

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE  
School of Management

**BRAND RELATIONSHIPS IN SHAPING COSMOPOLITAN IDENTITIES**  
**A narrative study of Fazer Blue**

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to explore the evolving nature of brand relationships and their role in consumption pattern shifts in the lives of expatriates. Expatriates and brand relationships have not been combined in terms of previous research. The theoretical framework builds around the concepts of identity narrative, cosmopolitanism, and brand relationships. The concepts are then put in a context of change and transition, and synthesized into sets of priori themes.

The study is conducted as a case study. The brand of interest is Fazer Blue, the renowned Finnish chocolate brand. The research is performed as a multi-method qualitative research, where seven in-depth interviews are combined with 167 units of netnographic data. The data uncovers story-like narratives of consumption and brand experiences. The data analysis follows a narrative interpretation framework.

The main findings are two-fold. Firstly, the changing life event – moving abroad – triggers the need to redefine identity narrative. This involves rethinking one's consumption habits and balancing between past, present, and future selves. Ties to and memories of the past self are maintained through the consumption of brands and products from home. Expatriates end up creating a unique mix of cultural traits and forming a cosmopolitan self-concept.

Secondly, brand relationships are found to play a prominent part in identity transition. In the case of Fazer Blue, the long-term brand relationship is protected by love felt toward the brand. Fazer Blue evokes strong meanings and memories. Due to distance, the importance of the brand increases. In light of these findings, it is suggested that in practice, expatriates and their insight should be better heard, understood and utilized in terms of brand development.

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Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus tutkia brändisuhteiden kehittyvää luonnetta sekä niiden roolia kulutustottumusten muutoksessa ekspatriaattien elämässä. Ekspatriaatteja ja brändisuhteita ei ole aiemmin tutkittu yhdessä. Teoreettinen viitekehys rakentuu identiteettinarratiivin, kosmopolitanismin ja brändisuhteiden konseptien ympärille. Näitä teorioita tarkastellaan muutoksen ja siirtymän kontekstissa, minkä jälkeen teorioista koostetaan alustavia teemoja.

Tutkimus toteutetaan tapaustutkimuksena. Brändi, johon tutkimus keskittyy, on tunnettu suomalainen suklaabrändi Fazerin Sininen. Tutkimus toteutetaan monimetodisena kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena, jossa seitsemän syvähaastattelua yhdistetään 167 yksikköön netnografista aineistoa. Aineisto koostuu tarinanomaisista kulutukseen liittyvistä narratiiveista ja brändikokemuksista. Aineistoa analysoidaan narratiivisen tulkinnan viitekehysten mukaan.

Keskeiset löydökset ovat kaksiosaiset. Ensiksi, muuttava tapahtuma elämässä – ulkomaille muuttaminen – laukaisee tarpeen identiteettinarratiivin uudelleenmäärittelemiselle. Tähän sisältyy omien kulutustottumusten uudelleenajattelu sekä menneiden, nykyisten ja tulevien identiteettien välillä tasapainottelu. Sidoksia ja muistoja menneeseen ylläpidetään kuluttamalla kotimaasta tuotuja brändejä ja tuotteita. Ekspatriaatit luovat uniikin kulttuuristen piirteiden sekoituksen ja muodostavat itselleen kosmopoliitin minäkuvan.

Toiseksi, brändisuhteiden havaitaan olevan keskeisessä osassa identiteetin siirtymässä. Fazerin Sinisen tapauksessa kuluttajien kokema rakkaus brändiä kohtaan suojaa pitkäaikaista brändisuhdetta. Fazerin Sininen tuo esiin voimakkaita merkityksiä ja muistoja. Etäisyyden takia brändin merkittävyys kasvaa. Näiden löydösten valossa esitetään, että praktiikassa ekspatriaatteja ja heidän näkemystään tulisi kuunnella ja hyödyntää enemmän brändikehityksessä.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1	I'm with the brand .....	7
1.2	Research objectives .....	9
<b>2</b>	<b>COSMOPOLITAN CONSUMERS AND THEIR BRANDS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1	Identity narrative from a cosmopolitan perspective.....	13
2.1.1	Narrative of the self .....	13
2.1.2	Brands as a part of the story .....	15
2.1.3	Cosmopolitan identities .....	17
2.2	Brand relationships.....	20
2.2.1	Types of brand relationships .....	20
2.2.1.1	Self-concept connection.....	20
2.2.1.2	Nostalgic attachment.....	21
2.2.1.3	Interdependence .....	23
2.2.1.4	Love or passion .....	24
2.2.2	Brand relationship portfolio .....	25
2.3	The effect of life changes in identity narrative and brand relationships .....	27
2.3.1	The dynamicness of a brand relationship in identity transition .....	27
2.3.2	Priori themes .....	31
<b>3</b>	<b>CONDUCTING THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>34</b>
3.1	Research philosophy .....	34
3.2	Case Fazer Blue.....	36
3.3	Research method.....	38
3.3.1	Multiple method qualitative research.....	40
3.3.2	The narrative research method.....	41
3.3.3	In-depth interviews .....	45
3.3.4	Netnography.....	46
3.4	Data generation .....	47
3.4.1	Conducting interviews .....	47

3.4.2	Generating netnographic data .....	49
<b>4</b>	<b>BRANDS' ROLE IN BECOMING COSMOPOLITAN .....</b>	<b>50</b>
4.1	<b>Informants' life narratives .....</b>	<b>50</b>
4.2	<b>Narrative data and its analysis .....</b>	<b>54</b>
4.3	<b>Changes in identity narrative .....</b>	<b>56</b>
4.3.1	Holding on to Finnishness .....	56
4.3.2	Cosmopolitan identity narratives .....	59
4.3.2.1	The transition process .....	59
4.3.2.2	The many faces of cosmopolitanism.....	61
4.4	<b>The redefined Fazer Blue brand relationship .....</b>	<b>63</b>
4.4.1	Individual-level brand image .....	63
4.4.2	A matter of taste.....	65
4.4.3	Memories .....	67
4.4.4	The narrative of an evolving brand relationship .....	68
4.5	<b>Expatriates as an evangelist resource .....</b>	<b>72</b>
4.6	<b>Conclusions and managerial implications .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>79</b>
5.1	<b>Summary of the study.....</b>	<b>79</b>
5.2	<b>Assessing the trustworthiness of the study .....</b>	<b>87</b>
	<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>90</b>
	<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>96</b>

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1. Priori themes connected to research question 1 .....	32
Table 2. Priori themes connected to research question 2 .....	33
Table 3. Methods used in similar research.....	39
Table 4. Key features of narratives .....	42
Table 5. Demographics of the informants.....	51

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1. The narrative research process .....	44
Figure 2. The cosmopolitan identity transition process .....	74
Figure 3. A matrix of the expatriates' evolved Fazer Blue brand relationship.....	76

## **LIST OF APPENDIX**

Appendix 1. The packaging of Fazer Blue .....	96
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 I'm with the brand

The consumers of today are more mobile than ever before. Work- and leisure-related traveling has grown rapidly and the world has increasingly become “our oyster”. In addition, more and more of us spend longer periods of time abroad, often for work-related reasons. As of 2013, over 323 million people live outside their home country – 54 % more than in 2000 (Thornhill, 2013). Furthermore, work-related relocation, where people take on job assignments, temporary or permanent, abroad, is becoming increasingly popular. Along with international mobility, new patterns of consumer behavior emerge (Lichy & Pon, 2013, 5). This has attracted the interest of practitioners and academics alike.

Expatriates come off as a very attractive target for many businesses, as they are often high earners who want premium services (Marketing Week, 2009). In addition to their increasing number and steady income, expatriates have a number of attributes that contribute to their attractiveness from the marketer perspective. A person moving to a new country usually has a range of immediate needs upon their arrival. These needs include services such as banking, telecommunications and insurance, as well as a full set of ordinary household products. They are unfamiliar with the local brands and companies and are not stuck to their routines and brand loyalties. No wonder many marketers have their eye on the expatriate segment, with brands such as HSBC, Marks & Spencer, and even Facebook having developed their own specialized expatriate marketing campaigns (Adweek, 2015).

From the academic viewpoint, the question of interest lies in whether or not are expatriates contributing to the emergence of a globally unified consumer culture. De Mooij (2010, 8) argues strongly against the congruence of cultures and consumer behavior, but admits that business travelers are often cited as examples of homogeneous groups. Therefore it may well make sense to examine the consumption behavior of expatriates and compare whether similar findings are uncovered in different samples. Thus far a large portion of the expatriate research has focused on

how they adapt to their new surroundings (Cleveland et al. 2011). Consumption is often seen as part of the process, which makes sense, since consumption is such a prominent part of consumers' lives.

The main purpose of consumer behavior research is to examine how consumers behave and why do they behave the way they do. What we have and possess are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities – who we are (Belk, 1988, 139) This study shares the basic premise of Schembri, Merrilees and Kristiansen's (2010, 624) research, and sees that brand consumption is “a powerful social tool that consumers employ in their quest for self-identity” – an assumption that this study shares and agrees upon. Brands are powerful mediators of meaning, and they consist of both shared and individual-level associations. Brand image is a group of meanings held in the minds of the consumers (Fournier, 1998, 367).

Brands do exist on a generic level, too. But it is only on the individual level that they become meaningful and valuable. Consumers become close with brands that they use regularly or are particularly interested in. Researchers widely agree on the importance of brands to consumers and their self-concepts (e.g. Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Belk, 1988). Recently, the relationship perspective has become increasingly popular as a theoretical approach to understanding consumer-brand interactions (Swaminathan, Page & Gürhan-Canli, 2007, 248). This discussion was initiated by Susan Fournier in 1998, as she conceptualized the emotional or habitual attachments to a brand as brand relationships. According to Fournier, brands store meanings and are used for creating and (re)producing concepts of the self. Ever since the seminal article “Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research”, discussion on brand relationships has continued to be vivid and fruitful.

This study employs the concept of cosmopolitanism for examining the brand relationships of expatriates. Cosmopolitanism includes various characteristics that help understand the mindset and motives of expatriate consumer behavior. Cosmopolitanism is not a new concept: the first theories around the term date back to 1957 (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002, 30). The definition has evolved since and been constantly updated to keep in the pace of the rapid change of globalization and cosmopolitanism along it. Unlike early theorists, today cosmopolitanism is not



seen as “citizenship of the world”. A more common perspective on cosmopolitans is that they are culturally open individuals who actively seek cultural experiences. Rather than converging to a globally unified culture, cosmopolitans mix and match different cultures and create one that is unique fits their needs and self-concept (Hannerz, 1990).

## **1.2 Research objectives**

Schembri, Merrilees and Kristiansen (2010, 634) suggest that “the concept of using brands as an indicator of the various role transitions that consumers make in life is a prime site for further research”. Tied to this, Fournier (2009, 12) remarks that “the evolving nature of brand relationships has been largely unexplored”. According to her, brand relationships change in response to contextual change. Keeping these statements in mind, the purpose of this study is to explore the evolving nature of brand relationships and their role in consumption pattern shifts in the lives of expatriates.

Fournier (1998) introduces the concept “world of brands”, which indicates the set of brands that a consumer considers their own – i.e. are accustomed to buying and feel that match their self-concept well. Expatriates have already once established a world of brands that reflects their identity. Moving to a new country means facing a new selection of brands – many of which are completely familiar. They need to readjust their consumption routine and form a new world of brands, one that reflects their identity; let it be the old identity or a completely new one.

Furthermore, this study aims to find out what happens to the ex-domestic brands and the relationships that consumers have built with them. Their role in the consumers’ identity narrative needs to be reconsidered when the narrative itself is modified – otherwise the narrative becomes fragmented (Ahuvia, 2005). Previous research offers explanations for ending brand relationships, i.e. “brand divorces” (Sussan, Hall & Meamber, 2012; Fournier, 1988). Another possibility may be that the consumer-brand relationship becomes stronger but changes in nature, taking on nostalgic characteristics that mark the time of identity transition and/or fulfill the individual’s need to belong (Schouten, 1991; Loveland, Smeesters & Mandel, 2010).

The guiding questions of this research are:

1. How do expatriates modify their identity narrative when moving abroad?
2. What happens to formerly domestic brand relationships when moving abroad?

Although identity narratives and their transitions have been researched in some contexts, expatriates and their brands have not been combined in the identity context before. The coupling of these paradigms is a rare one and there is little research on how consumers' brand relationships become altered as they move to another country. The consumption habits of expatriates have briefly been touched upon (Lichy & Pon, 2013), but there is no research available about emigrant consumers and their brand relationships. Therefore it should be interesting to see how accurately the brands as a part of identity discourse applies to expatriates and their identity transitions.

Earlier research implies that when moving abroad, consumers are forced to modify their consumption behavior as the brands that they have grown accustomed to suddenly become unavailable. There are various individual characteristics and external attributes that may affect the smoothness of the process of moving and adapting into a new home country. In addition, the work Schouten (1991), Fournier (1988), and Ahuvia (2005) form a useful framework of the role of brands in identity transitions. This research accounts moving abroad as an important life event that forces, causes or triggers these kinds of identity transitions.

Within the consumer behavior literature, consumer identity as structured through narrative has gathered quite a number of research interest (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Escalas & Bettman, 2000; Fournier, 1998; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; Shankar, Elliott & Goulding, 2001; Woodruffe-Burton & Elliott, 2005; Schembri et al. 2010). Since narrative is a natural form of identity construction (Thompson, 1997), this study adds to this methodological frame of reference. As typical for qualitative research, the aim of this study is not to provide the reader with an exhaustive and generalizable description of how expatriates use brands to adjust their

identity narrative, but rather to give insight into the various meanings that are given to brands in identity transitions.

The structure of this thesis follows a common order and organization. Chapter two presents the theoretical framework – the concept of the identity narrative and the prominent role of brands in forming it, the characteristics and different prominent concepts related to expatriates and cosmopolitanism, and brand relationships. To combine the streams of literature, the context of change and transition is introduced. A synthesis is presented in the form of priori themes. Chapter three introduces the research approach, design, and strategy. The famous Finnish milk chocolate brand Fazer Blue is selected as the case study of this research. The selection of a case study strategy and the case of question are backed up with research method theory, as are the methods of choice. Then the data generation and analysis procedures are introduced.

Chapter four presents the data, its interpretation, and the findings. The findings are divided based on the two research questions. The themes that emerge from the data are then introduced: regarding question one there is on one hand the holding on to one's Finnish origins, and on the other hand, cosmopolitan identity narratives, which are further separated to the transition process and a cohesive, redefined self-concept. Findings regarding the second research question answer to Fournier's call for insight on evolving brand relationships. Individual-level brand meanings, flavor profile, and memories are identified as key themes, and the narrative of brand relationship evolution describes the process of change. An important finding of the potential of expatriates as a valuable asset for a brand is identified and presented in the form of practical implications. Lastly, conclusions are drawn in form of two figures.

## **2 COSMOPOLITAN CONSUMERS AND THEIR BRANDS**

The conceptual framework of this study is built on a selection of consumer behavior theories. This study sees that identities are constructed in the form of a narrative, in which brands play a key role. First we discuss self-concepts and how they can be thought of being constructed as narratives. Theories concerning the role of brands in constructing identity are then brought forward. These streams of literature are extended into context with key expatriate terms and theories, e.g. cosmopolitanism, consumer ethnocentrism, and other theories that aid the interpretation of the expatriate identity narrative.

Second, we look into the academic field of brand relationships and its fruitful discussion lead by Fournier's pioneer article "Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research" (1998). Brand relationships are introduced through a variety of perspectives: firstly, the main types categorized by Solomon et al. (2014) that pinpoint the complex nature of brand relationships. Then, we discuss a portfolio viewpoint that emphasizes that each unique brand relationship must be evaluated against a bigger picture of the consumer's life narrative. Thirdly, we present a life cycle outline that gives a hypothesis of how formerly domestic brand relationships may evolve when consumers move abroad.

Subchapter 2.3 adds to the theories introduced in 2.1 and 2.2, steering the theoretical framework towards a direction that fits the context of this particular study. To wind up the chapter, a summary is presented in the form of two tables of priori themes. These tables are divided to represent both of the research questions, i.e. themes in the first table are potential findings concerning question 1 and themes placed to the second table may answer to question 2.

## 2.1 Identity narrative from a cosmopolitan perspective

### 2.1.1 Narrative of the self

*The symbolizing self centers on its own narrative, a life story that is itself created and constantly recreated.* – Robert Jay Lifton in the Protean Self

The thought of identities being constructed in the form of a narrative has become a widely accepted one among consumer behavior theorists (Escalas & Bettman 2000; Thompson & Tambyah 1999). According to this view, self-identity is not a given, stable construction, but rather an evolving narrative – a life story – that is continuously monitored and adjusted through an individual's ongoing actions (Schembri et al. 2010; Thompson, 1997). This self includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will become (Polkinghorne, 1988, 150). In brief, each of us hold a personal narrative about ourselves – a story that evolves from our childhood and describes who we are, and furthermore how and why we have come to be who we are. In addition to our past and present, the narrative also describes our future, our hopes and ambitions. Identity narrative is not written in stone – we adjust it along the way. Even memories from our past may be modified according to context. For example, if a beloved childhood friend betrays you during your adult years, the tone of the shared childhood memories may turn from cherished to bittersweet.

Polkinghorne (1988, 13) defines narrative as a kind of organizational scheme expressed in story form. A narrative is a story or description, a series of events in a specific order, with a beginning, a middle and an end (Shankar et al. 2001). The narrative captures various roles including past, present, and anticipated future selves (Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995). Although some researchers, Belk (1988) on the forefront, use the division of core and extended self to describe the construction of the self and how brands and possessions are incorporated to it, Kleine et al. (1995, 341) suggest that the life narrative more accurately conceptualizes the question of “me-ness”, i.e. what do consumers include as part of their self. This kind of a view gives more room for variation for the different possible levels of “me-ness” (Ahuvia, 2005, 172).

Mishler (1995, 108) says that consumer experience is “narrativized”, and narratives are integral in building conceptions of self. Thompson (1997) adds that the self is in fact constructed through personal events and experiences. Whereas consumers often describe themselves as a list of attributes (e.g. I am not good at math but I excel in sports and have great teeth), a more accurate and insightful way of describing one’s identity would be putting these experiences in a time line form. The self-defining moments are always linked to key episodes of life in the memory – which in turn are weaved together to form a story (Ahuvia, 2005). These narratives help consumers to make sense of who they are and to express their identity to others.

Sense making is indeed needed in terms of self-concept. The modern self consists of multiple aspects; it is rare for any individual to have a single persona that would apply across situations (Leary & Allen, 2011). The modern self is malleable – meaning that it is influenced by social roles and cues, causing people to behave differently in different situations (Aaker, 1999). For example, most people have different roles and behavior patterns for their professional self and their domestic self. A person may be a ruthless, even devious lawyer in court but also a loving and caring parent and partner at home. These role transitions come with ease in everyday life and do not cause conflict in the narrative, because the individual has made sense of it.

