



Meanings, views and opinions of fashion brands: understanding the female Greek consumer.

DROSOU, Ekaterini

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**Meanings, views and opinions of fashion brands:
understanding the female Greek consumer**

Ekaterini Drosou

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the meanings, viewpoints and opinions of foreign fashion brands held by Greek women living in Athens. Years of personal interaction with this social group sparked an interest for the research study; as the researcher being a Greek female. Through interaction, the research observed fashion brands, particularly foreign luxury ones, were used beyond utilitarian purposes, as a form of projection.

The study aims to contribute to academic and practitioner knowledge on the effectiveness of print images of fashion brand advertising and communication. Using a symbolic interactionist framework the study offers greater understanding of the ways in which the female Greek consumer 'reads' the fashion brand through print images placed in fashion magazine advertisements. Insights are offered into the meanings attached to foreign fashion brands and how these are formed through the print advertisement images contained in magazines. A two-phase data collection process was conducted including, semi-structured and open-ended interviews with a small sample of Greek women (n=XX, in total). A thematic analysis of data was conducted. The findings support the existence of a 'shared reality' through the identification of eight key emergent themes. These themes were found to be relevant to three principles of social interactionism: self; meaning; and interaction. They are identified as 'pillars' under which the eight emergent key themes 'sit'.

The implications for academic knowledge and practice are highlighted based on a more informed understanding of the communication process between consumer and fashion brands through print images and the interpretation of the images placed in fashion magazines. Greater knowledge is gained with regard to Greek women and how they attach labels and categorise fashion brands. Overall, the study contributes to an understanding of the overall mentality of Greek women towards fashion brands and associated meanings.

It is argued that fashion brand advertisers need to communicate in a more relevant and meaningful way to target intended audiences by taking into account wider social values and norms that exist within specific target markets. Effectiveness in international fashion brand advertising is argued to require appreciation of how fashion brands are employed as 'social tools' for projecting self-identity in response to socially defined markers of status and 'success'.

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the following research questions:

‘What are the meanings, views and opinions that Greek women have of foreign fashion brands?’

‘To what extent are these meanings, views and opinions socially shared?’

The study is concerned with developing a greater and more in-depth understanding of the symbolic meanings Greek women attach to foreign fashion brands, their views and opinions in relation to them and how these are socially shaped, shared and created. Interpretation of the images used in print images of fashion brand advertisements is also of interest in order to gain a greater understanding of the communication process involved between the fashion brand and the consumer through the image. The value of this focus is argued to lie within its potential contribution towards enabling fashion brand companies to achieve a better understanding of the Greek consumer and communication of foreign fashion brands through the images employed in print advertisements (placed in fashion magazines). This introductory chapter will outline the background and context to the research study. It will also introduce the intended contributions to knowledge and practice and the aims and objectives of the research. Finally, the structure of the thesis will be presented.

1.1 Background and context

There is a well-developed body of academic research in the areas of advertising and brand meaning and symbolism. Great attention has been paid to the effects of advertising upon individuals (particularly, in the context of teenagers and children) and their perception of particular brands. Further, the symbolic meanings that individuals attach to brands, has also been acknowledged in past research studies. The idea of brands being accorded with personality and symbolism were the main stepping stones for the academic and personal inspiration driving this study. It was recognised that there was an opportunity to extend knowledge generated by previous researchers and to identify and address possible gaps or under-explored aspects of research on the advertising of brands. In particular, there was recognition that the interpretation of brands might not be understood simply according to demographic variables but might reflect cultural and social norms or practices. The way in which the Greek women

interpreted fashion brand magazine advertisements, and the extent to which their interpretations reflected their status as female Greek consumers was of interest. The extent to which symbolic meanings are accorded to fashion brands as a result of exposure to fashion brand advertisements and the extent to which these were socially shared was also of interest. This was initially driven by personal observations of a district Greek female approach towards fashion –differing from observations of female approaches to fashion in other societies (namely, the U.K.).

1.2 Points of inspiration and choice of topic

A number of sources provided inspiration for the research, including: previous academic and market research on fashion brand symbolism and consumption; trends in Greek consumption patterns; and personal experiences as a female Greek consumer of fashion brands. Most importantly, it was acknowledged that there was a gap in the market of interest, Greece, in regard to the views, meanings and opinions held towards foreign fashion brands. This gap was visible in terms of the lack of existing research studies as well as in terms of the depth of understanding meanings and symbolisms surrounding fashion brands. The researcher had an academic and personal interest in this topic area as a Greek female living in Greece, interacting on a daily basis with Greek women. Through observing the interactions between Greek women and fashion brands, personal experience offered ‘social’ and experiential knowledge on Greek women’s attitudes towards fashion brand consumption and fashion brand meaning. In researching these interactions, the researcher will benefit in her future plans to build a brand identity as part of the development of her fashion-related business (discussed further in Chapter 7). In relation to academic development, a better understanding of fashion brand meaning will be gained alongside greater and more in-depth knowledge of consumer-fashion brand interaction (discussed further in Chapter 2).

Through time spent living in both Greece and the U.K. it has been observed that there appears to be a vivid, distinctive, shared dress or fashion style amongst Greek women that is not observed to the same extent outside of Greece. This is to say that Greek women tend to use fashion brands to ‘project’ and ‘display’ themselves. They dress in a similar style when they are in similar social situations (for example, at nightclubs or weddings) more so than British women. Greek women show a visible preference for foreign high-end fashion brands (namely, European) with the logo visible, for example, on handbags, shoes and clothing. As a researcher with ties to both British and Greek cultures, I am curious as to why Greek women might have specific

attitudes towards fashion brands and fashion trends. Specific styles or taste appear to be visually more homogenous and more strongly socially shared. A common way of thinking or 'mentality' towards fashion brands appears to exist.

Two studies were the main points of inspiration for this doctoral research study. The first influential piece of previous academic research that inspired the choice of research topic was Elliott and Leonard's (2004) study. The methodology used in their study offered an interesting basis on which to build the present research study. In particular, Elliot and Leonard's (2004) focus on brand symbolism and shared meaning within a social group was seen as useful to the present study, in terms of the development of methodology.

The second study which acted as a point of inspiration, in terms of its focus, was conducted by Kamenidou *et al* (2007). In this case Greek consumption was identified as being dependent upon or favouring western imports and trends. Further, Kamenidou *et al* (2007) found that foreign brands are perceived by Greek consumers to be of higher quality and more aesthetically attractive in comparison to Greek brands. However, overall, there has been a lack of discussion relating to the symbolisms and meanings that Greek consumers attach to (luxury) fashion brands. The study was both relevant in terms of the group of interest to be studied and of the focus on consumer behaviour in relation to foreign fashion brands and Greek consumer perceptions. The present doctoral study takes this further by offering more detailed accounts of Greek women in terms of the ways in which they perceive foreign fashion brands and how and why perceptions may have been affected through social interaction and exposure to print fashion advertisements in fashion magazines.

This was the first step in deciding the direction and focus of this DBA research study. What was of great interest was how individuals within one social context can acquire or create shared meanings and understanding of fashion brands. The extent to which some of the ideas of Elliott and Leonard (2004) might be relevant to social groups other than the British children studied.

A second point of interest for the study was recognition that Greek female consumers had not been extensively studied by previous researchers of brand symbolism and advertising. This is despite high levels of consumption being recorded for the nation (pre-economic recession). At the time of the commencement of the study (and data collection period) it should be noted that the Greek market for fashion brand consumption showed to be resilient and middle-income consumers were still purchasing luxury fashion items. It should be noted that this situation has now shifted.

Euromonitor (2013) notes that traditional Greek attitudes towards being high spending on fashion items have started to subside.

As a researcher, this type of spending in times of economic crisis sparked an interest in the reasons behind fashion brands consumption. In such difficult economic times, such spending offers an interest to discover how it is possible for a market to have high spending. This behaviour was particularly noticeable by the researcher through her everyday encounters with Greek women in Greece, and as a Greek woman herself. Greek women appeared to use fashion clothing brands in order to project or display themselves, to others, regardless of cost and economic circumstances. In the everyday life of the researcher during her residence in Greece, XX of fashion brands was commonly noticed in Greek women's responses to complements on their clothes or handbags for example, *'Thank-you, it's X brand'*. Fashion brands were observed to act as significant markers or symbols of social achievement, linked to perceived 'successful' projection of selves. The visibility of fashion clothing and accessories made these items more distinguishable as branded social tools during the researcher's everyday interactions with and observations of Greek women. This triggered a personal interest of the researcher in terms of how fashion clothing is used by these women for specific purposes related to projecting to themselves and it raised questions in relation to the researcher's readings of past academic research on the use of clothes as 'codes' and language (Auty & Elliot, 1998) and as a means of communication (McCracken & Roth, 1989) between individuals wishing to communicate their personal and social self (Noesjirwan & Crawford, 1982).

Through fashion clothing, values can be fulfilled '*such as acquisition or happiness*' (O'Cass 2004) and it is easier to observe consumption behaviour in relation to these items 'on the go' opposed to other possessions such as a luxurious house. This helped the researcher to recognise brand consumption of fashion clothing as visible behaviour. She was interested in how the visual display of fashion helps individuals to portray '*acceptable images*' (O'Cass, 2004) in a social context and the extent to which this might relate to a shared 'reality' that Greek women have constructed related to fashion brands.

Lastly, it was identified that the knowledge gained from the focus of the research would benefit the researcher in her practice as a business owner in the creation of a fashion accessory brand, providing her with a better understanding of brand perceptions, interpretations and meanings in relation to fashion brands. It was intended that this would facilitate the designing of her business brand in terms of the branding

decision making process, in relation to brand identity and the communication of brand characteristics. Through a better understanding of Greek women in relation to the way they perceive, understand, relate and interact with fashion brands it is hoped that a more effective brand strategy will be able to be achieved, at least in terms of marketing and communication.

1.3 Stance on fashion and intended contribution

The potential value of this research to practitioners and academics may be identified. The research is intended to offer insights and understanding of the meanings, views and opinions of foreign fashion brands shared by female Greek consumers with implications for effectiveness of fashion brand advertising. Fashion is a '*cultural product and commodity addressing multiple audiences*' (Moeran, 2006; 728). Consumer research has considered fashion important but in the past, there had been no attempt to assess it or even consolidate it (Naderi, 2013). Styles in women's appearance have been identified to alter at such speed that whether it is '*fad or fashion*' is irrelevant (Pannabecker, 1997:179), both of which are considered to be socially defined and to exist in a temporary state (Dale *et al*, 2001). Females have been found to be more involved with fashion clothing (Hourigan & Bougoure, 2012) reflecting overall female dominance in consumption culture *per se* (Pannabecker, 1997). What made fashion a point of interest is not only the way it was experienced by the researcher to be used by Greek women but also how in the past it has been shown that clothes act as a symbol and a way to gain identity (Feinberg *et al*, 1992) with meanings varying depending on the social context (Noesjirwan & Crawford, 1982) and that 'value' has an important influence on behaviour (O'Cass, 2004).

These were observations made in Greek women as they displayed a 'value' placed upon fashion brands in terms of social standing. The brand worn appeared to hold 'social value' in terms of their identity and 'worth' within society being visible in the emphasis they gave to wearing fashion brands.

Moreover, fashion clothing in the brands one wears is something that is visible to others, acting as a form of expression (Petrenko, 2015). This is of great interest in this study as the main interest is to discover the meanings, views and opinions of foreign fashion brands and this view of value can be seen as relevant in the way fashion brands are 'read'.

Since the nature of human beings is complex, involving many factors such as the social environment one belongs to or ones' personality traits (Beach *et al*, 2005),

this study's stance is that fashion is a complex concept for individuals, a multi-dimensional one, which is affected by the individual's perception, social environment and other external and internal factors. Because of the complexity surrounding the concept of fashion, defining it in the past has been left somewhat vague in academic literature.

For instance, Robinson (1958) approaches the general idea of fashion '*pursuing novelty for its own sake*' (Dale *et al*, 2001:137) and Evans (1989:7) sees fashion as simply: '*the current mode of consumption behaviour*'. The present doctoral study adopts Evans' (1989) definition simply as a starting point with the focus on discovering how consumers self-define fashion brands as it is interested in the meanings, viewpoints and opinions of Greek women in relation to fashion brands.

More specifically, this doctoral research study aims at understanding the perceptions that Greek women have of such a complex concept as fashion brands and how print images in print advertisements may influence and contribute to those views. The primary interest is to more deeply understand the ways in which fashion brands are 'read' and understood by Greek women and the meanings that the brands have to them.

Symbolic interactionism has in the past been 'blended' with other approaches in order to gain an understanding of the '*culture and basic assumptions about fashion*' (Pannabecker, 1997:178). It was recognised as an approach that could be used to gain a greater understanding of the concept of fashion brands regarding Greek women and their perceptions of those brands. The approach offered the ability to gain an understanding of the meaning fashion brands have for these women and, through this, a potential contribution to practitioners in terms of offering scope to create more informed and effective communication between the consumer and the brand. It is believed by the researcher that a better understanding of how the images used to promote fashion brands in print advertising (placed in fashion magazines), will benefit practitioners in terms of the management of brand communication processes.

For academics, greater insights into the Greek female consumer will be achieved in relation to how symbolic meanings of fashion brands are shaped by- and affected through interaction within their social group. Further, a better understanding of the ways in which print images in advertising are processed, 'read', interpreted and understood will be offered.

The specific focus of the research is on fashion brand advertising through print images placed in fashion magazines. It is intended to contribute to:

- A deeper understanding of the Greek female fashion market and Greek fashion consumer to inform practitioners (namely fashion brand advertisers) to assist effective brand communication
- Increased understanding of the extent to which and how groups of individuals create and attach meanings to brands in the context of fashion. This will contribute primarily to marketing and consumer behaviour literature.

1.4 Study aim and objectives

The aim of the study was to examine the viewpoints, meanings and opinions held by Greek women of foreign fashion brands advertised in fashion magazines. In relation to the aim of the study, a set of specific objectives were formulated. These objectives were related to both academic literature and researcher interest in the topic area. More specifically, the objectives were:

1. To review academic literature relevant to brand communication in the context of foreign fashion brands, the use of advertising as a means of brand communication, brand symbolism and brand meaning; and the impact of print images in advertising placed in fashion magazines upon female Greek consumer perception.
2. To develop conceptual thinking in relation to the effective communication of foreign fashion brands to the Greek female consumer within the context of one geographically distinctive area, Athens, Greece.

1.5 Fashion magazines in Greece

The production of fashion magazines has been suggested to have two aspects making them sociologically interesting: they are '*cultural products and commodities*'; and are '*characterised by a 'multiple audience' property*' (Moeran, 2006;727). Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter 2, knowledge regarding the Greek market in relation to fashion brands is limited. This also proved to be the case for statistics available in relation to fashion magazine readership and circulation in Greece.

The economic crisis which hit the country in 2010 did not leave the sector of fashion magazine publications untouched. The present study used print images, in order to discover how brands through these images were 'read' by Greek women. The research took place between 2010 and early 2013 including two phases (as discussed in Chapter 4).

The detrimental effects of the economic crisis in Greece lead to a decline in the market for women's magazines. 'Lymperis Publications' who published Greek editions of 'Vogue' Hellas and 'Glamour' magazines ceased operating after 32 years in 2012 (see <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2012/11/08/greek-media-company-is-closing-down/>) (see <http://www.tlife.gr/news/70/news-lumperi/0-38949>). Phase One of the research, used 20 fashion brand names that had appeared in 'Vogue Hellas' in 2010. Phase Two, used 6 advertisements from 'Vogue Hellas', 'Glamour' and 'Elle' magazines published in 2012.

Announced by Mr Lymberis himself, the significant decline of income from 93 million Euro in 2008 to 30 million Euro in 2012 (<http://olympia.gr>) resulted in terminating the circulation of 'Vogue Hellas' as well as other magazines such as 'Glamour'. The website of 'Vogue Hellas' and its link on the social media site 'Twitter', now simply redirect you to the British edition of 'Vogue'. This site does not provide any figures relating to readership and circulation for the Greek edition of the fashion magazine.

In terms of readership trends and market share, it is possible to detect that 2010-2011 saw a decline of 15% in advertising expenditure for 'lifestyle magazines' (the category in which fashion magazines sat) published by Lymberis Publications.

In November 2009 ,when 'Vogue Hellas' was used for Phase One of this doctoral research study, the magazine had a circulation of 35,222 throughout Greece (<http://www.argoscom.gr/index.php?page=17>). In November 2011, when Phase Two of the research was completed, 'Vogue Hellas' circulation had dropped to 23,709, reflecting a considerable decline in the lifestyle magazines' market. For the same month in 2011, 'Glamour' had a circulation of 59,827 and 'Elle' of 40,540. 'Elle' is the only magazine used in the present study still in circulation in the Greek market but it too, has experienced a decline in sales and displayed a circulation figure of 30,120 for January 2016.

These figures indicate declining market shares for fashion magazines. However, they also indicate that there remains a market that is considered to be financially viable for some of the publishers. The extent to which this situation will remain lies in question. Outside of the area of fashion magazines it should be noted that in 2012 IMAKO, another successful publishing corporation in Greece announced its official bankruptcy. Since 1995 the publisher had successfully published many popular magazines such as 'Nitro' and 'Down town' (www.advertising.gr).

It must be stressed, given the brief background to the media landscape in Greece presented thus far; the present doctoral study is not interested in discovering more effective ways of increasing magazine sales in Greece. The study is focused on the attachment of symbolic meanings to foreign fashion brands and their wearers by Greek women. It is interested in the print images of fashion brands (in fashion magazines) as part of a wider attempt to better understand how Greek women 'read' fashion brands through those images. The perceptions of Greek women in relation to those images are of interest relation to the content of the advertisements and fashion brands in general. Trying to identify ways to effectively increase circulation and sales in women's fashion magazines in Greece is not of direct interest in the present study. The study focuses on gaining a better understanding of the communication process between the fashion brand and Greek women through print images used in advertisements rather than aiming to increase fashion magazine sales. The core of the intended contribution both for academics and practitioners relates to how Greek women interpret fashion brands and, as part of this, print images advertising those brands.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One, offers an overall introduction to the research, explaining the context and background to the study and the aims and objectives. Chapter 2, presents and considers relevant literature relating to brand communication in the context of international fashion brands, the use of advertising as a means of brand communication, brand symbolism and brand meaning; and the impact of print media on consumption. Overall, this chapter presents a selective, critical review of published research related to the issues under investigation. Chapter 3, is based on the conceptual thinking behind the research. It explains how the literature (discussed in Chapter 2) contributed to the formulation of research questions, philosophical thinking and ontological and epistemological positions. A section discussing the chosen approach, symbolic interactionism, is provided, discussing its relevancy to the research aim and objectives. Chapter 4 explains the choice of methodology and research methods. A step-by-step explanation is provided of the process, sample choice, pilot study, and the interviews which were carried out. The data collection and analysis processes are explained. Chapter 5, analyses the results of the research in terms of observable patterns and themes of the data. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the findings. It reflects on conceptual thinking post-data collection and analysis vis-à-vis the initial thinking of the researcher presented in Chapter 3.

Reflections are provided on the extent to which the research aim and objectives have been addressed. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by outlining the contributions to knowledge and practice, limitations and challenges, ending in a personal reflection on the research journey and personal gains for the author as a researcher and practitioner.

1.7 Chapter summary

This introductory chapter has outlined the background and context to the research study. It has presented the research question:

‘What are the meanings, views and opinions that Greek women have of foreign fashion brands?’

It has also introduced the intended contributions to knowledge and practice and the aims and objectives of the research. The structure of the thesis has been presented. This structure reflects the researcher's journey from initial formulation of topic idea to reading and thinking, research design and execution, analysis and post-study reflection. The next chapter presents a selective, critical review of published research related to the issues under investigation and research objective 1.

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a selective, critical review of published research related to the issues under investigation - the meanings, views and opinions of Greek women in relation to foreign fashion brands and how these may be socially shared. The communication process between fashion brands and consumers through print images used in fashion magazine advertisements was also of interest as explained in Chapter 1.

This review of literature explores: brand communication in the context of foreign fashion brands; the use of advertising as a means of brand communication; brand symbolism and brand meaning; and the impact of print images on consumption. Acknowledging the inter-relationships between these bodies of literature, the review of the literature is divided into two main areas: brands; and advertising.

It is acknowledged that the literature presented is not exhaustive in terms of literature related to the research topic of study but a thematic literature review has been provided. This reflects the researcher's definition of the theories, constructs, categories, or themes that are important to her research. The themes reflect the researcher's positioning of the intended contributions of the research primarily to marketing and the effective advertisement of fashion brands. Thus, the literature is organised into themes that reflect the researcher's intended focus. The first section, brands, reflects the key research objectives which are concerned with studying, understanding and identifying fashion brand identities, symbolisms and meanings within a specific social group, Greek women. It considers the existing research debates around the creation and attachment of meaning through brands and the context of research around fashion brands, in particular.

In order to successfully understand the 'true' meaning of fashion brands within Greek society, and be able to gain an 'essence' of the implications that those meanings have for Greek women, as well as comprehend the role of these socially created symbols, there is a need to study the area of brands extensively. It was recognised that a study of the past literature on brand meaning and identity, would allow for the development of a better understanding of how brands affect female Greek consumers as well as how fashion brand meanings may be socially shared. More specifically, the creation of brand identity and brands as symbols (section 2.2.1) is considered to be an

important aspect to include in this literature review as there is a need to comprehend how brands are 'read' and understood through their identity, how symbols are attached and how they are used to fulfil psychological or social needs.

Through an understanding of how or why brands may act as symbols and their use to symbolically signify wearers' 'worth' within society, a better understanding will be gained of how brand meanings are created, in the case of this research in relation to fashion clothing brands. Literature relating to brand identities thus, is of relevance. That literature was identified as a starting point to enable appreciation and knowledge of the communication process between the brand and the consumer.

It is important to understand the processes which individuals go through attaching meaning and value to items, in this case fashion clothing brands, in order to gain a better understanding of the way in which fashion brands may be perceived and consumed. Increasing knowledge in relation to this, facilitates appreciation of, if and how a more effective brand identity might be achieved in terms of a brand's desired target group, in line with the second research objective of this study.

Brand awareness and communication (section 2.2.2) was a key theme to explore not least because in the communication process between fashion clothing brands and consumers awareness was recognised to be a natural starting point. Without awareness, it may be contended that the consumer will struggle or be unable to engage with brand communication and, as a result, brand meaning and symbolism will be challenged. A review of past academic literature on brand awareness and communication was seen as vital since one key underlying dimension of this doctoral research study is the communication process which takes place between brand and consumer. Finally, the selected literature on brands considers brand perception specifically in relation to Greece (section 2.2.3), reflecting the study's interest in Greek women as fashion brand consumers.

The second main theme of literature considered in this chapter, advertising, is also of direct importance and relevance to the research study as it is recognised to be a means through which an audience is exposed to a brand and a communication tool to link brand identity to consumer perceptions.

Firstly, print images used in magazines advertisements are considered to act as a 'stimulus' through which consumers are able to acknowledge the existence of a brand as well as be introduced to brand personality. The ways in which advertising acts as a means of communication through which consumers are able to acknowledge the existence of a brand, as well as be introduced to its personality are considered (section

2.3.1). This involves the communication of messages via text and visual imagery. Considering existing literature in relation to consumer exposure to advertising images is of importance to this study as it is of interest to identify and discover if and how, through advertising images, brand meanings are created or shaped and the extent to which brand meanings might be socially shared amongst Greek women at least partially as an outcome of advertising. Through this, some understanding of how Greek women 'read' fashion brands can be gained.

A close relationship is noted between advertising and brands as part of a marketing context. It is through advertising that fashion brands try to attract the attention of potential consumers and attempt to become known, enabling a brand to become considered as a potential consumption option. The literature on both brands and advertising was primarily examined from a marketing and social science perspective.

Section 2.3.2, specifically discusses the effectiveness of brand images in advertising, as this study is concerned with the symbolic dimensions of fashion brands. The images used in print advertisements (placed in fashion magazines), is seen as a potential factor of influence in the creation of brand symbolisms. It has been found that there are links between advertising effectiveness and interpretation of brand identity. Therefore, this was considered important for this study.

Finally, the section includes a critique of advertising that is mostly focused on the ethical issues arising from advertising practices in relation to brand and product promotion. This is related to images employed in advertising and how these might affect women in relation to how fashion clothing brands are communicated through print images in advertising. Although not central to the research objectives of the study, it was considered important to acknowledge the ethical implications of advertising, an area of research that is prominent in literature relating to advertising and consumption, not least in relation to women and fashion clothing.

2.2 Brands

This section focuses on brand communication particularly, in terms of its effectiveness within the context of international fashion brands and the impact of fashion magazine advertising upon female Greek consumers. It is explored in relation to: brand identity; brand symbolism, meaning and personality (particularly in terms of the ways in which these are envisaged to involve socially shared aspects); and brand

awareness and communication. The implications for the creation of brand identities and brands as symbols, brand communication and brand perception in Greece are considered, reflecting the specific focus of this thesis.

2.2.1 The creation of brand identities and brands as symbols

A key focus of the thesis is to understand the symbolism and meanings that fashion brands have for individuals. Blumer (1969:290) stated that: *'Fashion should be recognized as a central mechanism in forming social order in a modern type of world, a mechanism whose operation will increase'*. It has been argued that individuals purchase the symbol the item represents rather than the item (Millan & Reynolds, 2014), as brands are a piece of ourselves and that their choice is part of one's personality (Lannon & Cooper 1983, cited in Meenaghan, 1995). Through fashion brands individuals attempt to express and communicate themselves to others. Personality can be defined as: *'the intrinsic organisation of an individual's mental world'* being stable and consistent (Mulyanegara *et al*, 2009). Researchers such as Aaker and Fournier (1995) have in the past looked at brand personality and how brands contain personal meaning for the consumer in terms of brands having their own personality, and being afforded human characteristics. It must be highlighted that brand personality refers to the brand's personality and characteristics, and these may vary in the nature of their interpretation and impact or influence according to different individuals' personalities.

Some researchers have argued that brands have symbolic meanings to the consumer (Dichter, 1985; Phillips, 2009) and his/her identification with the brand (Diamantopoulos *et al*, 2005). It has been claimed that a consumer may feel part of a society or group through a brand, fulfilling social needs through ownership of 'fashionable' items (Waide, 1987). This idea has been used to support claims that brands are characterised through the encouragement of stronger relationships between the brand and the consumer (Aaker *et al*, 2004).

This section is concerned with the attachment of symbolism and meaning to brands in order to create a brand personality which will serve a symbolic function (Klink & Athaide, 2012) as well as how consumers 'read' this symbolism. In this manner, brand symbolism is acknowledged to be a two-way process, with the company and the consumer being of equal importance. One means through which brand symbolism may be understood, is through semiotics, as through this approach events which generate meanings and the structure of such events, verbal or otherwise, are

analysed (Mick, 1986). The scholar Saussure, for instance, is considered to be a key semiotics scholar as he was the first to suggest the role of signs as part of social life. Semiotic studies in the past (such as Veg-Sala & Roux's 2014 study of brand narratives and contracts to predict the brand extensibility of luxury brands) have indicated the role of signs. Further, in respect to building powerful brands via semiotics, Valentine (2003: 9) acknowledges the existence of a 'brand mirror' enabling the expression of self-image that is seen to be encoded in various semiotic 'languages'. She argues that, '*culture is perceived to present us with a 'mirror' its creators believe (consciously or unconsciously), we want to see ourselves, a constructed picture of me*'.

It has been argued that goods have become a social tool, used in a symbolic manner (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Leigh & Gabel, 1992) while brands, in turn, have become a quite powerful purchasing force, especially brands which have received public recognition (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967), as fashion is said to have an impact on any area with which it associates (Blumer, 1969). Through an exploration of one's self-concept, marketers have attempted to identify and discover individuals' purchasing decisions through the symbolisms attached to brands (Jamal & Goode, 2001). The relevance of self-concept, involving the 'self' both physically and mentally, raises questions around the extent to which clothes which are used essentially to serve functional purposes, might also serve as emotional enhancement (Evans, 1989) in the creation and communication of fashion brands. Brand symbolism has been found to be of considerable relevance within the context of fashion and other goods not only for young children but also for teenagers as it is argued that the purchasing choices surrounding them depend on the concept that consumers have of themselves, act as a form of expression and key factor in the formation of judgement of others (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004).

This process of brands being used beyond their practical or functional purpose is often displayed in the consumption of luxury goods as consumers arguably attempt to gain identity through investment in those goods (Belk 1988). It has been argued that luxury brands operate '*as an experiential brand (within the retail space)*' (Fionda & Moore, 2009: 348) and thus, involve more complex psychological and sociological processes than some traditional marketing theorists and marketing economist theorists have suggested. Brands may be recognised to be employed as social tools (Grubb & Gathwohl, 1967) and are commonly purchased for their symbolic meanings (Dichter, 1985) in order to fulfil symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Consumers are believed to be 'coded' in terms of what they wear, with clothes acting as a code (McCracken &

Roth, 1989) through which individuals create messages (Auty & Elliot, 1998) or communicate to others. However, little research has focused not only on the 'codes' that are placed upon individuals but also on how these 'codes' emerge. Greater knowledge needs to be gained in terms of why specific 'codes' are placed on individuals as well as how and why the specific 'codes' are created in relation to social meanings. The idea of 'coding' offers an indication of the potential social influence of branding and the stereotyping of an individual's dress style (Auty & Elliot, 1998).

Stereotyping, coding or labelling is a process often linked to the consumption of luxury brands. This can be recognised to relate to the symbolic meanings attached to fashion brands and, in particular, luxury or 'high-end' brands in fashion, as these branded items are often acknowledged to be explicitly consumed as social markers. Luxury brands specifically, offer ground to explore the symbolic use of fashion brands and how fashion brands are used as 'social tools' purchased with the intention to display or project the wearers status or social standing as observed by the researcher's personal observations of Greek women through her residency in Greece (Chapter 1).

Luxury brand purchasing decisions have in the past been shown to rest simply on the purpose of displaying brand ownership in an attempt to reflect the prestige of the wearer/owner (Husic & Cicic, 2009). The branding of luxury goods has been perceived to involve a more complex process than that for non-luxury brands as, luxury goods tend to be strongly affected by trends and, in the context of fashion as a transient concept, 'seasons'. By the end of each season, a luxury fashion good, in particular, is seen as '*dormant*' (Fionda & Moore, 2009: 348). It has been argued that, through consumption of a luxury brand such as 'Louis Vuitton', one can differentiate oneself from others (Hume & Mills, 2013) and this is a characteristic example of how one may symbolically extend the 'self' (Belk, 1988). For large companies with foreign brand recognition, the most treasured asset is the place which they have managed to gain in the consumer's life (Arvidsson, 2005). It is that social significance of the brand which is of most interest to this study (rather than purchasing behaviour patterns).

Consumer goods or items can be perceived in a different way depending on the visibility of the brand (or not) and in relation to this it has been argued that cultural contexts play a part in brand interpretation and the consumer decision making process (Wilcox *et al*, 2008). The extent to which the social and cultural surroundings of an individual, along with their socio-economic status, demand original brands rather than copies/fakes/counterfeit goods is interesting. Eisend and Schuchert- Guler (2006:14) examined the motives of consumers for buying products explicitly recognized as copies

('non-deceptive counterfeiting') and noted that, "[some] *'people buy counterfeit products because they want to demonstrate that they can afford branded goods, to show that they belong to a particular social group, or to use the product for symbolic self-extension'*". It has been argued, however, that the social risks of committing 'consumer misbehavior' and wearing a fake fashion brand are often mentally assessed and considered vis-à-vis the financial risks to the wearer (Penz & Stottinger, 2005). Furthermore, the potential social stigma of being detected by others as a wearer of fake brands is, in the context of consumption by adults, linked to the risk-readiness of individuals (Penz & Stottinger, 2005). The extent to which the status of a brand is lost if the brand is a copy and not an original has been considered by previous researchers. Commuri (2009: 86) points out that for luxury brands, the existence of copies or counterfeits can erode the exclusivity and prestige of the original brand.

In relation to this, Han *et al* (2010) discuss the significance of 'brand prominence', a construct reflecting the conspicuousness of a brand's mark or the logo on a product. This is linked to the social function of brands and an individual's desire to associate or disassociate with members of their own and other social groups. Brand prominence, it is argued, is employed in different ways and by different types of individuals. For example, *'wealthy consumers high in need for status use loud luxury goods to signal to the less affluent that they are not one of them'* (Han *et al*, 2010:15). In contrast, *'those who are high in need for status but cannot afford true luxury use loud counterfeits to emulate those they recognize to be wealthy'* (Han *et al*, 2010: 15). There is scope for far deeper analysis of the separation of the brand from the product as part of a wider understanding of fashion brand identity, consumption and ideologies especially in the context of social groups of consumers, like the female Greek consumers that form the focus of this thesis.

Examples of brands such as Nike, whose logo is like a tick, is greatly identifiable (Klein 2005) as the 'swoosh' displays how the logo has come to be associated with the brand, thereby making it clear to which brand it belongs. This acts as a form of label in order to 'code' the wearer and the item, and is associated with the symbolic characteristics of the brand. Even though other companies such as 'Reebok' and 'Puma', both of which are involved in sports fashion, differ from each other with regard to the same products (Nakassis, 2012), it has been argued that brand differentiation is possible through brand symbolism. Klein (2005:369) notes how, for example, *'Nike's branding power is thoroughly intertwined with the African-American heroes who have endorsed its products since the mid-eighties: Michael Jordan, Tiger*

Woods, 'not to mention the rappers who wear Nike gear on stage' thereby creating a brand image association with 'coolness' like those athletes and rappers. Regardless of specific target groups that it may focus on at times (for example black consumers as noted by Armstrong, 1999 and Valentine, 2003), 'Nike' as a brand is also regarded as a symbol for sports fashion in general (Uggla, 2006).

This explains why individuals may choose this brand to differentiate themselves, and acquire the symbolic meanings that are attached to the brand. It may be argued that wearers do not wear the 'item' but instead wear the 'brand', highlighting again that the symbolic value of the brand might outweigh its functional value.

