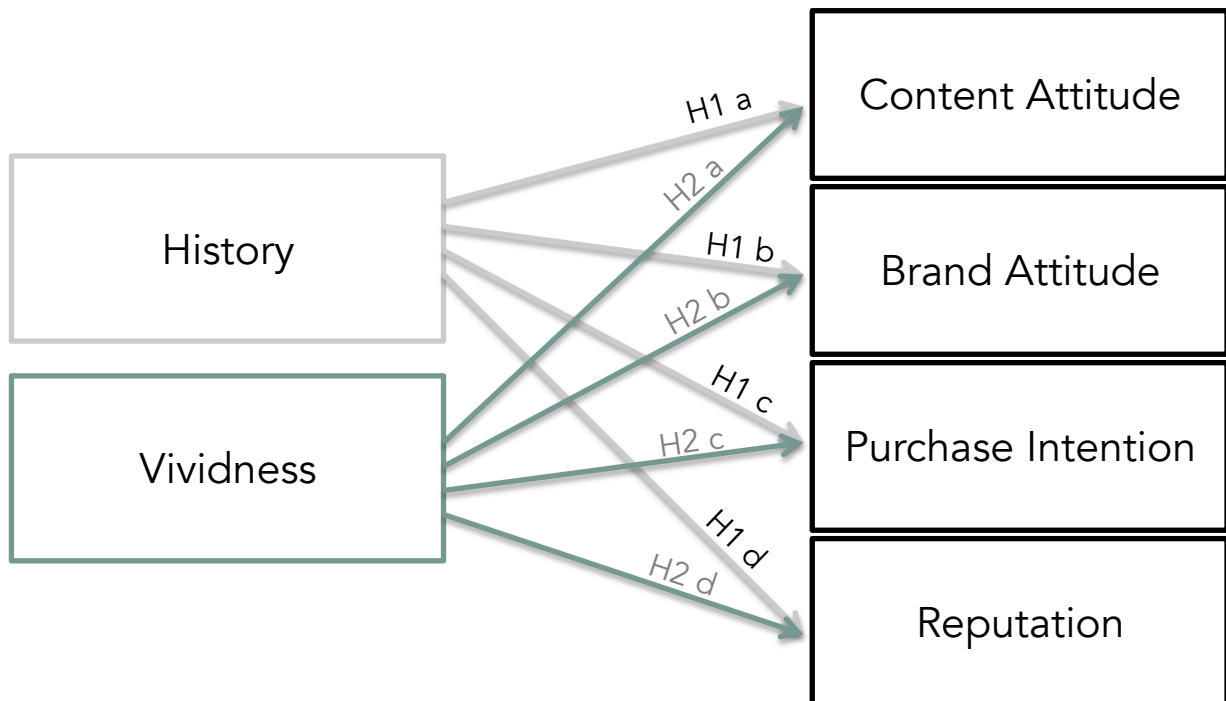

Figure 1 I Research model

The main experiment was in the form of a 2 (history versus no history) x 2 (vivid versus not-vivid) design that resulted in four different brand stories. Participants were only exposed to one condition. To be able to do a relevant research on the impact of storytelling on the four selected dependent variables a certain number of participants is required. The number of participants per condition should be equally distributed around 25%.

The online questionnaire was spread using the researcher's network and the Twente University's SONA system, a respondent pool. Participants were selected randomly, with the one condition that they need to be over 18 years old. A fictive brand is used in the stories to make sure had no image or reputation about the brand that could cause prejudices other than the given story. This procedure lead to a more secure outcome as the results depended completely on the effects of the tested characteristics in the stories.

4.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The data was collected using an online questionnaire. This research instrument is able to gather specific information from a large number of respondents in a relatively short space of time and has the advantage of measuring attitudes and intentions. Besides, as all questions were multiple choice as Likert scales and semantic differential scales were used, which reduces a bias. Participants were instructed in advance that the questionnaire would take about 5 minutes of their time and would be completely anonymous. As the target audience is mainly Dutch, the questionnaire was Dutch as well.

The questionnaire itself consisted of five major sections. At first, the attitude towards the content of the text was measured based on the 'Attitude toward the Ad' scales of Bruner (1998). To measure the content attitude, five statements were posed: "I find the story": bad/good, pleasant/unpleasant, not interesting/interesting, not appealing/appealing and unbelievable/believable. The second section measured the brand attitude. The attitude towards the brand was measured with the statement: "I find the brand Arctic Republic:" good/bad, not appealing/appealing, not interesting/interesting, and likable/dislikeable. Both these question groups were measured with a five-point semantic differential scale using bipolar adjectives. The third part examined the purchase intention. These questions were derived from the questionnaire of Chiu et al. (2012). The questions measuring the purchase intention and reputation were measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Three statements measured the purchase intention. "If I would need clothing:" "There is a possibility that I choose for Arctic Republic", "I would consider buying clothes from Arctic Republic" and "I would never choose for clothing of Arctic Republic". Fourth, questions regarding the reputation of the brand were posed. The 15 questions concerning reputation were completely derived from the Consumer Based Corporate Reputation construct of Walsh, Beatty and Shiu

(2009). This construct consists of five factors: Customer Orientation, Good Employer, Reliably and Financially Strong Company, Product and Service Quality and Social and Environmental Responsibility each with 3 questions. Questions range from "This company is a strong and reliable company" to "This company tends to outperform competitors". The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. The final section contains two manipulation checks and several demographic questions.