Polkinghorne (1988, 15) phrases the process of making sense to the identity narrative as follows: “Narrative enrichment occurs when one retrospectively revises, selects, and orders past details in such a way as to create a self-narrative that is coherent and satisfying and that will serve as a justification for one’s present condition and situation.” Today, having multiple selves is rather necessary (Aaker, 1999). Albeit the multitude of roles is natural and normal, people are likely to want to search for a certain level of cohesiveness in this identity narrative of theirs (Ahuvia, 2005). That is why they perform the “narrative enrichment” described above – to integrate the different roles they swap between. The use of this sense making helps consumers understand their existence as a whole, unfolding and developing story (Thompson, 1997).

### 2.1.2 Brands as a part of the story

*One of the fundamental premises of the modern field of consumer behavior is that people often buy products not for what they do, but for what they mean. This principle does not imply that a product's basic function is unimportant but rather that the roles products play in our lives extend well beyond the tasks they perform.* – Solomon et al. (2012, 13)

What Solomon et al. effectively manage to capture in the quote above, is the ability of brands to bear a variety of meanings and attributes. A brand – a trademark, a name, a logo – functions as a symbolic resource, shorthand for the meanings that people connect to them (Schau & Gilly, 2003; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Think about Coca-Cola. The perception of youthfulness and joy may quickly come to mind. And Chanel, on the other hand, is elegant, classic, and prestigious. These characteristics are meanings that marketers have built into the brand with marketing activities such as advertising.

Today, brands are more than what the advertisement communicates. Although consumers may initially acquire the ownership of a brand for what it means on a general level, they build individual-level meanings on top of that. In consumption, they extend the brand so that it becomes a part of their self-concept. Within the academic circle, the making a brand a part of the self is also known as extending the self; i.e. through the possession of a brand, the brand becomes a part of one's extended self.

The concept of the extended self was first introduced by Belk in 1988. Belk's primary findings – 1) identity issues are central to consumption and 2) possessions are a part of the self – have preserved their relevance over time and remain widely agreed upon among researchers (Ahuvia, 2005). The basic message of Belk's findings is that consumers use brands to construct and communicate their self-concept. "We are what we have" (van Esterick, 1986) is a basic premise of consumer behavior. The phrase has become even more relevant during the twenty first century, as people with increased consumption power are capable of using consumption as a tool for self-expression. We consume to make a statement – we consume to show other people who

we are and where we come from. We consume to express our individuality and personality, or to show that we belong to a certain group.

Objects can either literally or symbolically extend the self (Belk, 1988). Cars and men are a classic example of extending the self to material possessions. Stein (1985) interviews a man who owns an expensive Porsche sports car. He passionately explains how he feels differently about himself when he's driving the car, and how other people treat him differently, too. A car is a literal extension to the self, as it extends the physical access and reach of a consumer. But in this case a sports car's extension to the self is above all symbolic, because it changes the way others perceive its owner. It is an "extension of one's ego", as many often playfully yet aptly say.

Brand consumption is a social tool that consumers employ in their quest for self-identity (Schembri et al. 2010). Brands are used for not only making sense of a consumer's own narrative, but also communicating it to others; consumers who include brands in their self-narrative bear them "with pride" (Reimann & Aron, 2009, 74). Through signaling this bond to others, the brand's resources are perceived as one's own resources: the brand's attributes are extended to the consumer's self. For example a Chanel handbag sends out a strong signal of its carrier. People that are at all familiar with the category attach attributes such as elegance, luxury, and something that "never goes out of fashion". These attributes are carried over as perceptions and impressions of the bag's carrier. As becomes evident in studies such as the ones of Ahuvia (2005) and Fournier (1998), some consumers are extremely sensitive about the signals that they feel certain brands send out, whereas others are less deliberate about how they may come across to strangers.

Reimann and Aron (2009, 71) discuss brands and "rapid expansion of the self" arguing that a brand-driven reason and motive for rapidly expanding the self may occur with newly acquired brands. They set an example of Rolex, as when a consumer buys an exclusive brand such as thee, it enables an excited formation of new attributes to the self. They suggest that high-involvement products may elicit a stronger self-expansion than mundane, low-involvement categories, although switching brands in even the most ordinary of product categories may lead to adjustments within the self-concept, i.e. identity narrative.



The vivid use of examples in the above paragraphs demonstrate what kind of meaning brands can carry and how the meaning can be used to build one's own self-concept. All of the examples address prestigious luxury brands, since they are highly visible in consumption and packed with distinctive brand meanings, making them an example that is easy for most to comprehend. However, many or in fact most brands carry meanings that are transferrable to the extended self. Let it be toothpaste or washing powder, each brand has a brand image that includes a brand personality. But following the findings of Reimann and Aron (2009), the division between high and low involvement product categories often guides what brands are most visibly linked to a person's identity narrative.

### **2.1.3 Cosmopolitan identities**

In order to better understand, interpret, and evaluate the data and outcomes of this research, the identity discussion is further stretched into the context of the almost-global consumer. People have never been as mobile as they are now: they travel often, see the world, spend short and long times out of their home country. This has further increased the rapidness of cultural blending. Some consumers adapt to their new environment and adopt a local set of habits and way of life. Others connect with people with similar origin and form communities that imitate the culture of their home country: think Little Italy or China Town in New York. Some of the key concepts of the factors that may affect a mobile consumer's consumer behavior are introduced below.

*Cosmopolitanism.* The concept of the cosmopolitan consumer dates way back and refers to a consumer whose orientation is not bound to any particular culture or setting (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002). These consumers see themselves as "citizens of the world" (Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012). Cleveland et al. (2011, 935) put cosmopolitanism into a marketing context and describe cosmopolitans as individuals who "favor wider, loose and multiple cultural narratives --, hold universal aspirations and are less apt to hold allegiance to any particular community".

Cosmopolitans consume cultural differences in a reflective manner and are driven by curiosity – they are open to transcultural diversity (Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012). Riefler and

Diamantopoulos (2009) describe cosmopolitans as variety-seekers, open-minded and extensive travelers, whose consumption behavior transcends cultural borders. Cannon and Yaprak (2002) see cosmopolitanism as a transitional state and alike Thompson and Tambyah (1999, 328), they argue that consumers are unlikely to reach a complete form of cosmopolitanism; that is, not conforming to any particular culture or setting.

*Expatriates* are people who “take a work or study assignment in a foreign location, independently or sent by an organization to which they belong – often a multinational corporation” (Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012). Expatriation has grown significantly over the last few decades as globalization and legislative changes have increased international business and the flow of knowledge. As international mobility increases, new habits and patterns of consumer behavior emerge (Lichy & Pon, 2013). According to UN statistics, over 232 million people (3.2 % of the world population) live outside of their home country in 2013 (Thornhill, 2013). This is a significant increase from 1990 and 2000, when the respective figures were 154 million and 175 million. When looking at Finnish statistics, there are currently 329 000 Finnish people living abroad. This is roughly 6 % of Finland’s population. A majority of the Finnish migrants live in Sweden, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States (Harris & Provost, 2013).

*Consumer ethnocentrism* stems from the love and concern for one’s own country (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Ethnocentric consumers prefer domestic goods to imports because they believe that products from their own country are superior (Cleveland et al. 2007), or due to patriotic sentiment, even if the quality of domestic products is lower than that of imports (Cui, Fitzgerald & Donovan, 2014). Researchers do not fully agree on whether or not, and in what way, does ethnocentrism contribute to the consumption behavior of expatriates. Whereas Hannerz (1990) saw that emigrants build a cultural mix of their own, a more recent study by Zolfagharian and Sun (2010) found that bicultural individuals are less ethnocentric than the mono-cultural, as they attempt to fit into their new cultural and social environment. Thompson and Tambyah (1999) reach the conclusion that a full state of neither cosmopolitanism nor acculturation can be reached, as there will always remain traces of one’s origin.

*Acculturation* is “the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country” (Peñaloza, 1994, 33). A common finding has been that the better a consumer is integrated to his/her new country, the less they feel homesick and long for goods from their country of origin (Cui et al. 2014). Cui et al. (2014, 319) discovered that a key influencer for the level of an immigrant’s acculturation is whether the reason for their moving was external (e.g. expatriates who were assigned by their employer) or internal (e.g. the dream of pursuing education abroad). Overall, most researchers agree that the longer the stay in a new country, the more people adapt to its culture (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; Mehta & Belk, 1991).

## **2.2 Brand relationships**

The connection between a consumer and a brand can be thought of and described through the same terms as a connection between two human beings: a relationship. Through shared experiences, consumers form bonds with brands and create new meanings for them (Fournier, 1998, 343). The brand relationship paradigm originates from social psychology and shares many of the characteristics of interpersonal relationships (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012, 99). A brand relationship is capable of fulfilling the four core conditions that qualify relationships in an interpersonal domain presented by Hinde (1995): reciprocity, purposiveness, multifacetedness, and being an evolving process by nature.

### **2.2.1 Types of brand relationships**

As do all relationships, brand relationships vary in time, nature, duration, and level of commitment and maintenance that the relationships require in order to endure. There are a number of ways to categorize brand relationships, but the one by Solomon et al. (2012, 14) fits this research most conveniently because it highlights both the identity connection and a nostalgic dimension along with brand love. Solomon et al. categorize brand relationships into four different types, which are now introduced in further detail. Fournier (2009) lists an additional three types in her categorization: intimacy, personal commitment and brand-partner quality.

#### **2.2.1.1 Self-concept connection**

Just like consumers, brands have their own narratives. These narratives are symbolic stories or extended metaphors (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003, 21). The way that brand meanings are carried over to the brands' possessor was introduced earlier. However, consumers come across hundreds of brands on a daily basis. Not all of these encounters are significant or develop into meaningful relationships. Some brands contribute to the construction of the self more than others. The brands that become the closest and contribute most to the identity narrative may be called self-expressive brands. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006, 82) define self-expressive brands as

“the consumer’s perception of the degree to which the specific brand enhances one’s social self and/or reflects one’s inner self”. Self-concept connection is an important dimension in the brand relationship, because it indicates how much the brand contributes to one’s identity, value and goals (Fournier, 1998).

Sprott, Czellar and Spangerberg (2009) suggest that consumers are likely to engage with brands that reflect their self-concept. Many researchers agree that brands that are highly congruent to a consumer’s self-concept, i.e. the ones that resemble them, generate higher emotional attachment (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012) and brand love (Wallace, Buil & de Chernatony, 2014). In a “perfect world” a consumer would be able to find a brand whose narrative would perfectly match the brand’s narrative – resulting in an everlasting brand relationship.

Self-expressive brands highlight the notion that brands are “consumed, at least in part, for self-presentation” (Wallace et al. 2014, 34). Indeed, Belk (1988, 147) underlines how the relationship between a consumer and a brand is “never two-way (person-thing) but always three-way (person-thing-person)”. Brands act as mediators, which communicate a consumer’s identity to others. The communication of one’s identity narrative is socially constructed and often reliant on mutually shared meanings, such as brands. Self-expressive brands help this quest of self-representation and allow consumers to communicate who they truly are or whom they want to be (Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2011).

### **2.2.1.2 Nostalgic attachment**

The need to belong is a basic driver of human behavior. Nostalgic attachment describes the way that consumers may use brands to build a link to a past self. Products and brands that store personal meanings function as a bridge to past life events, periods, or memories of people (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012, 681; Belk, 1988). For example the thought or consumption of “Nalle” semolina porridge takes me straight back to my childhood when my grandmother would always make it for me. Loveland, Smeesters and Mandel (2010, 393) define nostalgic products as products that were more common or popular when the consumer was younger. If the concept

is stretched to better fit the context of this study, nostalgic brands can be defined as brands that were more popular in a previous period of the consumer's life.

In their study, Loveland et al. (2010, 393) “explore the possibility that individuals can satisfy the need to belong through the consumption of nostalgic products”. They conclude that the consumption of a nostalgic product may help strengthen a consumer's tie with his or her past. Other previous research have also confirmed that consuming brands that were popular in a consumer's former life helps the consumer feel reconnected with social communities that consumed those brands together (Brown et al. 2003). Indeed, nostalgic thoughts often have a social component: as Loveland et al. (2010) demonstrate through their findings, the consumption of nostalgic brands successfully restores feelings of belonging.

Nostalgic brand associations can be drawn from either consumer's personal or communal associations, meaning that the memory evoked may be an individual experience or a memory of belonging to a group or community. Belk (1991) remarks an individual sense of nostalgia, where personal possessions serve as materializations of memory and evoke a powerful sense of the past. Brown et al. (2003, 20) on the other hand conceptualize that in times of threat nostalgia may provide consumers a sense of comfort and close-knit community – “a safe haven in an unsafe world”. Loveland et al. (2010, 393) found that consumers who feel a stronger need to belong have a significantly higher preference for nostalgic products as opposed to consumers who less actively seek belonging. In addition they found that socially excluded individuals show an increased preference for nostalgic brand consumption.

Nostalgic attachment is a valuable starting point for building long-lasting brand relationships. Memories that are “shared” with a brand may establish a significant emotional connection between the consumer and the brand (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012, 681), such as in the earlier example of eating porridge with a late grandparent. The brand is closely intertwined with the memory and therefore “put on a pedestal” because it has unique associations anchored to it. Nostalgic products help create a tangible link to the past by providing a point of focus for nostalgic thoughts (Loveland et al. 394) – they sort of give the consumer a platform to reminisce on.

### 2.2.1.3 Interdependence

Fournier (2009) puts forward her worry over the popular view of brand relationships today: according to her, academics and managers alike fall into the trap of focusing on the more visible brand relationships, the ones that are used to build identity and communicate status. However, concentrating on only that category of brand relationships leaves out a major part of the big picture. Brand relationships can also address “functions lower on the need hierarchy by delivering against very pragmatic current concerns” (Fournier, 2009, 6). Indeed, the more mundane brand relationships often get little or no attention in research (Coupland, 2005). In subchapter 2.1.2, we discussed the concept of the extended self and how low-involvement products less often play a major role in the identity narrative (Reimann & Aron, 2009, 71). These are the more mundane brand relationships – ones that may well be important and enduring but rarely get as much attention.

Interdependent brand relationships are built on reliance and trust and the brands are part of the consumer’s daily routine (Solomon et al. 2012, 14). They are nothing fancy, just necessary. Fournier’s (1988) informant bought reliable mass brands because one of them was guaranteed to be on sale when she needed to cut back on budget. I myself always choose Fairy as my detergent because I know from experience that it gets rid of grease better than any other brand. Many interdependence brands are not bought because of the label, but because the buyer knows that it serves its purpose. In Coupland’s study (2005, 116), her informants even literally “unbrand” their purchases when unpacking their shopping bags (i.e. put rice and pasta into glass containers instead of storing them in the original packaging). This underlines the fact that in these cases the brand presents only a guarantee of functionality, not something to show off to others.

The relationship type can be described with “routine” and “habitual” (Fournier, 2009, 6). Although the interdependency brand relationships are not the most exciting ones, they may well lead to repeat purchases and word-of-mouth that falls to the convenient advice category. For the consumer, the biggest benefit of interdependent brand relationships is the way they make everyday life easier and help to get through daily tasks more efficiently. As Coupland’s (2005, 112) informant describes: “it makes my life so much easier not to worry what kinds [of brands]

I'm buying, without really having to think about it. It's just so automatic." Doing groceries in the same store, picking up the same products and brands, saves the informant a noteworthy amount of time.

#### **2.2.1.4 Love or passion**

Whilst the liking and disliking of brands has been on the agenda for marketing researchers across decades, the past few years have been all about love. In the 2000's, marketing research has explored the concept of love and established that consumers may experience such a feeling towards a product or a brand (Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2011). Most conceptualizations of love propose a triangular theory of love that includes three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008, 1063). Aron and Aron (1996) conceptualize that when entering a love relationship, people extend themselves: the object of love becomes a part of the extended self.

Although not all instances of brand love are fully analogous to the forms of interpersonal love, there are fundamental similarities between the two phenomena (Ahuvia, 2005; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; 81). Love is a prevalent, common feeling in consumption: when Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan (1989) asked their informants to list feelings that they have experienced when thinking about their consumption, love was the second most often listed emotion right after happiness. In a study by Batra et al. (2011, 36), 89 % of their informants reported that they truly love at least one brand. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006, 81) define love for a brand as the "degree of passionate emotional attachment that a person has for a particular trade name". Ahuvia (2005) lists five characteristics that brand love includes: passion for a brand, brand attachment, positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotions in response to the brand, and declarations of love toward the brand.

The borderline between brand preference and brand love is not an entirely clear one. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006, 81) acknowledge that consumers tend to use the word love somewhat loosely when talking about commercial products. This makes the phenomenon difficult to study. According to Fournier (1998), the brand relationships that fall into the love and passion category



are distinctively stronger than simple preference – the feeling towards the brand is richer, deeper, and more enduring. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006, 81) list four key differences between brand satisfaction and brand love:

1. While satisfaction is more of a cognitive judgment, brand love has a much stronger affective focus.
2. Whereas satisfaction is typically a transaction-specific outcome, brand love is usually a result of a long-term brand relationship.
3. While satisfaction is linked to the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm, brand love requires neither expectancy nor disconfirmation.
4. Brand love includes a willingness to declare love and involves integration of the brand into the consumer's identity – neither of which is present in satisfaction.

Researchers have identified that brand love has a positive impact on brand loyalty, repeat purchase intention, resistance to negative information about the brand, and that it often leads to the generation of positive word-of-mouth (Wallace et al. 2014; Batra et al. 2011; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998). In terms of which brands are most lovable, Carroll & Ahuvia's (2006, 87) findings suggest that brand love is greater for brands in product categories perceived as more hedonic (as compared with utilitarian) and for brands that offer more in terms of symbolic benefits. However, as Albert et al. (2008, 1074) note, the feeling and formation of (brand) love is to a large amount culturally bound. Whereas passion and pleasure were strongly present in both U.S. and French samples, trust and memories came through more strongly within the French sample, and the U.S. gave greater emphasis on attachment. Therefore it is questionable whether any of the existing brand love studies are applicable to a context of Finnish consumers.

### **2.2.2 Brand relationship portfolio**

Brand relationships can be seen as presentations of consumers' identities (Swaminathan, Page, & Gürhan-Canli, 2007). However, they do not tell much if the focus is too narrow. One of Fournier's (1998) main tenets is that brand relationships are purposeful and meaning-laden.