Strong support has been found for the view that consumers do not purchase solely because they need a product but do so also to 'show themselves off' (Debicka, 2000; Elliot & Leonard, 2004; Levy, 1959) as the brand is used for symbolic purposes and meanings (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Theories of hedonic consumption have, in the past, proposed that individuals' purchasing behaviour is linked to the symbolic meanings of the items purchased. This offers a useful perspective on marketing research since hedonic consumption focuses on '*the emotional aspects of products and the fantasies that products could arouse and/or fulfil*' (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982: 93). This can be seen in examples such as the purchasing of a 'Mercedes' car which symbolizes class and status, purchased for reasons beyond its functional value as the car becomes part of or an extension of a lifestyle through its ownership (Klein, 2005). There is a stronger force which comes into play when symbolic or rather hedonic consumption takes place, as '*the hedonic wants are more affectively and experientially appealing than the utilitarian ones. Just as hedonic alternatives are more effectively and experientially appealing than utilitarian ones*' (Okada, 2005:43).

This view of hedonic or symbolic consumption can offer an understanding of one of the functions which brands fulfil, which is to create and sell lifestyles with a specific symbolic meaning attached to them. This is frequently seen in respect to luxury goods, such as watches, jewellery, cars, and boats and, most often, in fashion brands. For example, 'Chanel' claims to have accomplished this, (Ferne *et al*, 1997) since apparel branding is explicitly linked to one's identification with a specific social group. Hedonic consumption is a concept which can be found to be not only relevant but also useful in the context of this DBA research, particularly in terms of how female Greek consumers 'read' and interact with the fashion brand, and the relationship that exists between consumers and fashion brands. The concept of hedonic consumption might offer useful insights into understanding the symbolic meanings of foreign fashion

brands for Greek women. This is why luxury brands are taken into consideration, as they have, in the past been considered to be *'among the most recognised and respected of consumer brands the world over'* (Fionda & Moore, 2009: 348) and price and country of origin can affect the consumers' perception of them (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Female luxury items are priced higher than male luxury items by the same companies and it has been suggested, in the past, that this is due to the goal differentiation between men and women, as women's goals and orientations are more social or communally-focused towards relationships (Stockburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013). In addition to studying a small neglected market such as the Greek market, this view offers greater interest by focusing on female fashion brand consumers.

The concept of hedonic consumption can be seen to be present in consumer attitudes towards luxury items or even services since it has been observed that the global economic crisis did not appear to have an effect on the consumption of luxury brands such as 'Chanel' or 'Hermes'. On the contrary, it was observed to increase their sales (Forbes, 2009 cited in Stockburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013). This is of utmost importance when considering the symbolic purchasing of items or brands in fashion as it suggests the 'power' and the extent of influence that fashion brands may have upon the consumer especially when a market is suffering from recession.

One common marketing strategy undertaken by companies which can be attached to symbolic or hedonic consumption is the creation of brand communities, *'a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand'* (Muniz and O' Guinn, 2001: 412). This is based on goods or services (Pihl, 2014) through which customers remain loyal to the brand (McAlexander *et al*, 2002).

Since this doctoral research study focuses on the existence of a shared 'reality' of fashion brands and symbolic meanings, it was recognised that brand communities offer a foundation to comprehend how individuals attach certain symbolisms to brands which are shared, and how brands are purchased in terms of their identity rather than their utility. One example is 'HOG' '(the Harley Davidson Owners' Group), where the buyer is more than a bike lover; s/he is a lover of the lifestyle built around the brand name since consumption has social and cultural relationships (Schembri, 2009). The owner or rider of a 'Harley Davidson' motorcycle, for instance, comes to understand the meaning of the brand 'Harley Davidson' by experiencing it (Schembri, 2009). This shows that certain brands may contribute towards creating lifestyles and have a specific symbolic meaning for that lifestyle attached to it. Further, this can lead to an attachment

to the brand that is underpinned by customers favouring and desiring the specific lifestyle offered by the brand.

This idea can support the notion of a ‘coding’ process involved in the attachment of symbolic meaning to fashion brands and the existence of and potential ability to identify specific ‘codes’ linked to specific fashion brands. In this study there is scope to further consider the extent to which brand meaning is perceived to be signified or coded to potential fashion brand consumers. Additionally, there is an opportunity to explore the arguments that brands act as a means of expression for individuals to identify themselves (Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008) and communicate with others (Banister & Hogg, 2004) in a given social group. Brands are positioned in certain groups associated with specific group statuses, which explains why some brands are considered ‘cool’ or ‘uncool’, for example, and are bought (Mayo & Nairn, 2009) or not bought by specific groups like teenagers. In the past, it has been stated that the nature of meaning is hard for researchers today to deal with in a scientific manner (Harman, 1981), as meaning is not directly measureable, nor physical in nature. Even so, attempts may be made to discover ways or processes to make links between a brand and its meaning and ‘coding’ and, more specifically, attachment of certain meanings to certain brands is an under-explored area of research.

Brands act as a type of ‘label’ that individuals choose to place on themselves in order to be positioned or identified with certain groups. This can be linked to the present study as clothes are believed to be used as social symbols by individuals in everyday interaction as they act as a ‘*public display*’ and are an ‘*easily manipulatable symbol*’ (Feinberg *et al*, 1992). However, most literature, including for example the much-cited Holt (2002), focuses on the power of the brand as opposed to the power of the consumer. This fails to acknowledge the free will and agency of the consumer, suggesting the consumer to be an unwilling creature driven by what he or she is being served and being ‘made’ to purchase.

Even where brands are demonstrated to have immense power (Holt 2002), there is an apparent disregard for the extent to which individuals are able to make judgements and that consumer decisions are more complex than simply buying into what is being promoted to them even when it may seem to be ‘forced’ on them through aggressive marketing. The creation of adverts in an emotional context resulting in attempts to persuade rather than inform (Ehrenberg, 1974) suggests a belief in the power of brand marketers to seduce consumers (Holt, 2002). The term ‘seduced’, in a psychological context, characterises a weakness suggesting that the consumer is perceived as a

passive, possibly naive being, and is taken wherever the brand itself wishes to take him or her or made to purchase (Davis *et al*, 1991). The power of fashion brands and the extent to which they may be argued to seduce fashion brands is an issue which requires further investigation, particularly in the context of the meanings, viewpoints and opinions held towards these brands.

It has been asserted that consumers use fashion clothing, in order to make their presence distinguishable from others (Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008) and fulfil their symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Studies have also shown that the more involved one is with fashion, the more likely one is to engage in impulse buying (Park *et al*, 2006), enhancing Holt's (2002) view of 'seduction' and the notion of purchasing for reasons other than utilitarian ones. Even so, much remains unclear about how individuals not only come to link fashion brands to social functions used as tools, but also what more specific meanings fashion brands may have. For instance, although there has been a plethora of research findings in support of brands having symbolic meaning, there remains a lack of research in terms of how these symbolic meanings might be greater than utilitarian functions and how these symbolic meanings are shaped on a deeper psychological level and in a sociological context.

In particular, there is a lack of understanding about the more complex stages which are involved in making connections between fashion brands and meanings and how these connections may have a specific meaning for individuals in their attempts to use brands as a means of projecting themselves, linked to their self-image. When referring to the symbolic meaning of brands, it is vital to comprehend the intentions of companies creating brands and how they operate. For instance, it has been claimed that fashion companies such as 'Dior' and 'Prada' employ top architects in order to create attractive stores which will allow their consumers to shop while in a 'trance' (Deyan, 2008: p11) and offer the ultimate shopping experience. Such examples are suggested to be found in Bond Street in London or even in Voukourestiou, in the Kolonaki area of Athens, Greece (the equivalent of Bond Street, London).

Many studies on advertising and brand influence and brand symbolism have been carried out such as Elliot & Leonard's (2004) study of 'British poor children' and the symbolisms attached to fashion trainers, sparking methodological inspiration and focus for this doctoral research study (as acknowledged in Chapter 1). Although, in the past, adults have been studied in terms of advertising effectiveness, the categorisation of brands and the existence of symbolic meanings, there has been no in-depth, extensive

study of the symbolic meanings of fashion brands held by groups of Greek women and communicated through print images in advertising.

2.2.2 Brand awareness and communication

This section focuses on brand awareness and how, a communication process between brands and consumers occurs. It is proposed in this section that both brand awareness and brand communication are brought together as factors of crucial importance to the effectiveness of the relationship between the brand and the consumer through the print images used in advertising. This holds implications for the present research as there is an interest to discover more about how Greek women ‘read’ fashion brands (in line with the second research objective).

The first step in creating a communications process is achieving brand awareness, which relates to the level of recall or recognition of the brand by the consumer (Huang & Sarigollu, 2012), achieved through the media. Through brand awareness, it is possible to create personal meaning in the consumer’s memory (Phillips et al, 2014) which in the past has been argued to have a major impact on: the consumer decision-making process; purchasing decisions; and increasing the market performance of a brand (Huang & Sarigollu, 2012) as, it is argued, brand status can affect people’s purchasing attitudes (Thanh, 2015). These ideas have attracted great interest in academia with the expansion of retail in foreign markets (Moore *et al*, 2000). Brand awareness serves to promote consumer acknowledgement of the brand and creates a brand image through media images and projections. It is important that through the process of brand identity the brand will be given the chance to differentiate or distinguish itself from other brands (Ramsoy & Skov, 2014) through a process of familiarity gained through direct or non-direct experiences (Dew & Kwon, 2010). Advertisement repetition which keeps the brand in a set of brands under consideration when the consumer is making purchasing decisions (McDonald & Sharp, 2000) is recognised to hold importance in this context.

Brand awareness and identity are perceived as the first step in the strategy used by marketers. It has been found that, the higher the level of brand awareness, the easier it is to make new associations and that advertising can increase brand awareness (Heckler *et al*, 2014). Therefore, through investing in advertising, consumers can be encouraged to purchase the advertised brand (Clark *et al*, 2009) and by making the brand known to the consumer through advertising, brand identity is created by companies in order to attach the brand to a unique image. Consistent and long term investment in the awareness and

image of the brand has in the past been shown to create strong, competitive brands (Geuens, 2004) which is why maintaining the brand appearance is important as it acts as a reminder to the consumer (Swerdlick, 2008).

Branding is an important aspect of the communication process as the encouragement of the consumer to purchase the brand offered is the aim of marketers (Clark *et al*, 2009). For this reason, companies bring together a number of different brand characteristics in order to create unique brand associations (Phillips *et al*, 2014) and, through this process, differentiate the product, firm or consumer identification (Schembri, 2009) from its competitors. This is not only important in terms of the creation of a brand identity for companies (Klein, 2005), especially ones that create fashion items updated every season, but also in terms of how brand identity offers an interesting insight into the creation of meanings, views and opinions, as well as the general perception that individuals have of brands.

Brands have been found to hold symbolic meanings for consumers (Dichter, 1985; Phillips, 2009) and the consumption of items go beyond the price and utility of the item in terms of 'brand equity' (Hofstede *et al*, 2007). This can explain why companies aim to create and attach specific symbolic meanings to their brands, in order to create unique identities around them. Symbolic consumption serves a communication function (Banister & Hogg, 2004) just as brand personality serves a symbolic function (Klink & Athaide, 2012). The personality characteristics that a brand possesses have been found to have a direct influence in terms of the relationship formed between the brand and its possessor (Fennis & Pruyn, 2007). This supports literature in relation to the symbolic consumption of items, as brands act as a point of reference for the consumer (Dew & Kwon, 2010) and it is argued unless there is an understanding of brands in terms of meaning, there cannot be a clear understanding of consumer behaviour (Belk, 1988). Consequently, there is a lack of understanding of the impact that brands have upon consumers. What is noteworthy to mention in relation to brand identity is that a luxury brand as a brand is perceived as having a certain price, prestige and symbolic value (Tynan *et al*, 2009). This suggests that the symbolic value of fashion brand luxury items, can serve the purpose of displaying the general wealth that the wearer may possess. Further, a more precise image may be achieved through luxury brands, one which may offer the wearer a specific image of a wealthy, successful individual.

What makes luxury brands exceptionally interesting in the present study is the symbolic meaning attached to them. It has been found that luxury brands are used as a means through which one's '*power and status*' can be displayed (Leibenstein, 1950).

Luxury consumption is considered to involve the purchasing of items and services exceeding one's household budget, to indulge oneself (Hume & Mills, 2013). This is appealing for this study as the discovery of the symbolic meanings of fashion brands can offer a greater understanding of and important insights into Greek women's understanding, attachment of meaning and value related to fashion brands. Luxury fashion brands such as 'Louis Vuitton' are one example of how brand identity plays an important role, as the consumption of such brands exceeds the functional purpose of the item and instead is purchased for display purposes.

In addition, comprehending how luxury brands serve symbolic functions (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Dichter, 1960, 1985; Phillips, 2009) serves as explanation why the store and service environment offered in the purchasing experience of such brands is so important (Fionda & Moore, 2009) as is consistency in communication (Matthiesen & Phau, 2010) between the brand and the consumer. This process displays a 'world' being built around the brand where the whole experience of the consumer in relation to the purchasing of the brand moves away from utilitarian purposes, into the lifestyles that the brand creates. This strategy is often displayed in contemporary advertising through the accounts created by fashion houses via 'Instagram', 'Twitter', 'Facebook'. (Kim & Ko, 2012), developing a new relationship with existing or potential customers who bring in a different type of value other than profit (Kim & Ko, 2012) which can also be related to brand awareness. This is not only an example of the evolution of marketing strategies in promoting fashion brands but also displays a more aggressive approach towards consumers where the brand is no longer an item but becomes an entity, or even represented as an individual involved in social media with accounts on 'Facebook' and 'Instagram' creating a more 'personal' relationship with its followers, thereby creating an illusion of interaction between the two as the brands become part of the individual's everyday lifestyle.

'Burberry' is an example of how a brand identity is important as for a period of time the fashion brand 'lost' its luxury status but managed to work on its brand image strategy in order to recreate and communicate its identity. As displayed in the Moore and Birtwistle model (2004), the brand has created a number of different labels under its name. The cheaper items are placed at the bottom, such as accessories, perfumes, eyewear and children's clothing, making them widely accessible. As the model continues, the labels are higher up consisting of more expensive items. For example, 'Burberry London' has become less accessible, with the couture line placed at the top being the most expensive and consequently the most difficult to access. This suggests

that a fashion brand may have lines under its name and consist of multiple identities which can be linked to a pricing strategy. The limited accessibility of its couture products clearly proposes that the brand is attempting to distinguish who wears what in order to maintain a specific image for its highest priced items. This highlights how certain fashion brands or even certain lines of fashion brands are targeted at specific groups acting as a specific label but only those who can afford them have access to them so that certain fashion brands are attainable for certain individuals depending on their economic status.

As we shall see further in the section on advertising, it has been supported that the symbolic value of the brand is a much more important factor in its economic value (Miller & Mills, 2012) while the brand identity created is of particular interest to this research in respect to achieving wider knowledge of female Greek consumers and their relationship to fashion brands. Brand awareness and communication are seen as a starting point in this research and consumers are seen to purchase fashion brands in order to communicate and interact, based on the shared meanings that those brands have (Banister & Hogg, 2004). Through understanding these two primary tactics and tools used by advertisers, knowledge can be achieved in terms of the effectiveness and role within the chosen social group which can support the view that individuals purchase items for symbolic reasons.

In light of this, advertising is considered to be the stimulus through the images of which these identities are created and the brand's awareness level increases. Awareness is the first step in communicating with the consumer whereby he or she becomes familiar with the brand. Advertising can not only reach vast numbers of consumers simultaneously and quickly but it also has the luxury of employing images and/ or illustrations in print and television format. Advertising is a key part of creating a whole 'world' around a brand which can contribute to the creation of the brand's identity and a common strategy undertaken in creating a world around a brand is the creation of brand communities. This is seen from many examples involving consumers emphasising specific items (Muniz Jr. & O' Guinn, 2001), like 'Harley Davidson' (section 2.2.1) this is an example which may suggest how certain brands may contribute towards creating lifestyles which are then attached to the brand and are favoured by consumers which desire the specific lifestyle surrounding the brand.

Past studies have found brand identity to display the effectiveness of the brand strategy used. Differentiation and identity amongst fashion brands is closely related to brand identity as brands are perceived in different ways and are seen as suitable for

different individuals (Jiang, 2014). Fashion brands have in particular been found to be perceived as a personality. For example, 'Nike' is a powerful brand which strives to create a deep and lifelong relationship with its customers (Klein, 2005) and has worked on its identity. Nike is like many other brands such as Puma or Apple or even companies offering services like Google who try to create an image around themselves and create meanings for consumers (Elliot & Leonard, 2004; Elliot & Wattanasuan, 1998; Klein, 2005) and companies do try to enforce this and create an identity through the brands.

2.2.3 Brand perception in Greece and cultural implications

Section 2.2.2 on the creation of identities and brands as symbols has outlined the importance of brand personality and meaning. In the past it has been identified that brand meaning also is affected by one's culture or social surroundings. It has been found that marketing messages are more effective if they are in line with one's cultural values (Briley & Aaker, 2006).

This is a section of particular relevance to the present study as it is based on the brand perception that Greek women have of foreign fashion brands. There is a lack of knowledge in regards to the relationship between consumers and fashion brands in terms of fashion brand meaning and the communication process between consumers and fashion brands. Since marketing '*as a body of knowledge, has always been concerned with understanding relationships between suppliers and customers*' (Veloutsou *et al*, 2002:433) there is a need to consider the implications involved within this communication process in order to gain a better understanding of the Greek consumer. Although the Greek market is relatively small due to current economic recession, it has been found to have the 'highest proportion of luxury branded items' worldwide (Nielsen, 2008, cited in Perry & Kyriakaki, 2014). This makes it an interesting market in terms of brand perceptions. This study thus, takes into consideration the size and economic state of a country which, on paper, is out of harmony with the high levels of consumption of luxury brands. Unfortunately, research based on the Greek market and Greek consumers' perception of foreign fashion brands is minimal compared to other markets such as British or American ones. Greece is also a neglected market in terms of consumer identity studies compared to America (Karanika & Hogg, 2010) and this is one potential contribution offered by the this doctoral research study, which offers a broader understanding of female Greek consumers in terms of fashion brands.

Popular fashion magazines in Europe and America such as 'Vogue', 'Glamour' and 'Elle' are sold in Greece. These are amongst the most popular fashion magazines amongst women and are advertised on TV, radio and via print advertising. The author will be focusing on magazine advertisements and the symbolism of the brands which are created through them. Greek editions of the women's magazines 'Vogue', 'Glamour' and 'Elle' exist. If a British and Greek edition of 'Vogue' is put side-by-side and compared to each other, one will see that the advertisements used within them, however, are the same. The fashion items and brands use the same printed advertisement instead of creating a different advertisement for Greece. One of the factors which will be looked at in this study is the relationship that Greek women have with fashion magazines, bearing in mind that magazines such as 'Vogue' are not purchased only for 'educational' or informational purposes as proposed by Petit and Zakon (1962). If Greek women are found to be purchasing such magazines because of their admiration for fashion brands, this can be compared to 'window shopping' through fashion magazines. Furthermore, through this, the participant's views and opinions of fashion brands will be able to be discovered, which is the main purpose of the study. This will be done concerning foreign brands in fashion magazines. The reason for this, is that even though Greece is a European Union country, and close to many other European countries in terms of exposure to foreign cultures (with a high number of inbound tourists from the rest of Europe, for example). It still possesses traditional societal traits with respect to the importance of the extended family for example, and in some cases is seen as 'eastern' because of its culture, customs and mainly because of its history, geographical position and influences. As in all European cultures, despite the similarities, the cultural differences which exist are such that recognition and consideration are important in advertising (Seitz & Johar, 1993).

Even so, Greece is still influenced by the UK and USA (Hatzithomas *et al*, 2009) as there is great media exposure which derives from those countries in terms of television series, cinema, and music. Therefore, foreign influences will be considered as a factor which may have influenced Greek women less in terms of their purchasing, than their fashion brand perceptions, in order to understand whether fashion magazine advertisements in Greece create or enhance brand meaning.

It has been found that Greek consumers prefer expensive foreign fashion brands over Greek designer fashion brands and show a willingness to buy foreign brands (Riefler *et al*, 2012). They find them to be (amongst other things) better in terms of aesthetics, material and stitching. Because the brands are seen in fashion magazines,

they are believed to be 'always in fashion' (Kamenidou *et al*, 2007). This is a good example of how the foreign media affects Greek women's views of fashion brands and can be a point for the present study to note, together with the effects of foreign fashion brand advertising.

One of the most important factors which should be kept in mind is that magazines such as 'Vogue' are purchased partly for women to see the clothes without any intention of buying the items they see, as they cannot afford them. An element of desire and aspiration exists. Just because the majority of women do not possess the economic power to purchase the latest fashion trend does not mean that a fashion brand that she cannot afford does not hold a specific meaning for her and that she does not categorise it amongst other factors such as 'success' (for 'YSL'), 'class' (for 'Chanel'), 'status' (for 'Armani'), and so forth. Thus, advertising may be acknowledged to create brand symbolism even when latent consumer demand is not realised.

The influence of foreign fashion brands through print media is of interest. Even though Greece has been argued to be a country relatively traditional in terms of culture and customs, it is influenced by the UK and USA (Hatzithomas *et al*, 2009), partly because there is a great media exposure which derives from those countries. Therefore, foreign media influences will be considered as a possible factor which may have influenced Greek women in terms of their consumption patterns and the meanings that they hold towards fashion brands.

2.2.4 Summary of the literature reviewed on brands

This section has focused on one of the two key areas of the research, brands. It has referred to literature dealing with brands as symbols, their meanings, personality and their impact on the whole in terms of the contemporary consumer. What has been identified is the great impact and influence that brands have in contemporary society regarding their use as social tools and, more importantly, the unique meanings attached to them and the associations that are commonly made with brands. Luxury, status and hedonic consumption have been considered since they form a great ground for studying the symbolic meaning attached to fashion brands. It is argued that consumption of brands goes beyond basic survival needs of consumers to fulfil psychological and social needs. The section has also referred to brand perception in Greece as it is vital for the study to discover literature and past studies on the social group on which it focuses.

Key research questions have been identified such as the greater knowledge which needs to be gained through understanding how certain labels and ‘codes’ are placed on individuals, through an understanding of the meanings that fashion brands have. It may be concluded that the symbolism of fashion brands needs to be understood further, together with the links individuals make to fashion brands in order to gain a better understanding of the process that takes place before the individual forms a view, meaning or opinion of a fashion brand. The next section will focus on the second key area of the literature selected for review, advertising.

2.3 Advertising

It must be stressed that the two main focus areas of the literature review, brands and advertising, are ‘inter-linked’ and so it is not possible to discuss them completely separately. For this reason, in the previous section on brands, it can be seen that advertising has ‘crept in’. Similarly, when discussing advertising primarily as a stimulus and a means of brand communication, it is not possible to avoid making links back to literature on brands.

2.3.1 Print images in advertising as a stimulus and means of communication

This section will focus on advertising, as it is identified as a tool used in the brand communication process. Advertising is considered a key area for exploration in this thesis as the foundation of this research is based upon not only how social interaction plays a part in creating a shared ‘reality’ and understanding fashion brands but also how print images in advertising act as a stimulus through which the consumer is influenced in terms of what is projected.

Meenaghan (1995) argues that the purpose of advertising is to acquire a personality for the brand it is promoting. Further, specific characteristics are given to foreign fashion brands in order to make connections between the brand and certain ‘*values*’ possessed by the brand. Even so, the word ‘value’ has to be closely identified and clarified. In this study, the value of the brand will be seen in terms of social and personal value as it is of interest to identify if fashion brands have any such ‘value’ of symbolic meaning for Greek women and, if so, what and how this meaning is acquired and socially shared. Through this, an attempt is made to gain a greater understanding of the role that foreign fashion brands play for Greek women and the relationship which exists between Greek women and foreign fashion brands.

The relationship which advertising attempts to develop between a product or service and the existing or potential customer, goes beyond the purposes of informing, as cultural meanings derive from the consumer's world (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998) and culture is considered by many researchers to be a strong determinant within a society (Debicka, 2000) where the success of the brand within that market is achieved. In the present study the national (namely, Greek) culture is seen as a possible factor in terms of determining or affecting the meanings that brands have for individuals. Culture is something which has been recognised in the past to affect individual attitudes by researchers and it has been claimed that advertisers face the decision of standardising or localising advertising messages in campaigns when targeting individuals (Seitz & Johar, 1993). In the past, inappropriate decision making regarding standardisation or localisation has created many problems such as in the case of the 1977 AIDS advertisement campaign which resulted in a number of billboards being burned down as they were considered offensive by the Polish (Debicka, 2000). Debicka (2000) supports the notion that advertising often violates '*the balance between efficiency and ethics*' in order to achieve its goals.

The images used in advertising in relation to fashion brand choices and perceptions are of interest in this study, since an effective communication process between the images and the consumer is seen as a major part of the marketing objectives set by companies in order to build a relationship between the two. This communication process is perceived to be responsible for the 'relationship' which is built between the consumer and the brand, resulting not only in possible sales but also serving as a starting point upon which brand identities are built.

Initially, in order to study this area, a clear definition of advertising must be set. The change in environments causing advertising to evolve (Laczniac, 2015) over decades have led to a need for redefining the concept of 'advertising'. For instance, a traditional operational definition of advertising would simply suggest a product competing against another (Clarke, 1973). More precise definitions have evolved over time, such as:

'Advertising is paid-for, non-personal communication from an identified organization, body or individual designed to communicate information and to influence consumer behaviour' (Yeshin, 2006:1).

This definition clearly positions advertising as a formal, strategically planned activity. In this vein professional associations such as the American Marketing Association (AMA) and the American Advertising Association (AAA) both define advertising as:

‘The placement of announcements and persuasive messages in time or space purchased in any mass media by business firms, non-profit organisations, government agencies, and individuals who seek to inform and/ or persuade members of a particular target market or audience about their products, services, organisations, or ideas’.

(AMA Dictionary, American Marketing Association, 2016: un-numbered - <https://www.ama.org/resources/Pages/Dictionary.aspx>).

The underpinning ideas of this definition are used as a starting point rather than a framework in the present doctoral research study, namely in terms of recognising advertising as an action with strategic intent (usually aimed at increasing sales). The placement of print images in fashion magazines as a means of targeting a particular audience to inform and persuade it are considered later in the analysis and discussion of research findings.

In relation to fashion magazines, Moeran (2006;728) supports that fashion and magazines address multiple audiences, *‘some of whom are there to show off clothes, others to buy them and yet others to create a buzz around them.* Although in the past it has been expressed that *‘the very concept of audience applied to written discourse is itself far from straight forward’* (Park, 1982; 247), the American Marketing Association (AMA Dictionary, American Marketing Association, 2016: un-numbered - <https://www.ama.org/resources/Pages/Dictionary.aspx>) offers a more precise view of what an audience is:

‘The number and/or characteristics of the persons or households who are exposed to a particular type of advertising media or media vehicle’

In this study this concept of audience is related to individuals who are exposed to the print images in advertisements and are considered to be the ‘receptors’ of this exposure, in line with Moeran’s (2006) view that there are different kinds of individuals or audience exposed to fashion magazines. It is this definition that the current study will employ with the aim of understanding advertising effectiveness in the context of brand communication. Advertising serves many purposes but this study aims to identify the

ways in which it may affect and influence individual perceptions of fashion clothing brands. Since the consumer undergoes a number of '*mental processes*' when reading an advertisement the effectiveness of advertisements is a result of the '*psychological results*' produced (Dichter, 1949). This may explain the criticism that is so often voiced that the 'value system is violated' (Petit & Zakon, 1962) by marketing practises in advertising.

Advertisements need to create and develop the brand's images (Meenaghan, 1995). For example, 'Special K' cereal promotes an image of healthy food for keeping women in shape, 'Apple' electronics promote technology, 'BMW' promotes safety, and green advertising seeks to increase food sales to 'green consumers' (Bartels & Hoogendam, 2011). Since we are part of an economy where our 'wants' are expanding (Lazo, 1961; Bhat & Reddy, 1998), advertising attempts to serve this purpose through its practices and tools. Advertising is considered to be a marketing strategy and a tool that is used in order to reach a mass number of consumers simultaneously in order to inform and attempt to persuade them, so there are many sides of advertising that need to be explored. It is important to gain an understanding and greater knowledge of its effectiveness or lack thereof, in order to comprehend and expand our knowledge of the brand symbolism and meanings created. This may be explored in detail in terms of the effectiveness of advertising campaigns when a primary concern is to target desired consumers to 'match' a brand (Cianfrone *et al*, 2006). Analyses of advertising expenditure has shown in the past the positive effects of the perceived product/service quality from consumer perspectives (Clark *et al*, 2009), as a dimension of measuring advertising effectiveness. Advertising, however, is a more complex concept and process than a simple mixture of factors or strategies blended together and it has been argued to be a more complex process than a means through which naive consumers are forced to purchase items that they do not need (Davis *et al*, 1991). Most importantly, the main purpose of advertising is effectively seeking to increase the awareness of products, services and brands, and persuading consumers to make a purchase in order to generate a profit through sales. If an advertising campaign fails to persuade the consumers that it targets, the product or service being advertised will fail to sell.

Petit and Zakon (1962) propose that the purpose of advertising is to '*socialize*' individuals in order for them to be ready to act as consumers and that advertising, therefore, acts as a type of education. This type of socialization can be seen as relative to the symbolic interactionist view adopted in this thesis in terms of the perspective of how individuals come to share a social 'reality' regarding fashion brands through the

media. Further, this perspective can suggest how interaction with the media can create views, meanings and opinions.

2.3.2 Image effectiveness in advertising

Since advertising is a wide topic area including many aspects, only those directly relevant to the aim and objectives of the study will be explored in order to understand its effectiveness and impact. This section will explore image effectiveness in advertising and critique advertising in terms of the negative effects of the media and sociological approaches.

Existing literature included in this chapter, was found to ‘agree’ to a large extent with regard to the links between advertising effectiveness and interpretation of brand identity. This was displayed particularly in studies concerned with brand perception and identity, with a limited amount of studies contradicting this view. The similarity of the findings proposed in the past literature inspired this research on brand perception and personality increased the researcher's interest to find out more about this research area.

Through advertising, meanings are created in relation to fashion (Auty & Elliot, 1998). With regard to advertising effectiveness, the quality of the advertised product and the advertisement itself, as well as the context within which the advertisement is shown are factors that are responsible for reaching consumers (Malthouse *et al*, 2007). Malthouse *et al* (2007) found that the variety of experiences which the reader gains from ‘*involvement in magazines*’ may affect their reaction to the advertising within them and, so, they stress the variety of different experiences which are linked to advertising.

Dichter (1949) argues that it is the psychological result which is produced by adverts that affects the consumer and that a purchasing decision is rarely immediate. He also supports that there are three steps which are triggered when an individual sees an advert:

- a) an effort to get into it (in which curiosity, rejection and sympathy are some of the processes that a reader experiences while reading);
- b) the registration of ‘*psychological effects*’ (the process which leaves the reader with certain feelings such as the sense that s/he has learnt something);
- c) registration of the effects the advert has had.

Further, Dichter (1949) agrees that the effectiveness of an advert lies in the association that the consumer creates between him/herself and the product. The more the thoughts produced by the advert, the greater the success in terms of the fulfilment of psychological needs. Moreover, the manipulation of the content of advertisements has been found to have major effects upon the level of beliefs that individuals have with regards to brands (Mitchell & Olsen, 1981).

Research has shown that the age of models used in advertisements affect female consumers' levels of advert acceptance as they become older (Hogg *et al*, 1999). Image is also a factor that plays a role in the loyalty of consumers with regard to products like jeans (Wood, 2004) and for women over 40, image is argued to play a role in terms of consumers wanting to '*look good for their age*' (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2006). Magazine involvement constitutes a variety of experiences and what the reader gains from reading a magazine may affect their reaction to advertising within it (Malthouse *et al*, 2007).

Image may be regarded as a reflection of the consumer's perceptions of brands (Ross & Harradine, 2010), which often lead to criticism of the images in print advertising which in the past have tended to display an increased sexualisation of women and young girls as in 'Seventeen' magazine (Graff *et al*, 2013). Advertising tries to create needs, which are beyond the basic survival ones, encouraging ideological behaviour and showing the 'accepted', 'ideal' or 'norm' in terms of lifestyle/physical appearance, promoting individualism (Olson, 1995). Further, it attempts to associate the product advertised with certain characteristics. For example, chocolate attempts to associate the product with attractiveness and status (Durkin *et al*, 2012) but never with the effects of eating too much like health issues linked to obesity.

Perfume advertising, for example, is linked to physical attractiveness, ignoring any other factor that an individual may possess. It can be argued that to achieve this, desirability has been portrayed as the Caucasian beauty 'ideal', which has been greatly criticised (Johansson, 1998), as well as cosmetic products targeting women like anti-wrinkle creams, which often use strong terms and are presented elegantly in order to ensure sales (Lodén *et al*, 2007). Through this process, it is aimed to create the illusion that women will regain their lost youth regardless of the fact that these adverts commonly use young women to advertise the product, thereby creating unrealistic beauty types (Meng & Pan, 2012). This 'world' and the misconceptions which are created through the image is what attracts brand communities, through which brands have the opportunity to attract life-long customers.

Cosmetic and fashion advertising campaigns are the most reflective examples of advertising images that promote the 'ideal' to women, often raising 'ethical' issues as they set standards that are usually both unrealistic for women to reach, and, unreflective of 'reality'. They commonly use young, thin models with flawless skin, tight thighs and luscious lips to target women who are far from those categories e.g., older or heavier. Beautiful models are used in advertising images in order to attract attention (Goodman *et al*, 2008), since model attractiveness has been found to increase sales (Caballero & Solomon, 1984) and past studies on the role of physical attractiveness in advertising (e.g., Kahle & Homer, 1985, as a follow up to Petty *et al*, 1983), have discovered that highly involved individuals were more likely to recall the product. In the same way, sex appeal has been thought to be overused (Wise *et al*, 1974) and it has been claimed that sexual images do not affect brand recall (Steadman, 1969). This can be argued to be a creation of the media as the same advertising campaigns are used for different markets, targeting cultures of different characteristics using the same images that may have detrimental effects, as will be discussed later in section 2.3.3.