Before participants reached the questions, they were requested to read a short brand story. The story was different, depending on which of the four conditions the participant was clustered in but the message of the story was more or less the same. To manipulate the brand stories and create the four different conditions, the elements of history and vividness were explicitly added or left out. To be able to dedicate the results to the effects of the story content and characteristics, it is of importance to keep the four different stories as similar as possible. This includes the length of the stories and the intelligibility. As Janssen et al. (2012) indicate, the stories should be between 200 to 600 words. All stories are between 264 and 333 words, meaning there is a deviation of 26% (69 words). Sherer and Rogers (1984) describe that vividness is manipulated by its three dimensions: emotional interest, concreteness and proximity. The vivid stories contain concrete, to the point information about the founders and their backgrounds (emotional interest) and special programs in Arnhem, the Netherlands (proximity and concreteness), which is close to home for the participants. The not-vivid story does not deliver this information. The history was manipulated by mentioning the history of the brand, the years of operating, the start-up of the different clothing lines and the lifelong mission. The four stories can be found in Appendix B.

A reliability analysis of the chosen constructs indicates that all four of the dependent variables are reliable (see Table 3). Besides, the five constructs of reputation were tested on their reliability separately as well.

Table 3 | Reliability Analysis

Dependent Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Content Attitude	$\alpha = 0,86$	5
Brand Attitude	$\alpha = 0,88$	4
Purchase Intention	$\alpha = 0,78$	3
Reputation	$\alpha = 0,89$	15
- Customer Orientation	$\alpha = 0,84$	3
- Good Employer	$\alpha = 0,84$	3
- Reliable & Financially Strong Company	$\alpha = 0,81$	3
- Product & Service Quality	$\alpha = 0,70$	3
- Social & Environmental Responsibility	$\alpha = 0,63$	3

All materials were pre-tested. Focussing on the intelligibility of the materials, the questionnaire and the four stories were tested by four participants. Moreover, it gathered insights in the amount of time spend to fill in the questionnaire and the logical order of questionnaire. One question appeared to have missing answers. These were added to complete the questionnaire. No further changes were made.

4.4 RESPONDENTS

A total of 187 respondents started the online questionnaire of which 46 questionnaires were excluded from this research due to incomplete data. Hence, the final sample of 141 participants was used to derive the data from whereof 46 men and 95 women. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The distribution is not completely equal, but all four conditions have an acceptable amount of participants. Table 4 indicates among other facts the amount of participants per condition group. All respondents were between 18 and 64 years old. The majority of the respondents (74,5%) has followed higher education and spends between €0 and €100 per month on clothing (83,7%).

Table 4 I Respondents

			Stories							
	Total		History & Vivid		No History & Vivid		History & Not Vivid		No History & Not Vivid	
Gender										
Men	46	32,6%	14	45,2%	8	21,6%	13	36,1%	11	29,7%
Women	95	67,4%	17	54,8%	29	78,4%	23	63,9%	26	70,3%
Total	**141**	100%	**31**	100%	**37**	100%	**36**	100%	**37**	100%
Age										
18-24	96	68%	21	67,7%	26	70,3%	23	63,9%	26	70,3%
25-34	29	20,6%	8	25,8%	5	13,5%	8	22,2%	8	21,6%
35-44	4	2,8%	0	-	2	5,4%	1	2,8%	1	2,7%
45-64	12	8,5%	2	6,5%	4	10,8%	4	11,1%	2	5,4%
Highest or current education										
Lower educ.	9	6,4%	2	6,5%	3	8,1%	1	2,8%	3	8,1%
MBO	27	19,2%	7	22,6%	5	13,5%	7	19,4%	8	21,6%
HBO	43	30,5%	5	16,1%	11	29,7%	11	30,6%	16	43,2%
WO or higher	62	44%	17	54,8%	18	48,6%	17	47,2%	10	27,0%
Amount of euro's spent on clothing per month										
€0 - €50	63	44,7%	12	38,7%	16	43,2%	18	50,0%	17	45,9%
€50 - €100	55	39%	16	51,6%	15	40,5%	13	36,1%	11	29,7%
€100 - €150	19	13,5%	2	6,5%	6	16,2%	4	11,1%	7	18,9%
€150 or more	4	2,9%	1	3,2%	0	-	1	2,8%	2	5,4%

5 RESULTS

5.1 MANIPULATION CHECK: HISTORY & VIVIDNESS

To find out whether the respondents have received the most important information about the brand, two questions were asked. Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations of the two manipulation checks.

Table 5 | Manipulation checks

I know more about the history						
	History		No History		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Vivid	3,81	,91	3,81	,91	3,81	,90
Not Vivid	3,89	,85	3,38	1,11	3,63	1,02
Total	3,85	,88	3,59	1,03	3,72	,97

The story is written vividly						
	History		No History		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Vivid	3,39	1,02	3,78	1,03	3,60	1,04
Not Vivid	3,28	1,09	3,41	1,26	3,34	1,17
Total	3,33	1,05	3,59	1,16	3,47	1,11

A two way ANOVA was conducted to examine the manipulation of history. The question whether one knows more about the history of the brand was asked to find out if the two conditions (history versus no history) would differ. No significant effect was found on history [$F_{(1, 137)}$=2,246 p=0,12] nor on vividness [$F_{(1, 137)}$=1,074 p=0,28]. No interaction effect was found [$F_{(1, 137)}$=2,324 p=0,11]

Likewise, a two way ANOVA was conducted to examine the manipulation of vividness. The question concerning vividness included whether the respondent thought the story was written vividly. No significant effect was found on vividness [$F_{(1, 137)}$=2,085 p=0,19] nor on history [$F_{(1, 137)}$=2,410 p=0,16]. No interaction effect was found [$F_{(1, 137)}$=0,635 p=0,47].