According to her, the relationships formed between brand and consumer can be understood only by looking to “the broader context of the consumer’s life”. Only this way can the relationship’s meaning be uncovered: what need or goal is it serving to achieve? Brand relationships have their own narrative, and researchers should focus not only on what brands mean, but also how they have come to mean something to the consumers who use them (Fournier, 2009, 8). By looking solely at one brand relationship, researchers turn their back on the big picture and therefore miss the point of *why* the brand relationship is how it is, and become incapable of interpreting its true nature and meaning.

Also, selecting a single brand relationship and attempting to use it to understand and interpret a consumer’s self-concept would be misleading, as the self is construed through a multitude of brand relationships. Fournier (1988) examines her informants’ brand relationships as a whole – a brand relationship portfolio – that can be linked to life themes and identity issues. Schembri, Merrilees and Kristiansen’s (2010, 629) informant manages to perfectly phrase the portfolio concept: “The different brands reflect the different parts of my personality. They are part of me, but I do not think I can be one brand. But there’s a connection, and each is part of my personality.” Without examining the whole of her brand relationship portfolio, the researcher may have come to contact with only one dimension of the informant’s self.

*Pam’s comments about the “solidity of movement” in the Bugs Bunny cartoons and the “really fresh, the big, fat bloomy” popcorn are excellent examples of connoisseurship –. In this way, even these seemingly mundane items join with the more straightforward examples like Bach CDs and her collection of vintage purses in supporting her bohemian artistic composer persona.*  
– Ahuvia (2005, 175)

Brand relationships are always built on a personal level and are therefore unique. Although two consumers may form a relationship with the same brand, it is unlikely that the brand relationships turn out the same way, as they are formed to fulfill the needs of an individual consumer. As in the example of Ahuvia’s study – it is highly unlikely that another consumer would have formed a brand relationship with Bugs Bunny cartoons that signifies a bohemian, artsy lifestyle. Without interpreting what the brand means to Pam against her identity narrative, many may have thought that the cartoons are a nostalgic, naïve bridge to childhood.

## **2.3 The effect of life changes in identity narrative and brand relationships**

Research has found that the nature and role of brand relationships evolves over time. It seems that when there come changes to the identity narrative, key brand relationships need to be reconsidered. Modifications are performed either to the brand relationship, or its role in the identity narrative – or both. As Fournier (2009) states, the dynamicity of brand relationships has not yet been studied.

This sub-chapter not only summarizes the theories presented in the previous two subchapters of the theoretical framework, but also adds the context of change to the mix. Theories about life changes and how brands function as an instrument that helps through transitional stages in life are presented. Although identity narrative and brand relationships have not been earlier studied within the expatriate context, some assumptions of what the findings come to be can be drawn based on previous research that is relatively similar. This subchapter lays out a variety of potential outcomes that may emerge from the findings. These priori themes are summarized in tables 1 and 2 and further on used as guidelines in the empirical part of this thesis.

### **2.3.1 The dynamicness of a brand relationship in identity transition**

Periods of life transitions are associated with significant changes in consumer behavior: as people enact new roles or relinquish old ones, they experience a need to redefine their self-concept (Mehta & Belk, 1991). Mathur, Moschis and Lee (2003) studied the impact of life events in brand preference. Their main finding was that “brand preference changes may be viewed as the outcome of adjustments to new life conditions and changes in consumption lifestyles that reflect consumer efforts to cope with stressful life changes” (p. 129). These shifts in brand preference can be translated into shifts in brand relationships, since a decrease in preference can be traced back to a change of nature in the brand relationship. Therefore, any period of life transition may lead to changes in the brand relationship portfolio.

When a consumer loses an important aspect of self, they must reconstruct a congruous, integrated self-concept (Schouten, 1991). Schouten's study illustrates the role and importance of consumption activities in this process. "Symbolic and experiential consumer behaviors are important to successful transitions in that they aid the exploration, establishment, and ongoing support of new roles and identities." (Schouten, 1991, 422) In such a transition of identity, a consumer may shape new identities with symbols and activities that are available in consumer culture (Mehta & Belk, 1991). As we know from the work of Belk (1988) as well as Mathur et al. (2003), consumption and brands have a prominent role in the construction of a consumer's identity narrative.

*Brands as linkage to the past*

Kleine et al. (1995, 335) researched consumers' types of attachment to their possessions. They discovered four types of attachment: a) strong, affiliative, past-oriented attachment; b) strong, present-autonomy-oriented attachment; c) weak, not-me attachment; and d) "mixed" attachment. A brand relationship to a brand that represents one's origins could become any of the aforementioned:

- a) Since the brand is something common at one's former country, it affiliates them to their origin and creates a sense of belonging.
- b) Since the brand is something unique to one's new surrounding, it distinguishes them from others in their present life situation; "I come from another culture – this makes me stand out".
- c) If one decides to fully redefine their identity narrative, former brand relationships will not fit in any longer and must therefore be ended.
- d) One's identity narrative becomes fragmented: the brand relationship belongs to one role of the self but not to another.

Evidence of the affiliative, past-oriented brand attachment is also found in Mehta and Belk's study. They found that formerly domestic brands are called on to fulfill roles that family, friends and familiar environment once performed for the emigrant. When possessions are seen as part of

the identity, they may allow emigrants to “transport” part of their former identities to a new place (Mehta & Belk, 1991, 399). Also in his earlier research Belk (1988, 159) states that by their very nature, concrete material objects help us to maintain a “personal archive”. Therefore, brands could be used as a tool for maintaining a previous self. This means that the brand relationship would become stronger but different in nature.

When geographically moving oneself away from everything familiar, individual possessions are used for anchoring identity (Mehta & Belk, 1991, 400). Kleine et al. (1995, 328) explain how special possessions can facilitate self-continuity by connecting a person with a desirable past self (e.g. memories). However, as the same products and brands may no longer be available and familiar habits can no longer be enacted, consumers are forced to change some parts of their routine. Previous researchers suggest that such estrangement leads to grief and therefore the migrant must go through a process of mourning before overcoming the culture shock (Mehta & Belk, 1991, 400). In addition, objects brought from “home” can be used as “security blankets” that provide comfort and store memories (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Belk, 1988). These transitional objects provide a sense of cultural identity and security that had been taken for granted in their homeland.

### *Brands as milestones in change*

In the light of previous literature, it is reasonable to state that brands can be used to milestone the periods and changes that a consumer goes through along his or her life. Many researchers have demonstrated how their informants connect different brands to different life situations. Ahuvia’s (2005) informant describes how some of her most significant brand relationships express her past as a girl from the ranch, and her present life as an urban marketer is expressed through her brand relationships with a baseball brand and some cookery brands. These milestone possessions, or self-signifying objects, help mark a path – a narrative path along which we have traveled and which has led to the present state (Kleine et al. 1995, 341).

A brand becomes increasingly significant for the consumer if it has a link to a meaningful life event, i.e. the object plays a role in the consumer’s identity narrative (Kleine et al. 1995, 341).

Objects of this kind may be an engagement ring, a family heirloom, or something less obvious, such as “Volvo, because it was the first car that I drove”. Indeed, many researchers have reached the conclusion that the use of brands for self-construction is specifically evident during life changes (Schembri et al. 2010; Ahuvia, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Schouten, 1991). In a role transition phase, consumption changes to reflect such changes (Mathur, Moschis & Lee, 2003). This dynamic follows from the consumers’ need to redefine who they are and communicate this to others (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Kleine et al. 1995).

Reimann and Aron (2009, 74) suggest that if a consumer has been involved in a long-term relationship with a brand, it is more upsetting to “break up” with that brand. In this spirit it seems clear that brands that have been prominent throughout a consumer’s life are hard to let go of when moving abroad. The duration of a brand relationship contributes to brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), meaning exactly that the longer the relationship the harder it will be for a consumer to substitute the brand. The most significant brand relationships are likely to endure the changes a consumer goes through in their life and become even more significant, or if not, they shall remain as the aforementioned milestones that mark a certain episode in life.

#### *Brands separate past self from present self*

A new selection of brands provides the opportunity of extending the self in a new direction. In this case, old brand relationships that were relevant to one’s previous identity may be replaced with new ones – ones that better reflect the new self (Mehta & Belk, 1991, 400). Many studies have uncovered insight of informants “cleansing” themselves after a changing life event (Ahuvia, 2005; Schouten, 1991). “By dispossessing ourselves or a symbol of a former self, we aid the process of leaving the past behind” (Kleine et al. 1995, 328). Cui, Fitzgerald, and Donovan (2014, 313–318) conceptualize that when consumers live in a foreign country, their extended self is broadened to reflect new identities. In other words, consumers may include cultures other than their own culture of origin as part of their self-concept.

Since consumption and objects are so central to the expression of the self, it is natural that consumers need to dispose of products or brands relevant to previous roles and acquire new

products or brands that are relevant to the new roles (Mathur et al. 2003). One of Fournier's (1988) informants had a clear distinction between her old, married self, and the new, divorced, independent self. There were the "old" brands she was trying to get rid of or give new meaning to, and there were the new ones - the ones that made her stronger and distinguished her from what she used to be. Also Kleine et al. (1995, 341) found evidence of possessions that signify "who I was but am no longer".

Returning to the thoughts of Aaker (1999) and the malleable self that adapts according to context and includes various roles, it is suggested that expatriates acquire several new roles when moving abroad: someone who is new to the place, someone who misses home, someone who is balancing to find their place in the new environment... The sudden appearance of all these new roles may lead to confusion and negative fragmentation of the identity narrative (Ahuvia, 2005; Schouten, 1991). On the other hand, some consumers may welcome the fragmentation as a positive change and an opportunity. According to Schouten (1991), some consumers see identity transition as a chance to redefine their identity narrative. In the process of redefinition, material objects are used to signal change and the development of a renewed identity (Kleine et al., 1995, 328).

### **2.3.2 Priori themes**

From the literature reviewed in this chapter, two tables are formed in order to summarize the theories that are most relevant in this study's context. The theories are categorized in terms of which of the research questions is it more closely connected to. These theories are later on treated as priori themes in the empirical section – as a way of structuring the data in the beginning of its interpretation. The theories are revisited in the conclusions subchapter in order to assess whether consistencies and/or inconsistencies emerge. Table 1 includes the themes that are connected to the ways that expatriates may reform their identity narrative once they move abroad.

*Table 1. Priori themes connected to research question 1.*

<b>Priori theme</b>	<b>Supporting research</b>
Life transitions cause significant changes in consumer behavior	Mehta & Belk, 1991; Mathur, Moschis & Lee, 2003
Consumption is important in the process of restoring the congruity of self-concept	Schouten, 1991
Migrants go through a stage of grief over lost consumption habits in order to overcome culture shock	Mehta & Belk, 1991
The use of brands for self-construction is specifically evident during life changes	Schembri, Merrilees & Kristiansen, 2010
Consumers may cleanse and redefine their self-concept after a changing life event	Ahuvia, 2005; Schouten, 1991
Expatriates have freedom of choice in terms of culture and consumption habits	Cui, Fitzgerald & Donovan, 2014; Hannerz, 1990
When moving abroad, consumers face the acquisition of several new roles	Aaker, 1999

Based on previous research it is safe to say that significant life changes, including moving abroad, are bound to lead to modifications in the identity narrative. Depending on the context of the study in question, earlier theories provide a variety of potential ways that the identity narrative may change. For example Schouten (1991), who studied the context of plastic surgery and its effects on identity, reaches somewhat different conclusions than researchers whose studies concern expatriates or immigrants. In addition, Ahuvia as well as Mathur et al. did not particularly focus on a single context of life change but rather their data revealed various changes that had led to identity narrative modification.

Below, in table 2, are listed the theories that contribute to the frame of reference for research question two, i.e. research that presents insight to the evolving nature of brand relationships, particularly in the context of life changes. The priori themes include findings of expatriate and



immigrant brand, object or possession consumption as well as brand relationships on a more general level that came to findings of relevance.

*Table 2. Priori themes connected to research question 2.*

<b>Priori theme</b>	<b>Supporting research</b>
During change, brand relationships can become past-oriented	Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995; Belk, 1988; Mehta & Belk, 1991
Brand relationships connect a person with a past self	Mehta & Belk, 1991; Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995
Objects brought from “home” act as “security blankets”	Mehta & Belk, 1991
Brands act as milestones that signify periods of life	Ahuvia, 2005; Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995
Long-term brand relationships are harder to give up	Reimann & Aron, 2009; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006
Old brand relationships may be disposed of to signify change	Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995; Fournier, 1998
Brand relationships can be replaced with new ones that are congruent with the new self	Mathur, Moschis & Lee, 2003; Mehta & Belk, 1991

In addition to the identification of priori themes, i.e. potential outcomes, some potential factors that impact the process of moving abroad emerge from the literature review. Several characteristics that are tied to cosmopolitanism may influence the smoothness of expatriate identity transitions process. The level of cultural openness, expected duration of stay, and motivation for moving are all among the antecedents that are likely to affect the level of cultural convergence and how readily the consumer will modify their identity narrative (Cui et al. 2014, Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Cannon & Yaprak, 2002; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; Mehta & Belk, 1991).

### **3 CONDUCTING THE STUDY**

This chapter lays out the empirical framework of this thesis. Ontological and epistemological presumptions are discussed before diving into the world of research methods in search for the best-fitting research instrument for this topic and its objectives. After selecting the appropriate methodology and explaining their strengths and weaknesses, the case brand and the sample the empirical study will be conducted to, are introduced. Subchapter 3.5 is dedicated to the evaluation of the credibility of this research.

#### **3.1 Research philosophy**

Philosophical assumptions lay under all research. Ontology and epistemology are the key concepts of philosophy in social sciences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 12). Research philosophy contains important assumptions about the way in which the researcher views the world. It impacts what we study, how we study it and how we understand the data (Saunders et al. 2009, 108).

Ontology looks at the nature of reality. The traditional and clear-cut division of ontological assumptions is often made between objectivism and subjectivism. This research sees that the world is constructed subjectively, where perceptions and experiences construct reality that may be different for each person, and change over time and according to context. A subjectively minded researcher attempts to understand the meanings that individuals attach to social phenomena. Subjectivism is a continual process, where all reality is in a constant state of revision through a process of social interaction and interpretation (Saunders et al. 2009, 111).

Furthermore, most qualitative research is often seen as interpretive (Kovalainen & Eriksson, 2008, 17). Events in the social world only become “real” to the individual once they have been interpreted and therefore acquire meaning (Shankar et al. 2001, 429). The dominant paradigm of current interpretive research is social constructionism (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 20). Social constructionism views reality as being socially constructed. Social actors perceive and interpret

different situations in varying ways depending on their own view of the world (Saunders et al. 2009, 111).

Epistemology answers to the questions “what is knowledge and what are the sources and limits of it?” (Kovalainen & Eriksson, 2008, 15) Seeing the possibility of multiple socially constructed realities, any understanding or interpretation of reality is bound to be subjective (Shankar et al. 2001, 432). Any generated knowledge is related to time and context, and is continuously constructed through experiences and shared meanings. Many argue that an interpretivist perspective is highly appropriate for the field of marketing research, since the situations are not only complex but also unique (Saunders et al. 2009, 116).

In interpretivist philosophy, it is crucial that the researcher adopts an empathetic stance, where they attempt to understand the research topic from their informants’ point of view (Saunders et al. 2009, 116). But of course, this kind of approach to data analysis is extremely demanding, since the researcher always makes subjectivist interpretations of the data – interpretations that are based on his or her own view on the world. “The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds” is how Guba and Lincoln (1998, 207) describe the interpretive research process. There are many possible interpretations to the same data, all of which are potentially meaningful.

The way of approaching the study can be roughly divided into two opposite ends: deductive and inductive reasoning. Deduction moves from theory to data and often involves the careful consideration of hypotheses driven from previous literature. Induction, on the other hand, goes the other way around. Starting with data generation it then looks at theory to find explanations to the findings. A vague generalization would be that deductive research is more often quantitative, whereas induction has more to do with qualitative (Saunders et al. 2009, 127).

However, it would be wildly misleading to say that the topic of research approach would be this black and white. It is possible to combine the two approaches, and Saunders et al. (2009, 127) even encourage doing so. This combination of the two approaches is called abduction. Researchers often use both induction and deduction in different phases of their study, which

means that you move iteratively between these two during a research process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 24). Peirce (1955) gives an example of an abductive approach: deduction can be used to evaluate hypotheses and induction for justifying them with empirical data. Theories will be used to generate hypotheses and the groundwork for research in a deductive manner, after which empirical research is applied in order to build and enhance theory. Induction is used to fill in blanks in previous research.

To sum up, this study follows the interpretivist, furthermore the popular social constructionist, paradigm. It has a subjectivist view on reality, and sees knowledge as subjective and dependent on context. It approaches research in an abductive manner, iteratively moving back and forth from theory to data and back to theory for adjustments.

### **3.2 Case Fazer Blue**

Robson (2002, 178) defines case study as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”. Case studies can be conducted from a variety of starting points. According to Eriksson and Koistinen (2014, 4), case studies consist of the examination of one or more cases and their most central objective is to define, analyze and resolve the case(s). Case studies provide a rich understanding of the research topic, and deep insight to a particular phenomenon and its processes.

Yin (2014, 9–15) suggests that selecting case study as a research approach is worthwhile when (1) the questions “what, how, and why” are central, (2) the researcher has only little control over what is happening, (3) there is little empirical research conducted in the area, and/or (4) the object of research is a current phenomenon. Case studies are most often contextual – meaning that the researcher wants to understand the case in question as a part of a specific context (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014, 7). In this study, the case is Fazer Blue and the brand is studied in the concept of expatriates and their consumption habits. A single case approach is selected

because it gives the opportunity to “observe and analyse a phenomenon that few have considered before (Saunders et al. 2009, 146).

When considering whether or not to take on a case study in this research, many scenarios were thought through. The scope of brand relationships of one informant, let alone several informants, is very wide. If brand relationships were to be addressed altogether and on a general level, the findings may turn out to be very difficult to structure and to draw conclusions from. The data may not present any form of consistency, because different brand categories may produce very different brand relationships. Furthermore, the way the brand relationships evolve, may be drastically different. It is reasonable to think that a brand relationship with Colgate toothpaste develops differently than a brand relationship with a Sony television. Therefore, in order to smoothen the research process and to ensure the generation of valuable and focused insight, this study will focus on a sole brand.

Different iconic Finnish brands were considered. Fast-moving consumer goods presented itself as the most attractive category, since brand relationships that required repeated purchase in order to flourish seem easier for informants to comprehend. Furthermore, it made sense to rule out products that go bad quickly, since brand relationships with the kind of produce would be near to impossible to actively maintain when living in a country where the brand is unavailable. Sweets are a category that not only endures for years after packaging but also evokes strong hedonic meanings.