One of the most popular choices that companies make for their advertising campaigns for products such as underwear and perfumes, are images of nude models. 'Vogue', an international and one of the most popular women's fashion magazines, started in 1969 to promote the '*nude look*' (Wolf, 1991:67). In fashion advertising, images linking the product to the consumer is a common strategy adopted (Seitz, 1998) with consumers, for example, assuming that they will become sexy if they use the product shown in a sexy advert such as, for example, an advert for perfume (Shimp, 1979). This is linked to the symbolism that a brand carries as well as the image that is created through advertising. Research has shown that there is no significant change in brand recall when increased nudity is used to advertise a brand and that the attitudes of individuals towards nudity do not influence the number of brands recalled (Alexander & Judd Jr, 1974). Although brand recall is not shown to be influenced by nudity, possibly because the focus of the viewer is on the nude body rather than the brand, this does not suggest that the image of the model used does not influence the viewer in terms of the 'ideal' body type.

It has been of research interest to look at why women care what is shown in magazines. An interesting response to this is offered by Naomi Wolf (1991:70) who argues that women do so because this type of media represents female '*mass culture*'. This is seen to be relevant to the present study as it focuses on Greek women's views on fashion brands through print advertising and an opportunity presents itself to identify

whether advertising contributes to the views, meanings and opinions that Greek women have of foreign fashion brands, whether social and cultural values influence them, or even a combination of the two.

Even though attractive models used in adverts are perceived more positively and create positive effects for the advertisement (Goodman *et al*, 2008), this type of model has been widely criticised, as they are considered to have negative effects on the psychological well-being of consumers (Andersen & Paas, 2014). The use of models in line with beauty ideals (of thinness, flawlessness) is often characterised as depicting images of women who are dependent on men (Hawkins & Hane, 2001) promoting sex role stereotypes (Hawkins & Hane, 2001). These types of negative outcomes, effects and ethical issues will be discussed in detail in section 2.6.3. Quite commonly in the realm of fashion advertising, we see advertisements showing lipstick that makes lips look big and luscious, creams that fight age and smooth wrinkles, body gels which work against cellulite, mascara which increases eyelash volume and perfume which makes women irresistible. These are only a few examples of advertisements intended to target females which align to what Wolf (1991) calls 'the beauty myth'.

A powerful, common practice which advertising companies use in order to persuade consumers, especially in beauty and fashion advertisements, is to employ clever slogans that reflect certain sentiments (Bellak, 1942). We commonly see such examples in cosmetic and beauty advertising: '*Because I'm worth it*' (L'Oréal), for example, implies that it is all about *you*, -*you* are worth every bit of it, *you* are what matters when advertising make-up. 'Maybelline' is another such example, as its slogan is: '*Maybe she's born with it, maybe it's Maybelline*'. There are, however other voices which support that contemporary print advertising has a counter-effect, such as promoting the symbolism of empowerment and personal freedom for women (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009). Even though this view may, to some extent, reflect a number of advertisements, it is important to take a closer look and interpret the adverts in order to gain a more accurate understanding of why such a change has occurred in contemporary advertising. This view, though, appears inconsistent with the majority of the studies. Many researchers, like Wolf (1991) and Kilbourne (2000), have repeatedly stressed that there are many ethical issues in advertising practices which negatively affect women.

This doctoral research study focuses implicitly on how the media is linked to mass fashion culture through its attempts to achieve a greater understanding of how the images in advertising are 'read' and processed by Greek women in order to identify the

factors which influence them, and why and in what way they become influential.

Although past research has endeavoured to discover the effectiveness of advertising images, the present study identifies the need to go further than simply understanding that advertising images might be influential. The present study sees a need to gain a greater knowledge of the more in-depth processes that take place in terms of the connections that Greek women make to the images they see in fashion magazines and the factors that could contribute to these connections. This is considered in terms of the extent to which meanings are socially created and socially shared around fashion brands.

Fashion magazines such as 'Vogue' contain a limited number of articles but are filled with advertisements for big fashion names, such as 'Prada', 'Fendi', 'Gucci' and since pictures act as '*symbolic artefacts*' (Scott, 1992), this would seem appropriate for presenting the product. The traditional adverts in these magazines include only the top luxury fashion brands for clothes, shoes, make-up, perfume, and it is observable that the advertising campaigns invest in the most attractive models (sometimes what the fashion industry identifies as 'super models') with the most striking silhouettes to create a sensational outcome. Regardless of the recent global economic crisis, in the past two decades, the global fashion market has witnessed a rapid growth of \$263 million (Tynan *et al*, 2010). Views such as those expressed in Kilbourne's book 'Can't buy my love' (2000),- strongly criticise the images employed in advertising, arguing that these sell values, images and concepts of love, and that the penetration level of influence of this selling is so strong that babies are able to recognise logos from as young as six months old.

Interesting views on the ways in which women's magazines portray ageing and size are put forward by Naomi Wolf (1991), who proposes that magazines act in such a way because, if they do not, the cosmetic companies will stop advertising through them. Thus, the magazines themselves are having to align their own brand images and brand values, at least partially, with the values of the brands whose adverts they include. With the growth of the anti-wrinkle cream market in the past few years (Gupta *et al*, 2011), if inner beauty were to be promoted over external beauty, this would result in a drop in sales and the same would apply to other cosmetic products that promote 'ideal' youthful image looking images. This would be the case for other cosmetic products promoting the 'ideal', often young looking image. This of course would create a domino effect in all fields connected to beauty like advertising or cosmetics counters. An interesting connection between religion and women's behaviour towards fashion magazines is

made by Wolf (1991), who refers to ‘the beauty myth’ and those types of magazines as the ‘gospel’. This suggests that the media creates not only needs, through its promotional practices, of religiously following those images through fashion, but also cult which needs to be followed. If you do not, you will be outside the ‘norm’ or acceptable. The term ‘gospel’ used by Wolf (1991) is interesting, it compares what fashion magazines are to a woman to what the gospel means to a religious person. This connection can be explicitly observed- in a advert for women's magazine ‘Cosmopolitan’ on Greek television, the advert ends with a woman’s hand on the front cover of the magazine and the woman saying that she swears not to miss the issue (as if swearing on the Bible in a court room).

The effectiveness of advertising depends on a variety of factors. It has been found that there are powerful tools that advertisers use to influence the consumer, though, such as the images shown in advertising which is why the individuals chosen to be part of the campaign are carefully selected. It has been found that significant differences exist between women and men regarding how they take in messages; for example, females more frequently than males ask ‘why’ questions (Hogg & Garrow, 2003) in the advertisements they see. Since fashion is concerned with new concepts, this is why empirical research is common in such studies (Evans, 1989) as it can offer a greater understanding in terms of how individuals perceive images in advertising.

Even though the use of models in advertisements has been predominantly found to affect women, body satisfaction has been found to affect men as well (Baird and Grieve, 2006). In a study using 173 college students that exposed them to garment and fragrance adverts, they found that the images of male models had the ability to diminish the participant’s ‘body satisfaction’ as well as increasing body dissatisfaction, whereas the participants who saw advertisements containing the product alone (without models) showed ‘*no change in body dissatisfaction*’ (Baird and Grieve, 2006). This example shows how self-consciousness in terms of the advertising images shown, has spread to the media targeting men and advertising images promoting ideal body types appear to have an influence, regardless of the sex of the viewer.

The previous sections underlined important factors related to how the viewer or audience is encouraged to link advertising images to notions of the ‘ideal’. Sections 2.6.1 and 2.6.2 both stress how images used in advertising are crucial in influencing consumers and how images of physical attractiveness may work in a positive way for the product illustrated. This is of interest as the present study is interested how images

in print advertising (placed in fashion magazines) may influence how the brand is 'read' by Greek women.

One aspect of physical attractiveness that must be acknowledged as a pertinent theme in the literature on advertising, within the context of fashion in particular, is nudity or partial nudity of models. Nudity tends to be included in advertising images as it is attention-grabbing and sometimes controversial (thus, provoking awareness) but it must be recognised that its presence contributes to a wider debate on the promotion of idealised images of body shape. This is an issue that emerged as relevant in this study of the perceptions of fashion brands held by Greek women.

Criticisms of women's magazines such as 'Vogue' have been made by feminist scholars such as Naomi Wolf (see *The Beauty Myth* -Wolf, 1991). The effects of models advertising fashion brands must however, be recognised to affect males as well as females, highlighting this to not solely be a feminist issue. Baird and Grieve (2006), for example, found that images of attractive males in adverts have been found to result in the body dissatisfaction of males. This will be looked at further in the next section in terms of acknowledging the ethical implications of advertising practice. This was a theme that emerged as salient during the researcher's review of past literature where issues of body image in relation to fashion brand advertising could not be ignored.

2.3.3 Ethical issues arising from advertising practice

It has been argued that existing knowledge in regards to the ethical considerations of marketing is inadequate (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1997). Since the influence of advertising is considered to be of vital importance as consumers are being affected through fashion brands by a need for self-identity and expression (Caroll, 2009), it has been considered that ethics is an issue with an unclear line between the 'ethical' and 'unethical'. Ethical issues are, of course, acknowledged to be culturally-relative and may shift over time. One way to consider ethics in an academic context thus, is to acknowledge ways to deal with relativity such as the cultural typology suggested by Hofstede. This has been argued to allow for determination of what is ethical according to four dimensions: '*power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance*' (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1993;753).

The previous section has underlined some of the associations that are attempted to be made between product and certain characteristics often in the promotion of the 'ideal' by advertisers. Frequently these associations are claimed to be misleading and

have often been the subject of criticism as unsafe behaviour may be a possible consequence (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1997). Ethical criticisms of the images used in advertising cannot be ignored as this was a prevalent theme in the literature reviewed on advertising image effectiveness. In fact, the issue proved to be almost inseparable from discussions of advertising image effectiveness.

This section examines some of the key criticisms. It consists of two parts: the negative effects, criticism and ethics related to the practice of advertising; and the specific issues of body dissatisfaction and other ethical issues linked to the identity of self. Both parts are seen as not only important to discuss, but also to act as a useful insight for understanding the psychological implications of advertising and the potential negative effects that advertising may have upon the individual.

It has been argued that the consumer is driven away from basic human needs such as food and shelter, and purchasing behaviour is characterised by strong desires which are a result of effective advertising (Malthouse *et al*, 2007) displayed as status symbols. This shift from functional to symbolic motivations has been criticised for creating and encouraging social inequity - for example, in terms of driving those unable to afford them to illegal means in order to possess them (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1997). In this context, questions arise as to ethical responsibilities of advertisers, particularly in relation to vulnerable or less mature groups of consumers (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1997).

The type of needs that brands fulfil will be examined in this study in terms of the symbolic meanings that fashion brands hold for Greek women. There is a distinction drawn between informative and persuasive advertising (Ackerberg, 2001). Persuasive advertising is frequently applied with regard to fashion or luxury brands as, it is argued, these affect one's self-perception rather than fulfilling a utilitarian need (Morley & McMahon, 2011; Zhang *et al*, 2012). This may be linked to the theory of symbolic interactionism, which concerns the 'self' and the understanding of the self through interaction with others and objects and the meanings of items. It may be suggested that the consumer may be persuaded into purchasing in order to construct the self (Schembri *et al*, 2010). Fashion in particular, could be taken as a representative example of aspects of the 'self' both in physical and psychological terms (Evans, 1989) and offer an explanation what drives consumers to constantly seek a better and bigger house or car, the latest gadget, or even madly follow fashion every season in order to own the latest creation by 'Lacroix', and be 'in fashion'.

Even though ethical issues were mentioned in section 2.3.2 with regard to the inevitable effects of the images in advertising this section will present a far more focused discussion of the ethical issues which arguably arise from advertising practices.

Criticism of advertising tends to centre on ethical issues and advertisers often have a bad reputation for honesty (Waller, 2012). Social sciences and marketing research is believed to be 'imprecise' (Nwachukwu & Vitelle, 1997) in relation to ethics in advertising although advertising supports the widespread use of- and reinforcement of stereotypes (Fichter & Jonas, 2008). In relation to fashion advertising, a number of ethical issues have been raised, mainly around the promotion of unhealthy body images of women, which are frequently mentioned in relation to studies that examine the onset of eating disorders amongst young women. Furthermore, there has been criticism concerning the governance of advertising and the advertising industry's ethical-related policies which have, over time, become less restrictive (Shead & Dobson, 2004). From social and behavioural scientists to neuropsychologists and marketers, the effects that advertising produces or stimulates have been of great interest in terms of brand recall, satisfaction and symbolism. Social scientists see the effects that advertising has upon people as 'phenomena' while marketers see advertising simply as a tool of the marketing mix, playing a particular functional role linked to brand awareness and the creation of needs and desires.

Since advertising has the power to shape one's view of the world and oneself (Hawkins & Hane, 2001), it has often been the object of criticism. The mass media in general is perceived to tend to depict idealised images (Weissman, 1999). This is why it is important to examine the ability of advertising, to contribute to or produce negative side effects for the individuals exposed to it. It has been well-acknowledged that there are a number of potentially damaging social impacts which arise from advertising campaigns, for example, the caring, supportive connotations of using 'milk nurses' in attempts to portray Nestlé's infant milk products resulting in a decline in breast-feeding practices (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1997) or the relationships of advertising with eating disorders (Becker *et al*, 2002) due to promotions of the 'ideal' body image.

Even though there is a view that individuals' beliefs cannot be changed by advertising and brands (DuVernay, 2008) many studies have found otherwise (including, Klein, 2005; Simpson 1983) which not only support the effects of advertising campaigns such as the 'Calvin Klein' jeans campaign (Simpson, 1983) but also support ethical violations in such practices. Feminist writers often mention issues such as the unethical portrayal of women specifically but these have a greater interest in

influencing humanities and social science research more generally (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). For example, that the images of women and the way they are portrayed in the media have afforded serious academic attention has had a significant effect upon media studies (Watkins & Emerson, 2000).

Many researchers, like Naomi Wolf (1991), focus their research on images of women in the media, -but also consider the implications for society as a whole. The negative effects on the welfare of women, often linked to the 'sexist' nature of fashion advertisements using women, as sex objects as claimed by feminists, are recognised to link to understanding challenges surrounding the role of women in society. Factors such as career success, the wisdom which is purported to come with age or how difficult but important it is to be a wife, mother and work at the same time go unmentioned need to be acknowledged.

Advertising can create notions of 'ideal' images, since 'emotion-arousing advertisements are often used, contributing to individuals' low self-esteem (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1997), especially in the context of fashion or cosmetic advertising. This brings into question issues of 'discrimination', as such idealised images of women in fashion advertising may become superficial and far removed from reality, resulting in unachievable aspirations. Further, a woman's failure to look like and align with these images may result in her being ostracised as a woman, as she will not fit the standards being set in contemporary advertising culture. Contemporary feminist thought, for example, has stayed true to the feminist beliefs of gender inequality expressing the view that the media in all of its forms including the internet, potentially promotes sex inequality (Watkins & Emerson, 2000), and the radical feminist focus on the creation of 'sameness' through improving women's status within society (Tyner & Ogle, 2007). Advertising is often seen as a means of oppressing women (Hawkins & Hanes, 2010), sharing common experiences with sex and gender inequality as a starting point rather than focusing on social interaction, a tricky and small distinction which differentiates feminist thought from this study's aim and objectives. Furthermore, the equality of the sexes, a major aspect of feminist thought, is not the current focus here, so feminist theory was considered less appropriate to use in this research.

Despite strong evidence which exists in support of the persuasive power of advertising, there are alternative voices arguing that individuals persuade themselves (rather than being persuaded by advertisements) on the basis of the assertion that deep beliefs held by individuals cannot be changed by external forces (DuVernay, 2008). Notably, this viewpoint does not take into account the idea that beliefs may evolve or be

altered over time. On the other hand, many writers suggest that influencing means moving forward and education or propaganda leads to the change in belief (Davidson, 2008). Many commentators, like Wolf (1991) and Kilbourne (2000) have repeatedly expressed the view that women are portrayed adversely in advertising but also, more importantly, they have argued how negatively influential advertising can be. This often includes criticisms of products such as cosmetics or weight-loss products. For example, it has been argued that through images in fashion advertising women may be persuaded in purchasing items without actually needing them (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1997) in order to achieve the 'look'. This might even result in consumers going to extreme lengths and risking harm, see for example Featherstone's (1991) discussion of dieting and slimming products.

This section is focused mostly on the negative effects of advertising through the promotion of the 'ideal' in advertising content, which has also been mentioned in the previous section. The 'ideal' which is promoted in advertising can suggest a possible attempt to shape the opinions and views of what is acceptable in terms of appearance and body-image. This can affect the 'self' as an individual is argued to understand him/herself through others, as supported by symbolic interactionism. Adopting this lens or worldview, the 'ideals' created within a society can indeed shape or influence the individual's perception of the 'self'.

Furthermore, this section will outline the images used in general in advertising campaigns and how these can have a negative side, in particular in relation to ethical issues such as eating disorders and the use of nudity in order to attract, both of which are linked to the 'ideal' body image promoted in advertising. Lastly, the images of certain individuals used for specific promotional purposes will be discussed in terms of the negative effects that this may have on consumers in other areas than body issues. All of the issues outlined in this section, offer an insight into how advertising and its practices through images, can have such effects upon the consumer, thereby displaying its effectiveness as a tool to shape or create social beliefs and values. This is related to the present study as through the study of such 'outcomes' or effects of advertising, the level of influence that fashion brand advertisements in magazines have, can be explored.

2.3.4 Ethics and fashion advertising

Advertising, especially fashion brand advertising which is the focus of this DBA thesis, has been found by other academic researchers to have considerable ethical effects. Particular issues of concern in relation to advertising ethics have been voiced

including consumer sovereignty, individual autonomy and the authenticity of claims relating to advertised products (Nwachukwu & Vitell, 1997). With respect to marketing practice, there have been calls for a 'more proactive approach' to be taken by practitioners in regards to setting and adhering to sets of agreed, socially responsible standards (Nwachukwu *et al*, 1997:116).

Nwachukwu *et al*'s (1997) position can be seen particularly relevant in relation to the extent to which images used in fashion magazines advertisements affect young women. In relation to this, many studies have suggested a link between the media and body dissatisfaction. This section focuses on the effects of the media and the promotion of 'ideal' body types in order to display the power and influence that the media has but, more importantly for this research, to show how advertising images create standards for women. Since body satisfaction is linked to the images in advertising, this shows how advertising influences individuals' perception of 'acceptable' body images. Moreover, through fashion advertising, the possible shaping or altering of views may be attempted in terms of the 'ideal' or 'acceptable' look and body-type, thereby creating standards which are to be followed. In the case of fashion brands, for example, the ideals of fashion brands that women 'need' to wear may be created in order to be 'in fashion'. Further, a promotion of a specific body type which is considered as 'appropriate' by fashion magazines in order to be able to wear such fashion brands may be seen to be promoted. This is of interest to this DBA study where the communication of fashion brands is considered through the print images used in advertisements.

Fashion-related images in advertising have attracted considerable interest and criticism in terms of the promotion of the so-called 'ideal' body images of slim women (Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008). The idea of having a 'standard of beauty for women' is noticeable. Many researchers argue that there is a close link between the media and eating disorders (Wolf, 1991), considered to be a 'plague' of the modern world and in the west, especially amongst young females (Parekh and Schmidt, 2003). It needs to be kept in mind that one's family and peers are factors that reinforce the concept of the 'ideal' being socially acceptable as well as being slim and such issues have shown to affect young women predominantly (Borland & Akram, 2007). Even so, it is impossible for most women to achieve the look, weight-wise, which is being promoted by the media (Tiggerman *et al*, 2005). Examples of advertisements that promote such 'ideal' images and body types are those related to weight loss products like milkshakes or products that combat cellulite, which appear to promote ideals of being slim, flawless and ageless.

Researchers suggest that models, especially female ones, are through fashion and the media shown in such a way that they are considered to be the 'norm' or even the 'ideal'. The media are seen as a powerful means through which the manipulation of consumers takes place (Parekh & Schmidt, 2003) but accepting this view of the media's power, means also accepting that consumers are weak, passive and naive (Davis *et al*, 1991), and easily influenced, which ignores the individual personality factor and agency of individuals.

The models used in fashion advertising are portrayed in such a way that certain messages are promoted through their looks. These are created through the media and are attached to specific lifestyle goals that may include factors like fame, money, attractive partners, and success. One such example is Twiggy, a British model of the 1960's who, given her nickname 'Twiggy' in reference to her thin body shape, helped to change the world's view of fashion and the image of females (Parekh & Schmidt, 2003), as the images of models up to then were of more curvaceous women, like Marilyn Monroe, compared to the models today. Thus, it does need to be acknowledged here that the standard of beauty for women as promoted by the media has historically shifted. Nevertheless, despite shifts it may be argued that there has always existed promotion of an 'ideal' that by nature excludes some women from being able to achieve the idealized image.

Some researchers argue that past research focusing on body image ideals and the effects on the self. Female perceptions of their body have been mentioned to exist even in Barbie dolls. Barbie is an interesting figure as she does not have the Mediterranean looks of Greek women, for example, but has been sold in the country and remains popular amongst little girls in Greece. Like fashion models, Barbie dolls portray a stereotypical body image, with long legs and a slim waist. This can create a standard whereby little girls grow up to be conscious of themselves if they do not look like or fit with this idealized, stereotypical 'role model'. The media is a transmitter of 'ideal' images, which may contribute to rather than create these idealized images as a single factor. This may explain why it does not have the same effect on everyone or every society or social group. A further criticism of the images used in advertisements relates to the gender roles that are said to be promoted within them, like the Coca-Cola zero advertising campaign that shows males getting away with being 'promiscuous' and being made to look cool for doing so. Gender bias has also been found in medical advertising in 440 advertisements (Leppard *et al*, 1993).

Image has become a popular way for advertisers to communicate with consumers (Callow & Schiffman, 2004) and advertisements commonly use the so-called attractive individuals, who have been shown to be more favoured among consumers (Snyder & Rothbarch, 1971) than unattractive ones (Dudley, 1999). One of the criticisms that advertising has received concerning its morality is the type of images it uses, for example, certain images are considered to be offensive or even obscene. Arrington (1982 cited in Bishop, 2000) asks, what are the crucial ethical implications of advertising ethics and does advertising inform or create desires? Whereas Bishop argues that image is a symbolism of the ideal which calls on potential consumers to link themselves to the image and become a kind of synonym to it (citing Beckman, 1992), referring to consumers engaging in purchasing behaviour in order to shift from the actual to the ideal. This suggests that advertising not only creates the notion of the so-called 'ideal' but could also be criticised for the way it does so via the practices used and the criteria it displays. The images of what is shown as the 'ideal' or 'norm' in today's contemporary society, like the thin girls used in fashion magazines and on the catwalk may certainly raise some serious ethical issues.

Suggesting that wrinkles are '*flaws*' and '*destroy beauty*' is similar to suggesting that growing older will destroy beauty and therefore could create issues of ageism, thereby promoting clichés (Panic. *et al*, 2011). This is quite a common practice in the messages included in adverts, even though the average age of the models shown in cosmetic and beauty product advertisements, such as for anti-wrinkle creams, are no older than 20. For some reason, the advertising implies that the consumer has to, look like the model, which may be impossible. Even though the fastest growing market segment is over 65 years of age (Panic, 2011), advertising products using young girls is a common practice, leaving consumers with a feeling of alienation (Panic, 2011). This is seen frequently both in television and magazine advertisements, as age-fighting products are commonly promoted in Greece. 'Calvin Klein' jeans are another example of a company's advertising campaign which is shown in a sexy way, something that makes one look irresistible when wearing the brand's jeans. As Bishop (2000) mentions, the Marlboro (cigarette brand) man offers the image of an independent, hard-working role model for males but the brand advertising raises ethical concerns.

Linking a male with socially idealised positive characteristics to the promotion of tobacco products that are associated with health risks is questionable in terms of ethical advertising behaviour. Even so, the author concludes that consumers should not

simply be seen as readily manipulated, but agency should be recognised and consumers do have power to choose what to purchase.

The 'Calvin Klein' jeans campaign of the 1980's was examined by Simpson (1983) and Klein (2005), where Brooke Shields (who was only 15-years-old at the time) was used. In one of these adverts, she is shown lying on the floor as the camera moves up her legs, focusing on the girl's buttocks, which could easily be considered unethical, considering her age. Simpson's (1983) study suggested that this advert was seen as inappropriate for TV, since children have access to it, and that such adverts are offensive to women, as they show a young female in such a way. Furthermore, Simpson (1983) suggests that these advertisements violate the norms of standards and in relation to accepted behaviour, such as sexual behaviour like distance and eye contact. Also, Simpson supports that children are used, unethically, as sexual objects.

The reactions that consumers demonstrate towards nudes in advertising display the great societal changes concerning these views, and adverts such as for 'Calvin Klein' jeans advert have often become the topic of social discussion. Moreover, 'Diet Coke Break' adverts showed a number of women rushing to the window of their office every day at the same time to stare at an attractive, topless worker with a six-pack, taking his break as he drinks diet coke while sweating. Venkatesan and Losco (1975) (mentioned by Dudley, 1999) suggest that the three types of roles that women portrayed between 1959-1971 were shown to be as sex symbols, attractive and depend on their husbands. They conclude that, during those years, women were not shown as sex objects.

The messages of 'Calvin Klein' adverts could also be considered unethical: *'Whenever I get some money, I buy Calvin's, and if there's any left, I pay the rent,'* (Simpson, 1983:148). These could be interpreted as trying to promote the idea that the jeans are of primary importance, that everything else comes second, thereby instilling a sense of irresponsibility among young people. Perfume tends to be advertised using sexy images that often show models of both genders topless, in sexy poses and looking full of lust. Countries such as New Zealand have taken serious steps to protect consumers for such promotional methods in advertisements (Lysonski, 1992).

Researchers have also found that products targeting women have to be linked to what they perceive as important. Advertising is certainly not innocent, as it tries to create needs, encourage ideological behaviour, show the 'ideal' or 'norm' (whether in terms of lifestyle or physical appearance), promoting individualism (Olson, 1995). Other ethical views of businesses are put forward by Howard (1992), such as insurance

companies selling services which are useless to the elderly. This is what advertising is often criticised for: pushing products which people do not need and convincing them to purchase them in order to fit in and create a certain image which will include them in 'the ideal' (Bishop, 2002).

This section has focused on the ethics of advertising and the ethical issues related to the study. Ethics are of crucial importance in order to ensure the welfare and protection of both consumers and businesses. Since advertising by nature 'exposes' individuals, there is a fine line that ethics are responsible for not allowing companies to cross. The American Code of Ethics is one such example and, even though there is no legislation which companies have to follow, these codes are used as good practice advice in order to protect employees and customers. It has been questioned whether even the '*existence of a formal code of ethics in organisations*' (Nwackukwu & Vitell, 1997;758) would be adequate to change attitudes in marketing practice.

2.3.5 Summary of the literature reviewed on advertising

The study of the previous literature provides a good basis for carrying out the research in terms of identifying some of the key issues relevant to this study in relation to advertising and branding. These key issues are concerned with the promotion of an ideal through fashion brand advertising and the symbolic values associated with a brand through brand image projection, namely through advertising.

Even though a rich body of research has been carried out in the past, marketing research in particular tends to be positivist in nature, examined in a quantitative manner. This doctoral research study recognises that there exists an opportunity to make a contribution to knowledge and practice using qualitative approaches.

Levels of consensus have been identified based on the argument that advertising influences consumers and those brands have been commonly found to hold symbolic meaning for consumers and be used as social tools. It was of great interest to discover that the past research was not found to consist of conflicting ideas in terms of the existence of advertising's influence rather; debate exists regarding the extent to which this influence occurs.

The gaps that were identified in the past literature tended to reflect a lack of discussion of the in-depth meanings that fashion brands might have for consumers. Greater depth might be accomplished by 'digging' deeper. The researcher believes that the more in-depth the accounts of the participants involved in such studies, the greater

the understanding that can be achieved. Furthermore, the review revealed a gap in understanding the process which consumers go through or the stages that they follow in order to form meanings, views and opinions about brands. Few studies have offered insights into the processes that shape associations that consumers hold with brands and the symbolic meanings that they attach. The literature indicates a lack of in-depth accounts of those meanings and the reasons underlying them. Where there are exceptions and the past literature has discussed the reasons for the attachment of symbolic meaning to brands, it was found that there still exists scope for a clearer understanding of the processes involved. For example, Elliot and Leonard's research (2004) acknowledged the role of social interaction in creating or attaching symbolic meaning to fashion brands, in particular. However, despite the value of their research it was recognised that there is scope to examine other specific social groups, particularly adult consumers in relation to the role of social interaction and its contribution to creating fashion brand meaning.

In particular, there is a need to broaden our understanding of the brand association and interpretation process as a whole, specifically the ways in which potential consumers might be influenced or not by brand advertisements and the ways in which influencing factors are involved may be holistically evaluated. This was the first key gap in the literature that was identified.

The second key literature gap concerned Greek women and their relationship to foreign fashion brands. This is a key gap in the literature in relation to the specific focus, aim and objectives of this research study. The Greek consumer market as a whole has been somewhat neglected in international academic research. Previous research studies have supported the existence of culturally-specific interpretations of brands. Differences in terms of nationality have been suggested in terms of general brand communication, brand consumption and brand associations. However, despite the existence of specific cultural advertising strategies tailored to certain geographical markets, a lack of consideration of this with respect to foreign fashion brand communication, in particular, was noted. Previous studies, for example Elliot and Leonard (2004), have tended to focus on variables such as age or socio-economic status rather than national culture which is one of the key objectives in the present study in relation to the Greek female consumer.

The study of existing academic literature contributed greatly to the researcher's thinking and research approach. The next chapter moves on to discuss the conceptual thinking behind the thesis.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a review of past literature, focusing predominantly on the themes of brands and advertising, both of which have been examined as a means of marketing communication. These topic areas were considered separately and were seen as key areas for the research. Even though they were examined separately, they showed how in terms of this research, they are interrelated and each plays a role in fulfilling the aim and objectives of the research. The literature review contributed to the shaping of the researcher's ideas in terms of assisting the identification of research gaps concerning knowledge in relation to the study aim and objectives. This is explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

In relation to the study aim and objectives, the review of the literature highlights a need to further explore how Greek women 'read' (or understand and interpret) fashion brands and the associated meanings, views and opinions that may result from that process. In particular, gaps within existing literature regarding Greek women as consumers *per se* and, more specifically, their views, meanings and opinions towards foreign fashion brand meanings were noted. Further, the study identified gaps within existing literature in terms of a lack of research related to the communication process between fashion brands and consumers through the 'reading' of print images in advertisements. There is a gap in literature especially regarding Greek women and how they come to interact with fashion brands through print images.

The chapter has offered existing knowledge and understanding in relation to brands and advertising, especially in respect of meaning attachment and the use of brands as social tools. A review of advertising and the use of images in advertising has also offered ground for understanding how images are used to communicate with the consumer and, in particular, how images contribute to the creation of social 'ideals'. The understanding gained from reviewing past research on brands and advertising was able to help the researcher to move towards operationalising her aims and objectives in terms of 'pinning down' issues relating to research design and execution. With this in mind, Chapter 3 discusses conceptual thinking as a result of reflections on the literature before a discussion in Chapter 4 of the influence of that thinking on the choice of methodology and methods employed in the study.

Chapter 3:

Theoretical approach and conceptual thinking

This chapter focuses on the theoretical approach adopted in this research, symbolic interactionism. Its relevancy and justification in terms of the research focus of the study is considered in relation to the discovery of the viewpoints, meanings and opinions that Greek women hold of foreign fashion brands. The chapter discusses symbolic interactionism and the relevancy of 'self', meaning and social interaction to this DBA research study. The conceptual thinking of the researcher is presented as a result of the researcher's own experiences as a Greek woman (acknowledged in Chapter 1) and the literature review presented in Chapter 2. The chapter precedes a more detailed discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of the research influencing the design and execution of research methods in Chapter 4.

3.1 Key research questions

Having studied some of the past literature in relation to brands and advertising and having identified research gaps in relation to a lack of knowledge of female Greek consumption and the views of Greek women towards foreign fashion brands, a set of key research questions were identified to be in need of exploration (in line with the original research objectives). These were:

- How do Greek women 'read' foreign fashion brands? This is a key issue to explore in order to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of foreign fashion brands held by Greek women. Through this, a better understanding of the effectiveness of print fashion brand advertising process might be gained.
- What are the meanings, views and opinions of foreign fashion brands held by Greek women as a result of how they 'read' the brands? This question is also of high importance to the study, as greater knowledge is sought in terms of the meanings that Greek women attach to foreign fashion brands and what those meanings are. This will offer a chance to identify if any patterns of socially-shared fashion brand meanings are evident for Greek women and whether or not there exists a shared 'reality'.

- What are the influences affecting Greek women in relation to their views, meanings and opinions of foreign fashion brands? These influences need to be identified in order to gain an understanding and broader knowledge of the factors that play a part in the formation of brand meaning and symbolism. This will help to inform the brand communication process of advertisers.
- What is the overall general mentality of Greek women towards foreign fashion brands which follows the attachment of meanings? Using the previous key issues the general mentality can be understood. The above key points are what will assist the researcher to gain a better understanding of Greek women's mentality towards foreign fashion brands.

The study was driven by an interest to discover the extent to which socially shared meanings, common views and opinions might exist amongst Greek women with respect to foreign fashion brands. Furthermore, the understanding of fashion brands from the perspective of social actors and how and why meanings and perceptions might occur was a main issue in the study, acknowledging that images are argued to be used to create meaning (Gamson *et al*, 1992). The following section discusses symbolic interactionism and outlines the theory's qualities.

Taking into consideration the four research questions, the next section will discuss symbolic interactionism as a framework and how it was seen as an appropriate theoretical approach for this study. Its relevance will be discussed in respect to its characteristics as well as its methodological implications, leading the chapter to a discussion of conceptual thinking.