In short, both manipulation checks were not significant, indicating the manipulations have not have been strong enough or the manipulation questions were not asked right. The questions were asked at the end of the questionnaire, after the 15 questions of reputation. This could have been of influence as the interest and focus of the respondents decreases. Moreover, the question concerning vividness might be too ambiguous or ambivalent, as the term vividness might not mean the same for

everyone or it may not have been clear what this question is about within this context. According to the literature all three dimensions of vividness can have an independent contribution to the impact of vividness in stories. Nevertheless, the researcher has chosen not to measure the three dimensions separately as it was not of direct significance for the research. Only the overall level of vividness is measured. By measuring the three dimensions independently the questions would have been less ambiguous. When looking at the standard deviations of this question it is also visible that the question regarding vividness is unclear. They the high standard deviations indicate an inconsistency in answers. To find out if the manipulations in the stories were strong enough to show a significant difference, the results give more insight.

5.2 CONTENT ATTITUDE

The overall attitude of the respondents in relation to the content is fairly positive (M=3,63, SD=0,80) with answers given from 1 to 5 on a five-point semantic differential scale using bipolar adjectives. The hypotheses concerned with content attitude are the following:

H1 a: *The presence of the history and founders in a brand story positively influences the consumer attitude towards the story content.*

H2 a: *The presence of vividness in a brand story positively influences the consumer attitude towards the story content.*

A Factorial ANOVA, or two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of the four conditions on the dependent variable, the attitude towards the content. Though the effect for history has a clear tendency towards significance, no significant main effect was found in neither history [F(1, 137)=3,835, p=0,05] nor vividness [F(1, 137)=1,311, p=0,25]. The interaction effect was not significant either [F(1, 137)=0,144, p=0,71]. For these reasons, H1 a and H2 a must be rejected.

Table 6 shows the mean and standard deviation of the dependent variable.

Table 6 | Attitude towards the Content

	History		No History		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Vivid	3,59	,67	3,81	,79	3,71	,74
Not Vivid	3,39	,95	3,70	,73	3,55	,85
Total	3,48	,83	3,75	,76	3,63	,80

5.3 BRAND ATTITUDE

The overall consumer attitude towards the brand is fairly positive (M=3,66, SD=0,75) with answers given from 1 to 5 on a five-point semantic differential scale using bipolar adjectives. The hypotheses concerned with brand attitude are the following:

H1 b: *The presence of the history and founders in a brand story positively influences the consumer attitude towards the brand.*

H2 b: *The presence of vividness in a brand story positively influences the consumer attitude towards the brand.*

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of the four conditions on the dependent variable, the attitude towards the brand. A main effect for history [F(1, 137)=7,370, p<0,01] was found in the attitude towards the brand, indicating a significant difference between history and no history. Striking is the fact that despite the main effect on history is significant, the texts without history score higher than the texts with history. Consequently, it must be concluded that history negatively influences the brand attitude and for that reason H1 b must be rejected.

No significant main effect for vividness was found [F(1, 137)=1,331, p=0,25]. We must therefore reject H2 b. The interaction effect was not significant [F(1, 137)=1,884, p=0,17].

Table 7 shows the mean and standard deviation of the dependent variable.

Table 7 | Attitude towards the Brand

	History		No History		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Vivid	3,65	,61	3,81	,79	3,74	,71
Not Vivid	3,33	,79	3,84	,71	3,59	,79
Total	3,48	,72	3,82	,75	3,66	,75

5.4 PURCHASE INTENTION

The purchase intention of the respondents is fairly positive (M=3,66, SD=0,84) with answers given from 1 to 5 on a five-point Likert scale. The hypotheses concerned with the purchase intention are the following:

> **H1 c:** *The presence of the history and founders in a brand story positively influences the consumer's purchase intention.*

> **H2 c:** *The presence of vividness in a brand story positively influences the consumer's purchase intention.*

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of the four conditions on the dependent variable of purchase intention. A main effect for history [F(1,137)=4,929, p=0,03] was found in the purchase intention, indicating a significant difference between history and no history. In consonance with the variable of brand attitude, the texts without history score higher as the texts with history. Consequently, it must be concluded that history negatively influences the purchase intention. For that reason, H1 c must be rejected.

No significant main effect for vividness was found [F(1, 137)=0,033, p=0,86]. We must therefore reject H2 c. The interaction effect was not significant [F(1, 137)<0,001, p=0,99].

Table 8 shows the mean and standard deviation of the dependent variable.

Table 8 | Purchase Intention

	History		No History		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Vivid	3,51	,71	3,82	,93	3,68	,84
Not Vivid	3,48	,89	3,79	,78	3,64	,84
Total	3,49	,80	3,81	,85	3,66	,84

5.5 REPUTATION

The overall consumer-based reputation is fairly positive (M=3,60, SD=0,51) with answers given from 1 to 5 on a five-point Likert scale. The hypotheses concerned with the reputation are the following:

H1 d: *The presence of the history and founders in a brand story positively influences the consumer-based reputation of the brand.*

H2 d: *The presence of vividness in a brand story positively influences the consumer-based reputation of the brand.*

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of the four conditions on the dependent variable reputation. A main effect for history [$F(1, 137)=10,048$, $p<0,01$] was found in the consumer reputation, indicating a significant difference between history and no history. In line with the previous findings, the texts without history score higher as the texts with history. Consequently, it must be concluded that history negatively influences the purchase intention. For that reason, H1 d must be rejected.