Finland has one strong sweets brand that beats all the rest in terms of prestige and importance, and chocolate is a universally popular sweet that only few are able to say no to. The chocolate market is strong, stabile and competed, and the product itself has been found to generate rich and complex consumption experiences (Zarantonello & Luomala, 2011, 55) Therefore it is no surprise that chocolate attracts academic interest and there is a number of research around the topic.

*The iconic Fazer's milk chocolate first appeared in 1922 in its famous blue wrapper symbolizing the pure Finnish nature. It is the chocolate that many Finns have grown up with and that has turned us into chocolate lovers. – Fazer (2014A)*

Fazer is one of Finland's most successful brands and the producer of Finland's best selling sweets. Founded in 1891 by Karl Fazer, the Fazer corporation is still a family business that is rooted in Finland. Although Fazer has expanded their business abroad, 47 % of its revenue firmly comes from Finland and 95 % of the sweets production takes place in Finland (Fazer, 2014B). Moreover, the Karl Fazer Milk Chocolate – or “Fazer Blue”, as it is more commonly known among the Finnish, referring to its distinctive, royal blue packaging – has been selected as Finland's most valuable brand for six consecutive years (Markkinointi & Mainonta, 2014; appendix 1). It is safe to say that Fazer Blue is an essential part of the Finnish cultural heritage.

In addition to the brand's prestige in the hearts of Finns, the brand makes a convenient case because of the company's internal interest in expansion and internationalization. According to the company report, the goal of the sweets business category is to gain 50 % of their growth during the next five years from outside their domestic market (Fazer, 2014C). The company has already turned their focus to frequent travellers, with whom they have developed the “Fazer Magic” product line that is sold mainly at international airports, ferries, and selected coffee shops and department stores around the world (Fazer, 2014C).

### **3.3 Research method**

In terms of choosing the appropriate research methodology, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 27) suggest that the researcher should let the research questions “dictate” the choice – and not the other way around. They add that methods are also closely attached to different theories. Therefore it can prove useful to turn to the theoretical framework and see how the topic has been examined earlier. In order to find the best-suited research strategy, a table that consists of similar research and the methodology they used, was put together (table 3).

*Table 3. Methods used in similar research.*

<b>Author, year</b>	<b>Research topic</b>	<b>Research method</b>
Cui, Fitzgerald & Donovan, 2014	Country-of-origin and the extended self	Questionnaire
Wallace, Buil & de Chernatony, 2014	Self-expressive brands	Online survey
Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012	Cosmopolitan identities	Online survey
Zarantonello & Luomala, 2011	Chocolate consumption experiences	Diaries
Loveland, Smeesters & Mandel, 2010	Need to belong & nostalgic products	Questionnaire & Word task
Schembri, Merrilees & Kristiansen, 2010	Brand consumption in the construction of the self	Semi-structured interviews
Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008	Brand love and self-concept	Semi-structured interviews & Survey
Mathur, Moschis & Lee, 2003	Life events' connection to brand preference changes	Questionnaire
Thompson & Tambyah, 1999	Cosmopolitan identities & their consumer behavior	In-depth interviews
Fournier, 1998	Brand relationships	In-depth interviews
Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995	Brands and self-concept	Questionnaire
Mehta & Belk, 1991	Meanings of possessions of immigrants	In-depth interviews & photographic methods

During recent years, surprisingly many of the studies that concern brands and their ties to self-concept have been quantitative. The study by Zarantonello & Luomala (2011) confirms that the

consumption of chocolate is appropriate to be studied with a qualitative method that assesses the experiences and texts of consumers.

### 3.3.1 Multiple method qualitative research

Qualitative research methods have been adapted to marketing research from social sciences after it became evident that quantitative research methods familiar from economics were inadequate to fully explain consumer behavior. One way of distinguishing between qualitative and quantitative research methods is the focus on numeric or non-numeric data (Saunders et al. 2009, 151). Qualitative research attempts to examine reality through meanings, and the emphasis is on interpretation and understanding, whereas quantitative research approaches the research problem through hypothesis testing and statistical analyses (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 5).

Qualitative research is typical for research in the interpretive paradigm, as are also small, non-probability samples and in-depth investigations (Saunders et al. 2009, 119). The research design in this study is *multi-method qualitative research*, since it uses a combination of two qualitative techniques (Saunders et al. 2009, 152). Using multiple methods within one study is a key advantage of case studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 127). This study also combines primary and secondary data since the interview data is generated first-hand, whereas the netnographic data already exists. Saunders et al. (2009, 154) list benefits of multi-method research:

- Triangulation. The use of two or more independent sources of data or data generation methods allow to corroborate research findings within a study
- Complementarity. The methods fill in the gaps of the other method
- Generality. Using independent sources of data provides the study a sense of relative importance
- Aid interpretation. Different perspectives to the research question may help identifying the most relevant aspects and findings in the data
- Solving a puzzle. Using an alternative data generation method may help when the initial method reveals unexplainable results or insufficient data.



To conclude, a multiple method research design provides a multidimensional understanding on the topic. Triangulation in data generation methods is also considered to increase the credibility of a study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 293).

### **3.3.2 The narrative research method**

Narrative research is based in the literature tradition of collecting narratives and analyzing themes in those narratives, as is done in literary analysis (McQueen & Zimmerman, 2006). The method is specifically designed to capture aspects of the narrative mode of thinking which people use to organize and interpret their life experiences (Bruner, 1986). Narratives make the experiences meaningful and are a way for consumers to make sense of their lives (Stern, Thompson & Arnould, 1998). Indeed, narrative research is based on behavior rather than based on opinions, which means that it generates insights into likely or actual consumption experiences, not simply opinions or feelings around a particular question (Webster, 2009; Shankar et al. 2001).

The narrative research method provides a bunch of benefits particularly suited for this research area and these research objectives. According to Shankar, Elliott and Goulding (2001), narratives are a good way of interpreting consumers' experiences. Many studies that are similar in topic and focus have utilized the narrative method and it has proved most useful and capable of producing valuable insight into consumer-brand relationships. Consumer researchers have adopted the narrative ideology to develop a richer understanding of different aspects of consumption – such as the role of consumption in the construction of the self (Shankar et al. 2001, 434; Escalas & Bettman, 2000).

Most market research methods ignore the contextual aspects of consumer behavior. When a person tells a story about a given scenario without being guided by a pre-formed question or hypothesis, the responses offer the researcher unbiased insights into how people really perceive and act in a specific context, and how they may communicate about their perceptions and actions with other people in a real-time context. It is these types of contexts within a complex

marketplace, which create the influences on decision-making that marketers need to understand more clearly. (Webster, 2009)

In addition, many methods turn their backs on “the big picture”: within narrative research, the meanings derived from specific consumption stories should be interpreted in relation to a “broader narrative of personal history” Thompson (1997, 441). This aspect is very evident in previous research of consumption narratives such as the work of Fournier (1998) and Ahuvia (2005), who both look to the consumer’s life history in search for explanations for brand relationships and their meanings. The narrative approach acknowledges the mistake that many methods commit: they become so involved in analyzing and breaking down data that they forget to synthesize and interpret the results against the big picture.

Mishler (1995) presents different ways of using narratives in research. This study falls to the category “narrative functions”, where the focus is on “how narratives ‘work’ to create” and an example of possible points of interests is how narratives create a sense of one’s self (Shankar et al. 2001, 435). Furthermore, I use a combinations of two narrative typologies introduced by Elliott (2005) and Gergen and Gergen (1988) for the key features of narratives in order to identify valuable parts within the data (table 4). Interpretive narrative research does not aim to make broad generalizations but rather to interpret and provide insight to consumer experience (Schembri et al. 2010, 626; McQueen & Zimmerman 2006).

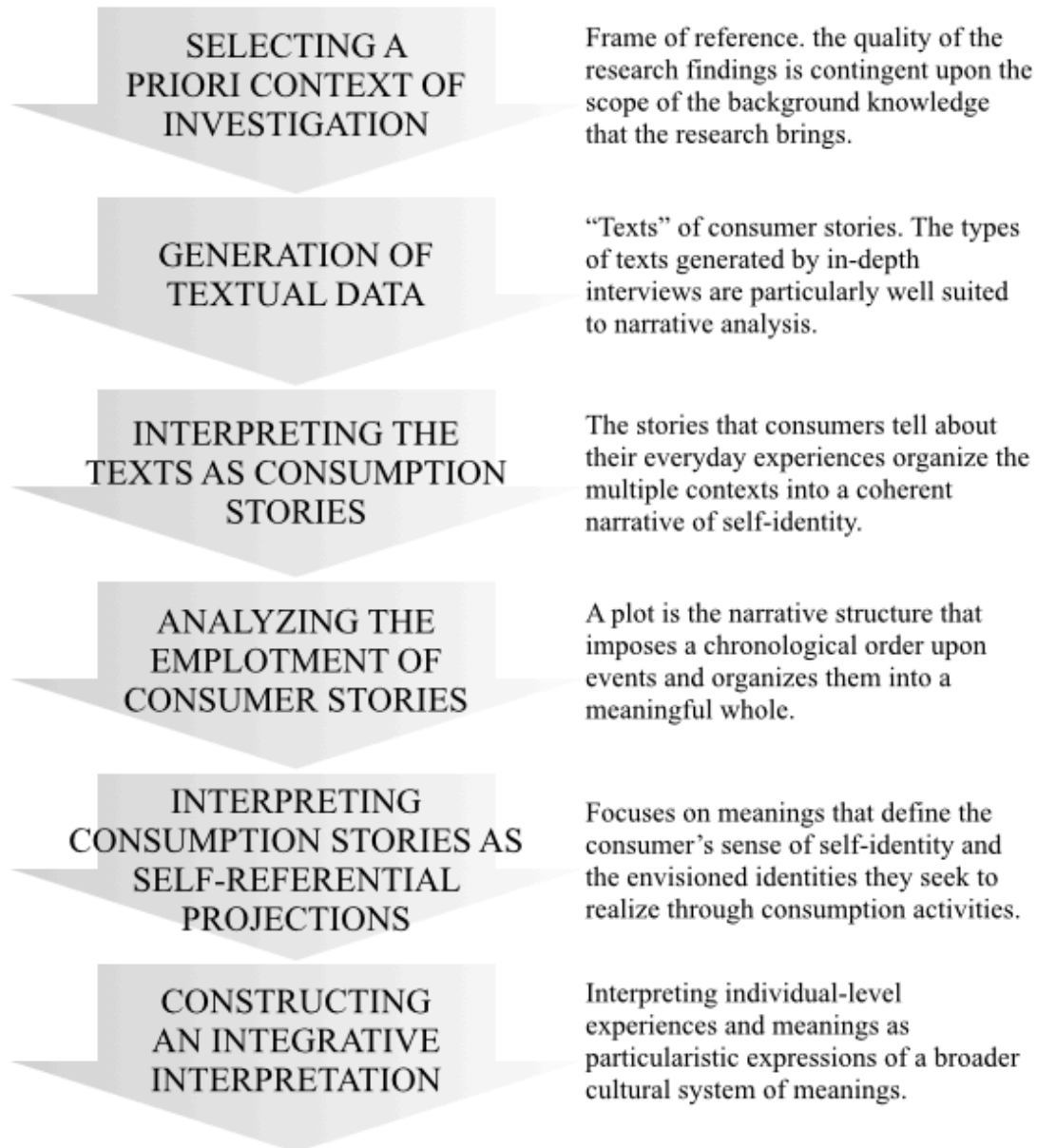
*Table 4. Key features of narratives (adapted from Elliott, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 1988).*

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Brief description</b>
The establishment of a valued end point	Every story must have a “point” to make. Moreover this point must be meaningful, negatively or positively, by the people involved in the narrative process
Selection of events relevant to the goal state	Selecting the events that help us make our point

The ordering of events	Placing the point and supporting events into a “linear, temporal sequence”. Beginning, middle, and end
Establishing causal sequences	The order in which we put the events of our story tends to be causally linked; event B only happened because of event A etc.
Social	Narratives are produced for specific audiences

However, narrative research presents some challenges. The theoretical and methodological base of the stream is diverse, and due to the various backgrounds, many narrative approaches are incompatible. Furthermore, many researchers find it difficult to formulate the practical implications of their narrative findings. (Kovalainen & Eriksson, 2008, 211) The goal of narrative research is not to present generalizable findings, but to give rich insight to the context of focus and to describe and interpret consumers’ brand experience (Schembri et al. 2010, 626).

The analysis of the data, i.e. transcribed narrative interviews, will be conducted following the hermeneutic narrative framework of Thompson (1997) (figure 1). The methodology was designed for marketing research in particular and Thompson himself used it to highlight how a consumer’s narrative relates to and constructs their identity (Shankar et al. 2001). The mere fact that the framework has been previously applied to research of similar context strengthens the researcher’s trust in its compatibility and applicability.



*Figure 1. The narrative research process (adapted from Thompson, 1997).*

This study will not perform the last step, “interpreting individual-level experiences and meanings as particularistic expressions of a broader cultural system of meanings”, in its totality. Instead, this research will simply construct an integrative interpretation; draw a synthesizing conclusion of the findings.

### 3.3.3 In-depth interviews

An in-depth interview is an unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single participant is probed by an interviewer in order to derive meaning through interpretations, not necessarily “facts” from the informant’s talk (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, 207). In-depth interviews can prove very helpful to “find out what is happening [and] to seek new insights” (Robson, 2002, 59). Unstructured interviews are typical for an interpretivist epistemology, where the aim is to understand meanings that informants ascribe to various phenomena. In-depth interviews are particularly appropriate if the topic or questions are either complex or open-ended (Saunders et al. 2009, 324).

As the name implies, in-depth interviewing seeks “deep” information and understanding. According to Malhotra and Birks (2007, 207), there are four meanings for deep in this context:

- Everyday events. The informant holds deep understanding in some everyday activity, event, or place. The informant then shares the knowledge with the interviewer – acts as her kind of mentor shedding light on the topic.
- Context. In-depth interviewing aims to explore contextual boundaries to uncover what is often hidden and to achieve a more reflexive understanding about the experience.
- Multi-faceted. Deep understanding acknowledges that there are multiple views and perspectives on and meanings regarding the topic of interest.
- Interviewer reflection. The researcher is always the “victim” of her own earlier knowledge, and the interpretation she derives from data is biased by her frame of reference.

In business research, in-depth interviews are frequently used as the primary source of data, which is then sometimes complemented with other sources of data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 125). In in-depth interviews, researchers usually rely on relatively few preplanned questions to elicit comprehensive narratives from participants (Casey, 1995, 232). Rather than a structured pathway, the course of the dialogue depends on the informant’s consumption experiences and meanings she/he expresses (Thompson, 1997, 442). The interviews use broad questions and

participants are encouraged to describe their consumption and brand experience (Schembri et al. 2010, 627). In order to tap into the informants' experiences and life worlds, in-depth interviewing requires a certain style of social and interpersonal interaction (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, 209). In-depth interviews build upon intimacy, to which mutual trust is a prerequisite.

The method of creating data to interpret through the narrative method was selected to be in-depth interviews. Although in narrative research literature data is often discussed as "texts", it is not often that the data is originally in written form. In fact, the most common approach to narrative research is to treat and interpret the consumer stories as texts although they have often been created through either phenomenological or in-depth interviews (Thompson, 1997, 442). It became also evident in the theoretical framework that narrative research is most often conducted via in-depth interviews (as presented in table 3).

### **3.3.4 Netnography**

As table 3 reveals, netnography as such has not been used to assess brand relationships nor the consumer behavior of expatriates. However, through her own experience, the researcher knew that expatriate Finns had formed some very active social networking communities in media such as Facebook. Today, an increasing part of communications is performed online. The beauty of the internet is that it transcends spatial limitations and brings people together no matter what location. Because virtual sociality is such a significant part of today's consumers' lives, virtual interaction and its phenomena must be examined (Kozinets, 2010, 1).

Netnography is a qualitative method devised specifically to investigate consumer behavior on the internet (Kozinets, 2010, 1). The logic behind netnography is to adapt ethnographic to study cultures and communities online. Ethnography has its roots in anthropology, and it is often used in sociology and other research concerned about culture and consumption. (Kozinets, 2002, 62–64) The core of ethnography is to integrate to the community of interest and make observations as a member of the group. This way the researcher is able to uncover meanings that are not shared with people outside the community. The aim of ethnography is to generate "thick description" that reports in detail the characteristics and hidden meanings of the community.

Analyzing conversations that already, organically exist online, is a very realistic research method (Kozinets, 2010, 56). Netnography is ideal to be used to supplement other research methods in order to create an efficient mix of methods. Both of the methods give the study complexity by incorporating their own strengths and versatile insight to the topic. This research does not attempt to examine the functions of a virtual community – the interest lies in how the community expresses and discusses the phenomenon that is being studied.

Netnography has several advantages compared to more traditional research methods. It is quick to conduct, simple, and affordable. It is often also a very unnoticeable and undistruptive method due to its observing nature. (Xun & Reynolds, 2009, 19) Because of the internet's documentary nature, it is always possible to return to the data, unlike in ethnography or interviews, where the physical interaction is temporal and spatial. Netnography is a convenient way of deepening the understanding of a phenomenon (Kozinets, 2010, 80).

### **3.4 Data generation**

The data was created from two sources: primary data through the conducted interviews and secondary data through existing online conversations.

#### **3.4.1 Conducting interviews**

The sample was chosen to consist of Finnish expatriates who live abroad instead of using a varying group of currently Finnish-based expatriates of different nationalities. Although consumers who currently live in Finland may have been easier to access, as Mehta and Belk (1991) note people of different cultural backgrounds construct their identity in a different manner. Therefore it was thought that not only would a group of originally Finnish people hold a more cohesively constructed self-concepts, their narratives would also be easier for the researcher to interpret as she herself is also of Finnish origin.

As typical for qualitative research, the sample was conducted using a non-probability sampling technique. For non-probability sampling techniques, the proper sample size is ambiguous and depends on the research objectives (Saunders et al. 2009, 233). The ideal sample size was sought for in previous literature and by reviewing relevant articles it was found that a usual sample size for in-depth interviews varies: whereas Fournier (1988) presented three informants, Ahuvia (2005) showcased two out of his total of ten informants, Schembri et al. (2010, 627) suggest that collecting six to ten interviews is necessary.

In order to evaluate the researchers capability of interviewing in a manner that derives meaningful narratives, a brief pilot interview was conducted. The pilot informant was a former expatriate who currently lives in Finland. However, the pilot interview was conducted via Skype in order to also test whether the recording functioned correctly. After the fifteen-minute pilot interview, minor adjustments were made to the interview draft but altogether the interviewer and interviewee felt that the sketch met its objectives well and gave the informant enough space to lead the conversation without straying from the interview's purpose.