3.2 Symbolic interactionism

The stance taken within any research is a crucial part as it acts as a foundation upon which the methodology and methods evolve. Since the main aim of the thesis was to examine the viewpoints, meanings and opinions held by Greek women of foreign fashion brands advertised in fashion magazines, the relevance of symbolic interactionism was identified as a natural approach to take, as meaning is considered to be a key aspect of symbolic interactionism in terms of understanding human behaviour (Jeon, 2004). Furthermore, fashion which is considered to be a socially defined concept

or a social happening (Blumer, 1969), is a key focus of the research in terms of wishing to gain a sense of symbolic meanings that Greek women attach to fashion brands. These ideas may be explored through social interaction as a way of understanding how individuals come to understand themselves, others and objects, and develop a sense of shared 'reality'. Images in print advertising (placed in fashion magazines) are also of interest in terms of the ways that Greek women 'read' or interpret foreign fashion brands. Thus, it was seen as necessary to adopt a theoretical approach that would accommodate lack of presupposition, and allow room to discover why and how meanings are formed and attached.

It was seen as necessary to present the findings in a manner in which they would not be weathered through a process of interpretation. As a theoretical approach, symbolic interactionism is used in order to understand phenomena within the areas of sociology and social psychology (Trevino *et al*, 1987). Since the present study touches upon perceptions as well as the processes involved in attaching meanings to fashion brands, a social research approach was sought in order to accommodate the discovery of in-depth meanings attached to fashion brands by members of a social group (in this case, Greek women).

Moreover, social interaction as a determinant for creating meaning needed to be understood, which demanded an approach which would allow the researcher to go into depth, one of the qualities enabled by a symbolic interactionism framework. The core ideas of symbolic interactionism can be applied to marketing research regarding consumers' perceptions of fashion brand meaning, through its understanding and approach to social groups and the meanings attached to objects (fashion brands) and individuals (Zhang & Kim, 2013). The idea that social groups, through interaction, construct, create and attach meanings is a useful basis for gaining a better understanding of the consumer and the influences that may be present in the way they attach meanings and understand fashion brands.

Symbolic interactionism is the 'offspring' of George Herbert Mead although it was taken forward by Herbert Blumer (Oliver, 2012) and colleagues at the University of Chicago (Fine, 1993). Mead saw society as a '*never-ending process of routinization of solutions to repetitive problems*' (Stryker, 2008;17) with the individual being inseparable to the context which he or she exists in (Handberg *et al*, 2015).

The foundations of symbolic interactionism derive from social behaviourism, a stance which has since been adopted by other supporters like Blumer and Dewey, who believed that humans could be understood in relation to their environment. Mead saw

communication of the individual within society as being crucial for social order (Mead, 1934). The term ‘behaviourism’ as a way to refer to ‘experience’ is a view shared by Mead and Dewey. Experience is an important part of this study as it is an outcome of everyday interactions and it is through experience that individuals come to form views, opinions and shared meanings. Symbolic interactionism focuses upon how individuals come to understand the world in which they live (Solomon, 1983). This is something which is of interest in this study as one of the overall concerns is to understand the meanings of foreign fashion brands that Greek women hold.

Blumer’s principle of people acting towards things based on their meaning (Oliver, 2012) and meanings being created and changed within social interaction (Fine, 1993), could be related to fashion brand symbolism and the meanings that brands have for individuals. It must be accepting that meanings can change as people change their minds especially in the context of responding fashion since it is a fluid concept by nature, constantly changing every season.

Consumers create connections with brands (Mocanu, 2013) and it is of interest to discover how and why Greek women use fashion brands, in what ways and the deeper reasons for doing so. In this manner, Blumer (1969) is seen as relevant in terms of his position of ‘self’ and symbolic meanings of fashion brands. Concerning style, for instance, symbolic interactionism supports that meanings and styles are negotiable by culture and that a majority adopts those that are meaningful (Buckland, 2000). Blumer (1969; 277) refers to individuals’ adoption of what is fashionable as ‘*a very calculated act*’ and identifies three categories of individuals who adopt fashion trends: conscious; coerced; and unwittingly. This can illustrate the more complex nature of fashion as referred to in Chapter 1.

Symbolic interactionists claim that via empirical discovery through social interaction, individuals come to realise the real world (Handberg *et al*, 2015). Through this, individuals are affected by the environment in which they live and the interaction which takes place within their society. The idea of an interpretation process might explain how and why brands can be interpreted in a similar manner by different individuals. The approach is defined by the focus and epicentre of the theory in interaction not only with others but also with objects and, of course, the ‘self’.

The three principles expressed by Mead (1934), ‘self’, ‘mind’ and ‘society’, are seen as highly relevant in this research and are considered in terms of its aim and objectives, as they refer to the importance of social interaction in the individuals’ understanding of themselves, others and objects. The next section links these three

principles to the research in order to approach the research objectives. Meaning, for example, refers to the meanings which are given or attached to fashion brands. Self is considered also as an important factor in ‘making sense’ of fashion brands and their wearers and, finally, interaction is seen as a crucial part of symbolic interactionism in that sense-making is considered in relation not only to the social interaction between individuals but also in terms of the interaction between individuals and print images projected through advertising.

3.2.1 The relevance of meaning, ‘self’ and interaction in the present study

Three basic principles of social interactionism are considered as factors of influence towards the meanings, views and opinions of Greek women: ‘self’, meaning and interaction. This section will explain how these principles help to recognise symbolic interactionism as a suitable approach for the present doctoral research study and for the marketing field more generally. The self is constructed (Fine, 1993), separated into the ‘me’ (object) and ‘I’ (subject) evolving through interaction and are more instinctual and less symbolic. *‘The self appears as a new type of individual in the social whole’* (Mead, 1934; 192) and symbolic interactionism can offer a theoretic *‘basis for conceptualizing the ‘socially oriented ‘self’ and its relationship to product conspicuousness’* (Lee, 1990; 388). This could offer a valuable ground for gaining and building greater knowledge in terms of how individuals may be creating social ‘norms’ and ideals of the ‘accepted’ within their social group, influencing their views and opinions of fashion brand meanings.

Further, a greater understanding of how individuals may act as a *‘social whole’* (Mead, 1934) and how meanings are a result of *‘situational appropriateness’* (Fine, 1993; 76), will offer a better understanding of the Greek female consumer in terms of what is considered as ‘appropriate’ within certain social contexts. This can be linked to the initial interest of the researcher to discover how Greek women use fashion brands and the intention of gaining a better understanding of the Greek market contributing to more effective fashion branding practice.

The ‘self’, is believed to be prominent in relation to literature concerning symbolic consumption (Millan & Reynolds, 2014) as self-perception is achieved through social interaction. It is believed that self-values are primarily taken from one’s family through the process of growing up and being socialised. The basis of Mead’s ideas are that the individual and society are *‘created through social process; each is*

constitutive of the other' (Stryker, 2008: 17). The importance of interaction within society or a group has implications for symbolic interactionism and the present research.

Interaction takes place when two or more individuals are communicating in a meaningful manner (Ligas & Cotte, 1999) and through it, meaning is influenced (Handberg *et al*, 2015). In relation to the present doctoral research study, fashion and fashion brands are socially visible through interaction and therefore this is another key reason for adopting symbolic interactionism as a framework as, commonly, consumers will make use of *'the visibility of the product to communicate symbolically something about themselves to the significant others'* (Lee, 1990; 387). This is linked to observations made by the researcher in terms of the explicit and vivid manner in which Greek women have been observed to display fashion clothing brands as a non-verbal language.

It is envisaged that, through interaction, individuals within a social group create and share fashion brand meaning as a symbolic communication on the principle of the existence of *'commonly shared meaning and experience about the product in a specific consumption situation'* (Lee, 1990; 387). Interaction is seen to be 'responsible' for sharing meanings of the 'self', others and foreign fashion brands through language or gestures (Denzin, 1974; Ligas & Cotte, 1999). In this study language is referred to as verbal and non-verbal - through the ways that fashion brands are talked about or the ways in which they are worn - and its role is recognised as an important part of communication.

In this respect, interaction is considered to be a key underlying process in respect to the aim and objectives of the study. A consumer is believed to purchase a fashion clothing brand according to what it represents to themselves and others (Leigh & Gabel, 1992) and purchasing decisions are seen to be influenced by the reactions of others (Lee, 1990). It is through interaction that one comes to understand oneself by the meanings given or attached by others within their social environment (Ligas & Cotte, 1999).

In this research, interaction is not only seen to occur between actors but also between individuals and images of foreign fashion brands employed in advertising taking under consideration that social values and meanings are different for different cultures or societies rather than adopting a fixed stance.

The understanding that an individual has of these attachments of meanings and symbols to others and objects emerges from social interaction rather than inherent individual viewpoints. Consumption of goods for symbolic meaning (Solomon, 1983)

and the interaction which takes place suggest a ‘shared reality’, socially constructed by individuals through interaction (Jussim, 1991).

This study takes the stance that ‘norms’ and ‘ideals’ are constructed and created by Greek women, as one constructs oneself through clothing (Fine, 1993) or appearance, in relation to those ‘ideals’ and ‘norms’. Therefore, it is considered crucial in brand management to distinguish between the individual and ‘*social dimensions*’ (Tuskej *et al*, 2013).

The notion that individuals interact in order to determine the way behaviour is structured (Leigh & Gabel, 1992) offers an explanation to why it is essential to be involved in interaction, otherwise, one is unable to interpret oneself. The essentiality of this interaction is of equal importance in attaching meaning and interpreting other people and objects and this is where the importance of language is highlighted with respect to effective communication as clothing has been found to act as a ‘code’ and a form of ‘language’ (Auty & Elliot, 1998).

Since social recognition is vital for communicating a product which acts as a ‘*symbolic communicating device*’ (Grubb & Hathwohl, 1967; 24), it is of interest to comprehend the symbolic meanings of fashion brands in relation to social interaction and understand how ‘defective’ communication can lead to dissimilar events and symbolic perceptions which, in turn, can lead to ‘socially inappropriate behaviour’. These ideas might offer valuable insight into the ways that consumers come to evaluate, understand, and ‘read’ fashion brands and the promotion of fashion brands through images in print advertising, giving practitioners leverage in terms of the way that they build and promote fashion brands to Greek women.

Meaning and symbolisms are not only seen as a fundamental part of symbolic interactionism but also suggest the importance of language as a tool for creating meanings and allowing labelling, stereotyping and ‘naming’. Language is regarded as an essential part of being human and it is argued that it is through language that individuals can comprehend reality.

Since meaning is given such a focus and plays such an important role in symbolic interactionism being ‘*central in their own right*’ (Blumer, 1969), this accounts for one of the reasons for the choice of symbolic interaction as the theoretical approach for the study. The meanings that fashion brands have for individuals is a key part of the study and brands are perceived to act as social tools (Leigh & Gabel 1992), with a sense of belonging being acquired by purchasing an item based on its symbolic meaning. The

symbolism of a product is regarded as a way to communicate a fashion brand in terms of role expectations (Solomon, 1983).

It is argued by Mead (1934) that the labelling or naming process that takes place in social interaction is what makes a person act in a particular way and the flexibility of this process offers an understanding of the different behaviours that one might adopt in different social groups or situations. This is an interesting point to consider as it is linked to the interest in finding out the meaning that a brand has to enable a better understanding of the Greek female consumer in relation to the way she is affected by interaction in forming views, meanings and opinions. The labelling process proposed suggests that individuals adopt an attitude towards an object or individual depending on the label placed upon them. This can be linked to a categorisation process described in section 3.5.2.

Meaning, even in more general terms than safety, is an essential part of human behaviour and everyday interaction as it is through meaning that one acts in accordance with social norms. The fluidity which can be found in symbolic interactionist theory of accepting that meanings can change and are not fixed, offers an explanation as to why one culture or social group can interpret something differently to another social group. Thus, the culturally specific context of meanings is suggested –something which is of interest in this research study with respect to the interpretation of foreign fashion brands in a Greek context, notably by Greek women.

As previously acknowledged meaning is a significant part of symbolic interactionism, as open to change and formed through social interaction. When interaction concerns one self, then it is argued that self-concept occurs. This notion of understanding the self includes past experiences which have occurred from birth to the present and this, again, demonstrates fluidity in the theory of symbolic interactionism as experiences are argued to be capable of constant change in one's self-concept. The self is a part of symbolic interactionism which could be linked to how a woman, for example, believes she should behave or even dress in different social circumstances. Also, the self could be linked to a woman's understanding of what is acceptable to wear at certain stages of her life or at a certain age. The self could also be linked to the personal style of an individual as 'style' may be recognised as something created rather than inherited and emerges from the individuals' perception of what suits them possibly both in terms of their physical appearance and personality.

3.3 Symbolic interactionism in practice and suitability for this study

It is considered necessary to discuss how symbolic interactionism as a framework is suited for the present study. The qualities of symbolic interactionism will be highlighted in this section in order to justify its choice as appropriate for the research. Although sociology has in the past been somewhat neglected in marketing-related research (Lee, 1990), it is believed that symbolic interactionism can offer a rich insight into how Greek women 'read' fashion brands. A greater understanding can be gained by its use in marketing research in terms of how the consumer understands fashion brands in relation to themselves, benefiting practitioners in creating more effective communication between fashion brands and consumers via print images in advertising.

Although the ideas of Mead in '*Mind, self & society*' (1934) were developed in 1934, they are recognised as still relevant today in social science research. More specifically, the notion of brands having symbolic meanings for the consumer (Dichter, 1985; Phillips, 2009) is accepted in the present doctoral research study. It is accepted that the consumer feels part of a community when owning 'fashionable' items (Waide, 1987) and brands are used as social tools, used in a symbolic manner (Grubb & Gathwohl, 1967; Leigh & Gabel, 1992) related to the researcher's observations initially sparking the interest of the study. The ideas of Mead become particularly relevant in the sense that individuals attach meaning to the 'self, others and objects through a process influenced by social interaction and the belief that brands may be used beyond their practical or functional use. Where individuals attempt to gain identity through brands (Belk, 1988) it is accepted that individuals purchase items based on their symbolic meanings.

The assumption that one's interactions, experiences and activities within one's social environment throughout their lifetime result in the building of the 'self' can be linked to how brands act as social tools and have meanings attached to them. This is a stance that should be taken seriously as interaction is a part of the everyday life within a social group and socialisation is considered to be an important part in the individual's upbringing; therefore holds significance in terms of social behaviour. Mead (1934), expands on the concept of 'self', putting forward a view that is common among subjectivists, that, there is a presence of consciousness but lack of self-consciousness and how social processes take place in the early developmental stages which produce the minds and selves which are crucial for the existence of society. The self is a very

interesting part of this study. Since symbolic interactionism supports the view that individuals are to be regarded in the '*context of their environment*' (Benzies & Allen, 2001) this is seen as an approach of high relevance to this research as it marks an attempt to understand Greek women's views on foreign fashion brand meaning.

The researcher's stance is that individuals are not simple but complex beings (Beach *et al*, 2005) and that symbolic interactionism was seen an appropriate framework to accommodate the present study. Symbolic interactionism may be considered a '*general sociological framework*' (Stryker, 1987) adopted to explain sociological issues, and also as a social psychological framework through which the impact of social interaction may be studied (Stryker, 1987).

Marketing research in the past focused mainly on economic relationships (Arnett *et al*, 2003) but there is a need to gain a better understanding of the relationship formed between brands and consumer in non-economic terms. A greater understanding of the consumer-brand 'bond' and the usage of brands is needed to gain further insights into how brands fulfil emotional needs through their symbolic meanings (Dichter, 1985; Phillips, 2009) as well as having social functions (Klink & Athaide, 2012).

In order to gain an understanding of the symbolic meanings that fashion brands have for a social group, there is a need for a framework which will allow the researcher to 'dig deep' into the 'psyche' of Greek women. With respect to this, a 'fluid' framework was perceived as valuable as it does not constrain data collection and allows for the adoption of new methods to suit the needs of the researcher when necessary and flexibility in the research process.

In relation to marketing research, symbolic interactionism can be used effectively to enable international companies to benefit from a stronger understanding of forms of brand or product meaning and how these are '*intrinsically relevant to the consumer*' (Ligas & Cotte, 1999:609). From personal engagement with academic marketing literature it is observable that there is a need in marketing research to approach consumers in a more 'respectful' manner rather than accept them as numbers in statistics or predictable 'mechanical' beings and appreciate their complex nature and agency.

Symbolic interactionism as a framework, can contribute to the present study by its position on comprehending meanings from the perspective of the individual under investigation (Denzin, 1974). It accommodates the complex nature of human beings and allows for the idea that, '*Reality is sensed, known and understood as a social production*' (Denzin, 1974; 269). Symbolic interactionism is a position offering ground

upon which greater understanding and knowledge can be achieved in terms of consumer perceptions of products, services, images in advertising or brands and it allows for the acquisition of deeper insights into brand meaning (Ligas & Cotte, 1999).

Because of the ‘fluid’ nature accommodated by the research approach, symbolic interactionism can be applied to gain a greater understanding of social groups in relation to in-depth meanings, views and opinions. This proved to be attractive to the researcher in her study of fashion clothing brands where a better understanding of the actor's, or consumer's standpoint was desired.

The intention was that through acquiring a better understanding of how individuals ‘read’, attach meanings to fashion brands and the influences of social groups in this process, a more effective brand promotional strategy can be built. Consumers have a tendency to be more attracted to brands whose identity matches their own in relation to how they see themselves (Tuskej *et al*, 2013) and it was important to use a framework which would allow for an emphasis on the ‘self’, meanings and social interaction in order to comprehend the formation of brand meaning together with an understanding of brand choice processes. The recognition of this importance was derived from the review of literature (Chapter 2) and specific existing studies on individuals’ choice of clothes worn in relation to how they represent their personalities (Feinberg *et al*, 1992), and how individuals attach symbolic meanings (Dichter, 1985; Phillips, 2009) and functions to brands (Klink & Althaide, 2012) viewing reality as a social production (Denzin, 1974). Through this, a greater understanding of how individuals ‘read’, understand, interpret and use fashion brands can be gained.

Applying a symbolic interactionist approach can contribute to a greater understanding of how consumers perceive fashion brands through the projection of images in advertising (stimulus). A symbolic interactionist stance was acknowledged to further benefit the study's potential contribution to practice by providing a greater understanding of the influence and impact of fashion brand image promotion in relation to Greek women. Further, symbolic interactionism can contribute in relation to how interaction is a contributing factor in how individuals within the same social group are influenced in a context relevant to marketing practices applied.

Foreign, high-end fashion brand apparel in the past has been reportedly seen by the Greek consumer to be better in terms of fit, quality and style as well as being more unique or original in design having the effect of ‘lifting’ the image of the wearer (Kamenidou *et al*, 2007). The researcher through first-hand experience of and

interactions with Greek women (Chapter 1) recognised the existence of a specific mind-set with respect to the explicit displaying of fashion brand logos.

It is of particular interest for the study as it could offer the ground for exploring Greek women's mentality regarding fashion brands and choice of fashion style and in a more 'academic' or research sense where the reasons behind this or the general relationship between Greek women and foreign fashion brands can be understood and explored. Although Kamenidou *et al* (2007) offer a background to the Greek mentality towards foreign fashion brands, there is as yet a lot left unexplored in terms of the generally-held symbolic meanings of foreign fashion brands compared to Greek ones.

A symbolic interactionist framework was chosen in the belief that it was most appropriate, in accordance with the research focus, aims and objectives. That is not to say that alternative potential approaches were not considered, for example, Marxism, feminism and post-modernism. It was decided that symbolic interactionism was best suited to the researcher's own world view and could help to unravel '*the complexities of how meaning is co-constructed by interpretive agents in interaction and social their world*' (Hangberg *et al*, 2015;1031).

As discussed in Chapter 4 the researcher wished to adopt an inductive approach. It was important to her that any conceptual framework developed to acknowledge her preconceived hunches and conceptual thinking pre-data collection would offer a loose structure for the research rather than aiming to allow for generalisability and replication. The research study was intended to be to a large extent exploratory in nature given its goal of attempting to extract and understand deeply held meanings. It was important that any conceptual framework developed for conducting the research would offer the opportunity to 'probe' participants when necessary.

Through adopting a symbolic interactionist approach it was believed that, consumer views of fashion brands could be uncovered. The researcher acknowledges that although in the beginning of the 1970's symbolic interactionism was characterised as 'unscientific' by some positivists (Stryker, 1987) the identification of its sociological– psychological nature (Stryker, 1980) could be used to strengthen and enrich knowledge for those engaged in marketing research especially in those engaged in the areas of branding and communication strategy.

Another perceived benefit of a symbolic interactionist approach relates to its macro-level advantages for marketing-related research, offering knowledge on the process that individuals go through in forming symbolic meanings, views and opinions. The acceptance of the individual not being 'fixed' in their views, can be linked to the

ever-changing or transient nature of fashion, enabling practitioners to understand the consumer on a deeper more intuitive level over time which can support the development of more effective strategies in relation to branding and advertising.

Existing literature in the past, (Chapter 2), has displayed an attachment of symbolic meanings on brands (Phillips, 2009), the consumption of goods for their symbolic meaning (Dichter (1960; 1985) and the fulfilment of symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). When symbolic meaning is attached to a brand or product, there is a need for companies to '*understand its nature so that they can reinforce or alter it to their advantage*' (Leigh & Gabel, 1992;28). Meanings behind words for instance can be considered useful in discovering meaning attachment to fashion brands, gaining an insight into the individual's understanding of others wearing fashion brands and the fashion brand itself. In relation to the research concerning marketing, symbolic interactionism can be used as a way to understand the interpretation of advertising and promotional practices adopted by identifying the symbolic meanings attached to fashion brands by consumers.

The symbolic interactionist idea of the individual being inseparable to their environment (Handberg *et al*, 2015) offers the view that brand meaning can be developed within that environment (Ligas & Cotte, 1969) as emotions derive from the '*social world*' (Fine, 1993). This takes us to how this approach, allowing for a deeper understanding of symbolic representation, was identified as more suitable for this study over other approaches, as the main purpose or overarching aim of the study.

A symbolic interactionist approach can facilitate in this understanding and be applied in order to be able to gain such knowledge and information from the research. Brand symbols contribute significantly in name awareness (MacInnis *et al*, 1999) and in the same way to how fashion brands are perceived; a further interest to see how individuals perceive others in their social group and others' relationship to the fashion brands was desired. Past consumer research has shown how brand selection derives from social interaction whether that involves individuals or individuals and fashion brands. This is looked at in terms of identifying whether fashion brands serve symbolic rather than utilitarian purposes and whether brands are used as social tools. This identifies society as a type of system in which interaction and communication take place between individuals, as well as the self, as a product of the society one belongs to and offers a stability in social meanings (Callero, 2003).

At this point, it must be noted and clarified that the internationalisation of brands is not something which will be looked at in depth but instead it is acknowledged as a

possible factor contributing to a shift in those meanings and viewpoints throughout time as something ‘foreign’ to the participants. An in-depth discussion of the impact of foreign brand practices and their effects on the sample groups in this research study does not form part of the research, as the focus is not on brand popularity based on brand origin but it is on the symbolic meanings of fashion brands.

Another point of interest is to find out whether localised social values or surroundings played a role and if these factors conflict with individual values. If so, is there any influence of those factors on the social group which affects fashion brand perceptions or preferences as the self depends on the symbolism of the brands and purchase (Dong, 1990). This again is a display of how interaction is seen to be of importance and relevance when exploring the topic. Furthermore, the way in which consumers ‘read’ or perceive the fashion brands in print advertisements and their consumption choices based upon the symbolic rather than functional performance of the product (Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Debicka, 2000; Jamal & Goode, 2001) is of interest. The choice of fashion apparel in order to differentiate the self from others (Piamphongsant & Mandhachita, 2008) and the symbolic use of brands to self-express and fulfil symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998) and sense of self (Roux & Korchia, 2006) as well as of individuals’ ‘*social meaning*’ (Levy, 1959) were areas of interest. All of this was considered in relation to exploring collective, shared viewpoints and opinions of fashion brands.

Symbolic interactionism offers a stability in the concept of social meanings (Callero, 2003), and their importance. Such stability is related to what social meanings are and how they might influence behaviour. This is related to how symbolic interactionism is engaged with paying attention to the ‘self’ which is seen as ‘*a reflexive process of social interaction*’ (Callero, 2003) and so is appropriately linked to the aim and objectives of this research. It is believed to offer a theoretical approach to allow for the investigation of the ‘*self-concept*’ and symbolism of products (Lee, 1990). The ‘self’ in relation to product symbolism and the interaction between individuals and fashion brands is a central part of this study. It is perceived to play a big role, as images in the media are studied and their affects upon individuals, who often appear to compare themselves to the models in the media (Martin & Peters, 2005). Even so, there are instances where this approach was seen to have failed in developing a great understanding in relation to the self (Callero, 2003).

The process of individuals understanding the ‘self’ through fashion brands and their symbolic meanings can be linked to symbolic interactionism, as the approach

perceives reality as something that is not fixed. Therefore, an approach which offers room for building or alternating as one goes along offers the flexibility needed to explore the idea that reality is continually recreated or even accomplished through meaningful interaction. Since personality characteristics can change and are not fixed, symbolic interactionism was identified as an approach able to accommodate the study aim and objectives. Recognition of an ongoing process of 'negotiation' deriving from social factors but also social identity as an outcome of interaction is a further argument for using symbolic interactionism in this study.

Lastly, in terms of symbolic interactionism, one has to comprehend the point of view held by social actors, and the definitions and meanings they attach or give to the situations in which they find themselves, in order to 'know' the social reality. In the present study the definitions and meanings attached to foreign fashion brands are of interest, the situations that individuals find themselves in are related to interaction in their social group, and the shared 'reality' is related to the society they belong to.

This type of research has been acknowledged as needing to be carried out in a different way to natural science research (Behling, 1980; Morgan & Smircich, 1980) and qualitative approaches provide an opportunity to *understand consumer reactions* (Flynn, D'arcy & Bowles, 1991) and offer knowledge on how people function (Gordon, 2002). Symbolic interactionism does facilitate a qualitative methodology as discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4 Underpinnings of the initial conceptual thinking: factors considered

Initially, there was a need to consider the factors which were thought to have a possible influence upon the consumer in the formation of meanings, viewpoints and opinions. Some underlying 'hunches' must be acknowledged stemming from the researcher's experience of social interaction with Greek women and this experience came from interacting with those women as well as interacting with women of other nationalities (through the researcher's role as a Greek woman who has lived both within and without Greek society). These 'hunches' were related to how Greek women use foreign fashion brands particularly as a means of projection and deliberately intend to display what they were wearing through quite vivid behaviours such as preferring items of clothing and fashion accessories with highly visible logos. This observed behaviour shaped the researcher's focus on certain factors or aspects of Greek female fashion

consumption, for example an interest in fashion brands used as social tools or as a means to project.

The researcher, herself, considering the formation of the meanings, viewpoints and opinions of foreign fashion brands, felt that there was a need to consider print advertisements (in fashion magazines) to act as a stimulus to which Greek women are exposed to. The images were of importance in order to discover how foreign fashion brands are communicated to Greek women and discover how a fashion brand is 'read'. The print image advertisement was considered to be a stimulus, not the magazine as a whole, as the overall experience of fashion magazines by Greek women was not of direct interest. The image printed was of interest on the advertisement and the researcher considered the possibility that there might also be other types of influences, both external and internal, contributing to the symbolic meanings attached to fashion brands, such as, for example, social interaction.

Further, it was considered that the symbolic meaning attached to fashion brands could serve as a means for communication, where Greek women are able to 'read' the identity of the wearer as well as the brand. As a result of the 'hunches, it is thought that through the use of fashion brands, a type of self-projection takes place as fashion brands act as social tools.

Some of these factors were noted in works of other researchers, for example, Blumer (1969) and the notion of fashion acting as a central mechanism in relation to creating 'social order' as well as brands having symbolic functions (Klink & Athaide, 2012) and brands purchased based on symbolisms attached to them (Jamal & Goode, 2001). Some factors were also considered pertinent as a result of the researcher's own direct experience of Greek women and how they used and acted towards fashion brands which constituted 'hunches' pre-data collection.

It is necessary to explain in simple terms the 'process' which took place in studying the factors concerning the influences upon individuals in their understanding and interaction with fashion brands, as well as the role of the stimulus which in this case is print images in advertisements. Furthermore, there was a need to study how the image is 'read' and interpreted by Greek women in order to understand the way the brand is communicated. Through this, the possible in-depth relationship and interaction between the individual and the fashion brand would be understood. As a result, this understanding of such interaction would offer knowledge on what it leads to, as well as which other factors might play a role in affecting Greek female perceptions of fashion brands.

It is of interest to discover formation of opinion through everyday social interactions with other women and what the influences of interaction are in relation to how Greek women come to understand foreign fashion brands. It is argued that the external and internal influences emerge from these social interactions within this society or social group. This includes interaction between individuals and, objects (which in the case of this study are foreign fashion brands), with fashion magazine advertising acting as the stimulus to which Greek women are exposed to.

These key principles of interaction are factors which were initially thought to affect an individual's relationship to fashion brands. In order to identify in- depth the way in which these influences affect individuals in terms of their perceptions of fashion brands, a stimulus and two sets of influences were identified. The stimulus was the print image in advertisements, focusing on the exposure of the foreign fashion advertisements. The stimulus, was considered to be (one of) the means through which Greek women come to 'read' the foreign fashion brand and discover its identity through the image as the purpose of advertising is to obtain a personality for the brands it is promoting (Meenaghan, 1995).

The first set of influences concern the internal influences which are considered to possibly play a role on an individual's perceptions, opinions and viewpoints of foreign fashion brand meaning and their perception of the 'self'. Two influences were considered: self-image and meaning and were both seen as crucial factors to consider in this research. Taking a symbolic interactionist perspective, it was believed that the social group to which one belongs and the so-called 'acceptability' of that social group, results in the perception one has of oneself. This was primarily believed to be formed through social interaction and language as a means of effective communication.

The second set of influences identified was external influences. These influences concern the environmental factors that one is exposed to, relating to those influences through which the individual becomes aware of the socially constructed meanings and symbolisms which are socially shared, and creating standards for what is 'acceptable', 'ideal' and 'normal'. The external influences relate to cues that stem from other social actors in different social situations, like the workplace for example. Two influences were identified here: social interaction; and images from the media. These influences are now considered, in turn, to demonstrate how they shaped the research design process based upon and in respect of Figure 3.1. Next, the stimulus and internal and external factors will be discussed in terms of the characteristics which they include and were considered crucial in the research design process.

3.4.1 The stimulus: print images in advertisements

The print images in advertisements is a central and core factor which individuals are exposed to directly. As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.), advertising and brands are interlinked. Print advertising has been found to promote symbolisms (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009). It is perceived to act as a stimulus to which the participants are exposed to during the purchasing process as its purpose is to obtain a personality for the brands (Meenaghan, 1995). Through the images in print advertising (in fashion magazines) the brand is communicated and individuals become knowledgeable about foreign fashion brands undergoing a series of '*mental processes*' (Dichter, 1949). It is more complex than simply targeting consumers and persuading them to buy an advertised product even when they do not need it (Davis *et al*, 1991).

Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2) has discussed images in relation to their effectiveness and the factors that play a role. There has been a plethora of research into the area and this research is concerned with how the images communicated in print advertisements come to influence the consumer. In terms of the communication process, the print images are considered to be the stimulus which individuals and groups are exposed to and this became an important factor to consider in the decision making process of the research design. In order to be able to discover the role or influence of the images in advertisements (in fashion magazines), the participants needed to be studied with respect to how influential they believed fashion magazine advertisements to be in forming the meanings, views and opinions towards foreign fashion brands.

What is of interest to discover in this identified stimulus is how foreign fashion brands communicate with the reader through the images used in print advertisements (in fashion magazines). The expansion of 'wants' in our economy (Lazo, 1961; Bhat & Reddy, 1998) attempted by advertising, is related to the symbolic attachment and purchasing of brands to be used as social 'tools' rather than being solely related to the informative aspect of advertising.

This process was an initial point of interest and is something that needed to be taken into account in the research design as it was a factor that needed to be identified through research. This stimulus is not considered solely in terms of brand awareness but also in terms of the overall influence of print fashion advertising placed in fashion magazines. It must be stressed that even though advertising may be considered to be a major influence in terms of consumer behaviour, it is not seen in this study simply to belong to the external influences such as social interaction. Rather, in this study the advertisement is perceived to be worthy of separate focus, acting independently of the

external factors although it is acknowledged that it may additionally act as an external influence.

It was recognised that positioning print images as part of 'external influences' would not signify their focal value in the context of this study. It is proposed that print image is a factor within the communication process, demanding a need to be appreciated on a deeper level in terms of its role. In the present research study, print images in advertising are considered to act as a stimulus, an independent factor to which individuals are exposed to through projection. As a result, consumers become aware of and acquainted with the image of the brand. The stimulus is classified to be much greater than a simple influence, as through it, advertising tries to form and develop a relationship between brand and consumer, going beyond informing. This, in addition to other influences, contributes to attachment of meaning, as cultural meanings derive from the consumer's world (Elliot & Wattanasuwas, 1998).

The stimulus acts as a starting point and first step in targeting the consumer, primarily engaged in attempting to 'match' the brand to the consumer (Cianfrone *et al*, 2006). This is considered as a form of 'socialisation' and advertising acts as a type of education which will enable individuals to act as consumers (Petit & Zakon 1962). This is highly relevant to the present study as it supports the idea that images in print advertising might act as a stimulus through which Greek women become familiarised with fashion brands. Further, through this stimulus, an attempt to create needs beyond survival encouraging ideologies portraying the 'accepted' or 'ideal' in relation to physical appearance or lifestyle (Olson, 1995) is promoted.

This is particularly obvious in the images of fashion advertising where the product is linked to the consumer (Seitz, 1998). Therefore, it is vital to consider the stimulus separately to external influences, as it acts on a whole different level. It is of interest to discover perceptions of Greek women in terms of foreign fashion brand advertising and brand images. Also, it is of interest to inform on the effectiveness of fashion brand communication, how an individual 'reads', 'processes' and interprets fashion brand advertising.

3.4.2 The Influences

There are two sets of influences: internal; and external. These concern the factors that individuals may be influenced by in the process of forming meanings, views and opinions regarding foreign fashion brands. Such influences are considered to have been built over the years through social interaction within the individual's social group as the individual is inseparable to their environment (Handberg *et al*, 2015) and reality is socially produced (Denzin, 1974; 269).