No significant main effect for vividness was found [$F(1, 137)=1,078$, $p=0,30$]. We must therefore reject H2 d. The interaction effect was not significant [$F(1, 137)=0,003$, $p=0,96$].

Table 9 shows the mean and standard deviation of the dependent variable.

Table 9 | Consumer-Based Reputation

	History		No History		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Vivid	3,50	,46	3,77	,49	3,65	,49
Not Vivid	3,41	,52	3,68	,53	3,55	,54
Total	3,45	,49	3,72	,51	3,60	,51

5.6 THE FIVE CONSTRUCTS OF CONSUMER-BASED REPUTATION

The consumer-based reputation scale (short scale) by Walsh and Beatty (2009) consists of five different constructs, each represented by three questions. These five factors were taken together in the overall reputation, but can be taken into account separately as well. When taking them separately they display which construct of reputation needs more improvement and which are already rated as sufficient. Table 3 shows the reliability analysis of the five factors.

To have better knowledge of which of the five constructs of reputation are influenced by the independent variable history, five two-way ANOVA's were conducted. As a result, four of the five factors have a main effect: customer orientation [$F(1, 137)=2,789$, $p=0,01$], good employer [$F(1, 137)=2,916$, $p=0,01$], reliable & financially strong company [$F(1, 137)=4,524$, $p=0,01$] and social & environmental responsibility [$F(1, 137)=1,956$, $p=0,03$]. Only product & service quality did not have an effect on history [$F(1, 137)=1,012$, $p=0,11$]. As there reliability analysis in Table 3 showed, the results of the social & environmental responsibility construct could be seen as questionable as the analysis did not score very high.

Table 10 shows the mean and standard deviation of the five constructs of reputation. In addition, no significant main effects were found for either vividness or for the interaction between history and vividness, which is in harmony with the results of the overall reputation. For that reason, the mean and standard deviations of vividness are not displayed.

Table 10 | The five constructs of Consumer-Based Reputation

Constructs of Reputation	History		No History		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Customer Orientation	3,31	,64	3,60	,60	3,5	,63
Good Employer	3,48	,70	3,78	,64	3,64	,68
Reliable & Financially Strong Company	3,53	,75	3,90	,70	3,72	,75
Product & Service Quality	3,57	,63	3,74	,61	3,66	,62
Social & Environmental Responsibility	3,37	6,5	3,60	,65	3,49	,66

6 DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to find out if the two story elements history and vividness would have a positive effect on the consumer's attitude towards the content, towards the brand, the purchase intention and the consumer-based reputation of the brand. This research was oriented towards a specific branch and a specific type of text: fashion brand stories found on the 'about' page of the brand's web site.

First of all, it can be concluded that the results of the main experiment are fairly consistent over the four dependent variables. The results indicate that, the use of history in fashion brand stories has a negative influence on the brand attitude, the purchase intention and the reputation of the brand. As the preliminary research revealed, 60% of the brands do use the history and the founders of the organisation in their story whereas 40% does not. It seems a divider between brands whether they believe it is of importance to mention in their story or not. The results of the main study reveal a clear insight: the use of history, including the mentioning of the founders in a fashion brand story has a negative effect. Though the effect regarding attitude towards the content of the story was just about significant, the effect was significantly negative on the brand attitude, purchase intention and reputation. Based on the outcome of this research it is apparently not the information that consumers are looking for in the brand story of a fashion brand. However, this result is against expectations and the existing literature in the field. Gill (2014) describes that mentioning the people within and past of an organisation adds value to the brand story and reinforces opinion or behaviour. This could for example lead to a more positive attitude towards the brand and a more positive consumer reputation. Mora and Livat (2013) in line with Hoeken (2009) mention a central character that makes the consumer able to bond with or create sympathy for. This would enhance the positive feeling of the consumer creating a more positive consumer attitude towards the story and the brand. Although these studies agree with each other, this experiment showed the contrary if the central character is to be the founders of the brand.

As these findings are going against the expectations based on the literature available, it is worthy of future study. Forthcoming studies may be able to support these results by focussing on similar brand stories in the fashion branch while focussing on the same characteristics. This might be a very specific outcome for the fashion industry or the type of product, thus future studies should have a focus on this branch, as this one study cannot represent a complete industry. Likewise, this research could be expanded to other industries as well so that differences and similarities can be discovered in for example product types and different branches and industries.

When examining the results of the influence of history and founders on reputation, it is interesting to see that despite the fact that reputation takes multiple interactions and time to build, four of the five constructs of the consumer-based reputation scale by Walsh and Beatty (2009) show a significant, though negative effect based only on the brand story. This means that even though consumers have not been in direct contact with the brand, its products or its personnel, consumers can still form a collective perception about other aspects of the brand. Noteworthy is the fact that product and service quality did not have a significant score. This proceeds on the remark that consumers are still likely to have the need to experience a product or service, before they are able to form a positive or negative perception based only on the brand story.

Looking at the manipulation of history, one feature was the central character in the story, which were the founders of the brand. The literature (Hoeken, 2009; Mora & Livat, 2013) describes that stories need a 'round' central character of which more information is available than just its name, to be able to identify with the story and create a more positive attitude. It might be possible that not the founder of the company but the product or brand itself or a user should be the central character in the story. This way, the focus lays on the actual product of which the consumer wants to know more about instead of the persons behind the brand. The consumer then identifies directly with the actual product or user of the product. This is in line with the findings of the reputation construct product and service quality and is a suggestion for future research to consider and evaluate.
Furthermore, mentioning the history and founders could be too much information besides the information about the products. This way the story might not be concise and concrete enough and possibly affect the other elements of vividness as well. Unfortunately the results of this study cannot substantiate this suggestion, as the three dimensions of vividness were not tested separately.