Snowballing technique was used to yield participants. Snowball sampling is recommended, when it is difficult to get in touch with members of the desired population (Saunders et al. 2009, 240). Twelve interview invitations were sent out, to which nine people responded and were willing to participate. A Skype date was set with seven of them. After that the researcher would evaluate whether a saturation point has been reached and whether more interviews should be conducted. With over 200 minutes of interview material, the data was considered as sufficient and there was no need to keep gathering interview data. The seven informants were interviewed during March 2015 via Skype and the sessions lasted between twenty-five to forty minutes. The informants were sent chocolate as a thank you for their time and effort.

In narrative interviewing, the interviewer pays attention to the little stories that informants tell spontaneously in interview situation (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 216). The interviewer also acknowledges her role as an activator of narrative production (Elliott, 2005, 2835). As typical to narrative interviews, there was no structured interview agenda or predefined list of interview questions – the informants are encouraged to talk openly. A narrative interview can also be



conversational, where the interviewer may also decide to share her own story about the topic at hand. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 216) During some of the interviews, the researcher used personal experiences and stories as initiative if it seemed that the informant was unsure about what to share.

### **3.4.2 Generating netnographic data**

The original idea was to conduct this research using only netnographic data. After browsing the internet without finding an adequate source of data, the thought was given up; until one of the informants briefly mentioned a Facebook group of Finnish expatriates. The entry requirement of this group was that each member must have lived abroad for over ten years. The informant described the vibrant chatter, reminiscence of Finland, and comparison of expatriate experiences that went on on a daily basis in the group.

After an informative request sent to the administrators of the group, the researcher was accepted to the group for a short period of time for data generation. For two days the researcher combed through the extremely active discussion and selected the most relevant posts and pieces of conversation regarding this study. The furthest of the threads date back to 2011, and altogether 167 individual messages were documented. After that, the researcher used initial coding that had been identified from the interviews, and divided the screenshots of individual messages into folders labeled with the theme. The messages that were left out of these folders were then re-read in search for possible emerging discoveries.

Like the interviews, the netnographic data was analyzed as narratives. Narrative analysis in netnography sets the netnographic data certain requirements that not all online material meets: it must be story-form, which in turn requires at least some level of length. Social media discussions are often somewhat brief and may not always even form whole sentences. However, the nature of this particular community allowed its members to also share experiences, memories, and stories of both past and present with the community.

## **4 BRANDS' ROLE IN BECOMING COSMOPOLITAN**

This chapter lays out the empirical data, its interpretation and findings. It starts with introducing the informants and gives a brief glance upon their life narratives. Then the process of interpreting narrative data is explained, before diving into the actual findings. The findings are organized to two subchapters: 4.3 sheds light to the first research question (How do expatriates modify their identity narrative when moving abroad?), and 4.4 provides answers to the second research question (What happens to formerly domestic brand relationships when moving abroad?). Subchapter 4.5 remarks the value of expatriates as brand experts and evangelists. The final subchapter then concludes the chapter by presenting a synthesis of the findings. This synthesis is then compared to the one presented in the theoretical framework. Finally, managerial implications are presented.

### **4.1 Informants' life narratives**

Brand relationships should always be interpreted against a bigger picture (Thompson, 1997, 441). A life narrative reflects one's identity, and captures various roles including past, present, and anticipated future selves (Kleine et al. 1995, 328). People's broader brand portfolios and life stories may strongly affect how they presume a brand and how the relationship with that brand evolves (Fournier, 2009). For example, in this case Emma, who has moved away from Finland only a couple of years ago, and led a student lifestyle whilst in Finland, is likely to hold very different brand relationships with Finnish brands than Valerie, who has lived abroad for fifteen years and already had a career and steady income before moving from Finland.

Another significant difference is the variety of countries that the informants currently live in. Stella, who lives in Norway – a country that is nearby, is similar in culture, and higher in price level – probably has dissimilar experiences about moving abroad than Frida, in South Korea – a country far away, with a very different culture, and a lower price level – does. For this reason, we shortly explore the backgrounds of each informant in order to avoid "jumping into conclusions", i.e. making hasty and/or false interpretations.

Before taking a quick glance at the life stories of each informant, table 5 gives an overview on their demographic distribution. In terms of age, the spread is from 24 to 42, countries vary from United Kingdom to all the way to Japan, and the duration of being an expatriate go from three to fifteen years. From this perspective, the sample gives us a rich and multifaceted set of data that allows for making preliminary conclusions and comparisons about how life situation, distance, and time may affect expatriate brand relationships.

*Table 5. Demographics of the informants.*

<b>Name (pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Years abroad</b>
Lisa	24	Customer Servant	United Kingdom	4
June	33	Journalist	Portugal	10
Frida	32	Human Resource Manager	South Korea	3
Valerie	40	Associate Professor	Japan	15
Stella	42	Student Administrator	Norway	6
Emma	27	Online Marketer	Germany	3
Dora	36	Translator	Turkey	13

### *Lisa*

Lisa is a 24-year-old recent bachelor graduate who originally moved from Finland after graduating from high school. Moving to London was her first step – or more of a massive leap – towards independence, since before that she had been living with her parents. Lisa considers herself a person who easily adapts to changes and thereby she has not faced any cultural shock or inconvenience when facing life in a totally new environment. According to her, not having particular consumption habits and routines of her own before moving out of Finland may have eased the process. Before now Lisa has been living on a strict student budget, which has not left much room to express herself through consumption. It can be thought that only now, with an

increased level of income, Lisa's consumer identity is starting to emerge and shape towards what she wants to become.

### *June*

As Lisa, June also moved abroad in an early stage of life – straight after finishing her university degree. June continued her studies in Portugal but has already been in working life for long enough to form a consumption pattern that reflects her identity and value set. Ethical and sustainable consumption is an essential part of June's identity narrative, but due to Portugal's weak economical situation the range of choice is far from as wide as she would hope for. "It's not as easy to find the products I'm used to buying in Finland. At least lately the organic produce, and fair trade... One thing I always look for here is fair-trade coffee and it's really difficult", June explains, describing how she has to put in a lot of effort into maintaining her green grocery habits.

### *Frida*

Frida moved to South Korea some three years ago because of her husband's job opportunity. They signed up for a three year stay and are to move back to Finland this summer. Before moving to South Korea, Frida was working in human resource, a career that she was able to continue in Korea. When looking back to the theoretical framework, it may be assumed that because Frida and her husband knew all along that they were not going to permanently stay in South Korea, they may not have been as eager to adapt to the new culture and modify their consumer behavior (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002).

Although the substantially different selection has changed the way Frida consumes, there is one factor that arises as even more significant. Frida tells that the economic development and increasing level of wealth among Koreans has caused a wave of materialism, where people consume obsessively and "everything has to be really expensive. -- I think that following the Koreans' habits has affected me and now I feel that I really don't want to buy anything more than I absolutely must." Frida has experienced a strong counter reaction to the consumerism of

”nouveau riche” Koreans, and has cut down on her own consumption instead of joining the negligent feast of extravagance.

### *Valerie*

It has been fifteen years since Valerie first moved from Finland to England. After working and raising a family there for fourteen years, Valerie and her family moved to Japan about a year ago. She feels that moving from UK to Japan has been a bigger culture shock than when she first moved from Finland to England, because the latter two cultures were more alike. ”Because here you can’t get Western products the same way you would in Europe”, says Valerie, and adds that ”since everything is written in Japanese and we can’t read Japanese... It’s these practical problems as well, not only the problem that something wouldn’t be available.”

### *Stella*

During the first year of her stay in Norway, Stella was on job alternation leave, meaning that she only worked half-time. The fact that she had less income meant that she had to temporarily modify her expenditure. After she got a permanent job, Stella describes that her consumption habits have gone back to normal. Since the Norwegian culture and cuisine is fairly similar to what she was used to in Finland, the process of adaption was painless and smooth. However, Stella notes that although in Norway the price level is higher than in Finland, there is not as much alternatives available – even in a supermarket there may be only one to three brands and options available per product.

### *Emma*

Also Emma moved to Germany straight after her graduation. What she feels is the most relevant change in her consumption is that she does not pay as much attention to price than she did in Finland. This is not only because she now has a permanent job instead of depending on student allowance, but also because food in general is a lot cheaper in Germany. She feels that she has now more freedom to do her groceries the way she prefers to – for example buying organic

produce has become more of a habit than something occasional. In terms of maintaining consumption habits that she had already established in Finland, Emma says that she is happy about being able to continue as a vegetarian.

*Dora*

”In Finland I was still a student, so even because of that my consumption habits have changed”, explains Dora who moved to Turkey after graduating. She started off working as a travel guide, took on a job at the Finnish embassy and is now working as a freelance translator along with her motherly duties. The main change in Dora’s consumption is that she uses more money to the little daily joys – going to coffee shops and using services such as going to beauty salons. She enjoys the lower price level and wider selection. However, Dora tells that getting used to the Turkish culture took her several years, because ”after all I have such a Finnish mindset compared to the Turkish, I’m more considerate and I don’t want to buy a product or stuff that doesn’t last for long. Because there’s a lot of that available here... I’d rather always only purchase things that are sustainable in consumption and of higher quality”.

## **4.2 Narrative data and its analysis**

In the analysis phase, the interviews as well as the netnographic data are treated as texts; stories of consumers. Indeed, the interviews consisted of a multitude of small narratives, glimpses of the informants’ lives. Many of them were told in story-form, may they be experiences, memories, or rambling about everyday life. What this data succeeds in doing particularly well, is delivering authentic consumption-related experiences that are strongly tied into context – a characteristic that many other methods ignore (Webster, 2009).

Below is a lengthy example of the kinds of narratives that the interviews are packed with. When returning to figure 1 (Elliott, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 1988), which presents five characteristics of a narrative, we see that Emma’s story ticks the box for each of them. The quote establishes a valued end point: the evolving of Emma’s perceptions regarding Fazer Blue. Emma has also

selected events that are relevant to making this point: how her mother always keeps Fazer Blue at her house, how she did not realize its worth before moving abroad. The story also follows a linear sequence: it advances in a chronological manner and has a clear beginning, middle, and end. It also has a causal sequence: she only saw the significance of Fazer because she had moved abroad. Emma's narrative is also clearly social in nature, because I, as the interviewer, was the audience that she produced it to.

*Mom always has Fazer Blue. From time to time she's tried other chocolate brands as well and she's also tried out these newer taste variations of Fazer, but she always returns to the original Fazer Blue. And perhaps when I was living in Finland myself, I perhaps didn't realize it... I mean I was a bit of a Marabou girl before, when I lived in Finland. But now I sort of understand it and when I go visit Finland then, Fazer Blue, somehow, it's so... Maybe the thing is that once you've tasted it as a kid, and now that you go back to Finland it just brings back your childhood memories. – Emma*

As an overview, the data available in the Facebook group that was used for netnographic data generation, consisted of versatile topics – from light everyday chatter to thoughtful self-assessment and from personal topics to totally random topics, not forgetting the most prominent topics concerning Finland and being Finnish. The discussions featured a lot of general reminiscence over the community members' time back in Finland – which, for some, was decades ago. Overall, the need to belong to this community of former Finns came off as very strong; the sense of community was evident through the extremely active conversation. Together the members formed a strong, close-knit virtual community.

*I have always had a home where my heart is and right now it's in Scotland. I enjoy getting to be Scottish but I hold on to my fundamentally Finnish value set. In my family we combine the traditions of Finland and Scotland so Christmas in particular is great because first you on the Eve you get the ham and casseroles and a part of the presents, and on Christmas day you get the turkey with its sides and the rest of the presents :D*

The data was analyzed in an autonomous manner, where the emergence of new and unpredictable findings was allowed. The theoretical framework was kept in mind as a provider of a basic guideline and priori themes (tables 1 and 2), but as will become evident further on, also new dimensions were discovered. The difference between data derived from the in-depth interviews and netnographic data is that the interview quotes end with the informant's "name" whereas the netnographic quotes are left anonymous.

### **4.3 Changes in identity narrative**

The findings that are related to the development of the informants' identity narratives are presented in the following two subchapters. The first one, "holding on to Finnishness" has to do with how expatriates maintain a link to their past. The second one, "cosmopolitan identity narratives" sheds light on how the adaptation process and letting go of one's home country leads to the development of a cosmopolitan identity narrative.

#### **4.3.1 Holding on to Finnishness**

*It's the emphasizing of one's own culture that I greatly wonder. What is the need that leads to it? The longing for your home country? The pursue of being unique, notice me, I'm something different?*

Valerie points out how long-term expatriate Finns go on about Finnish brands in their Facebook groups. In Valerie's words, "I don't know whether you just want to maintain your Finnish identity or whether you just miss Finnish design. Or is it just that you like them to some extent and then when abroad locals don't necessarily have them, then you want to buy them." As Loveland et al. (2010) put it, the brands from one's home country strengthens the consumer's tie with their past. For expatriates, holding on to Finnish brands may be a way of not losing one's "Finnishness". This is also in line with Kleine, Kleine and Allen's (1995) past-oriented brand attachment, where brands connect a person to a past self.



As Valerie notes, the sudden excitement over Finnish brands may also be because of their differentiating effect. Possessing exotic, foreign brands are a way to stand out and emphasize one's uniqueness and individuality. Schembri et al. (2010) note, that the use of brands as to construct self-concept is specifically evident during and after changing life events. Also one of the online community members reflects: "Maybe now that I live abroad, I emphasize my Finnishness because it's different here." Once living abroad, Finnish possessions therefore become a more meaningful part of the extended self, since suddenly their communicative power increases since the brands are less common in the new environment. For example whereas Iittala tableware are very common in Finland and found in every other household, Frida tells that they truly stand out in the Korean setting since the Korean style of dishes is extremely dissimilar.

Although expatriates are most often described to be strongly individualist (e.g. Cleveland et al. 2011), the theoretical framework provides research findings about consuming to feel a sense of belonging to a self of past (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012). Certain brands and objects remind consumers of the past and the people connected to it. In the data, this sense of belonging is stretched to the form of collective consumption, where expatriate Finns share the experience of Finnish brands. May it be face to face or virtually.

*It's like if someone of us goes to Finland we always ask whether someone needs something. And then we gather a list of what everything wants to be brought over. There are some online shops as well that would ship here but we're not that desperate yet. – Emma*

Throughout Emma's interview there was a lot of references to "us" – a small circle of Finnish expatriates living in Berlin. She describes how they "ramble on" about the Finnish products that they crave – for example an acute shortage of chocolate may cause a series of gloomy conversations revolving around the topic. A couple of the other informants also expressed how they enjoy bringing over Finnish products to their Finnish friends who also live abroad if they visit Finland. There is a feeling of connectivity – because only another Finn can understand the significance of a Finnish brand. "I'll be thinking about all of you out there as I munch on these" comments a member of the Facebook group when posting a photo of some Panda liquorice she found at a local store.

This shared understanding and appreciation of Finnish brands came strongly through in the netnographic data. The long-term expatriates clearly enjoy discussing Finnish brands, let them be Fazer, Ruispalat (a rye bread brand) or Auran Sinappi (a traditional, Finnish mustard brand). The topics rotate around how someone has gained access to a Finnish brand, or sharing tips about where Finnish brands might be found, or sharing detailed knowledge of the product. For example during Easter, there was a quiz thread about "Which Fazer candy is the oldest". In another discussion, someone shared the fact that "Fazer is the only company in Europe (so I've heard) that produces their chocolate from fresh milk. Others produce it from milk powder, which leaves a kind of sticky feel to throat."

*I think there's this thing among the Finnish, Finnish people are kinda like into... Not like patriotic but like we want to buy Finnish, "suosi suomalaista". Sort of like at least I myself am the generation that I have memories about if you buy Finnish stuff then people have jobs, and the Finnish people do better. -- At least some time ago there was this mentality in Finland... Like in Finland people bought Nokia phones until the very last bit, although nobody else bought Nokia, Finnish people still did. It's like that -- let's support Finnish. -- You sort of support your own country or home country's products, you strengthen those brands.*  
 – Valerie

"Suosi suomalaista" is a common Finnish saying, which freely translates into "prefer Finnish" and is a request to favor domestic produce. Valerie's quote is strictly in line with the definition of consumer ethnocentrism, according to which consumers feel that it is their responsibility to buy domestic produce whenever possible (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Ethnocentric consumers feel that products made in their home country are superior and that by buying them they support local economy and welfare (Cleveland et al. 2007). Consumer ethnocentrism as a concept was not mentioned by the researcher in advance – it was brought up by the informants' initiative during two of the interviews.

*Living here in England I constantly hear (or read here on FB) from others who've probably moved here rather recently, about what a undeveloped country this is compared to Finland. It makes me feel like*

*well then maybe Finland would be the better alternative for them if they can't stop comparing everything to Finland's superiority...*

Furthermore, a consistent characteristic of consumer ethnocentrism is patriotism, the feeling of pride over one's own country (Cleveland et al. 2011). On Facebook the community members frequently stated how it was always a source of joy to see a Finnish brand available somewhere in their home country. Many even took a snapshot of the "event" and shared it with the group. Lisa has a similar stance to Finnish brands: "It's like if I happen to see some Finnish brand here in a store then yeah I kinda feel proud, like wow we're fine, we've gotten this far."

### **4.3.2 Cosmopolitan identity narratives**

The findings regarding cosmopolitan identity narratives are now presented in two different subchapters, of which the first one explains the journey that the informants have gone through in enhancing their identity narratives after they have moved abroad. The second one presents the multiple forms of redefined identity narratives that the informants have achieved to build – these are representations of individual cosmopolitan identities.

#### **4.3.2.1 The transition process**

In addition to including Finnish origins to one's identity, Finnish grocery brands become seem to become a part of people in other ways, too. Many informants pointed out how difficult it had been to get used to the new, different flavors. A "taste of Finland" is something that natives learn in an early age, and it becomes a norm. "I feel that it's always like that – if you move away from a particular country and there you have gotten used to [the flavor palette] and you may psychically have like emotional connections to certain foods", describes Valerie. Also Dora remembers how difficult it was to give up Finnish flavors that she had grown so fond of:

*When I had just moved, they were important, I missed HK blue [a sausage brand] and mustard and, well, pretty much everything. I was just waiting for getting my hands on them and then we shared it together. And candy, I always had something Finnish to eat at home. But now, there*

*may be months when they [Finnish products] don't even cross my mind.*  
 – Dora

As Mehta and Belk (1991) explain, expatriates face culture shock when moving to a new country. To overcome it, they go through a stage of grief for their lost consumption habits. A constant craving and longing is this kind of behavior. Later on Dora adds, that she used to bring over a lot of food and other products when visiting Finland, but today she does not do that as much anymore. She has settled down in her new home country and during her years of stay in Turkey, she has modified her identity narrative accordingly. To the question of whether she misses any Finnish brands, Dora simply says that she does not miss any brands. It seems that she has been able to reshape her identity narrative into a cohesive whole that fits her current and future life situation (Ahuvia, 2005). Her change of preference describes the transformation process of her identity.