A ground for the processing of information that one is exposed to, which in this case, is the stimulus as previously discussed, images in print advertising. External influences include social interaction and are considered to be of importance in terms of influencing one's formation of the meanings, viewpoints and opinions of foreign fashion brands.

Fashion clothing, has been found to act as a means of communication by itself (McCracken & Roth, 1989), through which images are communicated (Feiberg *et al*, 1992). Interaction is considered to occur in different forms and social situations. Firstly, the social and/or cultural environment and surroundings that an individual has been brought up in, exposed to, and lives in and the culture which exists in the sense of social values is acknowledged to be influential. Secondly, the image that one believes they have to possess within their social group, related to the self is recognised to be of importance. Thirdly, the roles that individuals play in society, for example, as 'mother' or 'worker', are seen to hold relevance for the individual. These are all influences which derive from one's social group and surroundings, peers, family and work. They are conceptualised to result in a shared interpretation of identity for the individual that has been built over time and are considered to be factors which play a role in terms of responses to fashion brand advertising.

With respect to interaction, images from the media are considered to influence a shared understanding and influence on an individual in social groups. This is a result of the mass numbers reached simultaneously by the media, which can shape a common understanding of fashion brands. Interaction, as explained, creates a ground for 'norms' offering 'codes' through which clothing acts as language (Auty & Elliot, 1998) used by individuals to communicate their personal and social self (Noesjirwan & Crawford, 1982). Language in symbolic interactionism is also referred to have a non-verbal nature, existent in the gestures and movements (Denzin, 1974) individuals make.

This foundation laid through exposure and associative techniques, offers room for creating common interpretations of the brand images in fashion magazine advertising, resulting in what is proposed: a possible shared mind set within a group.

Internal influences concern self-image and whether one's body image and self-image influence, brand meaning and the extent to which there is a shared view of the 'ideal' body image one must possess. Past research has illustrated that advertising has been of influence in promoting clichés (Panic *et al*, 2011), manipulating consumers (Parekh & Schmidt, 2003) by depicting idealised images (Weissman, 1999). The present study is interested in looking beyond the influence of images to discover whether self-perception can affect or determine meanings, views and opinion held by Greek women and the process involved in forming those meanings views and opinions.

The discussion of factors considered in the underpinning of the research design has laid the foundations in terms of the key determinants considered to be crucial in terms of the meanings, views and opinions held by Greek women and their importance in terms of the role they play in forming those over time. The media acting as a stimulus, the internal and external influences considered, are all seen as components which through the years have contributed to the development of a certain mentality or mind-sets towards fashion brands, specifically in relation to foreign fashion brands, and particularly through the media (in this case, print fashion advertisements). This is thought to result in the symbolic meaning of the brand. The next key point which is considered important to discuss is the attachment of meaning fashion brands.

Being one of the main key factors and focus points in this study, the attachment of the symbolisms and meanings of fashion brands is of core interest to the focus of the research. In order to understand the existence of these meanings, viewpoints, and opinions held by Greek women in relation to foreign fashion brands, there was a need to identify the symbolic significance that fashion brands have. The past literature discussed in Chapter 2 has argued support for the existence of brand symbolism extensively (for example, Elliot & Leonard, 2004; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Leigh & Gabel, 1992). It is interesting to explore the symbolisms that fashion brands have for Greek consumers in particular, as this is a neglected research area. Past studies have continuously supported the idea that symbolic attachment occurs for each brand (Dittmar, 1994; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Leigh & Gabel, 1992) and the symbolic meaning of a brand can make it a social tool (Banister & Hogg, 2004). Also, it is purported that a categorisation of brands occurs where consumers place brands into different categories (Marsden & Littler, 2000). In this study, symbolism is recognised to be a key issue with respect to how individuals attach symbolic meanings to people, objects and themselves in relation to fashion brands.

Fashion brands and those wearing them will be considered in terms of the symbolism and meanings they have for Greek women. Since the research question is to discover what the meanings, viewpoints and opinions are that Greek women have of foreign fashion brands, the most important part of this research is to gain an understanding of the procedure in respect to being able to operationalise. The research aim and objectives is the discovery of the process or processes which Greek women go through in order to attach a specific meaning to a fashion brand and whether this is socially shared (as mentioned when discussing external influences). The choice of looking at foreign fashion brands was of special interest as past experience and research (Kamenidou *et al*, 2007), have indicated that Greek consumers show a preference towards them. Again, in order to understand the process that Greek women go through and discover why and how they attach symbolisms to fashion brands, a symbolic interactionist framework can assist the present study.

The issue of interpretation could act as a key underpinning of the research design process and the research itself, as it could offer a rich amount of information in respect to understanding how Greek women 'read', interpret and make sense of fashion brands and, more specifically, to discover the symbolic meaning and the processes involved in attaching meanings to fashion brands. Therefore, it was decided that the research methods should assist this. After the attachment of the symbolic meanings to fashion brands and the associations that individuals create for a brand, it is considered that a process of distinction or even differentiation between fashion brands will take place, whereby different brands will be placed into different categories based upon different characteristics. This is considered to be a process that is made up of a series of choices that individuals make and involves cognitive processing through which brands are mentally 'filed'. This could involve a labelling or stereotyping of the fashion brand whereby it is associated with specific characteristics, symbolisms and types of wearers.

This idea can be linked to the Blumer's reference to 'labelling' (1969), supporting the notion that individuals make judgement and label others and objects and then act towards them accordingly. In the case of fashion brand research, the labelling process can be linked to the idea of symbolic meanings being attached to fashion brands as displayed in Elliot and Leonard's (2004) study of the categorisation of brands and stereotyping of brands and their wearers. It is under this distinction, that labelling or stereotyping of fashion brands is seen as a possible contribution to the study in respect to its aim and objectives. This, for instance, could be in terms of how brands are

interpreted by the consumer or are categorised in the context of socially-shared interpretations and meaning attachment.

This process suggests positioning of fashion brands into groups in a form of categorisation in terms of different brand characteristics such as price, quality and style. This can be linked to the non-verbal language mentioned through gestures in communicating (Denzin, 1974) which in this case reflects how fashion brands are worn and used as social tools with the aim for the wearer to project herself to others as noted in Chapter 1. Examples of non-verbal language could include the categories and 'codes' which act as a means of communication (McCracken & Roth, 1989) between Greek women. For example, a brand may be perceived as having 'a formal essence', or 'a youthful image' or being seen as 'cheap'. The identification of the wearer's current status socially and financially through this non-verbal communication, can build on initial observations made by the researcher discussed in Chapter 1.

Understanding this process can contribute towards gaining greater knowledge of the general mind-set or mentality which exists within a social group. Also, it is important to establish what is prominent or salient in this process of fashion brand categorisation to be able to consider the extent to which socially-shared views might exist. Furthermore, the way in which fashion brands are labelled and categorised could display how, through fashion brands, psychological and social needs are fulfilled since past research has suggested that brands have symbolic meanings to the consumer (Dichter, 1985; Phillips, 2009). This is displayed in attempts to gain an identity through luxury goods (Belk, 1988), and is evident quite vividly in hedonic consumption as through it, other needs are fulfilled as it is experientially more attractive (Okada, 2005).

This leads to the idea of fashion brands having specific symbolic meanings attached to them, expected to possibly hold a specific place in one's mind in terms of perceived worth or 'value'. This will result in placing brands in categories and attaching 'codes'. 'Code' has in the past been defined as knowledge shared between individuals as a message between the '*addressor and the addressee*' (McCracken & Roth, 1989;13) and a means of communication. Approaching coding in this manner could offer an explanation as to how and why some brands may be chosen as more appropriate or suitable to be worn over others in particular contexts or on specific occasions, for example, at formal events or in the workplace. This categorisation process is thought to offer a much greater insight into understanding fashion brands in terms of their position within a Greek woman's mind in terms of symbolic meaning. It is thought to portray and illustrate the process of meaning and attachment that individuals tend to experience.

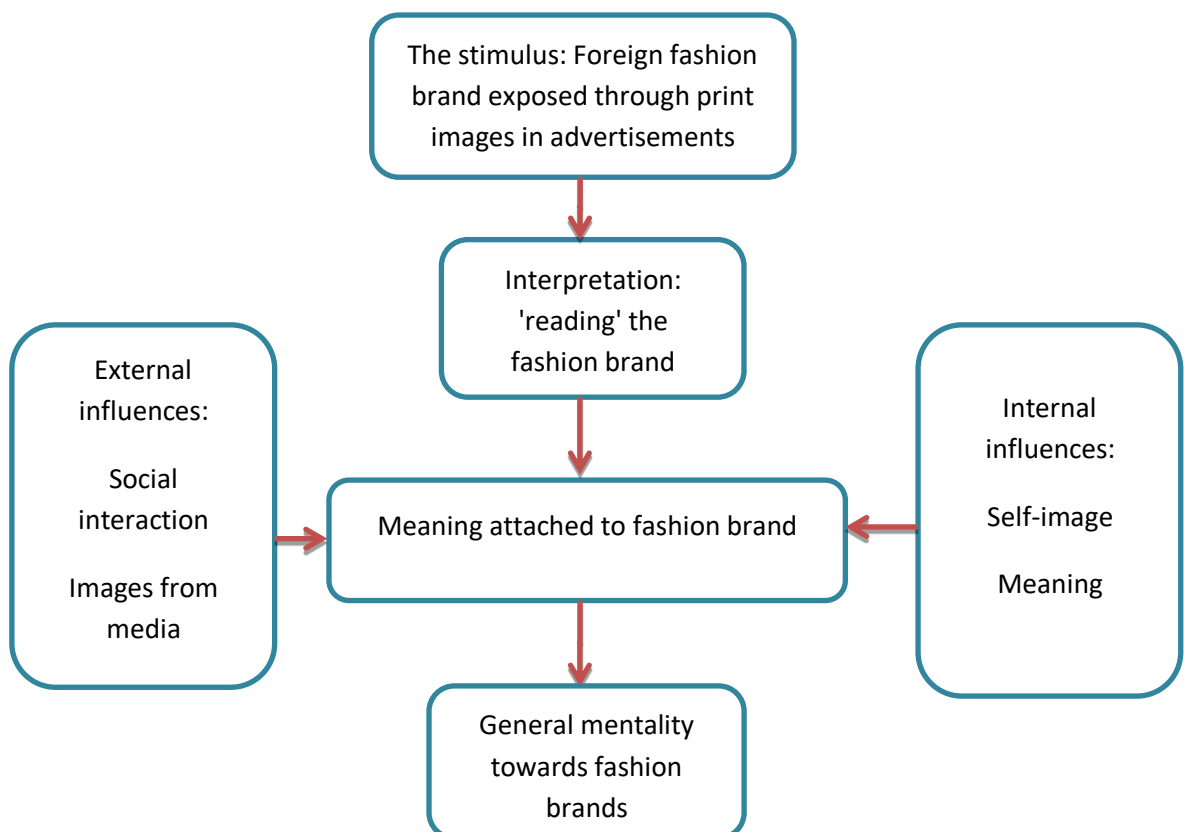
In respect to the symbolic meaning attached to the fashion brand and its use as a social tool, another issue which is considered in respect to social interaction and the use of fashion brands as social tools is projection.

Two types of projection may be considered in the context of this study. Firstly, desired and/or intentional projection implies that specific brands, holding specific symbolic significance within the group are worn with the intention of projecting a specific image of the wearer. Secondly, non-intentional or consequential projection emerging from the individual's dress style is argued to occur, through which the personality or identity of an individual may be shown or understood. These two kinds of projection can be linked to the use of fashion brands as social tools in order to deliberately self-project or, unintentionally, project a reflection of the individual's personality and/or lifestyle.

3.5 Conceptual framework

Figure 3.1 visually represents the conceptual thinking discussed in section 3.5. It identifies the determinants that are perceived to shape the meanings, viewpoints and opinions held of fashion magazine advertising via a process of consumer interpretation.

Figure 3.1: The process of consumer interpretation of fashion brand magazine advertising



3.5.1 Reading Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1 visually represents the process of consumer interpretation of fashion brand magazine advertising as conceptualised by the researcher, reflecting her thinking presented in Section 3.5. The ways in which each of elements presented in Figure 3.1 fit together to form a process will now be explained specifically in relation to this study.

Foreign fashion brand exposure through print images in advertisements

The print media is considered to be a stimulus, through which Greek women are exposed to the fashion brands. It is perceived as a source of information through which Greek women become knowledgeable about fashion brands that they are exposed to in their advertising images. This exposure leads to a reading of the fashion brand.

'Reading' the fashion brand

After the exposure to the advertisement, Greek women are considered to 'read' the advertisement through the image it presents. This involves the way they interpret, understand, perceive it and what they come to understand of its intended promoted messages as well as how Greek women process these images and the information offered to them. Through this process, it is believed that Greek women come to create an image or set of belief around that fashion brand which results from an interaction with print images in advertisements.

External and internal influences

These influences refer to the external and internal influences that Greek women are thought to be affected by forming brand meanings. They are considered to play a role in the opinion forming process. The external influences are the interactions and images received from the print media. Interaction is considered to be an important part of the formation of brand meaning as it is through social interaction that shared meaning can be achieved. Images from the media are the second external influence considered to affect ones judgement and to influence them in the meanings that fashion brands have for them. The internal influences refer to self-image's meaning. Self-image is an important concept to take into consideration as it is considered to be a determinant for the symbolic meaning of a fashion brand held by a woman. The meaning of a woman's self- image is a catalyst for the fashion brand's meaning she can create or share with others.

Attaching meaning to a fashion brand and its use to project

The stimulus, which is the image in advertising, the 'reading' of the advertisement and the internal and external influences lead to the formation of brand meanings towards foreign fashion brands. Through these three aspects, Greek women come to form and attach symbolic meanings, create 'codes', label and categorise fashion brands and their wearers. The fashion brand is then used intentionally in order to project themselves or non-intentionally to project information about the 'wearer'.

General mentality towards foreign fashion brands

The creation and attachment of symbolic meaning to brands leads to an 'outcome'. This outcome is the main purpose of this study which is to discover the general mentality that prevails within Greek female consumers. This general mentality which will be discovered will offer a wider and deeper understanding of the Greek female consumer in relation to foreign fashion brands.

Thus, based on the thinking developed as a result of the literature review, the personal experiences of the researcher, and conceptual thinking in line with the theory of symbolic interactionism, Figure 3.1 provided a basis for the development of the methodology and methods discussed in Chapter 4. It should be emphasised here that Figure 3.1 should not be seen as a deductive model to be tested but rather acts as a tool to aid the presentation of the cumulative thinking of the researcher up to this point in the research process. To reiterate from earlier in this chapter, it was seen as necessary to adopt a theoretical approach (symbolic interactionism) that would not involve any presupposition and would enable subsequent presentation of study findings in a manner in which they would not be weathered through a process of interpretation.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the chosen approach for this research, symbolic interactionism. It has outlined the relevancy of that approach for the focus of the research to notably involve consideration of Mead's three principles: 'self'; 'meaning'; and 'interaction'. It has offered an explanation as to how 'self', 'meaning' and 'interaction' are relevant in the present study and has provided discussion on how marketing research in general and in the present study more specifically, can benefit from a symbolic interactionist approach. A justification for using symbolic

interactionism as a framework and approach was offered in order to highlight the perceived relevance of symbolic interactionism as well as its suitability. A fuller discussion of research methodology, methods, research design, execution and analysis process is presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4:

Methodology, methods and research design

This chapter provides a detailed account of the decisions made within the research design and execution process. Firstly, a discussion of the factors initially considered to act as influences on the research design is offered. These factors will be followed by a discussion of the research design, a justification of the sample group, the methods chosen and the execution of the different stages involved in the research process. The methods chosen for data analysis are structured in relation to the underpinnings of the research design. Next, the research methods are explained in detail in terms of the three stages which took place and the two-phases involved within the process of data collection and the techniques employed. The decisions that were made, together with the reasons for them, are described. The chapter ends with an explanation of data analysis, using Thomas' (2006) framework and an account of the steps taken post-data collection.

4.1 Epistemology and ontology

This section outlines the approach to the methodology adopted with relevance to the study aim and objectives. The conceptual thinking explained with the assistance of Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3 acted as a foundation for the development of the study's methodology.

The decision to take a primarily inductive approach reflected the research objectives which focused on discovering the meanings, views and opinions that Greek women have of foreign fashion brands and the chosen theoretical approach of symbolic interactionism. Since a broader understanding of in-depth feelings was desired, an inductive approach was deemed necessary as it offers a close text reading and takes into consideration numerous meanings within the findings (Thomas, 2006).

Ontology, the study of 'being' and, through the position adopted within it, an understanding of the world is achieved through the understanding of phenomena. What makes ontology important is that, through it, a better understanding can be gained through the creation of theories and/or models.

This study is interested in individuals' perceptions of fashion brands, including, how people 'read' those brands as well as what meanings they give brands in terms of

their symbolic ‘gravity’. Although symbolic interactionism as it has developed over the years can be seen to come from a variety of positions (Denzin, 2004) the ontological position taken in this thesis is that it comes from a realist position. This does not preclude a subjectivist approach to research. As argued by Frazer and Lacey (1993:182):

'Even if one is a realist at the ontological level, one could be an epistemological interpretivist . . . our knowledge of the real world is inevitably interpretive and provisional rather than straightforwardly representational'.

In order to achieve a greater understanding and knowledge of this, a subjectivist position was adopted. This was based on the idea that the individuals studied would offer their own views and opinions from their own perspective and personal experiences which makes their claims subjective. Since personal experiences and meanings of fashion brands are offered by these individuals, the knowledge gained is based on their subjective point of view. This subjectivist perspective means that the way in which fashion brands are perceived is, to an extent, a reflection of their personal understanding of the world in which we live. This is usually considered to be an outcome of experience or of social origin (McAuley *et al*, 2014). The research was carried out underpinned by a symbolic interactionist theoretical approach, as discussed extensively in Chapter 3. Applying a symbolic interactionist approach, a subjective stance was taken in the sense that the in-depth meanings that Greek women hold were explored and discovered through their personal experiences. In this respect, knowledge in this study might be argued to be achieved through the actor's personal views and experiences, with truth is acquired from personal experiences. It must be stressed that, since personal experiences, symbolic meaning and interpretation are studied in relation to fashion brands, it was considered logical to adopt a subjectivist epistemology.

4.2 Methodology and methods

This section focuses upon the methodology and methods that were adopted in the study and the research design which derived from the chosen methodology. It will also offer an explanation for the choices made. Furthermore, it will offer a reminder of the intended contribution to knowledge and practice which the study aims to offer.

4.2.1 Methodology

As discussed in Chapter 3 the primary focus for this thesis is through the lens of symbolic interactionism. This has methodological implications as discussed below. Since symbolic interactionism deals with the study of a human group (Blumer, 1969) and since material possessions are considered to act within a group as '*symbolic markers*' (Dittmar, 1994), it can serve the purpose of this study in terms of discovering the meanings that fashion brands have for Greek women. A clear link between the approach and this study has been identified. Even though Blumer (1969) was interested in the symbolisms and interpretations of social life, the model he used originated from the physical sciences. Despite symbolic interactionism often being perceived as an approach used to underpin qualitative research, it must be noted that it has also been used in quantitative research (Benzies & Allen, 2001).

In this research, a qualitative methodological research approach was adopted. Since the theory of symbolic interactionism accepts and supports the view that individuals experience constant adaptation to a social world (Jeon, 2004), it was seen as most suitable for serving the purpose of comprehending and broadening the knowledge of a specific social group in relation to foreign fashion brands. Its use in marketing research has been found to contribute to a greater understanding of the meanings that consumers attach (Rahman, 2013) to fashion brands which was of interest in relation to the research aim and objectives. Since this is an '*ongoing process*' (Dean *et al*, 2016:7), symbolic interactionism was seen as an appropriate approach to adopt in the present study.

In relation to consumer behaviour research, sociological approaches have been neglected largely although sociology has been recognised as '*an area rich in its potential for contribution*' (Lee, 1990). In the context of marketing, symbolic interactionism is a perspective neglected and '*under-represented*' (Flint, 2006) by marketing practitioners although some marketing academics have moved from positivist to more interpretivist perspectives and methodologies (Wright & Losekoot, 2012) in the past decades. It may be purported that marketing research has been dominated by positivist approaches in the past (Schembri & Sandberg, 2011). Symbolic interactionism has mainly informed the present study through an appreciation that individuals are inseparable to their environments (Handberg *et al*, 2015), meaning can be developed within that environment (Ligas & Cotte, 1969) and that emotions derive from the '*social world*' (Fine, 1993), a world which is constructed through interaction (Jussim, 1991).

By adopting this understanding, the design and execution of research methods were informed, offering a sense of direction in discovering the factors influencing Greek women regarding the meanings they attached to fashion brands and the way that brands are communicated through print images to them. The participants' standpoint needed to be understood through in-depth accounts and symbolic interactionism was recognised to be able to provide an appropriate framework for interpretive description (Oliver, 2012) because of its sociological and social psychological nature. Through participants' accounts of past experiences and life stories, a greater understanding of their overall mentality and mind-set(s) towards fashion brands can be obtained. The importance of 'self', 'meaning' and 'interaction' identified in Chapter 3, assisted the researcher in appreciating the demand for an in-depth approach in order to be able to extract beliefs, experiences, emotions and perceptions. In order to extract such information, the participants needed to be allowed to go into detail in respect to their everyday life interactions with other Greek women and with print images of fashion brands. Doing so was acknowledged to be a way of producing greater knowledge in relation to their views towards foreign fashion brands, wearers and symbolic meanings.

'Self', 'meaning' and 'interaction' offered a foundation in terms of the research design and focus. It was believed that these three concepts could assist the present research since interpretive sociology for instance, is being applied to fields such as management (Rusel & Fusilier, 2014). As identified in Chapter 3, marketing can benefit from an alternative methodology to that of traditional marketing research. Marketers have acknowledged the greater need for understanding how the customer perceives a product's value (Flint, 2006).

Since 'value' is believed to be created by individuals through experience and cognitive associations (Flint, 2006), the framework was able to assist the research by offering a way through which the actor's view could be achieved. Factors and issues which could hinder the gathering of in-depth, rich information were considered. In-depth accounts narrated by participants, life stories and experiences could be extracted, (discussed further in section 4.2.2) and in relation to the present study, the discovery of 'why' those views and meaning exist was of importance.

Blumer's (1969) identification of three types of individuals who adopt to fashion (Chapter 3), offers an understanding of the complex nature of fashion brands and the need for allowing participants to offer detail in order to discover how they perceive and adapt to fashion brands. This may involve different categories of individuals in terms of the meanings attached to fashion brands, others and themselves. Symbolic

interactionism offers a powerful tool which can assist the researcher through methods used, accomplishing a greater understanding and knowledge of Greek women in relation to fashion brands through the ‘fluidity’ that is offered and the freedom it offers to a researcher to gather information in a study such as this in terms of its suitability. The fluidity which is characteristic of symbolic interactionism will allow room for meandering where appropriate instead of setting harsh lines to be followed. This offers the possibility not only to change the way in which the research is approached, if necessary, in case it does not ‘work’ but also can relate to the individual processes of evolution and change by taking into account the idea that individuals can change instead of remaining stable in one position or view.

4.2.2 Methods

As mentioned in Chapter 3, cumulative thinking prior to data collection had emerged as a result of the literature review, the personal experiences of the researcher, and conceptual thinking in line with the theory of symbolic interactionism. A set of key issues were conceptualised as meaningful, with print images in advertisements, acting as a stimulus along with a set of internal and external influences contributing to how individuals ‘read’ the fashion brand. These factors were considered to play a part in the meanings that are attached to fashion brands, resulting in an understanding of the general mind-set or mentality of Greek women towards fashion brands (see Figure 3.1). In order to gain a deeper understanding concerning female Greek consumers and their relationship to foreign fashion brands, it was acknowledged that detailed accounts of the women's views and opinions as well as their experiences were needed.

A range of qualitative methods were studied and assessed. Face-to-face personal interviews were chosen. This method was considered best able to collect more in-depth responses when necessary compared to questionnaires and more honest responses from the participants compared to a focus group or observation. Furthermore, face-to-face personal interviews are acknowledged to help researchers to elicit the beliefs that individuals have about themselves and their reaction to advertising practices (Flynn, D’Arcy & Bowles, 1991) through interacting with the participants.

The lack of presupposition adopted in symbolic interactionism assisted the study in terms of the method used, as it was of interest to discover rather than test hypothesis. According to Benzies & Allen (2001), the roots of social interactionism in psychology and the approach to truth as ‘fluid’ by pragmatists, offers the understanding that

participants need to be provided with room and comfort to do so, both literally and metaphorically such as the time available to speak and the privacy to do so comfortably.

In order to discover in-depth emotions, perceptions as well as the process involved in 'reading' fashion brands through print images, a qualitative research method was seen more appropriate. Providing room to participants in order for them to analyse and go into detail about past experiences with brands and others and the symbolic meanings of fashion brands was seen as crucial. Discovering how print images were 'read' was sought to demand elaboration and detail in order to discover these influences.

In order to achieve the desired detail and depth, it is essential to provide a comfortable and 'safe' environment to the participants, so they 'open up' and express their views, emotions and experiences freely and honestly, reflecting their 'reality'. This is discussed further in the next section. Denzin's (1989) views on interpretive interaction as a method, offers useful ground for this type of research as the actor's point of view can be understood which is of utmost importance to the present study.

This can be gained by face to face interviews as participants can be encouraged to expand upon their answers if they are insufficiently detailed. They allow researchers to be flexible in terms of their method (Amaratunga *et al*, 2002) as it is a method which allows the researcher to develop a discussion when necessary, and verify the answers and meanings of words such as 'good' or 'nice' which is impossible when carrying out quantitative research as one cannot directly observe reality within a social context (Whitley, 1984).

Through such interviews a deeper level of the participant's mind can be reached, offering detailed information (Ozdemir & Koc, 2012), ensuring visual encounters and face to face interaction (Irvin *et al*, 2013). Non-verbal information such as tone of voice, facial expressions and body language can be visibly offered (Opdenaker, 2006) and used as additional findings (Ozdemir & Koc, 2012) which cannot be achieved through telephone or email interviews for example. Through in-depth interviews, participants would be able to go into a lot of detail or even be asked how they perceive fashion brands, what fashion brands mean to them and even the extent of importance fashion brands have in the lives of the interviewees life as well as their fashion brands symbolic meaning, all of which are believed to be, at some point, interrelated.

Open interviews, such as the ones used in Phase Two in this research, can be applied in order to discover the shared understanding of a group (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) in relation to fashion brands. Meanings behind words can be discovered through the analysis and explanations offered, as participants can 'walk through' the

researcher into their past experiences. Through these stories narrated, attachments of symbolic meanings to fashion brands and the way those brands are 'read' through print images, the participants' standpoint can be understood, offering a suitable basis for retracting such information.

Although as discussed in Chapter 1, it was through observation and interaction with Greek women the researcher initially identified the use of fashion brands in a particular manner and context by these women, it was found insufficient as a method in relation to the aims and objectives. Observation alone would prevent the discovery of past experiences, emotions, meanings behind actions. Further, the process taking place when 'reading' fashion brands would not be able to be achieved, as it is visually undetectable as are the other factors mentioned above. Therefore there is a risk of misinterpreting participants' reactions which may not act as representative at the present moment.

Participants can be also negatively influenced when under observation, altering their behaviour (Herrera, 1999), an issue present in focus groups as well. This was considered to raise issues of receiving unreflective responses as participants may be embarrassed to open up in front of others. The level of elaboration demanded in discovering how print images are 'read', taken in, understood and interpreted would not be able to be achieved using observation as a method.

The main method used in this research was one to one interviews. A determining factor for the use of one to one interviews, was to ensure the participants comfort and 'safety' in order for them to share personal experiences as freely and honestly as possible without being embarrassed by the presence of others. In order to ensure this, the researcher when contacting the participants to arrange a meeting, gave them the freedom to choose to meet in their homes, the researcher's home or in a cafe. With the exception of four (out of a total of 34 including the pilot study), chose to meet in a cafe.

Symbolic interactionist researchers tend to favour 'natural' settings (Huber, 1973) and the choice was given in order for participants to feel comfortable in a setting they chose instead of making them come to the researcher's home where they may have felt uncomfortable or inconvenienced, or made to accept the researcher into their home, making them feel 'invaded'. This was intended with the purpose to extract as much information as possible and a comfortable environment was seen important in order to achieve this.

Through such interviews, the researcher has the opportunity to look into 'social and personal matters' (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), something other approaches such as

focus groups for instance, prevent because of their ‘public nature’ (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Although focus groups may be more convenient, assisting the simultaneous gathering of information from many participants, being quicker than one to one interviews, it was seen it could ‘hurt’ the research by its lack of privacy. This was a determining factor as in-depth accounts, emotions, perceptions and past experiences could be influenced since issues of honesty arise in focus groups (Hollander, 2004). Individuals may feel reserved in expressing honestly of their views in fear of not fitting in, which would result in unreflective responses of the individual’s feelings or experiences as past research has displayed how this is an issue in focus groups as individuals agree with others just to be polite (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Although the effects of social interaction is of interest in the present study and focus groups locate interaction through groups (Morgan, 1996), they run the risk of experiencing conformity.

One to one interviews in such a complex issue, of many implications, determinants and influences in need for consideration, provide the ‘luxury’ of space and time to each participant to speak freely and be extensively ‘probed’ (Stokes & Bergin, 2006) with the desired depth and detail provided which cannot be matched by focus groups. Sensitivity to group dynamics, another problematic issue of focus groups demands the researcher to establish a balance so participants would not feel insulted by the responses of other participants and size of group can affect ‘response patterns’ (Frey & Fontana, 1991). In a research involving emotions as the present, sensitive issues can arise of past experiences, which did indeed come up regarding issues of weight discussed in Chapter 5.

‘Verbal and symbolic inter-actions between people are the major avenues through which meaning and significance come to be associated with events, practices, and procedures’ (Reichers, 1987; 279).

One to one interviews offer the participant to feel free and have the chance to offer a journey of their life in order to understand what are the meanings, views and opinions and why they are formed. This space is not possible in observations or focus groups as it limits the time available to participants.

Although focus groups may initially seem appropriate in studying the way meanings may be formed in interacting with others, the study is not interested in collective behaviour of individuals. Instead, it was of interest to discover how social interaction within a greater social context has affected and contributed to the formation of views, meanings and opinions of Greek women.

It was identified that participants discomfort in focus groups could hinder the research, rather than acquire useful insight to the 'true' beliefs of Greek women in relation to fashion brands. This was due to deprivation of time and participants placed in an environment with strangers where they could feel reserved in expressing themselves in them freely, and may feel 'unsettled' (Hollander, 2004), not say things they wanted. This would result in damaging the present study through lack of honesty as some participants may be more shy than others and talk less therefore not offer much information, or some participants may try to show off, resulting in issues of consistency. Since the present study involved many complex implications to explore, such as character and perception, focus groups were seen unsuitable. Further, sensitive issues in relation to images in fashion advertising which in the past have been addressed for their ethical implications, for example: creation of ideal body types (Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008) and body dissatisfaction (Wolf, 1991; Borland & Akram, 2007), are examples that were considered to make participants uncomfortable in discussing in front of others in focus groups. Past experiences may not be shared or even sharing them with strangers would make participants contempt of sharing or even conscious of themselves. If a participant may have experienced in the past discrimination because of the way she dresses or 'body shaming', she would not want to share this in front of others. This was an issue throughout the research, found to be quite serious during the interviews, discussed in detail in Chapter 5. In doing one to one interviews, the researcher can keep a balance. Also, as discussed in Chapter 1, the researcher has personal experience as a Greek woman of interacting with the social group under study. She has observed that Greek women do tend to display brand names and logos on their clothes, shoes and accessories and this was seen as a big risk to take in using focus groups. There was a need to avoid participants not only being influenced by others but also to avoid potential offence in terms of what was being said in relation to specific brands. The main concern when choosing the research methods and assessing their relative qualities for this study was to consider the drawbacks and advantages that each would bring to the research. In this case, a lack of depth in terms of the responses and lack of an authentic reflection of the meanings, views and opinions were the main two concerns.

It was acknowledged there may be a need to talk about personal views and opinions and that this may lead to issues where the participants might feel conscious or insecure in discussing them in front of others. With respect to this, the researcher received ethical approval from the University to conduct the study at the DBA confirmation stage

of the research (DB2). Participant information and consent protocols were followed and the wording of the interview questions taken into consideration in order to avoid causing harm or distress to the study participants.

Another advantage that face-to-face personal interviews offered, as opposed to telephone interviews for example, was that facial expressions and body language could be experienced instead of just hearing the interviewee and attempting to gauge the tone in which they spoke. Face-to-face personal interviews offer the chance for the researcher to be able to make the interviewee more comfortable rather than having an unknown person asking personal questions over the phone. It was seen as helpful that the participants would have a face to attach to the voice asking them questions and this would make the environment feel more safe and comfortable to them. The participants' reactions were another factor which could be useful for tackling possible problems with their responses and would allow the researcher to use the reactions to assess the ground for further 'digging'. Put more simply, in face-to-face personal interviews the researcher has the unique opportunity to go beyond the response offered by the interviewees by looking at facial expressions and body language which could possibly offer further information in addition to the participant's response (Opdenakker, 2006).

For instance, in the present study, once data collection commenced, the same responses were not expressed by different participants in some cases. When speaking about weight, some participants displayed a body language and facial expressions which suggested that they felt uncomfortable or uneasy so that was a reason to stop discussing that issue. In contrast, there were examples where the participants displayed a more pleasant facial expression or an excited tone of voice which offered the opportunity to 'dig' further. Although facial expressions were not recorded, they were important as they were seen as opportunity for further 'digging'. Thus, they played a part in the management of the interview and dictated how the researcher proceeded with regard to the issue under discussion. In this manner, the interviewer can be provided with a unique opportunity to protect both the participant and herself by avoiding placing the participant in a difficult position and, in contrast, be provided with a chance to probe more information on issues which seem to be pleasant for the participant to discuss. Moreover, face to face interaction minimizes the number of misunderstandings surrounding issues such as feelings and opinions, offering a more personal and possibly relaxed environment.