The second variable that has been examined was vividness. Though proven not to be significant on any of the four dependent variables, all vivid stories are rated slightly more vivid as the not-vivid stories when looking at the four dependent variables. This is also visible in the manipulation check but again, this is not supported with significant figures.

Sherer and Rogers (1984, quoting Nesbett & Ross, 1980) describe that vivid texts are likely to have more impact on attitudes compared to not-vivid texts. As attitude has influence on purchase intention (Riefler, 2012 quoting Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) it was expected that vividness also would have an impact on the purchase intention. However, the findings of this research do not endorse this. A reason for this can be the executed manipulations. The following paragraph will elaborate further on the manipulations and the deficiency of the manipulation checks.

6.1 MANIPULATION CHECK

Despite the manipulation checks being both not significant, a significant main effect for history was found in the results. This indicates that the manipulations concerning history were, in fact, strong enough to have influence. The formulation of the manipulation check might have been inaccurate as the stories without history also learn the reader more about 'the history of the brand' as either way information about the brand is given. This may cause confusion and lead to the manipulation not being significant.

Because of the non-significance of the manipulation of vividness on all four dependent variables, it can be concluded that the manipulation of the stories was not strong enough to measure the differences in vividness. In addition, the scores regarding the question of vividness were not particularly high, indicating a propensity to a neutral answer (neither strongly agree, nor strongly disagree).

As the literature describes, vividness consists of three dimensions; emotional interest, concreteness and proximity (Sherer & Rogers, 1984, quoting Nesbett & Ross, 1980). These dimensions were all applied in the stories, adding extra information in the vivid stories compared to the not-vivid stories, keeping in mind that the texts should not differ too much. Furthermore, as with the manipulation check of history, the manipulation check of vividness might have been too ambiguous or ambivalent. As discussed earlier, the term vividness might not mean the same for everyone, as vividness is subjective. Nesbett and Ross (1980, quoted by Sherer & Rogers, 1984) state that all three dimensions can have an independent contribution to the greater impact of vivid information. Though the three dimensions are all used to manipulate the stories, they are not taken into account in this research as three separate variables but are used combined as the overall vividness of the stories. By measuring the three dimensions separately, the formulation of the questions would have been more precise and the overall vividness could be measured after all. This has not been done in this research because it was not intended to measure the three dimensions separately, which is a delimitation set by the researcher.

6.2 LIMITATIONS

Limitations that should be taken into account when considering the results is that because of the experimental setting, this research made use of a fictional clothing brand. Results of an experimental setting can diverge from the results of a real life setting. The use of a fictional brand was a deliberate decision because the respondents do not have a judgement about the brand yet. Consequently, the results are based on the stories only. In future, researches similar to this study can benefit from using a real life setting where participants actually read the story on the brand's web page. Presenting brand stories in a questionnaire can lead to different evaluations compared to consumers who search for the brand story by themselves.

This could be done using a pop-up questionnaire when consumers visit the page of a brand. Accordingly, the respondent is more likely to be able to comprehend the situation and based on this, the results would be more accurate. However, the respondent is likely to know more about the brand when using a real life setting. Other factors besides the brand story play a role in this, as for example consumer experience with the brand or media and word-of-mouth stories. This pre-knowledge influences the attitude and choice intention, as well as the consumer reputation and is likely to have a significant effect on the five constructs of consumer reputation. On the other hand, the brand straightforwardly knows which aspects are doing well and which need to be improved. This does not add value to the research as the results are influenced by other factors. Being able to work with a real life setting requires more time and budget and should be done in cooperation with a real brand.

Likewise, regarding the subject of this study, this research was only able to focus on two story characteristics, while there are numerous other characteristics to research as for example changing the central character to a user, the mentioning of the core activities, the use or non-use of images or presenting figures in brand stories. The latter is also interesting for the combination of the research fields of both storytelling as well as evidence types.

Additionally, the sample can also be of influence on the results as the respondents are mainly (68%) between 18 and 24 years old and are highly (HBO or higher) educated (74,5%). That is because of the use of the SONA system of the University of Twente, a respondent pool. The sample is not a true representation of the Dutch population, which causes to gain other results. For example, the effects of the story characteristics could have a different effect on older generations or a lower educated audience.

Moreover, a larger research sample would have been desirable, which would ensure the external validity of the research. Again, because of limited time and budget, this was not achievable.

One of the delimitations set by the researcher was that this research specifically focussed on the fashion industry and the brand web page as the main communication channel. The outcomes might be different in other branches or channels, because other products or services may require little more knowledge about the history of the organisation or brand to be able for consumers to engage or purchase. Hence it is not recommended to generalize the findings to other product types, industries or communication channels. However, it is not unlikely that the outcomes of this research can be generalized to other communication types as for instance brand-controlled channels like brochures and advertisements or even social media channels. It would be interesting for future research to examine the effect of history in brand stories for other product types, branches and channels.