*At first I put up Finnish stuff just for the sake of homesickness. Now that I've been here for over two times longer than I lived in Finland when I was young, I only choose the objects and things that I really like or what is close to my heart, such as something from my childhood home. When Mum died and our house in Finland was sold, that's when my strings to Finland were cut.*

Homesickness was a topic that came up often both during the interviews and in the netnographic data. The first very strong homesickness was also a finding of Mehta and Belk (1991) who tell that it is a part of the adaptation process. With time, the concept of home shifts towards the new country of residence. Peñaloza (1994) refers to the process as acculturation. The quote above, from the Facebook group, accurately describes how the range of important brands that are closely tied with one's self concept, slowly shifts. The final end to the informant's chapter of being Finnish ended to an important event – the death of a close relative that had been the reason she had still felt connected to Finland. The informant “cleansed” her self-concept after this changing event (Schouten, 1991).

#### 4.3.2.2 The many faces of cosmopolitanism

*I don't really know what kind of a bird I am. I was born in Finland, that's for sure. I no longer know which country's cuisine I like or which country's style I have. A gypsy like me, everywhere I've went I've picked up something on the way.*

Sudden changes may cause temporary fragmentations in the identity narrative, but by nature people wish to restore cohesiveness in the story and therefore attempt to make sense of the changes and fit it into their identity narrative by e.g. taking on new selves (Ahuvia, 2005, 172). In some cases, such as above, a wholesome cohesion is not even sought after: a “gypsy soul” may be interpreted into an identity narrative content with the way it is – without a clear box to be categorized in. This definition fits well into Cleveland et al.’s (2001, 935) definition of a cosmopolitan identity where cosmopolitan individuals do not conform to any particular culture.

Another anonymous informant expresses the malleability of her identity narrative conceptualized by Aaker (1999): “Although I’ve been pretty loud about my Finnish heritage, it doesn’t mean that I wouldn’t feel at home here. I have adapted well and like living in Greece. They don’t rule out one another!” For her there is no problem whatsoever in expressing freely her heritage, although she feels that she has fully adapted to her new home country. Altogether, the netnographic data presented exiting data concerning the self-handedly experienced concept of cosmopolitanism. Many that have lived abroad for most of their lives, do not feel that they particularly belong to any culture. Thompson and Tambyah (1999) remark that cosmopolitanism is not a pure state that an individual could reach – they always have some place, country, or culture that they feel rooted to. As the informant below expresses, her origins still lie in Finland.

*I am truly more international than Finnish. I don't particularly feel like a citizen of any country. The surroundings of my childhood are of course Finnish and my relatives are Finnish, so that I feel close to.*

In the synthesis of the theoretical framework, some potential factors that may influence the level of adaption and effort that individuals are ready to put into either maintaining their origins or adapting to their new surroundings, were introduced. Among these is the expected duration of

stay (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002; Mehta & Belk, 1991). It became evident in an online discussion, where the initial message speculated the reasons for why some people are more loud and visible about their Finnish origins whereas some seem to try to hide the fact that they are originally foreign.

*Short-term expatriates and their families probably emphasize the superiority of Finland because they're 2–3 years on some job assignment and then they have a job waiting in Finland. Often they and their expat wives don't even want to adapt to their assigned country, they just hang somewhere with other Finns and eat Finnish rye bread and sausage and drink Finnish coffee... They're a breed of their own.*

The somewhat judgmental Facebook comment above supports the findings of Cui et al. (2014): if the reason for moving abroad was external, e.g. a job assignment, people are less willing to even try to adapt to their new environment. This resistance increases even further, if they know that their stay will only be temporary (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002). However, there is another point of view to the same situation:

*Often people who move abroad for a year or two, to study or to work, don't flag around about being Finnish – they suck in the foreign culture like a vampire sucks blood... But it's temporary... Once they decide to stay in the country, they start feeling homesick, too.*

The differentiating factor between these two types of short-term expatriates that the Facebook group members identify is their natural degree of cultural openness (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2009). When the expected duration of stay is short, it is up to the individual whether to embrace the opportunity of diving into a new culture or to stick to his or her own and maintain their former identity. As the length of the stay prolongs, the choice to maintain a previous identity becomes more and more inconvenient. Still, the beauty of being cosmopolitan is, as Hannerz (1990) puts it, the freedom of choice. The freedom of choice to “mix & match” one's own ideal stand on culture.

*In our family we pick the “best bits” of both cultures. E.g. our ten-year-old son walks to school on his own, which people were horrified about*

*over here, but we held our heads. But on the other hand our sons must always say “please” and “thank you”. In Finland it’s not a norm.*

Above is a short narrative from a mother who has raised her family in her new home country but when raising her children, she selects what she considers the best parts of the two options. She and her family do not respond to any single culture but have rather created an ideal one for their needs and wants.

#### **4.4 The redefined Fazer Blue brand relationship**

Fazer proved to be an exceptionally well-fitting case for the context. As basically all of the informants readily clarify, the Fazer brand has a very special spot in the hearts of Finnish expatriates. No matter whether the brand was in any way special or even of preference in their former, living-in-Finland-lives, moving abroad had elevated the brand relationship. Four themes emerge from the Fazer Blue –related data: a surprisingly cohesive individual-level brand image, where informants describe the brand and the meanings they attach to it; the flavor profile, which according to the data has a significance in terms of brand preference; memories – personal events, people, and experiences that the informants connect to the brand, and finally, a narrative of an evolving brand relationship, in which the way brand relationships can develop side-by-side with individual identity narratives, is evident.

##### **4.4.1 Individual-level brand image**

Brands are concretized at the individual level. As Fournier puts it, brands are just a set of perceptions held in the consumers’ minds. Since expatriate Finns have had to reassess their brand relationships towards Fazer, or moreover since they have had to even actively think about their stance on Fazer, has created an ideal basis for research. The values and meanings that the expatriate attaches to Fazer have been processed more than an average Finnish people living in Finland has – because the brand is in such a mundane, effortless position that they do not have to think about. This thought process has made the expatriates small-scale experts on the field.

Therefore it is extremely valuable to examine the meanings that they have attributed to the Fazer Blue brand.

*Fazer is like an extremely Finnish brand. – Lisa*

*I present it as a Finnish chocolate and of course it's important that it's like an old brand and that it has a kind of history, it's not anything that has just entered the market like a couple of years ago. -- And since it's such a traditional brand that's probably why I bring it over so often. – June*

*I think it's somehow a really sympathetic brand. They've somehow managed to brand themselves really well. When thinking about the brand it brings up very positive feelings and also because it's been for so long and it's such a strong brand. And probably also because you've eaten it since you were a kid so it has strong traditions, the brand. – Emma*

*It's a brand that I remember since my childhood, that... It has always existed for me. And of course I know that it's a very old brand and it has long traditions. It is, one may say, familiar and safe. – Stella*

*Looking from here, I don't know whether it's an emotional connection, but many products such as Fazer and rye breads and stuff, they feel so old. Like there's always been the association that of course it's high quality and good, and it's sort of like respected, the brand. In comparison, here there's so many products, they come and go and there's so many brands, next to them it feels like more stable and perhaps more reliable. So maybe it's that [long history], like here's also many products that have a long history but that has no meaning for me, because it has nothing to do with my childhood, a local brand, in any way. These candy that we had lots of growing up, my grandma always had them fox candies and Fazer mixes, Fazer Blue, and you know, the same candy that there still is. – Dora*

The brand image that can be labeled onto a Fazer Blue wrapping paper based on the informants' brand images of it, would be the following: Finnish, traditional, high quality, respected, sympathetic, and familiar. Altogether, the comments concerning Fazer in the interviews and netnographic data are full of positive emotion. The informants express a "degree of passionate



emotional attachment” towards the brand, brand love, that is (Ahuvia, 2006, 81). It has distinctively resulted in the five characteristics that Ahuvia (2005) lists for brand love: passion for the brand, brand attachment, positive evaluations of the brand, positive emotions in response to the brand, and, in many of the cases, declarations of love toward the brand.

When attempting to distinguish whether or not the affection the informants show towards Fazer Blue is in fact brand love or just common brand satisfaction, Carroll and Ahuvia’s (2006, 81) key differentiators are revisited. The first two requirements are clearly met, whereas the following two are somewhat harder to evaluate. Nevertheless, it is clear that the emotion the informants expressed had an affective rather than cognitive focus. Many stated that the reason for their preference was Fazer Blue’s superior taste, but the answer to the researcher’s ”why” was often a vague ”because it just is”. The brand was primarily described with emotional attributes, such as the abstract values listed above, rather than utilitarian features such as price, degree of cocoa, or relief to acute chocolate cravings. Secondly, brand satisfaction as an outcome is often transaction-specific, whereas brand love stems from a long-term brand relationship. The long traditions and memories connected to Fazer Blue make the latter an obvious choice.

#### 4.4.2 A matter of taste

*I don't care that much for sweets, but if there's something then it's definitely Fazer Blue and the new chocolate things Fazer has. They're like the best ones. If there's chocolate then it has to be Fazer Blue, I rather don't buy any chocolate at all over here because they're just no good. – Dora*

Drawing from the data, it seems that Fazer Blue has set the standard of how “chocolate is supposed to taste”. The development of a Finnish flavor palette was discussed earlier in the findings. The same applies to the taste of chocolate – many informants expressed their preference for Fazer Blue and its distinctive taste. According to the informants, Fazer Blue is “not as sweet” and “has the right amount of cocoa flavor”. For many, such as Dora, Fazer is the only chocolate brand in their consideration set. Zarantonello and Luomala (2011, 63) found that

their informants got the best sensorial gratification only from their favorite type of chocolate, which is in line with the “fuss” and exclusivity that the informants express towards Fazer Blue.

Fazer Blue is a flavor that Finnish people get used from their very childhood, one could almost say that the habit comes in their breast milk. This makes the brand attachment that the informants have with Fazer Blue, a strong, affiliative, past-oriented attachment (Kleine et al. 1995). It connects them to their origin and is the number one chocolate brand, the one that everything else is judged against.

Research has shown that a strong brand relationship protects the brand from competition (Fournier, 1998; McInnis et al. 2009). A loved brand becomes the benchmark, the brand that all the competing brands of the category are compared to. And due to the strength of the brand relationship, the brand’s attributes are often evaluated on a more favorable scale, resulting in objective judgement (Ahuvia, 2005). Valerie told that Finnish people, expatriates particularly, get often into serious debates over the superiority of Fazer Blue. And when interpreting the Facebook comment quoted below, it seems like loving Fazer as a Finnish person is a norm, and if one strays, they are judged upon it.

*By the way, Fazer chocolate can't compete with Cadbury or Marabou at all. The taste is pretty flat in my opinion. Go ahead and crucify me, now that I disagree.*

The same assumption that “us Finnish *must* love Fazer” came across also in Valerie and Emma’s interviews. They both expressed how, whilst still living in Finland, they had not been too fond at all about Fazer. Both of them told it in a sort of secretive way as if it were forbidden to announce anything else than pure love towards the brand: “like, if I’m being completely honest...” A brand with such strong meanings that are shared almost on a nationwide level is something that connects people of Finnish origin no matter where they live and for how long they have been away. Mehta and Belk (1991) describe how objects can be used to anchor one’s identity to their origin. It is interesting to discover the Fazer Blue does that – not only in an individual case but also as a mutual anchor that most of Finnish expatriates can relate to and share.

### 4.4.3 Memories

The data uncovers a variety of nostalgic brand associations connected to Fazer Blue. The thought of Fazer Blue takes most of the informants straight to their childhood; many also mention a particular person that Fazer Blue reminds them about. For Lisa, it is her grandmother, who would always give her Fazer Blue when she went over for a visit. As Belk (1991) remarks, this individual sense of nostalgia is evoked as brands serve as materializations of memories from the past. Also Zarantonello and Luomala (2011, 64) remark that consumers often connect certain foods and flavors to their youth; in line with this research also most of their informants mentioned that chocolate brings back memories. Fazer Blue is also mentioned as a “safe, familiar” brand, providing the informant a sense of comfort that nostalgic brands are capable of offering (Brown et al. 2003).

*Mom always has Fazer Blue. -- Maybe the thing is that once you've tasted it as a kid, and now that you go back to Finland it just brings back your childhood memories. – Emma*

Emma explains her memories of Fazer Blue and how for her, the fact that Fazer is not available in her current country of residence, makes it a nostalgic product that is “strongly linked to when you go home and then you get Fazer...”

*I remember Fazer's slogan: “Say Fazer when you want good” and how in preschool, feeling my sweet tooth aching, quietly repeated “Fazer, Fazer, Fazer”... And nothing happened...*

Above is one of the rare individual memories that the informants hold over Fazer. Generally, informants connect Fazer to a period of life – childhood and/or the era when they still lived in Finland – or people; family and relatives. Just like Ahuvia's (2005) informants, also these people connect the brand to a certain period of life, like a milestone. As in Zarantonello and Luomala's (2011, 65) study, the informants' nostalgia does not relate to chocolate brands consumed in the past, but rather to nostalgic consumption contexts, people, and periods of time that belong to their past and are somehow associated with chocolate. The brand marks the narrative path along which the informants have traveled to the present state (Kleine et al. 1995).

#### 4.4.4 The narrative of an evolving brand relationship

The connection between brand relationships and identity narratives became evident during many of the interviews, although the interviewer did in no way bring up the concept of identity narratives. Mathur et al. (2003) found that in an identity transition phase, consumption changes are made to reflect the changes. The changes in a consumer's identity narrative may challenge brand relationships. Sometimes the role and meaning of the brand relationship is slightly altered so that it becomes congruent to the new self-image. Yet sometimes the brand contradicts the identity narrative too radically. June has experienced such an event:

*Lately I've somewhat distanced myself from it [Fazer]... I'm interested in ethicalness and sustainable consumption so for that reason I've experienced some counter reactions, because I'd rather buy fair-trade and preferably organic chocolate. So now Fazer Blue doesn't really fit in the picture any more. I may be going through a crisis in my relationship with Fazer Blue. – June*

In this case June has "drifted apart" from Fazer Blue because the brand has not adapted the same ethical and sustainable values that she has. As she observes herself, she is going through a crisis in her brand relationship with Fazer Blue. She already feels as if she's sacrificing her values and being more forgiving for the Fazer brand as she would to any other brand: "I think I would probably be a lot more strict about it with any other brand – I would never bring for example Juhlamokka or such." Juhlamokka is a Finnish coffee brand that does not source its ingredients ethically. June's stance on Fazer is a perfect demonstration of the practical benefits of building strong brand relationships: consumers are more willing to forgive the faults and downsides of the brand (McInnis et al. 2009).

Several informants described how their relationship with Fazer had changed after moving abroad. At first their feelings for Fazer were nothing above neutral: "in Finland we'd hardly ever buy Fazer. But after we moved..." tells Frida. As Schouten (1991) states, consumption is an important part of the process of restoring congruity of self-concept after life-changing events.

After a changing event, many informants had suddenly started craving for Fazer Blue or become fond of the brand. The reason for this could be the need to anchor one's Finnishness to a brand, a brand of mutually shared meaning of pure Finnishness.

*Mostly the fact that now I even have perceptions about it [Fazer] – I don't remember feeling anything particular towards it while I still lived in Finland. But yeah it's like... -- I think I was already eating it when living in Finland, but back then it wasn't anything special to me, I don't remember having any particularly strong memories about it. So it has more like become a "thing" because I left Finland. – June*

*Somehow it has maybe even increased here, it's true that you "have to go far in order to see near", in Finland I didn't think or like hype these products so much, but now that I live here then I tend to ramble about them when I'm, like, short on chocolate. – Emma*

Emma and June both identify distance as a factor that has influenced the development of their brand relationship with Fazer Blue. "When I was living in Finland, I perhaps didn't realize it... But now I sort of understand it and when I go visit Finland, then, Fazer Blue, it's sort of the thing" – Emma distinguishes the relationship status back then, and the relationship status now; pre- and post-moving abroad. The changing life event was the trigger, the moment that made Fazer stand out and mean more for her.

However, not all of the informants have experienced change in their brand relationship with Fazer Blue. In the case of self-defining brands, the brand relationship is already so well established that it, at least for Stella, endures distance and remains unchanged (Albert et al. 2008). Long-term brand relationships are harder to let go of (Reimann & Aron, 2009). The duration of Stella's brand relationship with Fazer Blue has resulted in a strong brand loyalty. This is visible in the persistence with which she remains dedicated to eating Fazer Blue chocolate.

*I'm a friend of chocolate. And eating Fazer Blue has been my hobby for, let's say for decades, and it still is. And I can tell you that every time I go to Finland, I've got Fazer Blue in my bag on my way home. -- I can't say that the way I feel about Fazer Blue has changed... It's more of a*

*habit, which I have stubbornly continued despite all the obstacles, if I can say so. – Stella*

Throughout the data, it came evident that when it comes to the most important, long-term brand relationships, expatriates are ready to put in great amount of effort for maintaining them. Each of the informants had personal experience and stories of the trouble they have gone through to be able to keep consuming certain Finnish brands. Batra et al. (2012) remark that the willingness to invest in maintaining certain brand behavior is an indicator of brand love. The more significant and enduring brand relationships are resistant to competitors' activities because they are based on strong personal brand attitudes and emotional attachment (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). The special position that Fazer Blue holds in the minds and brand relationship portfolios of the informants protects the brand from competition. Even if there were other chocolates, far more easier-to-access chocolates, available, the consumers would still have Fazer Blue in their mind.

When asking about important Finnish brands, also brands other than came up. They will be included in this section. For Lisa, the most prominent brand relationship is Jenkki chewing gum. She always brings heaps of it when she visits Finland, or when a friend or relative comes and visits here in the United Kingdom. Instead of actively looking for an equally healthy option for Jenkki, she is determined with her opinion that Jenkki is the best chewing gum in the market: "Uhm, no, I haven't tried that hard to find a replacement brand over here, I'm under the impression that the chewing gums over here contain a lot of sugar." – a sign of commitment, an outcome of brand love (Albert et al. 2008). Lisa, and Valerie, who also used to live in England before moving to Japan, both mention the Finnish Church in London, which is a base for the Finnish community in London and hosts a small shop that sells selected Finnish products such as chocolate and rye bread.

*From time to time I would go to London to the Finnish Church and spend a lot of money on those Finnish products. Because somehow I felt that I was ready to pay that double or triple the price to what I know they would've cost in Finland. First, taking the train to London and then those obscene prices – absolutely terrible. But at that point I was willing to do it, to buy even at those prices. Because I had such a craving for them.*  
– Valerie

The willingness to pay a generous price premium for Finnish products came up in a couple of interviews where the informants had discovered Finnish brands being sold in some local shop. It was however evident that the informants often rather waited until someone visited and brought gifts or they themselves took a trip to Finland. Then they would buy the brand of their wants and stack up on chocolate, sour bread, or Finnish cider. After going through great lengths to be "reunited" with the brand, consuming or possessing it becomes special and distinctly pleasant – the feeling of truly earning the brand relationship makes it even more significant. Due to the distance, a Finnish brand goes from mundane to high involvement – where in Finland one hardly puts thought into rye bread, because its availability is standard (Coupland, 2009), a sense of "hard to get" once being separated instantly makes the product more desirable.