After deciding upon the most appropriate type of method to adopt for this research, it was necessary to decide upon the structure of the interviews. Semi-

structured interviews were seen as a good starting point as they would not only help the interviews to stay focused but they would also allow room for elaboration whenever necessary, something that structured interviews would not allow. The participants would be able to follow a set of questions and understand what is being asked but would also be allowed to unfold their perceptions, views and opinions without being limited to specific and restraining guidelines.

Silence gaps during the interview was also considered, which poses a risk of the researcher losing balance between requesting more information and driving the participant into specific responses. Another risk identified was the possibility of becoming judgemental, because of past experience and interaction with Greek women, of the respondents' answers and, even though a subjectivist stance was adopted, this does not suggest that the personal views of the researcher should enter the discussion. Another issue which was seen as a possible challenge in the face-to-face interviews was not to lose focus while allowing the participants to go into any details they considered to be pertinent to the discussion. A balance between avoiding guiding the participants in terms of what to say but keeping on track and not straying off into other topics was also sought during the interviews. Taking into account all of these possible challenges, it was seen as necessary and wise to use a pilot study to test the method and questions set, followed by reflection and evaluation. Therefore, it was decided that although the initial idea was to use semi-structured interviews, a trial and error type of procedure would be adopted to ensure that satisfactory results were obtained in terms of securing data to inform the study aim and objectives.

4.3 The research process

This section discusses the research design and data collection stages of the research process, the sample selection and the difficulties encountered within the research process.

Table 4.1 summarises the three data collection stages of the research process in terms of stage and format.

Table 4.1: The three data collection stages of the study

Stage	Format
Stage 1: Pilot study	4 semi-structured interviews with 20-40 year old Greek women
Stage 2: Phase One	20 semi-structured interviews with 20-40 year old Greek women
Stage 3: Phase Two	10 open interviews with 30-35 year old Greek women

The three stages evolved as the research progressed, each serving a different purpose. Stage 1, which was the Pilot Study, served as a test to inform the research design and execution of the Phase One interviews. Stage 2, which became Phase One, evolved after the pilot study and its evaluation. Stage 3 was Phase Two, which evolved from the findings of Phase One. The next section will offer a detailed account of each phase and what was involved.

The sample group for the pilot study consisted of Greek women living in Athens, Greece, between the ages of 20-40 years. The sample was ‘purposive’, including women of a specific age were approached and ‘snowball’ sample technique. The sample involved acquaintances with a mixed educational background, financial, marital and economic status. For stage 2 and 3, when there was a need for more participants and the participants involved were asked if they could provide the researcher with women who would be willing to take part.

4.3.1 Stage One: The Pilot Study

The purpose the pilot study was to assess the suitability of the research objectives, in terms of the amount and depth of the responses delivered through a set of semi-structured interview questions and test out the interview format. In order to make the participants feel comfortable they were offered a choice regarding where the interviews would be carried out. This choice included their own home, the interviewer’s home, a friend’s home or a café.

Four women the researcher had direct access to were interviewed. These women were not close friends but acquaintances. In terms of age, the sample consisted of 20-40 year olds in order to look at adults without there being too wide an age gap between them. Socially and mentally, the difference between a 20 and 40 year old woman is quite big as, when she is in her 20’s, a Greek woman is commonly referred to as a ‘girl’

instead of a woman. The reason for not limiting the age gap further was because it was seen as interesting to explore whether a shared mind-set or mentality could exist regardless of age. The reason why only four participants were interviewed is that after the fourth interview, it became clear that the interview questions were not working in terms of what was intended to be discovered in respect of the research aim and objectives. Therefore, the pilot study demonstrated the need to make changes to the range of questions included in the interview schedule.

The interviews were semi-structured. All of the participants were asked exactly the same questions which were read out by the interviewer and recorded using a digital voice recorder (Olympus, model VN-7800PC). They were briefed on the purpose of the research as this is an important aspect of research ethics. In this process, the participants were given the chance to ask questions and voice any concerns or anxieties before the interview commenced. They were informed that, if they had any further questions during or even after the interview about what they were being asked then they were 'free' to ask the researcher. The participants were assured that the results would be used for the purposes of the research and that they were welcome at any time to ask for more information in the future and would be able to see the final research thesis. They were informed that the study was not interested in their knowledge of- but simply their views on fashion brands. They were told that they could state that they did not know or were unsure about how to respond or ask questions if they were unsure about what they were being asked. It was clearly stated that their responses would remain anonymous, that the recording was taken to be used for research purposes only, that the results would be used for research purposes only and that the participants were welcome at any time to ask for more information in the future. This was also the case for Phase One and Phase Two interviews.

The pilot interviews were semi-structured and the focus was on four broad themes, structured as different 'parts' of the interview schedule (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Pilot interview focus

Placement in interview schedule	Theme
Part 1	Personal information e.g.: education, age, marital status.
Part 2	Fashion magazines and fashion brand information
Part 3	Fashion magazine consumption and relationship to the content and fashion brands
Part 4	Perception of fashion brands and fashion in general

It must be noted that the symbolic interactionist framework influenced the questions asked. This was mostly in the type of questions which were asked in order to understand the participants' relationship to fashion brands and their meaning to them. For instance, the 'self', meaning and interaction which are discussed in Chapter 3 to be of relevance to the present study, acted as a guide in terms of what to ask in order to discover meanings attached to fashion brands and how participants 'read' those brands.

Firstly, personal demographic questions were seen as important as there was a need to observe whether such factors played a part in the participants' views. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 for example suggested there are links between brands, socio-economic status (in particular) and lifestyle aspirations. In the second part, questions concerning general responses towards fashion magazines were asked in order to see whether the relationship that the participants have with fashion magazines might affect their views of brands. The third part was included in order to consider the levels of familiarity Greek women had with fashion brands and magazines. It was hoped that this would provide insights into whether or not exposure to the stimulus (fashion magazines) and the frequency of reading fashion magazines shaped their views on fashion brand advertising or not. Finally, the fourth part was clearly related to the perception of the participants towards fashion brands. This part was intended to explore responses towards the participants own views on wearing brands themselves, or others doing so.

The pilot interview results indicated that the information gathered did not offer the level of depth required in terms of the research aim and objectives. Additionally, silence proved to be a big issue to manage along with responses being provided that

were vague and non-descriptive. In view of all this, it was necessary to evaluate and redesign the questions.

Evaluation of the pilot study

After the fourth pilot study interview was completed, it was seen as necessary to revisit and possibly redesign the interview questions. This need became apparent from the way in which the participants replied to the questions, resulting in vague responses or simple statements of opinion rather than a discussion of why they held these views and how they had formed them. On reflection, it was decided that there was a lack of ‘probing’ from the researcher, although this alone was not considered to have been enough to secure the desired depth of responses. Further, it became apparent that the way in which the questions were worded did not allow room for elaboration in order to obtain in-depth accounts from the participants. This was a serious issue, as the research aim and objectives could not be addressed from the interviews under the pilot study format. Responses were vague in the sense that they did not offer enough insights into the process of how participants ‘read’ fashion brands, nor did they offer sufficient information on the level of influence of the media, or internal and external influences. Further, the responses did not offer detailed information on the relationship(s) between consumers and fashion brands nor did they illustrate the more precise meanings, views and opinions that Greek women hold of fashion brands.

When the participants were asked if they purchased brands and, if so, what type, the term ‘brand’ was left unspecified in terms of its definition and meaning. The participants, however, assumed that it was something specific and replied straight-away, without requesting a specification of the term ‘brand’ or its type. This provided an initial hint that there was scope for further research in terms of how or what the term ‘brand’ means to Greek women. The use of the term ‘brand’ was interpreted in a specific way for example, for instance, Participant 1’s response when asked about her view on women wearing brands was that, ‘*they are victims of consumerism and advertising*’, even though this was not a response that was repeated.

On reflection, the level of detail that was required from the interviewees needed to be specified more clearly. The interview design did not allow them to express their personal brand meaning and their responses focused mostly on what brands mean to others. This observation suggested a tendency for the participants to exclude themselves from their social group when discussing fashion brands and fashion magazines. In effect, they distanced themselves from the issues under discussion. It was interesting to

see how the interviewees replied in terms of the way in which they perceived others wearing fashion brands, which seemed to be a specific view, such as: *'the individual has money if they are wearing brands'*. Thus, a learning point here was that there was a need to discover more about how Greek women view their own interactions with others and where they place themselves within their social group.

The effectiveness of the four parts of the pilot study interviews was evaluated. The main objective was to see if each part assisted the research in respect to addressing the research aim and objectives. The interviews were played back, transcribed and read, while making notes. Part 1 included questions of demographic nature in order to identify any patterns that might be related to age, educational level. This part was seen as useful and acceptable as it was, and no changes were made. Part 2 was also seen to be acceptable, focusing on short questions with straight forward answers for example: 'do you purchase magazines', 'how often'. The desired information was obtained. Part 3 which consisted of responses that would lead the interviews to Part 4, was kept the same. Part 4 was expected to gather information from the participant's in-depth accounts of their experiences, resulting in a discussion. Although the questions were answered, the information offered was limited, lacking the desired depth and failing to sufficiently address the research aim and objectives.

In considering what changes were necessary in order to better fulfil the study's aim and objectives, the issues that were seen as crucial to tackle were mainly the lack of detail in the responses. More in-depth accounts were sought and specific examples of individuals' symbolic meaning of foreign fashion brands. Two main steps were taken in order to deal with these issues. The first concerned the extent to which individuals were encouraged to express their views and go into detail. This required some changes from the interviewer and interviewee sides, 'probing' the participant to offer more information and asking more questions and details based on the responses given. Therefore, there was a need to change the interview technique as well as the content of the interview. The second issue which required changes to be made was offering participants the chance to talk specifically about fashion brands in order to encourage them to elaborate and to make it easier for them to understand what was expected of them. Therefore, it was decided that the interview would be redesigned to include a fifth part, as will be explained in the next section. The redesign of the interview took the research into its second stage, Phase One. The next section will discuss the semi-structured interview design and execution process for this 'Phase One' stage.

4.3.2 Stage two: Phase One interviews

Phase One consisted of the same age group, 20-40 year old Greek women as, at that stage of the research, there were no grounds to make any changes with respect to sample composition the sample was purposive which used acquaintances of the desired age group. When there was a need for more participants, a snowball technique was used, asking participants if they could provide to the researcher any women of that age group who would be willing to take part.

The interview schedule is presented in table 4.4 (and Appendix 1). It focused on the following themes:

- brand perception
- brand symbolism
- brand association

The symbolic interactionist framework has greatly contributed to the questions asked. The relevancy of the main principles of the approach, ‘self’, meaning and interaction (Chapter 3), and its stance on the attachment of meanings through interaction and language, assisted the researcher in the direction and the style of questions.

For instance, the three themes which were going to be looked at, were assisted through the position of symbolism offered by symbolic interactionism, contributing to planning the questions (table 4.4) and process. More specifically, the ‘fluid’ nature accepted by symbolic interactionism (Chapter 3), was a powerful tool which assisted the researcher as it allowed the researcher to change the process if it didn’t ‘work’. The pilot study is such an example, as it did not provide the desired depth and detail or personal accounts, as the responses lacked in terms of the information gathered. Further, through the framework, a chance to take the research further rather than change as it was seen in Phase Two was offered.

Upon the assessment, it was identified that some parts of the interview were adequate but others could be improved as the example below (Participant 1):

‘Do you purchase fashion magazines? *‘No’*

‘Do you read fashion magazines? *‘No’*

‘Do you follow fashion? *‘hm...yes...erm...’*

The participant although displayed no particular engagement with fashion magazines, responded that she has worn brands and has in the past compared herself to the models used in fashion magazines and that women wearing fashion brands *‘are fashion victims’*

and wearing fashion brands may influence an individual in their personal, social and professional life. This is an example of how more detail was seen necessary, and the need to avoid ‘closed’ questions even when simple information is looked for.

This was an issue for the next 3 pilot interviews and it was seen that there was a need for participants to be more explicit in their accounts through experiences and life stories. Therefore, the interview was redesigned, keeping parts 1-3 and elaborating Part 4, used to get participants to talk further on why it was they perceived fashion brands the way they do. It was acknowledged that this was a challenge as semi-structured interviews were used and the interviewer would have to respond on the spot depending on the responses she was getting. Encountering difficulties in relation to not getting detail on views, it was decided that interview should be carried out in a different manner able to extract more in-depth meanings, experiences and so on. The element which offered a chance to gain a greater understanding of fashion brand perception was the addition of Part 5 after the evaluation of the pilot study.

It was considered that asking about specific fashion brands could assist in encouraging the participants to talk more and offer more insight into the meanings and symbolism that foreign fashion brands have for them. Twenty fashion brands were chosen so that the participants could have a point of reference as well as enabling the researcher to discover whether a shared brand meaning exists within this social group. The twenty foreign fashion brands, shown in table 4.4, were randomly chosen from advertisements in the Greek edition of ‘Vogue’ magazine. The only criterion being they were clothes, shoes or accessories of foreign brands, the initial point of interests. This magazine was chosen because it has different international versions and features foreign fashion brands but also, can offer further comparative research between cultures in the future. The participants were asked if they knew the fashion brand, how they would describe it, how they would describe a woman wearing it and what type of woman would wear it.

Table 4.3 lists the interview questions used in Phase One (after the redesign of the interview schedule following pilot study evaluation). The table includes two columns. In the left-hand column, the type of questions is displayed, in the middle column, the kind of questions asked, and, on the right-hand side, their purpose is explained:

Table 4.3: Phase One interview design & Purpose of questions

Part	Purpose of question	Intended link to research focus
Part1: Demographic questions	Asked to identify background information on the sample characteristics (age, marital status, educational level)	These questions reflected any patterns such as similar statuses, education levels.
Part 2: Yes/ No questions on fashion magazines	Used to warm up the conversation and obtain an initial impression of the relationships between the sample and fashion magazines.	These questions were required in order to identify the relationship between Greek women and fashion magazines where advertisements were the stimulus.
Part 3: Short answer questions on fashion magazines and their content	Used to discover the interactions with fashion magazines and their content	This part would facilitate a more detailed account of the participants' views on fashion magazine advertisements and how they 'read' the content.
Part 4: Fashion brands and the way they are advertised	Used to discover the participants' views on fashion brands, their meaning and the way they are advertised in fashion magazines.	This part offers information on the meanings and symbolisms attached to the advertised brands and the discovery of those being shared amongst this social group.
Part 5: 20 fashion brands	To discover the foreign brand awareness level and perception of those brands	This part would offer a more detailed in depth account of Greek women's specific symbolic attachment to foreign fashion brands as well as the discovery of patterns in those meanings.

There was a need for further elaboration and clarification by the participants on their views towards foreign fashion brands. In both Parts 4 and 5 of the interviews, they were asked to elaborate on their views, and if they struggled to do so, they were asked further questions on their views based on their given responses. In the pilot study interviews the participants were being vague, and this was something which was again initially visible in Phase One in Part 5 of the interview. Once completed, the twenty Phase One interviews produced a rich amount of information in relation to the initial research aim and objectives. A sample of Phase One interview is offered in figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Phase One interview sample

Part 1)

- 1) Are you born /bred in Athens?
- 2) Age?
- 3) Married?
- 4) Children?
- 5) Educational level?
- 6) Home owner?
- 7) Working? What is your profession?

Part 2)

- 1) Do you read fashion magazines?
- 2) Do you purchase fashion magazines?
- 3) Do you follow fashion?
- 4) Do you follow fashion online?
- 5) Do you buy brands?
- 6) Do you wear only brands?
- 7) Have you ever compared yourself to the models in magazine?

Part 3)

- 1) How often do you read fashion magazines?
- 2) On average how many magazines do you purchase every month?
- 3) Have you ever purchased something you've seen in a fashion magazine?
- 4) Do you admire the things you see in magazines and are brands?
- 5) Do you think by wearing brands others see you differently? How?
- 6) Do you think that models used in fashion magazine advertisements influence readers as far as the image they have?

Part 4)

- 1) What is your opinion of women wearing brands? What kind of people are they?
- 2) Do you think by wearing brands it helps one succeed in their personal life?
Social life?
- 3) Do you think wearing brands has no influence at all?
- 4) Do you think foreign brands are too expensive for the Greek market?
- 5) Do you think if someone is wearing a brand others see them as more capable or worthy than someone who isn't wearing expensive brands?
- 6) In your opinion what is it that makes one choose brands?
- 7) Do you think the brands one chooses to wear symbolises who they are?
- 8) What is your opinion of fashion?
- 9) Do you think brands promote a specific lifestyle?
- 10) Do you believe one wears brands in order to project something?
- 11) What are they trying to say?
- 12) Is fashion created for a certain audience?
- 13) Do brands promote a specific lifestyle?
- 14) Do you believe brands advertised in fashion magazines affect readers so they desire that brand?
- 15) Has your attitude towards brands changed throughout the years as you got older?
With the economic crisis?
- 16) What is your opinion of the models used in fashion magazines?
- 17) Do you believe the models used in fashion magazines advertisements promote an unhealthy body type? Why do you think they are used?
- 18) Do you believe this type of models is attractive? Do the readers see them as attractive?

19) Do you believe the Greek women try to look like these models?

20) Do you think these models promote a certain lifestyle?

Part 5)

1) I will tell you 20 brands. (For each participants were asked: Do you know it? What women wear it? How would you characterise a woman wearing this brand?)

- 1) Armani
- 2) Burberry
- 3) Chanel
- 4) Dior
- 5) D & G
- 6) Donna Karan
- 7) Gucci
- 8) Guess
- 9) Lacoste
- 10) Louis Vuitton
- 11) Max Mara
- 12) Miss Sixty
- 13) Prada
- 14) Ralph Loren
- 15) Roberto Cavalli
- 16) Sisley
- 17) Tommy Hilfiger
- 18) Valentino
- 19) Versace
- 20) Yves Saint Laurent

The reason why Phase One consisted of only twenty interviews was that, after interviewing twenty people, there was no more new information offered by the participants, and the participants displayed views which were found to be commonly shared. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

4.3.3 Evaluation of Phase One interviews

Phase One produced valuable information through the rich content of the interviews offered from the participants past experiences and life stories offering greater knowledge in relation to the aims and objectives set. More than expected was offered, taking the research beyond than what initially expected (discussed in Chapter 5). Phase One offered an understanding on the relationship Greek women had with brands and what it means to wear a brand, how fashion brands are perceived as 'suitable' or not 'suitable' according to the social context the wearer is in. Further, Phase One displayed how Greek women label and categorise fashion brands and how they categorise them, as they would describe different brands and their wearers, using different words or grouping some brands together. Further, this phase was able to offer a greater understanding of the meaning the term 'brand' had for them, which commonly meant an expensive, known and luxury brand. The material gathered, offered a 'wealth' of information in terms of the more complex views Greek women held of foreign fashion brands. Their responses displayed how brands are 'powerful' in their meanings, attaching quality to some of them. This displayed a whole 'mentality' towards them offering a more in-depth understanding of their perceptions and emotions towards them.

In order to be able to 'make sense' of the data collected, a thematic analysis was seen suitable. Symbolic interactionism as a framework and qualitative content analysis, assisted in gaining the interpretations of Greek women, through one to one interviews and identify 'codes', themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Meaning, interaction and 'reality' being socially constructed were of interest and through this type of analysis patterns could be identified within the text (Thomas, 2006).

This would benefit the present study in discovering why participants feel or think the way they do and how this is shared through 'thick description' and 'thick interpretation' offered by the participants. These terms used in interpretive interactionism, refer to rich and dense detail which encourages the development of understanding of participants' interpretations to their experiences (Mohr, 1997). This assisted the study in an attempt to understand how Greek women 'read' fashion brands through print images, the process they go through during this exposure and how this may be socially shared.

Below is a sample (Participant 1) displaying how one to one interviews offer valuable information. The transcript displays how one to one interviews can assist the researcher in extracting valuable information and how through the process of one to one interviews the researcher is able to ask for more information. When the interviews were

transcribed the participants' responses were written in red as shown, as to be easily identified when analysing and comparing them with other participant's.

Do you think foreign brands have great power in the Greek market? *Yes*

How? *In the sense that, there is a large portion of the consumers that will do 'everything' to buy that 'Louis Vuitton' bag, which costs 800€. And even if they don't have that ability, there are so many imitations and they will buy something equivalent.*

Are they considered better than Greek ones? *Yes, and Italian in my opinion are indeed better than most Greek ones at least, I'm not referring to all of them.*

Why? *It's a matter of quality from personal experience.*

In terms of quality alone? *I have bought specifically, 10 years ago a Gucci suit and it is like I bought it yesterday and I have bought equivalent Greek ones, not equivalent.... more economic, which are also in a good condition but the quality isn't the same.*

Do you think foreign brands are too expensive for the Greek market? *No, abroad are similar prices now*

Why do you think Greek women keep on purchasing these brands in these times the economic situation is difficult?

'cause I have done some research and have read about research, women, no matter the economic crisis that may exist, will not neglect the cosmetics, accessories, clothes. Maybe instead of 10 pair of trousers she'll buy 5, but again she will try to buy definitely. Specifically 'cause I was discussing it the other day, with some colleagues, as soon as it was announced and all this chaos came about, with the economic crisis, a year ago, something like October of 2008, the first research studies in 2009, a year ago showed there was an increase in the cosmetics market by 7%.

What type of women are those? *Smaller in quantity maybe but there isn't a decrease in customers. If so, it's a small one.*

Do you think if someone is wearing a brand others see them as more capable or worthy than someone who isn't wearing expensive brands?

Personally, I do not. Now, if I look at my peers, maybe some specific people, it may be an object of admiration 'oh they are wearing brands, wish I could too'. On the other hand it could be an object of jealousy 'oh so and so earns money and I don't have it to buy that'. Or, could be neutral and lack in interest behaviour/ attitude.

Does it say something of the status? *Seeing in tv channels as well, and if we see the Greek show-biz a little more carefully, it's established that x singer or actress or in the*

arts, the reporter cannot go out and go to a reception or something, with something that isn't made by a famous designer, Greek or foreigner.

So does that go with economic comfort/reflexivity? *In general yes.*

In your opinion what is it that makes one choose brands?

One is quality, what we say 'you get what you pay for'. Clearly if I spend some extra money I will get something better. From then on it is that 'I want to look like so and so,' Maybe that don't want to be unnoticed, cause others will see and maybe 'I will show it off a little more that it's a brand the dress or clothes I'm wearing'. And in self-confidence because when I'm wearing something from x brand, I feel much better because I'm wearing something more expensive.

Do you think one may wear brands to project something? *Definitely there will be that group of people the 'I'm economically flexible ' or 'I'm someone better 'cause I'm wearing a brand.'*

What for? *Self-projection probably, or indeed those who are economically flexible. someone earning 10.000€ salary, why not spent 700€ on a pair of jeans?*

Do you think the brands one chooses to wear symbolizes who they are?

When referring to known people we see being projected, who we know a few more things about them, whether they are artists or politicians, or a journalist definitely the style of a news presenter let's say, to another one is different. Clearly a stylist, cause usually stylists have picked something which shows the same vein. Some are a little more serious. Something that will show, bring out the personality they don't all have the same personality. From then on, what everyone picks to wear in their personal life, definitely reflects their style, meaning it is impossible for two people which have totally different personalities to wear exactly the same clothes.

What are they trying to say or state by wearing brands? *It is the portion that has't anything to show anything, there's just a bigger salary so obviously will move in those circles. There's the social establishment that 'It's not possible so and so on to go out without.', cause there are shows that comment what is this and that, from the accessory to the underwear. And there are others who are 'psonia', as you mentioned earlier.*

What is your opinion of fashion? *For me, fashion is good to exist, of course every year it renews itself, we have new suggestions, I just don't agree with the term fashion victim, so that I am a victim. I prefer someone to follow fashion, but as far as they can afford to, without altering your character. It is not by chance that there are items we say 'this is classic'. Every woman has a classic item in her wardrobe. of course shell*

have something more modern as well. Of course what we see in fashion TV, to our own shows (Greek) can't everything suit you.

How important is it to you? *I don't follow it blindly. Of course I am informed, I want to see 'cause I go out and buy and want some of the elements at least to be compatible, let's say.*

How important is it to Greek women? *Very. More specifically, the biggest percentage definitely follows, I see it in the street. Blindly, faithfully. 'What will be worn this year. This shoe, this style of clothes, colour, so this year we purchase only these. Even if I don't like any of those shoes that are in the shop windows I'll buy it cause it is worn.'*

Do you think it is created for a specific audience? *No it addresses everyone, 'cause there are always copies, not saying that in a bad way, what you will find in the expensive, you'll find something equivalent in design in more economical brands.*

Do you think brands promote a specific lifestyle? *Definitely don't know if it is created for that reason but possibly so. Probably no they were: a fashion house is created for bread winning reasons, like I have my profession and you yours, that's exactly how it is for them. That they are used and projected outwards is for reasons of prestige. mainly I think.*

Do you think brands advertised by fashion magazines influence the readers in desiring a brand? *Clearly, when you see that being advertised all the time in front of you is hard to repel, it will be in your mind. That is why we know 5 brands all of us, it isn't out of chance.*

Has your stance towards brands have changed as you get older? *Not at all.*

Your stance towards brands has changed because of the economic crisis?

Not at all. It's just that ok, because of this situation and other unfortunate conditions, I won't buy 10 but 5.

Participant 1 was not an exception in the responses she offered, as valuable information, great depth and elaboration regarding fashion brands, experiences and perceptions of others wearing them was offered overall by the participants. The use of one to one interviews offered time to the participants, in order to discuss and elaborate on their views and experiences as to get an understanding of why they have such views.

The interviews which in many cases reached an hour or more to complete, would not have been possible if other methods had been adopted. This was found to have been a factor which has played a big part in the information gathered and is seen to have been necessary. The participants appeared comfortable about being asked about

the twenty brands, even in the case of those women who stated that they did not follow fashion or thought that women wearing brands were '*psonia*'.

4.3.4 Phase One data analysis

This section discusses the data analysis process and the type of framework used to analyse the data and offer explanations as to why this framework was chosen for the data analysis. The difficulties inherent in such research were identified mainly in the gathering and analysing of the vast amount of data collected. In the present research, the numerous factors implicated within the participant responses displayed to be of importance creating a plethora of findings. This resulted in gathering a considerable amount of information which could be perceived as 'messy' especially in the 'sense-making' and interpretation of the data collected.

Since understanding in-depth emotions and perceptions were of interest through the power and influence of social interaction in order to understand fashion brands, a number of factors such as the 'self' and the role of experience in relation to fashion brand meanings were considered. Further, the generation of information gathered regarding symbolic meanings, labels and 'codes' attached to fashion brands were considered creating what initially seemed as 'chaos'.

In order to organise and analyse the vast amounts of information and deal with an overwhelming 'chaos' of the data collected, it was identified that using an appropriate way to analyse it could make the 'mess' and 'chaos' into a set of interesting findings. Achieving an understanding of emotion and perception was seen as inappropriate by the use of scales or yes or no questions. A complex set of issues had to be taken into account, in line with the researcher's stance that humans are complex beings themselves (Oliver, 2012). In attempting to control the 'messy' nature of the approach and 'chaotic' data, it was acknowledged that although the approach was 'messy' it could generate valuable knowledge when analysed in a clear manner.

Although the type of framework used in the present study may be considered 'messy' because of its nature identified above, it is also acknowledged that it could generate valuable knowledge when analysed in a clear manner, possibly difficult given the great amount of information gathered. The advantages were seen to outweigh the disadvantages and the use of symbolic interactionism was seen to be able to assist the research design. The advantages were seen to outweigh the disadvantages and the use of symbolic interactionism was seen to be able to assist the research design. In order to

ensure the integrity of the research it was identified important to make sense and analyse the data in a clear manner without ‘losing’ its rich content (discussed further in section 7.4.2).

Thomas (2006) provided a clear framework, and thematic analysis assisted the present study as rich data gathered can be managed in a clear manner. Thomas (2006) offers a straightforward analysis procedure aimed at researchers for analysing qualitative data assisting the ‘thick description’ acquired (as Participant 1) offering a solution to concerns of ‘making sense’ great amounts of data without losing rich and valuable content, a balance needed. By close reading and evaluation of text, descriptions of meanings, links and categories can be identified (Thomas, 2006), crucial in the present study in regards to the research question, aims and objectives. The framework was used as the participants perceptions, processes involved in ‘reading’ brands through print images were of interest in relation to how they were shared with others. This was seen as important since in inductive research findings emerge from themes which emerge from the data gathered (Thomas, 2006).

In order to be able to acquire in-depth accounts and discover any patterns, this was identified as the most suitable way to analyse the data. By reading the interview transcripts it was found that the emerging themes were interlinked and related to three main issues, the self, meaning and interaction, offering a better understanding of how the participants feel about fashion brands. The creation of categories (Thomas, 2006) are also seen as crucial in the present study in terms of how these themes identified are categorised (‘self’, meaning and interaction, discussed in Chapter 5) as well as how individuals distinguish, differentiate and even ‘code’ fashion brands. Participants common expression for example: *‘you get what you pay for’* (e.g.: Participant 1 above), a common understanding found also in Phase Two contributed in discovering a shared ‘reality’ in regards to fashion brands for instance.

The first step in data analysis was to back up the interview files. The interviews were played back, transcribed in Greek and translated to English by the researcher who is bilingual. During the process, the researcher made notes next to the responses such as: laughing and change of voice tone. This can be seen not only as a justification of using face to face interviews but also to the importance of language (discussed in Chapter 3) as useful for this type of research.

Having grown up in the UK, translation of words and context was made easy. Still, challenges were met mainly in common phrases used in Greek which are not

translatable to English therefore some of the phrases were kept in Greek and explained as to not alter meaning and context.

Once the transcripts were translated, they were printed out and studied one by one, reading every line and often playing back recordings in order to listen to things such as hesitation. Reading and listening to the recordings were equally important activities, as by playing them back, the tone of the participant's voice could be heard as well as when participants paused or replied confidently, and this was important as there can be a rich amount of information hidden in audio recordings. Hearing the way the participants expressed themselves made a big difference to the meaning and interpretation of the responses opposed to simply reading the transcripts, at the same response could be perceived in different ways if expressed in a serious tone, laughing or even in a sarcastic manner. Such notes were very important as they offered the chance to discover how participants responded beyond words whose meaning could be altered depending on the tone used. For example, there are a lot different types of laughs and words alone may not mean much but when tone of voice is offered it can display the sentiment e.g.: happy or uncomfortable. This was an issue with respondents' references to issues of weight for example as answers on transcripts were offering limited information but when hearing the interview an essence of how it affected participants could be gained as tone can determine change in meaning. Tone of voice and silence gaps were two important issues identified, for example, when the participants wanted to stress something and emphasised it, it was underlined and dots were written in order to show silence gaps.

Responses relevant to three main themes: brand perception, brand symbolism, brand association were highlighted by making handwritten notes next to the responses. For example, when an answer was related to symbolic meanings attached to brands or others, it was noted in order to be able to identify patterns in responses in relation to the research question, aims and objectives.

The words used by participants to talk about brands and what those brands represented to them contributed in identifying themes, such as: 'the term brand and its use to project' and 'brands as symbols of 'self' and socio-economic status', were discovered through the common and frequent references of: *'brands being worn by individuals to project'* (Participant 7), or *'usually when they have the economic status they wear brands'* (Participant 2). Through this, a shared 'reality' was acknowledged in relation to brands related to socioeconomic status in the same manner, offering consistency in the responses.

This can be linked to social interaction as a determinant for constructing and understanding ‘reality’ through which meanings are attached to objects and others. ‘Self’, meaning and interaction (Chapter 3) in terms of their relevance to the present study started to emerge through the patterns and themes identified, creating 3 pillars which all the themes evolved around (discussed in Chapter 5).

After the third transcript, it became apparent that responses were repeated by different participants in content and context by the use of identical or similar words for example, even the same adjectives were used in the responses (for example: for the 20 fashion brands in Part 5, discussed in Chapter 5).

Following the identification of patterns in meaning and mentality held, the researcher made further side notes on the transcripts linking responses of different participants when they were shared by re-reading transcripts and putting them aside in the same questions. When two or more participants were replying similarly, a little note was made on the side for example: participant x, y, and so on in order to link them and finally discover how common the same views were.

Responses such as: *‘you get what you pay for’* (e.g.: Participant 1) and views on who wears brands: *‘they are economically flexible’* (Participant 4, Phase One, Participant 8, Phase One) were frequent and common forming patterns and themes through responses. Participants identified and referred to other women wearing fashion brands, their common views towards fashion brands as well as the words they used and the experiences which were common. The term ‘psonio’ for example (referring to individuals who show off), was the most common response to the question: why women wear brands? : *‘just want to show off’* (e.g.: Participant 3, Phase One), discussed further in Chapter 5 displaying a shared ‘reality’ as the word was used in the same instances, context, attached to the same people through the same examples. This resulted in identifying similar and repeated responses which formed and reinforced theme identification.

The researcher was fortunate in terms of discovering themes as the responses and most importantly the experiences narrated by the participants regarding others, how they and others perceive fashion brands, were common and repeated frequently displaying consistency in the views held. It appeared as if different participants experienced the same social situations by the way they kept replying for example: they themselves do not judge others by brands worn but others do (e.g.: Participant 1). Their experiences, was the same story narrated by different individuals presenting a ‘shared reality’ through their responses. The same experiences and beliefs existed, making it

easy to identify themes and patterns within the texts as similar examples, language and context were offered.

The emergent themes, such as: ‘brand symbolism’ or ‘brands associated to socioeconomic status’ were formed by patterns noticed through the common understanding of the participants, which are related to a shared ‘reality’ and experiences of individuals wearing brands having money. This can be linked to symbolic interactionism and how within a social group there are meanings which are shared as a result of experience through interaction. Interaction at this point and research refers to the same society these women belong to, and their exposure to fashion brands through the print images available in advertisements.

Since this phase managed to gather twenty responses, which were seen as enough as there were no new themes emerging and response patterns were being observed, another evaluation took place. This again was necessary in order to discover any gaps that remained in relation to addressing the research aim and objectives. There appeared to be more scope to understand the issues that were emerging. Phase One, offered a vast amount of information in terms of brand symbolism and the perception of fashion magazine images but it also showed that further information could be obtained to explore the emergence of patterns of common and shared views. In particular, it was found that the fashion magazine advertisements could be explored further. Therefore, a Phase 2 interview stage was needed.