6.3 PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

For public relations professionals it is essential to use the right valuable information to the right target audience. It is therefore highly important to know what specific information the target audience wants to learn more about and which information should be left out. This way, the story is not too long and contains the right information that makes it easier for the audience to comprehend and tell the story further (Megehee & Spake, 2012; Schank, 1999). Eventually, the right brand story can contribute to a positive consumer attitude, purchase intention and a more positive consumer-based reputation.

Based on this research, recommendations for the field of public relations are mainly to be found in the noteworthy result that the mentioning of the history and founders of a brand has a negative effect on storytelling for a fashion brand. This can be too much information or not the right valuable information that customers are looking for when they are searching for information about the brand at the about page of the brand's web site. A possible explanation can be found in the result that the history and founders of a brand do not have a significant effect on the product or service quality. The information about the history or founders of a brand does not add value to the products or services that a brand offers and partly clarifies why the characteristic had an overall negative effect.

In agreement with the literature, it is recommended to use a vivid text, based on the three dimensions of vividness: emotional interest, concreteness and proximity as proposed by Sherer and Rogers (1984, quoting Nesbett & Ross, 1980). In the results no signs are found that contradict the literature concerning vividness.

Finally, this research has provided insight in storytelling characteristics. By combining the overview of corporate story characteristics by Janssen et al. (2012) and the work of other researchers in the fields of storytelling and writing, this study adds value to the fields of storytelling and public relations. It helps to create a set of storytelling characteristics that a fashion brand story should contain to have influence on various areas as for example attitude and reputation. This set of features is useful in the practical field of public relations, where public relation managers and communication professionals can use it as a checklist when writing brand stories, to make their story a success story.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - PRELIMINARY RESEARCH: BRAND OVERVIEW

Table 11 | Preliminary Research: Brand overview

Brand	Country	Brand story found on website
Zara	Spain	http://www.inditex.com/en/brands/zara
G-Star RAW Denim	Netherlands	https://www.g-star.com/nl_nl/corporate/index.htm
Vanilia	Netherlands	http://www.vanilia.com/727/about/
Chasin	Netherlands	http://www.chasin.com/nl/about-chasin.html
Scotch & Soda	Netherlands	http://www.scotch-soda.com/nl/nl/about-us.html
Primark	Ireland	http://www.primark.com/nl/over-ons/about-primark
Vero Moda	Denmark	http://www.veromoda.nl/Vero-moda-about-us/vm-about-us,nl_NL,pg.html
Esprit	USA	http://www.esprit.com/index.php?command=Display&page_id=45&navi_id=50
Levi's	USA	http://www.levi.com/NL/nl_NL/about/our-company
Sissy Boy	Netherlands	http://www.sissy-boy.nl/oversb
MEN at Work	Netherlands	http://www.menatwork.nl/nl_NL/klantenservice/contact/over-ons/about-us.html
Tommy Hilfiger	USA	http://global.tommy.com/int/en/about/overview/13
Diesel	Italy	http://globalbrands.bg/en/brand/t/diesel
Hugo Boss	Germany	http://group.hugoboss.com/en/group/about-hugo-boss/group-profile/
Stone Island	Italy	http://www.stoneisland.com/experience/en/pages/the-brand/
SuperTrash	Netherlands	http://www.supertrash.com/nl/about
Michael Kors	USA	http://www.michaelkors.com/browse/common/staticContent.jsp?slotId=400005
GUESS	USA	http://www.guess.com/en/
Ralph Lauren	France	http://global.ralphlauren.com/en-fr/about/Pages/default.aspx
Calvin Klein	USA	http://www.calvinklein.com/store/nl/en/customerservice-about

APPENDIX B – BRAND STORIES

BLACK = The stories are identical
RED   = The stories differ based on information about history
GREEN = The stories differ based on the element of vividness

Condition 1 – History & Vivid

Arctic Republic | 'Opposites attract'

Arctic Republic is een internationaal merk van Nederlandse bodem dat zich richt op de stijlvolle en zelfbewuste jonge man en vrouw. Het label Arctic Republic is in 1990 opgericht door Jane en Dennis. De vele samenwerkingen tijdens hun studie aan het ArtEZ in Arnhem bevielen zo goed dat ze besloten samen door te gaan. Tijdens hun lange wereldreizen ontdekten ze hoogwaardige kwaliteit stoffen, duurzame ontwikkelingsprocessen en raakten geïnspireerd door andere culturen. Met zowel een dames- als herenlijn en 8 verschillende collecties per jaar is er voor ieder wat wils.

Collecties
Arctic Republic heeft verschillende lijnen binnen haar collecties. Zo begonnen Jane en Dennis met de FROST lijn bestaande uit tijdloze en essentiële basisstukken van goede kwaliteit en luxe materialen. COLD biedt collecties met de juiste items voor een geklede look voor de hard werkende professional. Deze lijn kwam in 1995 op de markt. Twee jaar later volgde BLUESKY: de stoere jeans lijn. Sinds het voorjaar van 2012 ligt de nieuwste lijn in de winkels: STARBEAM is een lijn met stoere trenditems, die is geïnspireerd op het bijzondere kleurgebruik in andere culturen en zich richt op de eigentijdse modetrends. Deze laatste lijn is een enorm succes en is veelal uitverkocht.