Although most of the informants both in interviews and online had multiple examples about how they had transported Finnish produce to their current country of residence, or begged friends and family to bring souvenirs with them, it is Frida who shares probably the most impressive story of putting effort into maintaining Finnish consumption habits. After moving to Korea, she and her husband found themselves deeply disappointed with the quality of local beer: "it's pretty awful, kind of watery and flavorless. So at some point my husband decided to start brewing his own beer! He bought all the equipment and learned to make it himself."

When looking at the quotes above from the perspective of the theoretical framework, it is clear that the brands that the informants persistently keep buying and bringing over are a close part of their identity concept. It can be that the self-concept connection between the consumer and the brand is particularly strong, and the consumer feels like the brand reflects their inner self (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) – "I always eat Elovena porridge. It's the best porridge brand in the world and therefore the only one I accept". This willingness to put in great amounts of effort into maintaining a particular habit with a brand fulfills the requirements of brand love, where the person feels highly committed towards the brand (Albert et al. 2008). As Aron and Aron (1996) put it, the loved object becomes a part of the extended self.

## 4.5 Expatriates as an evangelist resource

The way Finnish expatriates export and introduce Finnish products abroad is elevated to form its own subchapter for that it does not directly have to do with either of the research questions, but are an important finding concerning the brand relationships of expatriates. The main statement is that when expatriates introduce Finnish brands to their foreign friends, they act as brand evangelists and extend the brand's reach. Fazer has stated that their big strategic priority is international expansion, and this research suggests that expatriates, who are already doing the expansion work for them, should be taken into consideration in the process.

Below are only some of the various examples from the data that reflects how Finnish expatriates have spread the good word of Fazer, i.e. acted as “evangelists” for the brand. A brand evangelist is a person who feels passionately of the brand and is highly likely to recommend it to people in their social network (e.g. Albert et al. 2008). The informants tend to give Fazer as a present to their foreign friends – June explains that she appreciates Fazer Blue as a souvenir or gift for of its pretty packaging, convenient size, appropriate price, guaranteed quality and the overall fact that chocolate is something every gift receiver is likely to appreciate and enjoy. She also notes that for her, it is important to be able to tell the receiver that the gift is something with strong Finnish roots – Fazer is an appreciated brand, a family-owned company, and, in Finland, often perceived as a sign of high quality. The appropriateness of chocolate as a gift has also been uncovered in previous research (Zarantonello & Luomala, 2011, 70).

*It's [Fazer Blue] nice because it's so kinda Finnish and even the packaging is so Finnish and it's so blue... So it's been nice to give to Korean friends as a souvenir or gift. -- I have this one Philippine friend who now craves it above anything else so I always have to bring him loads of it. He always asks "Frida would you happen to have some of that chocolate for me" ... – Frida*

*There's this gift giving culture in Japan so that always if someone does some small favor to you then you return the favor with a gift. So I've given everyone Geisha. -- Geisha is something I like and well the Japanese are thrilled, because "hey this is called Geisha". – Valerie*



*Fazer chocolate is on my wish list too... Not for myself, but because all of my friends here always ask for it... I once made the mistake of serving it to my local visitors, and they've reached the conclusion that they've never eaten better chocolate!*

Besides their tendency to extend the reach that the brand would usually have by only marketing, expatriates can be seen as holders of great brand insight. Below is an example of the kind of knowledge and unique perspective that expatriates have on the brand. This insight can be highly useful in terms of developing the brand and the product offering. Many companies have learned to use the inside knowledge that committed customers have – Ramaswamy (2008) introduces a collaborative product development case that Nike executed with their customers. The brand created a social network where its customers were able to share their brand-related experiences. “With over one million fans participating in this innovative brand building effort, Nike had a unique opportunity to learn directly from its customers”, explains Ramaswamy (2008, 9). Below is June’s suggestion about the way Fazer could further develop their Fazer Blue brand to even better match the perception that many foreign people have about Finland.

*It would be absolutely great if Fazer introduced a fair trade chocolate to the market. Because in Portugal when I tell about Finland, Finland has a lot of great examples that I am proud about sharing... It would be great if there were also fair trade chocolate, Finnish, because that's not available here... I mean you can't get fair trade chocolate here. -- In my opinion it would be a good fit; I tend to describe Finland as a very responsible society. We often discuss education and welfare. [Fair trade chocolate] would fit the Finland brand particularly well. – June*

The interaction with and participation of customers in the processes of the brand and company has become significantly successful during the last years. Not only do consumers become more engaged with the brand once they feel like they're appreciated, but often they also provide new, fresh insight to how the brand, product, or its marketing should be developed. The study shows that not only is the Fazer Blue brand capable of producing strong sentiment reactions, it also generates strong associations. This is specifically significant since chocolate is often considered as a mundane, low involvement everyday product and not something that consumers would feel strong about (Reimann & Aron, 2009).

## 4.6 Conclusions and managerial implications

Figures 1 and 2 are created in order to synthesize the findings. The findings are compared to the priori themes that were identified in the theoretical framework. First, figure 2 demonstrates how a consumer's identity narrative is shaped toward cosmopolitanism and what factors were identified to affect the process.

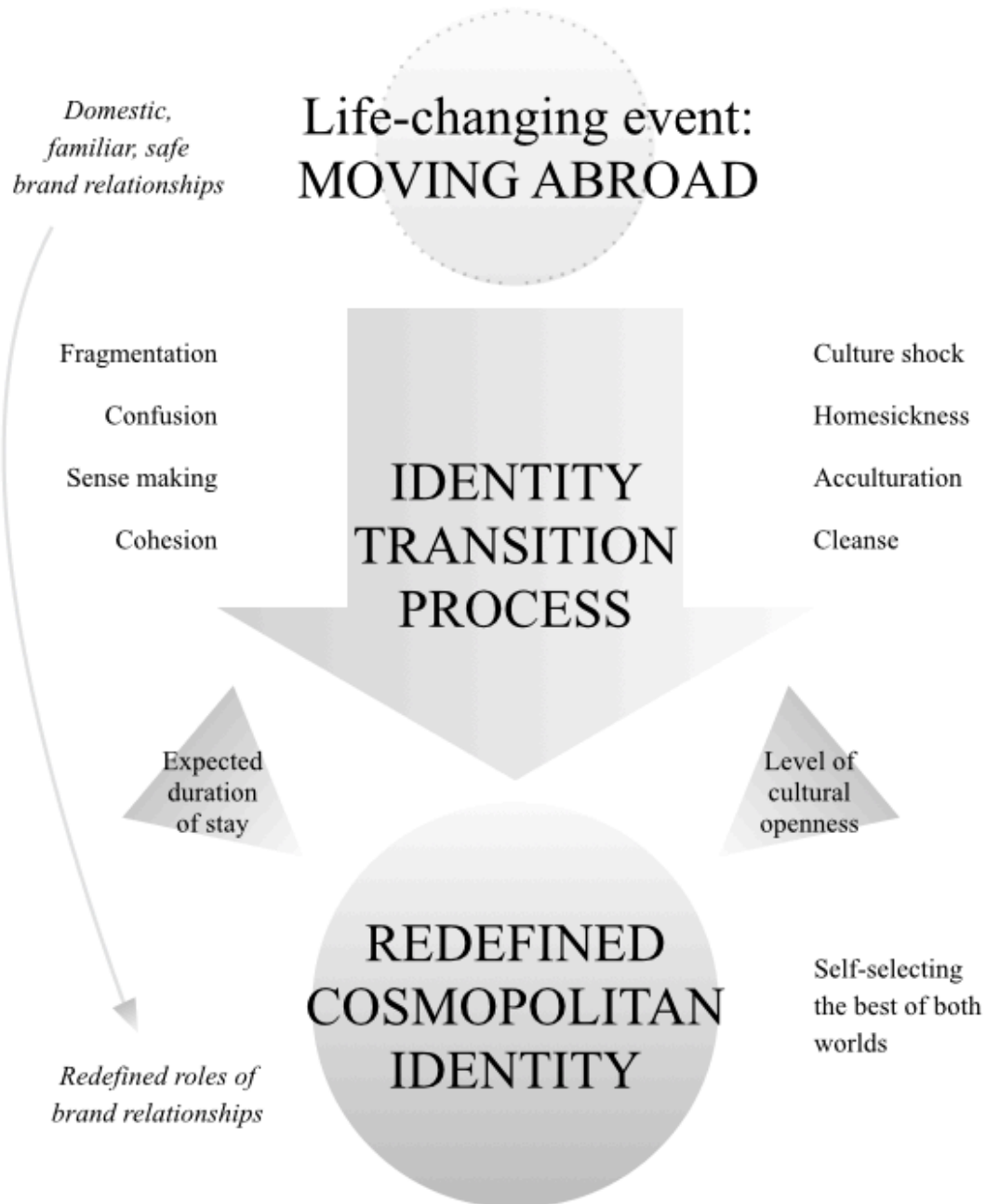


Figure 2. The cosmopolitan identity transition process.

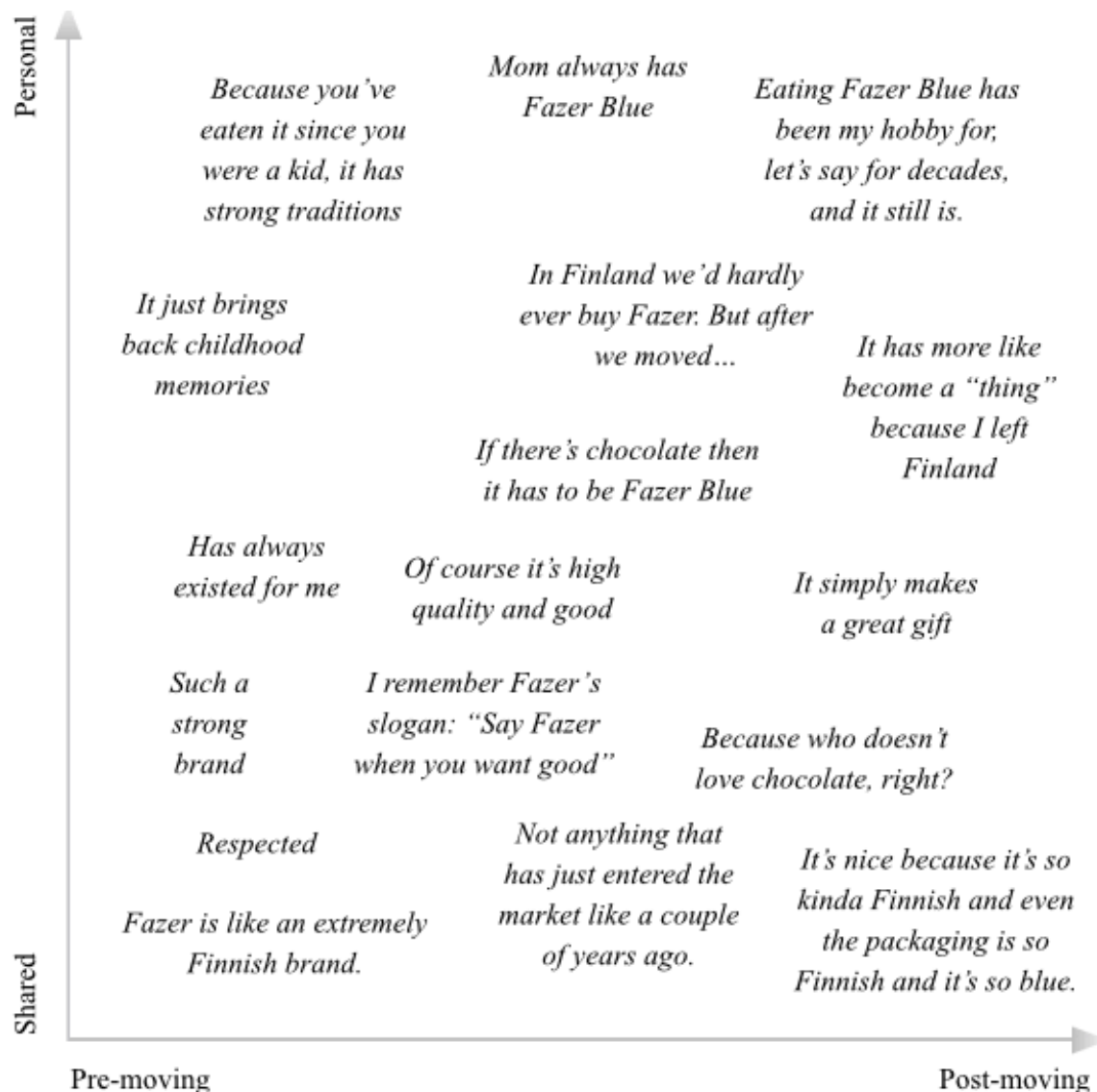
Moving abroad is understood to act as the trigger to the transition of the consumer's identity narrative. The process of change is individual, and the characteristics that were identified from the data are not generalizable – some expatriates may experience all of them, others only some. This study does also not attempt to evaluate how long the process of “becoming cosmopolitan” takes. Culture shock and homesickness were both present in the study of Mehta and Belk (1991), although they label homesickness as grief. Fragmentation, confusion, sense making and cohesion are familiar from Ahuvia's (2005) research, which captures the role of brands in the various phases of identity narrative particularly well, even if the context had nothing to do with moving abroad. The data provides examples of getting lost and finding oneself again. The cleansing of identity narrative is proposed by Schouten (1991), to which similar evidence is found through the metaphors of “strings cut” and “getting over” Finland.

The expected duration of stay and level of cultural openness were both identifiable in the data. Informants' own and observed experience let the researcher understand that these variables have significant impact on how smooth the process of adaptation and integration becomes. The variables proposed by Cui et al. (2014), Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2009), and Cannon and Yaprak (2002) are thereby confirmed. However, it became evident that the level of cultural openness often overruled the impact of the expected duration of stay: no matter how long the stay was anticipated to be, a curious and open expatriate would adapt and explore. The motivation for moving did not come up in the data in detail, so for that proposition cannot be commented upon. Hannerz (1990) as well as Cui et al. (2014) found that expatriates can create their own kind of culture by choosing the “best of both worlds”. This finding was confirmed especially in the netnographic data, where many informants described their family's life as such mix of cultures and habits.

To the left side of the figure, there are brand relationships that signify the expatriates' consumer behavior. It became clear that the changes forced the expatriates to rethink their consumption habits and modify them to better fit their new identity and new environment. The increased importance of the dearest Finnish products but also the fact that the most integrated informants did not miss any Finnish brand or produce in particular, confirm Mathur et al. (2003) and

Schembri et al.'s (2010) findings: firstly, life transitions cause significant changes in consumer behavior, and secondly, the use of brands for self-construction is prominent during life changes.

Second, figure 3 introduces a simplified matrix of evolving brand relationship dimensions. The time factor is situated on the x-axis, starting from the time spent in one's home country and continuing from moving to after moving to the new country. On y-axis the attributes are located on a scale from extremely personal to widely mutual – collective, shared. In this case, the "shared" end of the continuum refers to attributes that are common on a Finnish scale, not globally. The different meanings that the informants list have been placed into the matrix accordingly, forming a wholesome picture of a redefined Fazer Blue brand relationship.



*Figure 3. A matrix of the expatriates' evolved Fazer Blue brand relationship*

Furthermore, when comparing the findings to the priori themes set in the theoretical framework, significant similarities emerge. Above all, long-term brand relationships are prominently used as gateways to memories of past, family and friends left in one's home country. Brands do indeed serve as strong mediators of personal memories and meaning. The informants responded readily with attributes and memories that they attach to the brand, such as quality, Finnishness, and childhood. These discoveries support the findings of Mehta and Belk (1991), Ahuvia (2005), and Kleine et al. (1995).

The nostalgic attachment became evident during the interviews, where informants expressed how Fazer was a part of their past life, a period of life that was over. Yet they love to consume Fazer as it is, a nostalgic product that has significant, special meaning attached to it. These notions support the work of Solomon et al. (2012), Kleine et al. (1995), and Mehta and Belk (1991). The fact that practically all of the informants have maintained their brand relationship to Fazer Blue although its preconditions have become significantly more challenging, support Reimann and Aron (2009) as well as Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) claims about long duration as a contributor to brand relationship strength. The data did not highlight "swaps" from old brand relationships to new ones that better reflect redefined self-concepts. Therefore these statements of Kleine et al. (1995), Fournier (1998), Mathur et al. (2003) and Mehta and Belk (1991) are left under debate.

Marketers need to be capable of analyzing and interpreting how consumers perceive products in relation to themselves in order to develop their positioning and to gain advantage in relation to competitors (Thompson, 1997; Zarantonello & Luomala, 2011, 59). This study presents a consumer-perspective on the Fazer Blue brand, its meanings on both a shared and individual level, and how the brand relationship functions. The Fazer Group can evaluate whether or not their desired brand image matches the existing brand image. This research implicates that Fazer's long heritage and Finnish roots, along with its high quality and distinguishable taste, are the cornerstones to its success. Consumers are willing to pay a price premium for these attributes, so rather than making changes to the product, Fazer Blue is better off by maintaining and developing its prestige.

From the company perspective, acknowledging and encouraging the building of consumer-brand relationships is important because they are one of the “most reliable sources of future revenues and profits” (Lemon, Rust & Zeithaml, 2001, 21). Strong brand relationships translate into repeat purchases, securing the company enduring long-term customers. Thus the strength of consumer-brand relationships is a commercial asset for the company – an asset that is likely predictive of performance and resilience to competition (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). This research indicated that Fazer Blue has managed to encourage the development of strong brand relationships. The strength of these brand relationships has in turn contributed to their endurance and the fact that neither unavailability nor new competitors have been able to shake its position on the highest podium in the minds of the informants.

The outcome of a brand relationship strongly depends on its nature. Just as there are numerous types of brand relationships, there are a variety of potential results. Brand relationships can be expected to evoke consumer behaviors such as brand loyalty, brand forgiveness, positive word-of-mouth, involvement in brand communities, or acceptance of brand extensions (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012; McInnis et al. 2009, 11). In the case of strong brand relationships where the brand is extended to the self, loss to the brand equals loss to the self. Therefore a committed consumer may resist negative publicity concerning the brand and devalue competing brands (Reimann & Aron, 2009, 75). For many of the informants, the Fazer Blue brand relationship has managed to do exactly this: they evaluate all other chocolates negatively against Fazer Blue. For Fazer, these are signs of relief; as long as they do not alter the brand or irritate their loyal customers, these brand relationships are likely to continue to blossom.