Participants displayed associations and relationships with the twenty brands regardless of their reported brand purchasing habits. This suggested that there could be a possibility of falsely placing this in Part 5 rather than Parts 3 or 4 in order to enable the participants to warm up and start opening up. Although, up to Part 4, the participants appeared to distance themselves from talking about brands as part of their own lives, Part 5 revealed more detailed personal brand perceptions and appeared to enable participants to reflect on their own relationships with and views towards brands. Thus, much more depth in response was acquired. The addition of Part 5 had a considerable impact on the methodological practices. It indicated that the participants, when asked about fashion brands specifically, appeared to have about their own relationships with fashion brands than when they were asked about brands in a more generic manner.

This revealed complexity in fashion brand interpretation. For example, the issue of brand copies was highlighted to be of relevance (discussed further in Chapter 5). Even though the participants were not asked to talk about copies, this became a key

issue of importance for the women within the broader discussions about the meanings, viewpoints and opinions that they held towards fashion brands.

After analysing the Phase One interviews, it was decided that adding another phase of data collection could offer further insights into the participants' relationship to brands, the meaning as well as the symbolisms they had for them and the power that fashion brands had over individuals in terms of what they represented. Furthermore, it was seen from the analysis of the interview transcripts, that there was much more that could be discovered in terms of the meanings, views and opinions held by Greek women towards foreign fashion brands. More importantly, the relationship between consumers and fashion brands was yet to be discovered on a much deeper level in order to achieve a better understanding of how Greek women 'read' and the 'process' of making sense of foreign fashion brands (with a view towards informing effective fashion brand advertising).

After evaluating and analysing the results, it was decided that the collection of further data (via what became Phase Two) could offer a chance to illuminate how individuals might be influenced, evaluate and perceive a fashion brand through the print images in advertising. This was a good chance to see how the participants perceived the fashion item also without being able to see the brand.

The intention was to find possible gaps in terms of the gathered information in relation to the research aim and objectives. The researcher considered whether or not there was any room for further exploration in terms of obtaining more detailed participant views, always with the intention of gaining as much in-depth information as possible about the participants' opinions of fashion brands. Referring back to the conceptual thinking presented in Chapter 3, it was acknowledged that in the data gathered in Phase One did not fully inform the conceptualised process of consumer interpretation of print images in magazine advertising. The more complex process of 'reading' an image and the level of internal and external influences were still seen as 'blurry'.

4.3.5 Stage three: Phase Two interviews

This section discusses Phase Two of the research process and how the data collected was analysed. Phase Two was concerned with three key issues:

- gathering in-depth accounts of fashion brand meaning;
- discovering whether the 'hints' provided through Phase One interview responses were pertinent enough to be 'key issues';
- developing a better understanding of how Greek women 'read' print images in advertisements.

Having used semi-structured interviews in Phase One, it was seen that, although the method provided insights from participants, more open interviews could offer further detailed in-depth accounts which would give participants an opportunity to 'tell the story' behind their views and would enable the researcher to better understand the background of the symbolic meaning Greek women attach to foreign fashion brands and the individuals who wear them.

The interview consisted of three different parts, as displayed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Phase 2 interview design

Part	Purpose of questions
A: Brands and influence in style	To discover the participants' relationship to brands and the way they dressed in order to elicit their views on brands and what affected their dress choice
B: Visual prompts for anonymised advertisements	To discover how the participants 'read' print images in advertisements
C: Demographic questions	To identify possible patterns e.g.: in terms of educational background.

For Phase Two, it was decided that the age group of the sample could be shrunk to 30-35 year old women, since age did not appear to be a determinant or influence in terms of fashion brand symbolism and meanings, views or opinions in Phase One. Therefore, since it was intended to conduct more in-depth interviews with a smaller sample group,

the mean age group was chosen. This was more convenient in terms of the sampling process. Once again, purposive sampling was used consisting of acquaintances initially as a purposive sample and then the snowball technique was followed as in Phase one.

Phase Two was seen as an opportunity not only to obtain more in-depth accounts of the meanings that foreign fashion brands have for Greek women based on the key themes identified in Phase One but also to discover whether the themes' identified in the previous stage in the participants' answers were key issues or not. Furthermore, it was decided that this phase could offer more information on the way in which Greek women perceive, understand and are affected by print images in advertisements.

Open-ended interviews were seen as more appropriate at this stage in order to explore more deeply brand meaning and symbolism as well as the interaction between the participants and print images used in magazine advertisements. This was intended to be a methodological 'test' for exploring in-depth the symbolic meanings that fashion brands have for Greek women.

Past research has shown that the use of advertisements can help to elicit the perceptions of individuals in terms of the images to which they are exposed. Such examples have been displayed in studies of nudity in advertising and brand recall (Alexander & Judd Jr, 1974), as well as studies of model effectiveness in advertising and their negative effects on women and men in terms of body dissatisfaction (Baird and Grieve, 2006). Figure 4.6 is the interview guide:

Figure 4.6: Phase Two interview guide

Part A)

- 1) Why do you dress the way you dress?
- 2) Has the way you dress changed with time?
- 3) Do you prefer specific brands to wear?
- 4) Do you believe advertising has contributed in your view or behaviour towards brands?

Part B)

I'll show you some adverts

Advert x: seeing this adverts how do you feel? What is the essence that it brings out?

What do you think it advertises? What brand do you think it is? What is the message you think this ad is trying to give?

Reveal brand: Now that you see what brand it is, your view of the specific advertisement changes?

Part C)

What is your educational level?

Married?

Children?

Are you working?

Part A and B of the Phase Two interview will now be explained in terms of what was intended and what was included.

Part A: Brands and influence in style

The first part of the interviews focused on how fashion affected the respondents in terms of the way they chose to dress (or their actions/ behaviour in respect to fashion brands). It also explored the influences on how they dress and the extent to which they felt that the fashion brands they choose might reflect or project a style or image that they aspire to or an identity that they wish to project. This is linked to desired and unintentional projection and Mead's theory of the 'self' and how we understand ourselves through the interaction to others within a social group. It was acknowledged that the participants would have become accustomed to a set of 'norms' within the society to which they belong to and might wear specific brands to show what they want to project to others within that social group.

In order to obtain more in-depth accounts from the participants, it was decided to limit the number of questions set compared to Phase One but to also focus on personal meanings rather than commentary about general social attitudes. For example, more direct questions were used:

'Why do you dress the way you do?'

In this manner, the participant was 'made' to talk about herself, rather than about others (an observed tendency amongst Phase One interviewees). The rest of the questions were asked in the same tone and manner and sought to elicit a direct account of the participants' dress style and influences through interacting with others, brands and the media. Since the interviews were open, the few questions that were initially set as a guide for the interviewer often brought up many other questions which were based upon the respondent's answers.

It should be noted that, as in Phase One, the word 'brand' was left loosely defined, although the participants seemed to assume that it referred to a luxury or expensive fashion brand. Even though some participants asked if specific types of brands were meant and were informed that it was fashion brands in general, this shows that they connect the word 'brand' with expensive or luxury ones. This came to be one of the emergent themes in the study findings as it was seen that there was a shared understanding in language and symbolism attached to the term 'fashion brand'.

Part B: Visual prompts for anonymised advertisements

Part B gave the researcher an opportunity to discover and see 'live' participants' reactions to print images used in advertisements. In order to do this, 6 anonymised fashion brand advertisements were used, whereby the participants were asked to discuss the advertisement without knowing the brand. Following this discussion, the brand was revealed before the discussion continued.

This part contained two main points of interest. The first was to discover how Greek women 'read' and perceive print images used in advertisements. The second point of interest was to discover the level of awareness or familiarity of the participants regarding the brand. It offered an opportunity to explore whether the perception of the image changed after the fashion brand was revealed and the possibility of identifying any mismatches between the fashion brand being advertised and the interpretation of the advertisement. This would contribute to the discovery of the communication process between the brand and consumer via the image the consumer is exposed to. In order to do this, the brands were hidden and pages were taken out of the magazines so the participant would not be distracted or influenced by other factors and focus on the image alone which was of interest, rather than other factors such as where it came from. Since the intention was to see how print images are perceived and understood by Greek women the discovery of experiences, feelings and views towards magazines as a whole was not desired.

What this part attempted to do was to 'fill some of the gaps' and better inform how Greek women perceive print fashion images placed in magazine advertisements. Even though Phase One elicited the participants' views on fashion magazines and the images they project, the responses were felt to be too vague to be able to form meaningful conclusions.

Three international, Greek edition fashion magazines were chosen: 'Vogue' (a different edition to the one used in Phase One when identifying a list of twenty fashion

brands to be consistent with the other two magazines in terms of fashion season), 'Glamour' and 'Elle'. 'Vogue' was the only one chosen intentionally, as it had been employed in the previous phase. The other two, 'Glamour' and 'Elle', were randomly chosen, the only criterion being that their target group is women. Six advertisements were chosen from the three magazines, randomly associated with different fashion brands.

This was merely used as a guide in order to start a conversation and to encourage the participants to talk about how they perceived the images, in order to keep on track but also to offer space for elaboration. In between those questions, there was a discussion where the participants were able to express their views and it was observed that the views expressed at this stage were commonly far more generous than the responses gained to the topic of fashion brand advertising in the Phase One interviews. The visual material seemed to help the participants to be more descriptive in their accounts and the advertisements appeared to be a good stimulus in getting them to open up and offer deeper information on their views and general perceptions about fashion brands.

When the discussions appeared to offer no new information, the brand was revealed to the interviewees. At that stage, the participants were firstly asked if they knew the brand itself and if they were surprised or not to see that the advert belonged to that brand's advertising campaign. The reason for this was to reach an understanding of fashion brand perception. This created the opportunity to elicit further comments based on the participants' responses, especially where these involved strong feelings, either negative or positive, about the fashion brand and/or its advertising campaign. The aim was not only to explore the relationship between the participant and print image (the stimulus) but also to assess their familiarity with fashion brands and to see whether or not they could identify or guess the brand to which the advertisement belonged, based on their familiarity with that brand. How the participants perceived and understood the advertisement was also explored through discussion of the style of the advertisement, the use of colour, images, models.

When participants were asked what fashion brand they thought was being advertised, patterns and similarities were found in the views of the participants. These are discussed in Chapter 5. When they referred to what brand they assumed was being advertised, they were asked why they thought it was that particular brand. This enabled the researcher to better understand the factors influencing brand perception through brand communication, i.e., the representation of the fashion item, style of the image.

Moving on, the participants were asked what they thought the intended message of the advert was. The respondents found it difficult to answer this question as many appeared to be baffled by it. In this case, the question was rephrased while taking care to avoid changing its meaning, to explore what the people who created the advertisement were trying to communicate to the consumer. If the respondent was still struggling, they were then asked to consider if there was something written as a slogan at the bottom of the advertisement what they thought that would be. After obtaining their response, the participants were asked to explain what was it that made them think that (the model or the advertisement as a whole).

After revealing the fashion brand, the participants were asked if they knew the brand and the relationship they personally had with the brand, for example: *'have you ever bought it?', 'how familiar are you with it?', 'how do you know it?'*. They were asked if their views of the advertisement had changed after discovering which brand it advertised and, if so why. In cases where they failed to guess the fashion brand from its advert correctly but they reported subsequently that they knew or had experienced the brand in the past, they were asked what they thought was done wrongly by those which had created it. If the respondents guessed wrongly (named a different brand to that being advertised), they were asked what led to their guess, if they had experience of the fashion brand they named and also if the advert was representative of the 'wrong' brand they guessed. A sample of a transcript for Phase Two (Part B), is offered below (Participant 1). Again, the participant's responses were transcribed in red:

I will show you some adverts and I want you to tell me what you think.

How do you feel seeing this advert? (no answer) What is the sense that it's bringing out to you?

Erm.... (long pause) How does it make you feel?

Erm...(long pause) It may not make you feel anything

No it doesn't

So if you saw it in a magazine it wouldn't impress you? *I would flip through it in a second.*

As a consumer, what is the feeling that this specific advert is bringing out?

For someone else?

Objectively if I asked you what the sense/feeling this advert is bringing out what would you say? *Again, I would say indifferent, I don't like it.*

What do you think it advertises? *Suppose a bag and the dress?*

What brand do you think it is? *I have no idea. No I am not familiar with brands... a tendency you may be drawn towards in your mind to say it looks like... no it seems like an expensive brand.*

Why do you say that? *Because bags usually are. It's more the bag that looks to me expensive so in combination to the dress, the dress is expensive as well now for a specific brand I can't tell...*

So since you don't have a specific brand in mind, what do you think is in the advert that is bringing out this expensive you say?

The quality of the bag it looks expensive. It looks like an evening bag.

So do you get this from the item or the advert as a whole? *From the item. Not the advert.*

What is the message you think the advert is trying to give?

The message? Erm...I don't know. A woman kind of... professional who dresses like that to go to work?

Patterns of common themes and views emerged, and the interviewees appeared willing to talk at length about brands when actual fashion brands were the focus of the interview, as was the case with the 20 brands in the first interviews. However, participants had little to say about their relationship to the brands and found it challenging to go into detail about their interactions and everyday relationships with them, but were more open when asked about the advertisements. On reflection, the structure of the interview might be questioned. The fashion brand advert questions might have been better placed at the beginning of the interview as this was when the participants appeared to have the most to say and they opened up and elaborated on their opinions of fashion brands. It would have been a lot easier to gather responses on their dress style and relationship to fashion brands if they had been asked about this in Part 2 rather than Part 1. It is considered, had the images been used as Part A, as 'warm up' questions, participants would talk more and personal experiences could have evolved through this part. Even so, there was still a rich amount offered in the participants' responses. It is acknowledged, the structure of the interview could have possibly affected the further depth and detail in the responses especially in relation to why print images are 'read' the way they did or process they go through after looking at the image in relation brand symbolism.

As in Phase One, it was identified that responses were shared, commonly displaying a shared 'reality' and understanding of fashion brands, their meanings and of their wearers. This is displayed for instance in views such as it is not appropriate to

dress as you like at work (with the exception of Participant 1, Phase Two) or how the images were understood and interpreted. It was discovered the same words were used to describe fashion brands and the images used e.g.: ‘Miss Sixty’ was an example of the theme ‘shared brand meaning’ through the way it was talked about. Body image and weight, another theme that emerged from the participants responses discussed in Chapter 5, a determinant for how they dressed was common. The frequency of common views offered by participants in relation to this, offered the theme: ‘Body image and weight’ (discussed further in Chapter 5). As in Phase One, patterns were easily detectible through the repeating of the same experiences and views, even words used.

Overall, individuals who were more familiar with the brands had more to say about the way it was chosen to be communicated through fashion magazine advertising than those who were less familiar with the brand.

After the tenth interview, it was found that there was no new information emerging and that the patterns and themes were becoming clear and repeated. The responses had to be analysed in order to reach a conclusion. In order to analyse the findings, content analysis was chosen. After the Phase Two interviews were completed, the evaluation of that phase was necessary. This phase was slightly more challenging to evaluate than Phase One as the responses were derived from more in-depth discussions and formed part of longer answers. An explanation on how the information was analysed will be provided in the next section.

4.4 Phase Two data analysis

All of the interviews were conducted in Greek. As in Phase One, the Thomas (2006) framework was used to analyse the data. The recordings were copied to a laptop, transcribed, translated into English and printed. Each was read and played back in order to make notes next to the responses in relation to aims and objectives, tone of voice, silence gaps and laughs. The frequency of common responses in the same questions made the identification of themes straightforward, displaying a shared ‘reality’ and understanding as in Phase One where the participants were different (with the exception of one).

As in Phase One, terms such as ‘nice’ or ‘good’, were perceived vague, not assisting the discovery of symbolisms and meanings or even ‘codes’ attached to brands, and clarification of their meaning was asked, crucial when analysing the responses in

order to ensure the consistency of emotions, perceptions and views which patterns could be identified and themes to be formed. Ensuring ‘nice’ was the same for all in regards to brand meaning or image in order to gain consistency in the meanings behind words and therefore be able to come to conclusions in terms of shared meaning.

As in Phase One, similar responses and experiences were offered, for example, weight as a determinant for what participants wore, was a common response (e.g.: Participant 3 in the previous section). Also, the conception of ‘a time and a place to dress accordingly’ was expressed, e.g.: ‘*you can’t dress as you like*’ (at work, Participant 6) displaying a common understanding of social conduct and norms within this social group, linked to the relevance of meaning and interaction responsible for forming meaning, as the appropriateness of dressing accordingly was a view for other social contexts displayed in the participants responses. The frequency of these views for instance contributed in discovering the theme: ‘shared understanding’ in regards to how they dress. As in Phase One, the frequency and repetitiveness of the same views, issues and experiences by different participants became the basis for the identification of patterns where key themes emerged (discussed in Chapter 5).

The focus and significance participants gave to the same issues and the mind-set they shared were of interest to the analysis, given the research aim and objectives of the study. Close study of the transcripts, brought vivid responses in relation to the way Greek women dress, deriving from similar reasons in relation to dress style influence. This included factors not initially considered such as body size and weight linked to the influence of social interaction in terms of reality being socially constructed through interaction (displaying the 3 pillars in Chapter 5). The following extract (Participant 3) is an example of how size determines what they wear:

Why do you dress like you do?

Erm...because erm...basically I dress almost always in black because I’ve put on weight and because they make me look thinner I think.

So is it a matter of image? *Yes and mainly comfort.*

Your influences? Do you think your peers influence you? *In the way I dress, no.*

So it’s irrelevant to the way your friends, family and work may expect from you?

No, at work I usually dress as I like, it doesn’t influence the way I dress. My friends dress very differently to me. No, I don’t think I am influenced.

Has the way you dress changed with time?

The truth is that when I lose weight it does change. I feel more comfortable, put on more colours, I may buy a dress, a skirt that I think it may suit me, while when I'm heavier, I don't feel like shopping so I am repetitive in the way I dress and the colours and...

Has the way you dress changed as you get older?

No it changes according to my weight and not my age.

As far as what you said about your weight, was the word comfort? what do you think makes you feel more comfortable when you are thinner? What is the main reason that influences you in feeling more comfortable?

I have more choices. So it's more practical? Not more practical, erm...it's what I told you. I may see something in a window and find my size erm... so I can follow other clothes as well that I like it doesn't need to be in season or fashion just that I may picture something and feel I can get into it (fit) so I buy it.

More specifically, the notion of the 'accepted' was commonly expressed in relation to body image, apparent in the responses of different participants. Other issues related to print images used, also were found to be repeated, such as 'Miss Sixty', where participants used even the same adjectives to describe the brand as in Phase One. Patterns formed through such instances as the use of the same words by different participants to describe the image and the consistency in such instances to identify how Greek women 'read' the images.

Through the close study of the transcripts patterns were forming in a quite 'vivid' manner, where responses were offered using strong opinions regarding issues such as copies, brand symbolism and body image commonly without being asked in both phases, at a high frequency rate. The two phases did not seem to display contradicting findings in terms of feelings and views.

Reading and underlining responses to identify patterns within the transcripts led to the identification of eight key themes emerging in total from Phase One and Phase Two. These themes derived from a constant discussion on the participants responses in both phases, issues they had not necessarily being asked about such as weight or copies.

A thematic analysis of Phase One interview responses identified the following four key themes:

- shared viewpoints;
- advertising as a means of brand communication and its influences;

- the term brand and its use to project, brands as symbols of the self and socioeconomic status;
- shared brand meaning, coding and categorisation.

Next, the interviews from both phases were compared, studied in terms of what themes were identified for each, and the patterns formed, words used, meanings attached to brands and how they differentiated, categorising between fashion brands and their wearers. Their overall mentality towards foreign fashion brands became clear through the themes identified which can benefit practitioners in relation to how they communicate fashion brands to Greek women especially in a declining market such as the fashion and lifestyle magazines mentioned in Chapter 1. Further, because Phase Two went into the 'reading' of the image, uninfluenced where it came from, this could benefit the improvement of brand communication through images regardless where these images.

A thematic analysis of Phase Two interview responses identified five key themes:

- body image and weight;
- style influences;
- shared brand symbolism and copies;
- advertising as a means of brand communication and its influences;
- shared brand meaning

The key themes from both phases are considered collectively in Chapter 5 in the presentation and analysis of the results. These focus on eight overall themes (identified by the researcher when analysing Phase One and Phase Two themes together in relation to the research objectives):

- brands as symbols brands as symbols of self and socioeconomic status;
- body image and weight;
- understanding of the term 'brand' and its role in projection;
- shared brand symbolism and brand copies;
- shared viewpoints;
- advertising as a means of brand communication and its influences;
- shared brand meaning, categorisation and coding;
- style influences.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the decisions made within the research design and execution process. It has discussed the adoption of a subjectivist approach to research methodology and the adoption of symbolic interactionism in the execution of research methods as outlined in Chapter 3. A three stage -two-phase approach to data collection has been explained in response to the researcher's reflections throughout the process of research execution offering reasons for the methodology and methods adopted. This resulted in a combination of semi-structured and open interviews being used. A thematic approach to data analysis has been acknowledged using Thomas (2006) framework. The two phases displayed consistency in relation to the themes identified.

The next chapter discusses in detail the results from Phase One and Phase Two and considers them in relation to the research objectives and conceptual thinking presented earlier in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5:

Analysis of results

This chapter discusses the results with specific reference three principles of symbolic interactionism found to be relevant to the present study:

- self;
- meaning;
- interaction.

These principles were discussed in Chapter 3 and were acknowledged to shape the researcher's conceptual thinking pre-data collection and be of high relevance to the present study. Although these are considered as principles for symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), in this study they act as overarching 'pillars' to accommodate the key themes identified during the analysis of the interview transcripts.

The findings are discussed with respect to the research aim and objectives. Firstly, the chapter explains and discusses the three pillars and how they are seen to be inter-related. Next, the identification of key themes emerging from the interview responses gathered in Phase One and Phase Two of the data collection process and their placement as key themes under the pillars is discussed. To reiterate, the interviews focused on issues relating to two broad themes in relation to the literature review, brands and advertising. Brand symbolism, meaning and identity were considered in the context of foreign fashion brands, particularly from a socially-shared perspective. Advertising was assessed as a means of brand communication. It should be noted, that although some of the key themes discovered from the interview responses might be placed under one pillar, it is recognised that the themes are often interlinked and might be relevant to more than one or to all three pillars. The next section discusses the key themes and their relevance to each pillar.

5.1 The three pillars and key themes

As discussed in Chapter 4, the frequency of common responses amongst respondents resulted in the identification of themes through the close reading of the text. These themes were vivid in the responses of the participants, suggested a common understanding of fashion brands and their wearers, as accentuated by the use of the

same adjectives to describe the same brands (e.g.: Phase One, Part 5). Shared views and experiences were identified amongst the participants displaying a shared ‘reality’ in regards to fashion brand meaning with a common understanding of ‘norms’ and the ‘accepted’.

As discussed (Chapter 4), when the interview transcripts from both phases were studied closely, notes were made next to the responses in order to identify common responses and themes. For instance, the theme: ‘Brands as symbols of self and socioeconomic status’ was seen to be related to meaning, as symbolisms were attached to brands and the wears. The repeated responses by different participants indicated its relevance to social interaction as the views were shared. This was also attached to self as participants offered an understanding brands display someone’s status through their projection. This offered for instance one example of how they see certain brands representing certain characteristics and how through brands they ‘make sense’ of the wearer.

Another example, ‘Shared meaning’ was seen to be directly linked to meaning and social interaction through the common responses offered in relation to the meanings Greek women gave to fashion brands and their wearers, such as: to wear brands you have to have money or women wearing brands do so to ‘*show off*’ (Participant 3-Phase One).

Table 5.1 illustrates the identification of key themes emerging from the interviews under each of the three pillars. Additionally, the table indicates the data collection phases during from which the key themes emerged. In total, eight key themes were identified.

Table 5.1: The placement of key themes emerging from the interviews under three pillars

Key theme	Pillars			Data collection phase
	Self	Meaning	Social interaction	
Brands as symbols of self and socioeconomic status	X	X	X	1
Body image and weight	X			2
Understanding of the term 'brand' and its role in projection	X	X	X	1
Shared brand symbolism and brand copies		X	X	1 & 2
Shared viewpoints		X	X	1
Advertising as a means of brand communication and its influences	x	X	x	1 & 2
Shared brand meaning, categorisation and coding	x	X	x	1
Style influences			x	2

The discussion of the results is structured to reflect Table 5.1 as follows:

1) Self

- brands as symbols of self and socioeconomic status
- body image and weight

2) Meaning

- understanding of the term 'brand' and its role in projection
- shared brand symbolism and brand copies

3) Interaction

- shared viewpoints
- advertising as a means of brand communication and its influences
- shared brand meaning, categorisation and coding
- style influences.

In reading the interview transcripts, there was a similar and common response style that the participants had which included the frequency to which they referred to issues that later became the basis of the key themes identified. The focus and the importance they gave to those issues as well as the mind-set which they shared were of interest in the analysis, contributing to the identification of themes.

Even though there were many issues which were found to be similar to Phase One, Phase Two discovered more about some of the 'hints' or topics that were briefly offered or introduced by the participants in Phase One. It is necessary to stress that the findings from each phase did not appear to contradict each other but some issues about Greek women emerged with insufficient insights provided to make them into themes thus, they remained 'hints' to be explored in further research rather than being included as key themes here.

The participant responses displayed they had common past experiences. This made the interview process experiencing the same story narrated by different women. A display of a shared 'reality' was shown through the way they understood what is meant by the term 'brand' for example or what does it mean to wear brands. A consistency in the responses offered by participants' accounts displayed a shared understanding in regards to issues related to fashion brands and views which came to be consistent.

Next, the key themes identified from the results of Phase One and Phase Two will be discussed in respect to the three pillars: self; meaning; and interaction.

5.2 Self

The first of the three overarching pillars identified to accommodate the key research themes was 'self'. Past research shows that the 'self' can be affected by branded items (Belk, 1988), and the brands one chooses to wear can define oneself according to the personality of the brand (Fennis & Pruyn, 2007). The first pillar 'self', and the key themes acknowledged to be related to it, refers to the key issues identified within the

research on what influences Greek women and their perception of the ‘self’. Under this pillar, two main key themes were identified: brands as symbols of the self and socioeconomic status; and weight.

5.2.1 Brands as symbols of self and socioeconomic status

One of the main intentions of the research study, was to gain insights into the symbolic meanings that Greek women attach to fashion brands, themselves and also to others wearing fashion brands, through the process of social interaction. It has been widely supported in the past that brand personality serves symbolic functions (Klink & Athaide, 2012), especially of public recognition (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967), which is a very powerful force. This force is especially powerful in terms of luxury goods (Belk, 1988) as, through them, a feeling of identity is gained and the wearer can be recognised as wealthy and able to afford luxury goods (Han *et al*, 2010; Eisend & Schuchert-Guler, 2006), fulfilling other needs provided via hedonic consumption since it is experientially more attractive (Okada, 2005). These points are of relevance for this study as the responses in Phase One and Phase Two display a sense of social fulfilment through fashion brands or it is suggested that brands act as social tools that can offer or infer social status.

Symbolic interactionism argues that it is through interaction within a group that meanings are socially created and shared by individuals. This is done by attaching meanings to others, objects and self, in order to explain or identify social actors and objects. In this study, the object is the foreign fashion brand and its symbolic meanings. In the interview responses, specific symbolic meanings were attached to fashion brands, displaying a common perception prevailing in terms of the relationship of certain brands to individuals with a certain socioeconomic status or profession. Some researchers have argued that such consumption may be a result of status or used to portray status (O’Cass & Frost, 2002). The participants in this study suggested that wearing particular fashion brands can reflect socioeconomic status. For example, when the participants were asked what their views were of women who wear branded items, the responses included:

‘Most of them are (rich). To do this you must have a high economic status’

(Participant 3, Phase One)

‘That they are economically flexible’ (Participant 4, Phase One)

'They have the money and they buy them' (Participant 9, Phase One)

Even though some individuals stated that women can overspend on their credit card to buy fashion brands (implying that some women do not necessarily have the 'money' to afford the brands without credit), there was still a common understanding that fashion brands were being worn by wealthy women. The most common view observed was that the fashion brands that women wear are linked to their socioeconomic status. For example, when Participant 9 (Phase One) was asked about her view of women wearing brands, she responded that *'they have the money and they buy them'*. When she was later asked if she thought these women were rich, she responded *'no'*. Even so, this does not alter the main view of fashion brands and the general associations between them and people of a high socioeconomic status. Participant 9, when asked about the twenty fashion brands in Part 5 of the Phase One interview, differentiated between brands and class. For example, she believed that 'Armani' was worn by 'middle class women'. It is important to note that at this point that, in Greece, class is an issue which is linked to wealth and financial standing. For example, the upper classes of Greek society are mainly considered to consist of individuals who are wealthy through inheritance, commonly referred to as *'neoploutoi'* (individuals with inherited wealth). Past research has strongly suggested that brands act or are used as social tools, especially luxury brands (Grubb & Gathwohl, 1967; Leigh & Gabel, 1992). They are also used to fulfil symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998) and a sense of self (Roux & Korchia, 2006). 'Loud' luxury items are intentionally used to make a statement about the economic status of the wearer (Han *et al.*, 2010). These ideas were found to hold relevance to the views expressed by the Greek women interviewed in this study. Fashion brands were perceived to act as social tools, not only in terms of self-projection but also as a means of revealing one's socioeconomic status. When the respondents were asked, *'Do you believe that the brands one chooses to wear symbolizes who one is?'*, even though they responded *'No'* Participants 2, 3, 13 (Phase One) at the same time expressed the view that individuals who wear fashion brands do so in order to 'say':

'I'm here, look at me' (Participant 3, Phase One)

[to] *'look nicer and more chic'* (Participant 13, Phase One).

This suggests that the participants believe that individuals wear fashion brands with the intention of attracting attention. The comment by Participant 13, in particular, suggests

that individuals link luxury or expensive brands to ‘good taste’ or ‘superiority’ in comparison with cheaper clothes or brands. This supports the past literature, such as studies on the symbolic functions of brand purchasing for the fulfilment of symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998).

The participants tended to express the belief that what one wears can suggest who one is in terms of socioeconomic status (Participants 4, 6, 19, Phase One) and that individuals *'have an economic foundation to pull off these buys'* (Participant 1, Phase One). When asked if the brand one wears symbolise who they are, Participant 10 replied:

'Yes, it depends on the cost of the item. Depends on the brand and the money you can afford to spend'.

Also, brands were seen to help people create impressions that may influence their employment prospects. Participant 12 (Phase One), for example, remarked, *'instantly the other person looks and says 'he has money' and it influences them a lot*. Participant 12 (Phase One) also expressed the view that, even though foreign brands are expensive for the Greek market, they are still being purchased as:

'we are psonia. If you have been taught since you were young to purchase eponyma (well-known and famous) clothes, you will do it in the future'.

The same participant also replied that she believes that some people regard someone as more worthy when wearing branded items, *'that is how we are, how we have been taught. We admire what is nice and do not notice what isn't'*. What is noteworthy from this response is how Participant 12 formed a link between branded items and how they are considered ‘nice’. This might be interpreted to imply that branded fashion items may be considered to be attractive or in good taste, while non-branded ones might be seen in the opposite manner.

This is also another point where a common understanding or ‘familiarity’ was found to exist. The social group under study appeared to be aware of and shared knowledge of a specific fashion brand, for example, ‘Louis Vuitton’. This brand was frequently mentioned by the participants when speaking of expensive, quality brands. What is of great interest here is that O’Cass and Frost’s study (2002) argued that people

do not need to be familiar with a brand in order to identify it as a status brand and for consumer brands to generate value (O’Cass & Frost, 2002).

Both socioeconomic status and social dimensions were common responses when the participants were asked what they thought individuals were trying to show by wearing brands. The term 'brand' was left loosely for them to interpret to enable insights to be gained into their judgement of what brands are and how they perceive 'brand'. The commonly shared views and responses received suggest that social interaction within a group influences the creation and attachment of meanings and common viewpoints. The participants frequently referred to how they believed others to see brands. They often referred to how society has taught them to understand fashion brands, such as in Participant 12’s responses. Especially when asked in Phase One whether or not branded items can help one to succeed in one’s personal, social or professional life, there was a clear understanding that, even though they might not do so in their own personal lives, many thought wearing fashion brands would affect status in certain professions:

‘Definitely plays a role’ (Participant 5, Phase One);

‘In multinationals with marketing, advertising’ (Participant 6, Phase One);

‘Those that have to do with coming into contact with people’ (Participant 7, Phase One);

‘Depends on the job. In social ones like P.R., ones where girls’ appearance matters to what they do. But appearance, how well looked after you are counts in all jobs. Even if you go freelance tutoring, they will look if you are looked after, it counts in all jobs, whether that is good or bad, your worth increases and the expectations that others have of you through the brand, You sell yourself more expensively’ (Participant 8, Phase One).

The responses about brands being linked to taking care of one's appearance and being something that matters in the questions about work can be linked to the responses about brands being linked to socioeconomic status, as in those responses also, branded clothes were being referred to in a positive manner (e.g., as ‘nice’, as in the case of Participant 12, Phase One).

Participants elaborated and focused on the relationship between brands and status both at a social and economic level. The associations that they made repeatedly were on the same basis: 'that 'X' brand shows 'X' status', particularly when the brand is in its original form and not a copy or purchased through going into debt (although the latter is something that is not readily observable to others).

The interviews highlighted the participants' associations between fashion brands and socioeconomic status also when they were about their own viewpoints and the links they make themselves. In Parts 4 and 5 of Phase One interviews focusing on advertising and participant views of fashion brands, even though the participants reported that they tended to perceive other women wearing fashion brands negatively, they acknowledged that these individuals do so in order to project a certain image. They appeared to understand why women might choose to wear brands to acquire status but generally the participants did not believe women should have to do this. More specifically they referred to other women as wearing brands to '*show off*' (Participants 3, 4, 5, Phase One), particularly when they are dressed 'head to toe' in brands. Similarly, the participants perceived people who wear brand copies or charge their credit card with money they do not have just to have branded items in a negative way. This was identified as an issue to be further examined through the Phase Two interviews and it is subsequently analysed further under the theme 'shared brand symbolism and copies'. The participants appeared to associate and attach particular fashion brands to a certain socioeconomic status, class or profession, for example: 'X' brand for a doctor, lawyer, 'upper class'. Expensive brands were seen not only as a symbol of status and class but also in terms of monetary value. Participant 1 (Phase One) for example commented, '*you get what you pay for*'. This sentiment can be linked to Kim and Jang's (2013:306) view that:

'a higher price induces consumer's expectations of higher perceived quality (price-quality schema) or prestige sensitivity and, consequently, increases intentions to buy (Zeithaml et al, 1996).