Strategie
Arctic Republic heeft vanaf dag één een succesvolle strategie. Zo worden de collecties bewust in kleine oplagen uitgebracht en hebben ze een snel verloop. De 150 zorgvuldig uitgekozen wereldwijde verkooppunten dragen onze waarden en passen bij onze visie. Arctic Republic werk aan een duurzame dier- en natuurvriendelijke productie binnen Nederland. Ook heeft Arctic Republic binnen 5 jaar na de oprichting in samenwerking met het ArtEZ een speciale academie opgezet in Arnhem. Deze academie biedt een platform voor creatieve ideeën en start-ups van jonge talenten binnen verschillende disciplines. Jane en Dennis zijn intensief betrokken bij de academie en werken regelmatig samen met de jonge talenten uit de omgeving van Arnhem.
Al sinds de oprichting 25 jaar geleden streven ze naar een toekomst waar innovatie, duurzaamheid en eigenheid bovenaan staan.

Number of words: 333

Condition 2 – No History & Vivid

Arctic Republic | 'Opposites attract'

Arctic Republic is een internationaal merk van Nederlandse bodem dat zich richt op de stijlvolle en zelfbewuste jonge man en vrouw. De twee designers Jane en Dennis startten Arctic Republic aan het ArtEz in Arnhem en hebben een passie voor het ontwerpen van duurzame, eigentijdse kleding die hun veelzijdige en sprekende stijl toont. Tijdens hun lange wereldreizen ontdekten ze hoogwaardige kwaliteit stoffen, duurzame ontwikkelingsprocessen en raakten geïnspireerd door andere culturen. Met zowel een dames- als herenlijn en 8 verschillende collecties per jaar is er voor ieder wat wils.

Collecties
Arctic Republic heeft verschillende lijnen binnen haar collecties. De **FROST** lijn van Jane en Dennis bestaat uit tijdloze en essentiële basisstukken van goede kwaliteit en luxe materialen. **COLD** biedt collecties met de juiste items voor een geklede look voor de hard werkende professional. **BLUESKY:** de stoere jeans lijn. **STARBEAM** is een lijn met stoere trenditems, die is geïnspireerd op het bijzondere kleurgebruik in andere culturen en zich richt op de eigentijdse modetrends. Deze laatste lijn is een enorm succes en is veelal uitverkocht.

Strategie
Arctic Republic heeft een heel eigen strategie opgezet die bewezen heeft zeer succesvol te zijn. Zo worden de collecties bewust in kleine oplagen uitgebracht en hebben ze een snel verloop. De 150 zorgvuldig uitgekozen wereldwijde verkooppunten dragen onze waarden en passen bij onze visie. Arctic Republic werk aan een duurzame dier- en natuurvriendelijke productie binnen Nederland. Ook heeft Arctic Republic in samenwerking met het ArtEZ een speciale academie opgezet in Arnhem. Deze academie biedt een platform voor creatieve ideeën en start-ups van jonge talenten binnen verschillende disciplines. Jane en Dennis zijn intensief betrokken bij de academie en werken regelmatig samen met de jonge talenten uit de omgeving van Arnhem.
De designers van Arctic Republic en hun team streven naar een toekomst waar innovatie, duurzaamheid en eigenheid bovenaan staan.

Number of words: 306

Condition 3 – History & Not vivid

Arctic Republic | 'Opposites attract'

Arctic Republic is een internationaal merk dat zich richt op de stijlvolle en zelfbewuste jonge man en vrouw. Het label Arctic Republic is in 1990 opgericht door twee designers. De vele samenwerkingen tijdens hun studie bevielen zo goed dat ze besloten samen door te gaan. Ze werken met hoogwaardige kwaliteit stoffen, duurzame ontwikkelingsprocessen en halen inspiratie uit andere culturen. Met zowel een dames- als herenlijn en 8 verschillende collecties per jaar is er voor ieder wat wils.

Collecties

Arctic Republic heeft verschillende lijnen binnen haar collecties. Zo begonnen ze met de FROST lijn bestaande uit tijdloze en essentiële basisstukken van goede kwaliteit en luxe materialen. COLD biedt collecties met de juiste items voor een geklede look voor de hard werkende professional. Deze lijn kwam in 1995 op de markt. Twee jaar later volgde BLUESKY: de stoere jeans lijn. Sinds het voorjaar van 2012 ligt de nieuwste lijn in de winkels: STARBEAM is een lijn met stoere trenditems, die is geïnspireerd op het bijzondere kleurgebruik in andere culturen en zich richt op de eigentijdse modetrends. Deze laatste lijn is een enorm succes en is veelal uitverkocht.

Strategie

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Al sinds de oprichting 25 jaar geleden streven ze naar een toekomst waar innovatie, duurzaamheid en eigenheid bovenaan staan.

Number of words: 297

Condition 4 – No History & Not vivid

Arctic Republic | 'Opposites attract'

Arctic Republic is een internationaal merk dat zich richt op de stijlvolle en zelfbewuste jonge man en vrouw. Twee designers startte Arctic Republic met een passie voor het ontwerpen van duurzame, eigentijdse kleding die hun veelzijdige en sprekende stijl toont. Ze werken met hoogwaardige kwaliteit stoffen, duurzame ontwikkelingsprocessen en halen inspiratie uit andere culturen. Met zowel een dames- als herenlijn en 8 verschillende collecties per jaar is er voor ieder wat wils.

Collecties

Arctic Republic heeft verschillende lijnen binnen haar collecties. De **FROST** lijn bestaat uit tijdloze en essentiële basisstukken van goede kwaliteit en luxe materialen. **COLD** biedt collecties met de juiste items voor een geklede look voor de hard werkende professional. **BLUESKY:** de stoere jeans lijn. **STARBEAM** is een lijn met stoere trenditems, die is geïnspireerd op het bijzondere kleurgebruik in andere culturen en zich richt op de eigentijdse modetrends. Deze laatste lijn is een enorm succes en is veelal uitverkocht.