Brands need to develop insight on how the brand relationships that consumers form with their brands evolve and change over time (Fournier, 2009). Consumers tend to switch brand relationships according to life situation: as some of the informants noted, Fazer Blue had not always been significant for them. And they had also let go of many brand relationships after moving. Companies need to be aware of these shifts in order to either maintain relevance in their customers’ lives or acquire new customers as they experience changes in their life and seek new brands to fulfill gaps in their identity narrative.

## 5 SUMMARY

### 5.1 Summary of the study

Consumers have never been as mobile as they are today. More and more people travel regularly and spend longer times abroad – working or studying. The moving around has caused new consumption patterns to emerge. Expatriates are often have earn high and since they are new to the country, their consumer behavior is yet to be stabilized. This makes them an attractive target in the eye of the marketer. It is no wonder that practitioners and academics alike have been developing both business and theory around the segment.

Whether or not expatriates converge in a global culture or create an own unique cultural environment has been under debate for decades. Previous research on expatriates has examined the level of adaptation that expatriates perform regarding their new country and culture. Consumption is often closely involved in the process. Consumer behavior examines the behavior of consumers and the reasons leading to the way of behaving. Furthermore, the ways that people consume is seen as central to identities. Brand consumption is seen as a powerful tool for communicating and understanding self-identity. The relationships that consumers form between brands and themselves have become a popular discussion since the emergence of the relationship paradigm.

The role of brands in life changes has not been thoroughly assessed in previous research. In addition, the evolving nature of brand relationships, i.e. their dynamicness, has remained uncovered. Expatriates and the identity narrative transitions they face have not been earlier combined with the concept of brand relationship. This study tackled these gaps in theory with the purpose to explore the evolving nature of brand relationships and their role in consumption pattern shifts in the lives of expatriates. Furthermore, the research questions were set as follows:

1. How do expatriates modify their identity narrative when moving abroad?
2. What happens to formerly domestic brand relationships when moving abroad?

This study has been based on the notion that identities are constructed in the form of narratives, in which brands play a prominent role. According to the identity narrative view, self-identity is not a stable construction, but rather an evolving story that is continuously adjusted through an individual's ongoing actions. This identity includes selves of past, present, and an anticipated future. Narratives are an organizational scheme that presents events in a specific order. The identity narrative includes memories, experiences, and objects that vary in their level of "me-ness".

Narratives are integral in building self-conceptions. Self-defining moments in life are weaved together to form a story, a story that constructs identity. This narrative enables consumers to make sense of who they are and to express their identity to others. The modern self is not limited to a sole self, but rather it has multiple dimensions. Consumers then switch between these roles according to context and situation. These various selves are made sense of by narrative enrichment, through which consumers can understand and communicate their existence as a whole, cohesive story.

It is typical for modern consumers to buy products not for what they do, but for what they mean. Brands have become increasingly important for their symbolical meanings. Identity issues are central to consumption. Once possessing a particular product, it becomes part of the extended self. Brands are a powerful means of communicating identity to others. Increased wealth has enabled modern consumers to express themselves through their consumption, as they have more room to play around with it. Consumers may purchase certain brands to express either individuality or belonging to a certain group. Some brands become more important in terms of identity expression than others, for example an expensive sports car is often more eagerly "shown off" than one's go-to detergent.

Theories about cosmopolitanism were reviewed in order to ease the interpretation of the data. Cosmopolitanism refers to a consumer whose orientation is not bound to any particular culture or geographical setting. Cosmopolitan consumers rarely feel part of any specific community and consume in ways that transcend cultural borders. Consumer ethnocentrism is a habit of



consumption that declares a person's love toward his or her home country. Ethnocentric consumers prefer domestic goods to imports because they are certain that products from their own country are superior to the ones produced elsewhere. Acculturation describes the expatriate's level of adaptation to their new home country. It is likely that the longer a consumer has stayed in their country, the better he or she has adapted to the new environment. These concepts were treated as potential factors that impact the transition of identity narrative in the empirical part of this study.

The connection between a consumer and a brand can be seen as a relationship. Consumers form bonds with brands through shared experiences and create individual-level meanings for them that strengthen the relationship. Brand relationships are reciprocal, purposive, multifaceted, and evolving in nature. As do all relationships, brand relationships vary in time, nature, duration, and level of commitment and maintenance that the relationships require in order to endure. This study adopted the following categorization of brand relationship types: self-concept connection, nostalgic attachment, interdependence, and love or passion.

Self-concept connection occurs when the brand's image is closely congruent with the consumer's identity. Nostalgic attachment is driven by people's need to belong. Brands store personal meanings and function as a linkage to past life events and memories. Interdependent brand relationships are a category that is often overlooked. These mundane brand relationships are formed with everyday products, nothing special, brands that make daily routines easier. Brand love is the opposite; it is a strong feeling toward a brand. Brand love is more affective than cognitive and includes the willingness to declare the love toward the brand out loud. Brand relationships should always be evaluated against a bigger picture instead of focusing on a single brand relationship. The brand relationship portfolio indicates the whole range of a person's brand relationships.

Life changes have been found to offset identity transitions where the consumer redefines their self-concept. These adjustments to the self-concept that new life conditions bring along may realize as changes in consumption style and brand preference. Any period of life transition may lead to changes in the brand portfolio. The loss of an aspect of the self leads to the reconstruction

of a congruous, integrated self-concept. Symbolic and experiential consumer behaviors are important in terms of the success of the transition, since they support the formation of new identities.

When a brand from one's home country is "left behind", the brand relationship may become past-oriented. These brands are called on to fulfill roles that family, friends and all things familiar once performed. Brands can be used as a tool for maintaining a previous self, and as "security blankets" to ease out homesickness. Since the brand simultaneously becomes something unique in one's new surrounding, it distinguishes the consumer from others in the present life situation. This increases the brand's present-oriented importance. Therefore brands can also be a tool for expressing uniqueness and standing out.

Brands also act as milestones in change, where certain brands are intuitively connected to certain periods of life or certain life events. This increases the brand relationship's significance. However, if the change is welcomed and the past self is not viewed as positive, consumers may abandon the brand and "cleanse" themselves from their previous self. They acquire new, replacement brand relationships that better reflect their new self.

This study took an interpretivist stance on reality, where events in the social world only become real to the individual once they have been interpreted and thereby acquire meaning. The study follows the social constructionism paradigm, where social actors perceive and interpret different situations in varying ways depending on context and their own view on the world. All knowledge is related to time and context and is continuously constructed through experiences and shared meanings. The researcher has attempted to understand the research topic from the informants' point of view but acknowledged her subjectivism in the interpretation.

Fazer Blue is Finland's most valuable brand and a part of the Finnish cultural heritage. The iconic milk chocolate is the chocolate that most Finns have grown up with. Chocolate is universally popular and a significant, competed market. It has been found to generate rich and complex consumption experiences. For these reasons, Fazer Blue was selected as a good fit for

the case study. A case study provides rich understanding of the research topic, and deep insight to a particular phenomenon.

The selected research questions strongly pointed that qualitative methodology would be appropriate for the study. Qualitative research attempts to examine reality through meanings, and the emphasis is on interpretation and understanding. This multi-method qualitative study employed both in-depth interviews and netnography. Two methods enabled triangulation of data, complementarity, clarified the interpretation process, and provided a multidimensional understanding on the topic. The study approached empiricism in a narrative manner. People make sense of their lives through narratives, and therefore a narrative perspective is particularly useful in capturing aspects of people's life experiences. It fits well research of brand relationships and maintains a sense of both the contextual aspects and the big picture of consumer behavior. The narrative data interpretation framework followed six steps: selecting the context and topic, generation of data, interpreting data as consumption stories, analyzing their plotment, interpreting the stories as self-referential, and constructing an integrative interpretation.

The interview informants were selected with the snowball sampling technique. As typical for qualitative research, non-probability sampling was used. The seven interviews were conducted via Skype and they lasted between 25 to 40 minutes. The informants were encouraged to tell about their consumption experiences in story-form and altogether the interviews were unstructured. The netnographic data was generated from a closed Facebook group of long-term expatriate Finns. The group's feed had very active conversation of various topics. The researcher selected the data relevant for the topic and gathered 167 units of data during the few days she had access to it. Narrative messages were emphasized in the data generation stage, so that the narrative analysis method could be applied in the interpretation stage.

Brief descriptions of the informants' life stories were introduced before the actual data analysis. This was because people's life stories may strongly affect how they presume a brand, how the relationship with the brand evolves, and how their identity transitions are perceived and expressed in their identity narrative. For example Emma, who had moved away from Finland

only few years ago, and led a student lifestyle and budget whilst still in Finland, is likely to hold different sort of brand relationships with Finnish brands than Valerie, who has lived abroad for fifteen years and was already an adult with steady income whilst in Finland.

The data showed that Finnish expatriates maintain their Finnishness by holding a close grip to their favorite Finnish products and brands. For example the famous Finnish tableware brand Iittala was often mentioned as their dishes of preference. The informants also expressed a sense of pride when introducing their Finnish branded possessions to their foreign friends. The pride also emerged for that Finnish brands represented something exotic in their new home environment. It also became evident that Finnish expatriates, no matter how well integrated to their new country, liked to form friendships with other Finnish expatriates. The collective consumption of Finnish brands was important to the expatriates, because they felt that only fellow expatriates could share and understand the significance and appreciation towards the Finnish brands. Another interesting finding was that Finnish expatriates tend to remain consumer ethnocentric towards Finnish brands, although rationally thinking it would make more sense to shift one's brand-of-origin preference towards produce of their current home country.

The flow of identity transition was described by many of the informants. Most expressed how at first they had missed many common Finnish flavors and dishes. However, as the acculturation proceeded, they had gotten used to the new culture's flavors and noticed that they missed Finland's cuisine less and less. This was in line with previous theories in that the longer a consumer stays, the better she becomes accustomed to its way of life. This homesickness and longing for everything familiar was also connected to the period of grief that a culture shock causes.

The life change of moving abroad had clearly caused more and less major fragmentation in the informants' identity narratives. As they acquired new concepts of the self when settling in to the new environment, they adapted their identity narrative by enrichment and thereby made sense of it again. Many informants expressed how, although they felt that they originated from Finland, and lived in their new country, they did not fully feel like a citizen of either of the countries. Neither did they feel like a part of either's culture. They had become cosmopolitan, in a sense

that they had adjusted their identity narrative so that it best fitted their self-concept. This resulted in a fusion of cultures, a unique end result.

Fazer Blue brought strong meanings and perceptions to the minds of the informants. Due to the brands decreased accessibility, the expatriates have had to more actively consider their brand relationship with Fazer. The informants diversely mentioned brand image attributes such as Finnishness, respect, heritage, tradition, and the distinguished packaging. For many informants, it was evident that the relationship that they had with Fazer was brand love rather than plain brand preference. They were willing to put in great effort to maintain their brand relationship with Fazer Blue, i.e. consume it as regularly as possible in their situation, and were proud to recommend the brand to others.

For the informants, Fazer Blue's flavor profile had set the standard of how chocolate is supposed to taste. They had grown up with the flavor and they compared all other chocolates to this "top-of-mind" brand. For a brand, this kind of superiority is a strong protector against competition, as Fazer Blue was often given an advantage against other perceived less good-tasting chocolates. In fact, it was a general assumption that all Finnish people were supposed to love Fazer Blue – informants who did not worship the chocolate seemed to feel somewhat guilty about admitting it. The heritage and strong origin of Fazer Blue also came across in the vivid memories that the consumers attached to the brand. All of them told that it reminded them of their childhood; many even named a particular person, event, or situation.

Clear evidence of the evolving nature of brand relationships emerged from the data. The most often cited evolving of the Fazer Blue brand relationship was that the expatriates had not specifically liked Fazer Blue while they still lived in Finland, according to them they used to think it was alright, pretty good, but they would rarely buy it for themselves. However, after moving abroad, it had increased its importance. Suddenly it became a representative of Finland, and turned into a constant craving. They told how they brought over Fazer and always had it when they would visit Finland. Some informants, who were already Fazer Blue enthusiasts when living in Finland, had noticed no change: they persistently maintained their habit of eating Fazer

Blue despite of the distance-barrier. The length of a brand relationship contributes to its strength – consumers were willing to put in effort in order to keep the brand relationship alive.

The informants described multiple occasions of how they bring over souvenirs from Finland to their foreign friends and acquaintances. They act as brand evangelists who extend the brand's usual reach into new territories. Loyal consumers like these are an important resource to the company. Also the insight that expatriates have about Fazer Blue, their own opinions and the feedback from the people they have given it to, is very important data for the company behind the brand. Some companies have already remarked this important source of knowledge and encouraged their engaged customers to become part of innovation or brand development.

As a conclusion, the theoretical framework was revisited and re-evaluated. A flow figure for the identity transition was identified and introduced. Instead of grief, this study found that a sign of culture shock is homesickness. It is best tackled by maintaining a bond to Finland by close brand relationships and acculturation. An identity cleanse was identified, where expatriates no longer felt the need of holding on to some possessions. In line with previous theory, the anticipated duration of stay and the already realized duration of stay were found to impact how well the expatriates adapt to their new environment. However, the most important factor was found to be the level of the individual's cultural openness, because it overruled the former two.

The evolvement of a brand relationship was demonstrated in a matrix figure. The two axis were from shared to personal and from before moving to after moving. The informants' quotes were then placed along the continuum to identify how the brand relationship had changed during and after moving abroad. The matrix emphasized how Fazer had become a more significant brand relationship for them after they had moved away from Finland. Throughout the data the theories of nostalgic brand relationships functioning as a bridge to memories and past selves was proved. Informants expressed how they placed Fazer Blue as a past-oriented brand relationship, but it had become stronger after the orientation had shifted.

## 5.2 Assessing the trustworthiness of the study

The “goodness” of qualitative research cannot be assessed with the same measurements as quantitative research has traditionally been assessed. These classic evaluation criteria include reliability, validity and generalizability (Saunders et al. 2009, 156–158). Lincoln and Guba (1985) present the perhaps most frequently applied evaluation criterion for qualitative research: *trustworthiness*. Particularly in constructivist research such as this one, trustworthiness is the “goodness” criterion for research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 294).

Trustworthiness can be further divided into four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 294), general descriptions often given to these criteria are the following:

- *Dependability*. Offering information to the reader, carefully documenting the process so that it comes through as logical and traceable. Throughout this research, a high degree of transparency and thorough argumentation has been maintained, so that the reader can easily keep up with the study.
- *Transferability*. Showing the degree of similarity between this research, or parts of it, and other research, in order to establish a connection between this study and previous results. A strong frame of reference has been maintained throughout the research highlighting connections to existing literature.
- *Credibility*. Ensuring familiarity and knowledge on the topic and that the data is sufficient to support the claims that are made. Ensuring that any other research would be able to, on the basis of the materials, come relatively close to the interpretations made or to agree with the claims made. All logic and interpretation has been explained in detail so that anyone can agree, and, with the same level of background knowledge, reach similar interpretations and conclusions.
- *Confirmability*. The data and interpretations are not just imagination; linking findings and interpretations to data in ways that are easily understood by others. Consistency in presenting quotations from data has been maintained in order to establish that all findings can be traced back to the data.

*Coherence and consistency* also often come up when evaluating the goodness of qualitative research (Kovalainen & Eriksson, 2008, 295). The quality of research can be judged by its consistency, whether the researcher has documented the process in a manner that follows the same practice throughout. This research uses the terminology introduced in the introductory and theoretical framework chapters throughout the thesis, returning to the central concepts in the conclusion phase (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010, 243). Consistency is also a matter of focus: are the title presented on the cover page, research objectives, and research findings in line with each other? The basic premises were ensured to remain cohesive throughout the research process. Although the objectives and topic were updated along the way, as typical for qualitative, abductive research, the researcher made sure that the topic, purpose, and objectives were edited accordingly and kept up-to-date.

Mills, Durepos and Wiebe (2010, 243) gather an extensive list of strategies to enhance the credibility of the study. In order to establish credibility, researchers strive for *data saturation*; e.g. in this study, further interviews would have been conducted if the researcher had not felt that the data had began to “repeat itself” and new themes were no longer emerging. After the saturation point has been reached, it is the researcher’s responsibility to present the data in the form of *thick description*, which brings the case to life for readers. In the data generation stage, the data was created until the researcher saw that relevant new themes were no longer emerging. Thick description was sought through consistent triangulation of data, theory, and interpretation.

Other ways that the researcher has increased credibility in the case of this study, have been so called *member checking*, where one of the informants was followed up and asked to give their opinion on the interpretations that the researcher had made from the interview data (Mills et al. 2010, 243). A peer was also asked to review the text and comment on whether the study has been conducted with a good level of *transparency*. The aim has been to provide the reader as good of an “*audit trail*” as possible, where the interpretations and the process of analysis has been communicated clearly (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The need for full disclosure about how and why the data has been interpreted in particular ways has been kept in mind throughout the process (Mills et al. 2010, 243).



*Triangulation* can be used as a basis for evaluation. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 293) present five forms of triangulation: triangulation of methodologies, methods, data, theories, or of researchers. This research applies three of the above: it uses two different methodologies (although both qualitative) to generate data, there are multiple empirical sources that have been used to support findings, and thirdly, the triangulation of theories is strong, because understanding to the research questions has been sought from a variety of theories and theoretical discussions. Mills et al. (2010, 243) point out that in order to enhance credibility, triangulation should also bring forth possible contradictory sources of data.

*Reflexivity* is the process of examining the research and oneself as a researcher (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). It involves examining one's "conceptual baggage", i.e. personal frame of reference. These preconceptions influence all interpretations that are made. The conceptual baggage that the researcher carries in this case, is that she may herself impact the interviews conducted, and she is also herself responsible of which units of the netnographic data are included in the study. A thorough knowledge about the theoretical framework of the topic prepares the researcher for making the right choices in terms of data generation, and decreases the possibility of misunderstanding.

When eyeing the interplay between the two methods of choice – in-depth interviews and netnography – they to some extent balance out each other's weaknesses. Whereas in-depth interviews suffer from the interviewer impact (Malhotra & Birks, 211), netnography does not have that. Netnographic data is secondary and the creation of the data has not been impacted by any way of the researcher. On the other hand, netnography may have a poor quality of textual discourse, and due to the lack of interviewer-informant interaction flow, the meanings of messages may be left unclarified and thereby misinterpreted (Xun & Reynolds, 2009, 20). In in-depth interviews, the researcher can by her own actions affect in both of these factors by probing and asking for clarification.

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## APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Images of the packaging of Fazer Blue (source: Fazer, 2015).