Strategie

Arctic Republic heeft een heel eigen strategie opgezet die bewezen heeft zeer succesvol te zijn. Zo worden de collecties bewust in kleine oplagen uitgebracht en hebben ze een snel verloop. De 150 zorgvuldig uitgekozen wereldwijde verkooppunten dragen onze waarden en passen bij onze visie. Arctic Republic werk aan een duurzame dier- en natuurvriendelijke productie. Ook heeft Arctic Republic een speciale academie opgezet. Deze academie biedt een platform voor creatieve ideeën en start-ups van jonge talenten binnen verschillende disciplines. De designers werken regelmatig samen met de jonge talenten.

De designers van Arctic Republic en hun team streven naar een toekomst waar innovatie, duurzaamheid en eigenheid bovenaan staan.

Number of words: 264

APPENDIX C – QUESTIONNAIRE

Beste deelnemer,

In het kader van mijn afstudeerscriptie doe ik onderzoek naar een Public Relations strategie binnen de kledingindustrie. U zult zo direct eerst een korte tekst te lezen krijgen. Vervolgens zullen er enkele vragen gesteld worden over die tekst. Dit zijn vragen waarin uw mening over de tekst centraal staat. Ten behoeve van het onderzoek zullen ook enkele demografische vragen gesteld worden. Dit onderzoek zal ongeveer 5 minuten van uw tijd in beslag nemen en is geheel anoniem. De ingevulde gegevens zullen vertrouwelijk worden behandeld en niet aan derden verstrekt worden. Dit onderzoek is niet in opdracht van een organisatie en de teksten beschrijven een fictieve situatie.

Mocht u het interessant vinden om de resultaten van dit onderzoek te ontvangen, dan kunt u aan het einde van de vragenlijst uw e-mailadres achterlaten.

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname!

Dieuwertje Spijker
Studente Communication Science – Universiteit Twente

Ik stem geheel vrijwillig in met deelname aan dit onderzoek. Daarbij heb ik het recht om op elk moment mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek af te breken.
- Ik ga akkoord en ga verder naar het onderzoek
- Ik ga niet akkoord en wil niet deelnemen aan dit onderzoek.

Stelt u voor:
U heeft leuke kleding in een kledingwinkel zien hangen en bent erachter gekomen dat deze kleding van het merk Arctic Republic is. Omdat u graag wat meer wilt weten over dit merk, zoekt u de website van dit merk op. Onder het kopje 'Over Arctic Republic' vindt u de volgende tekst:

Lees onderstaande tekst aandachtig en probeer u zo goed mogelijk in te leven in de situatie. Het is belangrijk dat u deze tekst helemaal leest.

Beantwoord de onderstaande vragen op basis van de tekst die u zojuist gelezen heeft.

Onderstaande vragen hebben betrekking op de inhoud van het verhaal dat u zojuist gelezen heeft. Ik vind het verhaal:

Slecht	O O O O O	Goed
Aangenaam	O O O O O	Onaangenaam
Niet interessant	O O O O O	Interessant
Spreek mij niet aan	O O O O O	Spreekt mij aan
Niet geloofwaardig	O O O O O	Geloofwaardig

De volgende vragen gaan in op uw mening ten opzichte van het merk. Ik vind het merk Arctic Republic:

Goed	O O O O O	Slecht
Onaantrekkelijk	O O O O O	Aantrekkelijk
Niet Interessant	O O O O O	Interessant
Prettig	O O O O O	Niet prettig

Stel, u bent op zoek naar nieuwe kleding. U bent inmiddels op de hoogte van het merk Arctic Republic. Als ik kleding nodig zou hebben dan:

Is de kans aanwezig dat ik voor Arctic Republic kies	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Zou ik overwegen kleding van Arctic Republic te kopen	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Zou ik nooit voor kleding van Arctic Republic kiezen	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens

De volgende stellingen hebben betrekking op de reputatie van het merk Arctic Republic. Geef aan in hoeverre u eens bent met de onderstaande stellingen. Arctic Republic:

Behandelt zijn klanten goed	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Is betrokken bij zijn klanten	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Heeft personeel dat geeft om de behoefte van de klant	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Lijkt een goede organisatie om voor te werken	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Lijkt zijn werknemers goed te behandelen	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Lijkt goed leiderschap te hebben	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Kan concurrenten overtreffen	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Herkent en gebruikt marktkansen	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Heeft sterke vooruitzichten voor een toekomstige groei	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Is een sterke en betrouwbare organisatie	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Ontwikkelt innovatieve producten	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Levert een hoge kwaliteit producten en services	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Probeert werkgelegenheid te creëren	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Handelt ecologisch verantwoord	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Zou zijn winstmarge verkleinen voor een beter milieu	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens

Als laatste drie overige stellingen:

Ik weet meer over de geschiedenis v/h merk	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
Het verhaal is levendig geschreven	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens
U zou dit merk aanraden aan vrienden	Helemaal oneens 0 0 0 0 0 Helemaal eens

Ten slotte uw gegevens:

Geslacht
- o   Man
- o   Vrouw

Leeftijd _____

Hoogst genoten (of huidige) opleiding
- o   Middelbare school of lager
- o   MBO
- o   HBO
- o   WO of hoger

Hoeveel euro geeft u maandelijks uit aan kleding?
- o   €0 tot €50
- o   €50 tot €100
- o   €100 tot €150
- o   €150 of meer

Einde van het onderzoek. Bedankt voor uw deelname.