Participants also reported a belief that a certain brand or priced item is suitable for particular social situations, like weddings. Participant 1 (Phase Two) for example remarked, '*I try to dress youthfully on the one hand but appropriately for each occasion I attend, where I am, with whom*'. This implies that dress style for type of occasion might hold implications for 'acceptable' monetary spend on fashion items.

Examples of brands that were associated with lower socio-economic classes were not offered but, instead, it was notable that cheaper fashion brands (e.g., 'high street brands') were not referred to when the interviewees talked about 'brands'. Furthermore, the socio-economic status of the consumer was mentioned with reference to fashion consumption more generally:

'You can't always follow fashion and when you aren't in that upper, higher class, you are lower to middle, you step back' (Participant 19, Phase One).

Attaching meanings to brands using certain language and specific words was quite common. The connotations of words emerged as a way of sharing meaning between these women in relation to fashion. The participants also tended to speak of the wearers of fashion brands from the perspective of an 'outsider', as though commenting on fashion trends rather than an issue that affected their own lives. In particular, the way in which fashion brands were interpreted in relation to and bound up with 'self' was an interesting theme. In symbolic interactionism, the self is separated into the 'me' and the 'I', developed through interaction that is essential for attaching meaning to the self, others and objects. Language plays a vital role in this. In this study, language appeared to play an important role through a shared understanding of the term 'brand' as meaning something specific. Further, in terms of self-perception it was identified from participants' responses that there was also a shared understanding of the basis for differentiating or distinguishing between fashion brands notably in terms of price and socio-economic status.

5.2.2 Body image and weight

The existence of an 'ideal' body shape or body image (and the associated issue of weight) has been widely identified as a common underlying theme within the fashion industry and fashion advertising campaigns (Chapter 2). Many previous research studies have focused on the detrimental effects produced by fashion advertising and media images in their projection of the 'ideal' or 'norm'. Researchers like Wolf (1991) and Kilbourne (2000) have highlighted the ethical issues involved in the promotion of specific images within fashion advertising and the unpleasant effects that these might have on female body images. In this study, these findings are supported as weight was expressed as a big issue for Greek women aged 20-40 years. Weight, for these women,

appears to be a determinant of what they wear, purchase and how they value themselves as individuals and as women. It is clear from the responses, that weight was an issue for this group in terms of their size rather than health. Weight was a concern not in terms of being fit but in terms of being thin and this emerged as a key finding mostly from the Phase Two interviews (although it was referred to initially in Phase One responses as well). In Phase One, it was mostly brought up as a comment or response to advertising in general:

'They (models in advertising) try to project a specific type and this is negative' 'cause they don't take into account all the groups of people. Definitely don't take into account the average Greek woman 'cause the average Greek woman isn't 1.90cm and 45kg – no way! (Participant 3, Phase One).

Advertising was also perceived to be attempting to promote 'role models' through the models they use and it was claimed that Greek women try to look like these role models by, *'buying clothes, changing their hair, make-up, everything that has to do with their appearance, the 'display' (Participant 5, Phase One).* In terms of weight and body size, where the issue was raised in Phase One, the participants' views were overwhelmingly negative and, in some cases drew attention to wider social impacts, for example, *'I don't like the impact it has on young girls' (Participant 6, Phase One).*

Phase Two offered an opportunity to attempt to gain a deeper insight into the gravity of weight as an issue for Greek women with respect to fashion brands and it was in this phase that weight was particularly identified as a pertinent theme. The participants expressed that weight played a role in how they choose to dress. Participant 1 in Phase Two for example stated that how she dresses: *'depends how I feel. Depends if I have put on some unneeded kilos or not'.*

The references to advertising and what it promotes were quite visible in Phase Two interview responses. Participant 2 in Phase Two, when asked why she dresses as she does, responded *'because it's comfortable'.* She added that the way she dresses *'is different to everyone else's, that's why I like it'.* When asked what she meant, she responded, *'the style you see in shop windows and they take it and copy it and everyone ends up without their own different style'.* Participant 2 went on to explain that, because of her size, nothing she sees in shop windows fits her because of her weight. She added:

'Even if I didn't have that problem, again I wouldn't like to copy 100% what the magazines, fashion, stylists, everyone anyway commands, so I prefer to adapt things in a way to my own style to feel comfortable in what I'm wearing and not to wear something just because fashion imposes it'.

Not only is there an implied criticism here that the clothes in Greece appear to be designed for slimmer women than the participant, but she also refers to *'what everyone commands'*. She acknowledges there to exist an 'accepted style' amongst her social group, one which she perceives to be very specific and one which is connected with fashion industry promotion and with weight or body image. She does use a phrase about adapting even though she chooses to do this through developing her own personalised style. This response may also be related to the third pillar under which the key themes of the results may be situated - interaction - which will be discussed later.

When the participants were asked in Phase Two if the way they dressed had changed over time as they got older, although they referred to a change with age they actually mentioned that weight was a greater determinant in changes in dress style than age and that they believe they cannot choose to wear anything they want to because of their weight. Participant 3 (Phase Two), for example, commented:

'The truth is that when I lose weight it does change. I feel more comfortable, wear more colours, I may buy a dress, a skirt, that I think may suit me, while when I'm heavier, I don't feel like shopping so I am repetitive in the way I dress and the colours'.

Here, Participant 3 does not refer to age at all in terms of the changes in her dress choice but instead explains that her choices are based upon her weight and it appears to affect her confidence and mood. This theme is linked to the 'clues' from the participants' responses gathered in Phase One where weight appeared to be emerging as an issue when it was commonly used as an example of how advertising affects Greek women negatively because of the models used. Weight as an issue affecting fashion choice can be also linked to the literature concerning weight in relation to media effects. The responses brought out in Phase Two in relation to clothing choice suggested that fashion advertising determines an individual's fashion style. Weight was an issue that also came up, unprompted, in response to showing the participants Advert 4 (for Replay jeans - see Figure 5.1) in Part B of the Phase Two interviews.

(Figure 5.1: Advert for Replay jeans used in Part B of the Phase Two interviews, item removed for copyright reasons)

The issue of weight was expressed in many different ways but all in relation to the model's figure. Participant 6 in Phase Two for instance when asked how she felt when looking at Advert 4 replied, *'personally I think I was like that once and now I'm not'* and *'I like it, as far as the figure and the model... At least the girl wearing it looks nice'*.

Other responses also reflected an apparent craving to fit in the product they were talking about. Participant 2 (Phase Two), for example, commented, *'I would want to fit in these jeans'*. When asked what she thought the message of the advert was, Participant 5 replied, *'Put on these jeans and look like that'*, suggesting that the intended advertising message was intended to create a desire to try to look like the model through purchasing the brand.

The Replay jeans advert sparked some interesting responses in terms of weight and body image. Participant 6 (Phase Two) remarked, *'jeans need good bodies, they look better on good bodies'*. She was asked if she thought the advert might have negative effects on certain groups of consumers. She responded:

'Sure, because there are women who are really fat, are nothing like the girl here and will definitely be annoyed, they'd say are these the only trousers there are, low waist, line as this? Maybe yes they would. Not me so much but if I think that I have a few kilos on me which are quite a problem for me, I can imagine those women being more annoyed.'

At this point, some apparent contradiction was noted. Participant 6 (Phase Two) stated that she was conscious of her own image when looking in the mirror because she had gained weight but she also stated that the Replay jeans advert would not affect her negatively on a personal level although she felt that it might affect other women. This suggests that the participants of the study did not always directly identify with the other women that they referred to when considering the impacts of fashion brand advertising and clothing choice. It illustrates how respondents sometimes positioned themselves as 'outsiders' in terms of reflecting on self rather than others.

Another response to Advert 4 was, *'Because the jeans are skinny, they bring out femininity'* (Participant 10, Phase Two), which suggests a perceived belief between fashion items and female identity (namely the concept of 'femininity'). This theme is

less linked to eating disorders as nothing of this kind emerged from the responses given. The women did not mention any kind of diet or exercise they engage in, in order to improve their body image.

What is seen from the responses concerning the Replay jeans advert is how not only did the participants compare their own figures to that of the model but, further, they demonstrated that fashion brand advertisement images can make women feel self-conscious. The use of models in the fashion brand adverts appeared to prompt self-reflection from the participants and they, themselves, raised the issue about a woman dwelling on the potential negative aspects of her figure, weight or size if she does not think that her body shape resembles that of the model. Participant 6 (Phase Two) displays a strong mind-set concerning her own weight and body image - as will be shown through her responses further in relation to some of the other key themes.

Weight was referred to as a strong determinant of women's dress choice throughout the interviews. They shared a common understanding of how weight is an important factor affecting what they wear and this is reflected in their responses such as, *'basically I dress almost always in black because I've put on weight and because they (black clothes) make me look thinner I think'* (Participant 3, Phase Two).

At this stage of the interview process, potential ethical issues arose and even though there was a good opportunity to elaborate further on this topic, it was clear that the participants were especially conscious about their weight. It was also apparent that they would get upset if they talked in more detail about their weight so no further details on their responses were probed in order to avoid making the participants feel uncomfortable or emotionally harmed.

Of course, the issue of weight was not completely avoided as the participants' responses reflected a common link between their self-image and the images of models which they see in fashion advertising. This, therefore, provided a greater understanding of how the participants 'read' the images in fashion brand advertising. This was an issue that the participants raised themselves and they indicated through their responses that it was of great importance to them. For instance, when asked if the way they dress has changed through time, responses included:

'When I lose weight it does change' (Participant 3, Phase Two).

'In my case, I have been influenced by pregnancy, it changed my body a lot and can't yet control it. I can't find the rhythms I once had of my body and this annoys me a little and because of that I don't want to see it in the mirror and

therefore I wear longer clothes, more baggy tops, etc.’ (Participant 6, Phase Two).

Participant 6 contributed extensively to the research. Although all of the participants’ responses were relevant, her responses were directly and clearly linked to the key research issues. She displayed self-consciousness about her weight at this point as well as showing that it is a key determinant of the way she dresses. The fact that she expresses dissatisfaction with her own reflection when looking in the mirror suggests that her weight is a crucial factor for her psychological well-being. In another example, a different participant talked about how weight was an important factor for her and expressed her views that larger women cannot wear the same clothes as smaller women, even though she does not take into account other factors such as height or body type:

‘A piece of clothing cannot be worn by someone who’s 50kg and another whose 90kg’

[Interviewer]: Why?

‘It loses its beauty’ (Participant 8, Phase Two).

For her, size in kilograms was expressed to be the sole determinant of clothing choice and there was a belief that not all women can wear the same clothes because of weight.

In Phase Two, Advert 3 advertising a pair of UGG boots (Figure 5.2), also brought up the issue of body image.

(Figure 5.2: Advert for UGG boots used in Part B of the Phase Two interviews, item removed for copyright reasons)

When Participant 10 (Phase Two) was asked how she felt when looking at the advert, she replied, *‘I’m jealous ‘cause she must be in a really nice place, country, on a mountain and has a really nice figure this girl and nice legs. I feel a kind of jealousy’*. This response displays how, even though the advert focus is on a pair of boots and the model wears a plain black dress without any particular focus on body image, the consumer can still be affected.

This reinforces past research which found that when examining fashion brand promotion weight is a big issue, mostly for women, and that the existence of an ‘ideal’ body image negatively impacts upon self-image. Feminist writers in particular, such as Klein (2005) and Kilbourne (2000), have focused on these issues extensively in terms of

media portrayals of women and female models. In this DBA study, body image has been found to be an issue for Greek women predominantly in relation to size.

5.2.3 A conclusion of 'self'

The 'self' is a very important principle of symbolic interactionism and has been found to be an equally important pillar of this research as the results from both Phase One and Phase Two interviews revealed the self-image of participants (and the women to whom they referred) to play a big part in the ways in which fashion brands and fashion brand advertising were understood and evaluated.

This pillar and the key themes identified within it, display how the 'self' appears to be important to Greek women not only in terms of understanding themselves and others, but also with regard to how they place and position themselves and others within their social group.

This is based upon the key themes: 'brands as symbols of self and socioeconomic status; and body image and weight'. It should be noted that self-image can be related to how fashion brand adverts are read by consumers. As part of self-image, body image emerged as an issue for these women and appeared to be a strong determinant in relation to what they chose to wear. This can be related to existing literature in relation to the 'accepted' or 'ideal', promoted by advertising (Wolf, 1991) and the morality of such images (Kilbourne, 2000). Further, symbolic interactionist ideas of reality and how it is socially constructed in relation to how they perceive their and other women's bodies, influenced by images used in fashion advertising can be seen of relevance.

It was also discovered that Greek women attach fashion brands to socioeconomic status, believing that certain fashion brands are associated with certain status or professions. Key themes such as 'Brands as symbols of self and socioeconomic status' were displayed by a tendency for fashion brand advertising to not only create desire for a brand but to also cause a woman to compare herself to a model 'ideal' supports concerns over the ethical issues surrounding advertising practices (as discussed in Chapter 2). The ways in which self-image emerged as an issue in terms of the influence it has upon brand meaning and its role in terms of the symbolic attachment that the participants give to fashion brands may be linked to the initial conceptual thinking presented in Chapter 3.

5.3 Meaning

Meaning is the second of the three overarching pillars identified to accommodate the key research themes. 'Meaning' refers to the meanings that Greek women give to the term 'brand' and the meanings that foreign fashion brands have for them as consumers. These two key themes show how Greek women share an understanding of what is meant by the word 'brand' and what meanings they attach to fashion brands which were found to differ for different brands.

5.3.1 Understanding of the term 'brand' and its role in projection

This key theme was identified in both Phase One and Phase Two interview responses phases of interviews and it is discussed according to how it emerged in each phase. It was identified that the term 'brand' has a specific meaning for Greek women and that brands are used as a means of projection for them.

An observation from the interviews in Phase One was that the participants commonly understood and used the word 'brand' to refer to known, expensive or luxury brands like 'Louis Vuitton'. Past research has shown that luxury fashion brands have traditionally been used with the sole purpose of gaining prestige for the wearer, which is referred to as 'hedonic consumption' or 'status consumption' where that consumption involves *'the emotional aspects of products and the fantasies that products could arouse and/or fulfil'* (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982: 93). In particular, it has been argued by other researchers that wealthy individuals use fashion luxury or status brands in order to show that they do not belong to the same group or status as the less affluent (Han *et al*, 2010), i.e. brands are used to distinguish oneself in terms of social group identity or belonging.

The findings support the relevance of a symbolic interactionist approach to this research as the term 'brand' was commonly used and interpreted in a similar way as well as offering a display of how language is shared and is important in effective communication within the group. In some cases, the participants started to talk about certain brands in order to reinforce the view that the term brand is used to refer to expensive or luxury brands in relation to fashion:

'A girl wearing a 'Zara' coat is characterised differently to one wearing 'Gucci'
(Participant 8, Phase One).

Later, when asked what she considered women who wear brands and what type of people they were, the same participant replied:

‘there are two different levels e.g.: I might see a girl that is really flexible economically, so it is a given that she’ll have a budget for clothes and accessories, which will not set her back and she just picks them because they are of good quality and there is a second category which is girls struggling and going crazy to buy branded clothes just to show off its ‘X’ brand’.

In this response, the participant indicated a belief that branded items can be used in order to project something to others. The idea of something being branded was used to refer to certain brands, the well-known, famous, expensive and luxury ones. When asked if her attitude towards brands has changed with the economic crisis, Participant 9 (Phase One) responded, *‘definitely. I don’t spend money on them now’*. She clarified that she does not spend money on brands now, not on clothes. Therefore, it appears that brands were considered to be of a specific nature, namely designer and high-end labels as opposed to high street brands.

This belief was explicitly expressed by Participant 5 (Phase One), who stated that she would not discard an item because it was not a brand and would buy clothes if she liked them, even if they were not a brand *‘from the market or go to ‘Zara’*. This suggested that, to her, Zara was not considered a ‘brand’ as she sees it to be more affordable (given its reference alongside clothes from the market). There were other responses from other participants that suggested a similar mind-set regarding the use of the term ‘brand’ and how brands are used to project social status such as the following:

‘There is a large portion of consumers that will do anything to buy a ‘Louis Vuitton bag, which costs 800 Euros’. (Participant 1, Phase One)

‘A girl dresses in ‘Louis Vuitton’ to go to a club maybe to get noticed, not feel part of the masses’ (Participant 2, Phase One)

[Interviewer: ‘What in your opinion makes one choose a certain brand?’] *‘To wear them instead of something that is not branded* (Participant 19, Phase One).

When asked why people buy brands, Participant 13 (Phase One) responded, *'to show off'* and when asked why she thought people do that she commented, *'to project themselves'*.

What is of great interest is that in these responses, the fashion brand 'Louis Vuitton', in particular, is mentioned as being perceived as a brand choice made with the intention of standing out or being different from one's social group. Brand ownership, generally, was also identified to infer status or success. Participant 2 (Phase One), for example, remarked, *'Inside me, I know it doesn't mean anything but we all want to have a known brand in our wardrobe. Either have it or buy it'*.

This response suggests an internal psychological conflict within the individual as she admits to knowing that 'inside her' the brand or item does not mean anything but, on the other hand, she wants to have a known brand in her wardrobe. This voiced internal conflict, also clashes with the participant's previous response that a brand is bought only in order to *'get noticed'*. There were a number of responses in Phase One that lend support to the literature on how the symbolism of a brand acts as a social tool purely for social or psychological reasons rather than utility ones. The use of a fashion brand in order to project a particular image was a common theme throughout the responses:

[Interviewer: What in your opinion makes one chose a brand?]: *'They want to be seen by others'* (Participant 17, Phase One)

'Social projection' (Participant 19, Phase One).

Social interaction appeared to contribute to views on what a brand is and why it is worn by someone. Also, in the interview responses the importance of the symbolism of the brand was mentioned often, as opposed to the brand's utility or functional value. The responses also suggested that people understand others within their social group based on their (others') brand choices.

What is very interesting is that it appears that the symbolic meaning of fashion brands can act as a force powerful enough to create conflict between one's personal feelings and consumption patterns. In relation to motivations for wearing branded fashion items, participants stated:

'It has been placed in our minds. We'll look better, we'll be better' [through wearing branded items] (Participant 3, Phase One)

'Want to show something more than they are. Not always but most of the time'
(Participant 12, Phase One)

'If you see a Prada bag and fancy it you say good for her for having it but doesn't make the person carrying it any better' (Participant 15, Phase One).

The latter quote here again suggests that the wearing of fashion brands was perceived to act as a marker of the socioeconomic status of the wearer and it is indicative of an underlying theme across both Phases One and Two. A higher socioeconomic status tended to be perceived as positive and aspirational and, fashion brands were used as a tool to assess or 'read' the socioeconomic status of others.

This is of high relevance to this study. On the whole, a shared mentality and mind set was displayed regarding the use of the term 'brand' and also in terms of the meanings attached to specific fashion brands. For example, Participant 15 reported that if she sees another woman with a 'Prada' bag she will say *'good for her'*. This is interesting in the sense that it implies that a woman gets noticed for her handbag. The participant said that, although carrying a 'Prada' handbag does not make one a better person, good for that woman with it. An interesting question raised here is, why would a woman get noticed for carrying a branded handbag? It implies that a branded item has some meaning to others if they notice it in a positive way. The responses suggest that the participants not only shared similar views on the meaning of the term 'brand' but they also expressed similar sentiments or opinions about fashion brands and the associations of those brands with status, i.e. brands were observed to act as status symbols.

Even though participants clearly perceived a link between brands and socioeconomic status, they tended to contradict themselves by acknowledging that wearing brands does not always actually reflect status. This is commonly displayed in the responses of participants who refer to women who purchase brands without being able to afford them as *'pretentious'* (Participant 18, Phase One).

This emerged strongly in Part 4 of Phase One, when the respondents were asked, 'What are they (the women) trying to show by wearing brands?':

'Apart from liking something, economic status' (Participant 7, Phase One)

'How much money their husbands have' (Participant 6, Phase One)

‘That they are of some social class and there’s some social surface’ (Participant 9, Phase One)

‘That they are more beautiful and they have money’ (Participant 17, Phase One).

Other replies indicated the participants’ association between the brand worn and the status of the wearer:

‘Usually, when they have high economic status, they wear brands’; a brand definitely makes a boom’ [noise] (Participant 2, Phase One).

‘Usually, depending on the brand you wear, people see the economic class you may belong to’ (Participant 10, Phase One).

These responses not only relate to the aim of the research but also to the findings of Leigh and Gabel (1992), Debicka (2000), and Jamal and Goode (2001) concerning the symbolic rather than utilitarian reasons for purchasing goods as well as the self-expression and fulfilment of symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998) and *‘social meaning’* of brands (Levy, 1959). There are other examples where the participants associated the word ‘brand’ with something specific rather than generic and, as mentioned in the previous section, attached the term to known, expensive fashion brands (as opposed to high street fashion brands). This is displayed in the responses to Part 3 of the Phase One interviews when the participants were asked, ‘Do you purchase brands?’:

‘Almost always’ (Participant 1, Phase One)

‘I do’ (Participant 2, Phase One)

‘Occasionally’ (Participant 5, Phase One)

‘So and so’ (Participant 6, Phase One)

‘Sometimes’ (Participant 7, Phase One)

'Yes. Known ones, yes' (Participant 8, Phase One).

In the next part of the interview, there was a chance for the respondents to show what they understood the term 'brand' to mean. A similar mind-set was displayed in the responses when asked what type of people they thought wear brands:

'People who have the economic basis to pull off these purchases' (Participant 1, Phase One).

'Usually they have a certain economic status' (Participant 2, Phase One).

'Different categories, maybe have money' (Participant 5, Phase One).

'Either people with money to spend on buying expensive things or they are people that don't have money and use their credit cards in order to purchase beautiful and expensive clothes' (Participant 6, Phase One).

These responses reveal, once again, how Greek women tended to connect the term 'brand' with expensive or luxury fashion brands. There appeared to be a common belief that you need to have money to buy or dress in fashion brands.

Even though there was a small variation in the responses, only a couple of the 20 Phase One participants asked the interviewer to clarify what was meant by a 'brand'. On the whole, the meaning of the term was assumed by participants in a very similar way without them seeking any explanation. This was interesting as the previous questions in Phase One concerning fashion magazines had provided the participants with no reference to specific brands. Shared meaning appeared to exist amongst the group in relation to 'brand' outside of the interview context. It appeared from participant responses that 'fashion' was linked to expensive, high-end fashion brands rather than high street fashion brands. This was also observed in Phase Two when brands were discussed with a different sample of women to those interviewed in Phase One.

Another example of shared meaning in terms of language used amongst the women related to the term 'style'. This was a word that was mentioned frequently but unequivocally, to refer to their personal style that they wished to project, rather than their fashion or dress style. It is necessary to clarify at this point that (personal) style is a term which features in Greek in the interview transcripts but, when translated into

English, even though the context used is as close as possible, it may still create the view that ‘style’ refers to dress style rather than how it was originally mentioned (as personal style).

5.3.2 Shared brand symbolism and brand copies

As in Phase One, the Phase Two interview responses also suggested that Greek women attach meanings and symbolism to fashion brands since, in many cases, it was believed that the brand itself is what sells and not the actual product or fashion item:

‘The person who’s a big show off will not buy the hoop [‘Louis Vuitton’ key ring] if it hasn’t got ‘Louis Vuitton’ on it or if it isn’t visible (Participant 9, Phase Two).

‘If there was no label on the bag they would never buy it’ (Participant 10, Phase Two).

These views can again be linked to the idea of brands being used to reflect status and the theories of brands being used as social tools (Grubb & Gathwoh, 1967) or to serve symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998) as well as to studies of the hedonic consumption of luxury or status goods. Furthermore, the responses about fashion brand handbags, in particular, show that there is a shared understanding that the visibility of the brand plays a role in how someone who is carrying or wearing a branded item is socially regarded. This can again be associated with the Phase One responses on brands as markers of status and also with other responses in Phase Two, notably in relation to brands as tools for projection.

The most apparent display of a shared understanding of brand meaning and symbolism was observable amongst Phase Two participants when the participants expressed their views on copied or replica fashion brands. The issue of brand copies was first identified in Phase One in reference to the perceived status of brand consumers and it was probed by the researcher in Phase Two when participants talked about their relationships with fashion brands. The participants appeared to hold very strong views on what brand copies represent to them. Fake brands were commonly referred to in negative terms and a negative attitude towards those wearing them was expressed.

Brand copies were not accepted as being simply related to the projection of style, even when the fake brands might be highly similar to or indiscernible from the original brand item in terms of visual appearance or design.

In the past, it was argued that counterfeit items can drive away ‘genuine’ item consumers as they corrode the value of the branded item (Commuri, 2009) and that the less affluent consumer ‘*in need of status*’ used a copy or counterfeit item in order to ‘*emulate those they recognise as wealthy*’ (Han *et al*, 2010: 15). This is a valid reason for understanding why brand copies in this study were perceived to be related to lower status and taste and were not seen as acceptable to wear even though a woman wearing a brand copy may actually belong to the socioeconomic group who they believe wears the original brand (i.e., the wearer may not be wearing brand copies to be socially aspirational).

It may be observed that, for the participants, the wearing of fake brands was partly objected to because it complicated or confused the ‘reading’ of social status. The participants held some very strong views about people who wear fake fashion brands. They stated that they perceive those who wear brand copies to be ‘fake’ in terms of their personality or even an ‘impostor’. It was believed that wearing fake brands creates misconceptions about- or projects an inauthentic image of a wearer’s socioeconomic status. This finding can be associated with Eisend and Schuchert-Guler’s (2006) view that the wearer of a brand copy is an individual who is trying to show that he or she can afford the supposed brand they are wearing and that they belong to a social group which they do not belong to in reality.

It should be noted at this point that the participants appeared to hold complex views on the relationship between fashion style and brands throughout the interviews in both Phase One and Phase Two. They expressed the view that an individual does not need to spend a lot of money to dress smartly or even that they themselves do not care about wearing brands and do not spent a lot of money on clothes. However, they stated that they would not buy a replica brand as it is fake and they would not want to anyone to know that they did not have the original brand. Even though they stated that one does not need a lot of money to dress nicely, they still distinguished fashion brands as ‘good’ clothes and indicated that they were something they chose to wear on special occasions.

Objections towards brand copies were not only voiced in terms of the brand’s quality but also in terms of the act of wearing the brands. Since brands are used as a way for individuals to categorize themselves within a society (Elliot & Wattanasuwan,

1998), wearing copies of brands was recognised to be an 'illegitimate' way to place oneself in a specific social category.

In Phase One, the issue of brand copies emerged when the participants were asked about their views on women who wear brands. After responding to this question, they were asked: 'As far as these brands go, original or copies?'. The participants considered fake brands to be lacking in quality but also to be more deeply associated with being or acting 'fake'. It seems that wearing copies, for this group, represented a pretentious attitude and an individual's attempt to appear to be something that they are not. This may be recognised to link to the attachment of meanings to people and objects. The participants explained why they perceived brand copies to be negative:

'Because I believe if you want a brand it's best to get the brand and spend some money. Otherwise, don't and get something else that looks like it or something that is similar to the style' (Participant 1, Phase One);

'If you want to have something, have an original and not a copy. Usually, it's obvious it's a copy and in a bad way. Secondly is what I said before why would I buy a copy of a bag or belt? To show that I'm wearing it? So to show that I'm wearing what everyone wants to wear again it's a matter of showing off and in a bad way 'cause you can tell it's fake usually'. (Participant 2, Phase One);

'I don't like copies. I don't mind if the clothes are cheap, but always had this thing and I wouldn't buy a copy at market. I don't like the clothes to be copies' (Participant 3, Phase One);

'It is like kidding yourself. It is like wanting to have something of quality, known, good, which all these go together, and have something which just looks like it' (Participant 6, Phase One).

The last response shows that the participant appears to perceive a genuine brand in positive terms and believes a brand copy to be unable to live up to the associations that she mentions, 'quality', 'known' and 'good'. The participant was asked to elaborate on whether it would bother her if someone realised and told her that she was wearing a brand copy or if it would bother her to buy a brand copy. She replied: *'It would bother*

me if they told me. Of course, if I had bought it, I would be aware of it, but still I would mind.'

This may be seen as a clear example of how projection was an important issue for participants in terms of interacting with others. Participant 6 appeared to be more bothered about others in her social group knowing that she is wearing a copy rather than the copy itself. The fact that others might be able to tell would make her uneasy. This indicates how social interaction is important for the self and how one comes to understand oneself through interaction with others. This is displayed more clearly in the participant's her next response when asked if it would bother her if someone knew she was not wearing something authentic. She replied: *'Yes it would and that's why I avoid doing so'* (Participant 6, Phase One).

Another example of projection was also provided in the following response where, although the participant says that a brand copy might not visually appear to be a replica, her knowing that it is fake would be an issue for her:

'When you wear something that you want to be a brand, it is good to buy one that is. If it is a copy it will show'... visually and ...ok...in my mind. Even if it doesn't show I will know it's a copy' (Participant 7, Phase Two).

The issue at this point for the participant was not the copy itself but what it represented in her mind, something quite negative. It is more of an issue that the item is a copy in terms of what that represents than its quality or make. This also could be an issue emanating from her environment and having a certain view as a result of interaction with her social group and might reflect how her own beliefs might have been shaped by others. When asked to elaborate on why a brand copy would bother her so much, another respondent (Participant 9, Phase Two) replied:

'Cause I don't like fake things. You either have the money to buy it or you don't. End of it'.

[Interviewer: 'So buying a copy- what do you think that states?']: *'Trying to show people something I'm not. Carrying a 'Louis Vuitton' that is a replica, because I want to so that I have one.*

[Interviewer: 'So you think it's a matter of 'showing' (off) the brands?']: *Yes of course.*

[Interviewer: 'And those buying copies do so to show off?']: *'Yes, because there is a huge difference as far as brands go. It's a different thing to shout out, have it written everywhere it's 'Dsquared', and another thing to have it written nowhere, do you understand? If a woman comes to buy a dress that is 'Dsquared', which costs 800 Euro's, I know 'cause I have staged it' [in the shop window as part of her work].*

Similarly, Participant 10 (Phase Two) remarked:

'If I decide to buy something, for example: 'Louis Vuitton', I'll buy the original yes, I'll spend half my salary on it but, if not, I'm not going to buy something fake!, I don't want to show off something that isn't authentic'.

There are some interesting issues around authenticity and the self here. The frequent use of the phrase 'show off' suggests an intentional attempt to display status and, most importantly, implies a conscious process of self-projection. The participants in this study repeatedly expressed a view that Greek women use fashion brands to try to show what they are or where they belong primarily in terms of socioeconomic status. This notion of 'showing off' can be again linked to Phase One responses and the common term *'psonio'* used by the participants to refer to those women (always others, never themselves) who wear brands. Participant 10 in Phase Two, for example, reported that she would prefer to spend half her salary to buy a genuine brand rather than a cheaper brand copy. 'Showing off' (in terms of projection) did emerge as a pertinent issue in Greek female fashion brand consumption, although the participants often denied that they personally had any desire to 'show off'. However, for many of the Phase One and Phase Two participants it became apparent that their own consumption of fashion brands and their views towards fashion brands were linked to beliefs that fashion brands are able to make a statement and a genuine brand (as opposed to a brand copy) is important in terms of projecting status. The motivation for this projection appeared to centre on the sole purpose of showing others what they have. Thus, it did actually appear that they themselves engaged in this 'showing off' behaviour.

Analysing the Phase One and Phase Two responses, two main reactions to the issue of brand copies were notable. Firstly, there was a belief that a brand copy would be of inferior quality to a genuine brand. The second, more common, reaction concerned the symbolism of the original brand and its ability to be used as a tool to

'show off' to other people. The participants expressed the view that wearing copies is like trying to appear to be something that you are not and therefore, that is why they prefer originals. What is surprising is that participants do not realise that they themselves are doing the exact same thing as they are criticising in others. They did not appear to realise (or at least did not acknowledge) that, if they spend half their salary on a handbag, it means that they are trying to appear to be something they are not since the item is not truly 'affordable' to them. Since they expressed that genuine brands are a display of socioeconomic status, this behaviour suggests that they are (perhaps unconsciously) acting in a similar manner to those individuals that they criticise as being 'fake' (i.e., by trying to appear to be something that they are not).

When Participant 10 (Phase Two), for example, was challenged about this, she responded 'yes', admitting that she is attempting to appear to be something that she is not and, continued, *'But the person seeing you doesn't know it that you have spent half your salary'*. This suggests that the participants are more interested in how they appear to others rather than being true to their personal values expressed earlier (i.e., that being a fake is negative). Participant 6 (Phase Two), at this point in her interview offered a good example of how the symbolic meaning attached to a brand copy is of great importance and just how negatively a brand copy is perceived. She suggested that she is more worried about what those around her would say rather than about the brand copy itself, *'It would bother me if they told me'*.

5.3.3 A conclusion of 'meaning'

To conclude, brand symbolism was found to be important to Greek women when it comes to wearing fashion brands. This was illustrated through: the association of a named brand with a certain meaning or symbolism; brands in general being linked to the projection of higher socioeconomic status; and brand copies being perceived to frustrate the meaning of brands.

The participants appeared to have a common understanding of the term 'brand' to infer an expensive, known fashion brand. Brand copies were also an issue which participants displayed a have a shared view, seen as something 'fake' which also characterised the wearer.

Bhat and Reddy (1998) offer a relevant view in relation to this when they discuss consumers who purchase for both functional and symbolic reasons and the theory on 'social tools' by Grubb and Gathwohl (1967) may also be linked to the findings of this study. The theme of brand symbolism in relation to brand copies was the most apparent

link to symbolic interactionism and the idea of the attachment of meaning to brands. The social processes surrounding reported shared beliefs that genuine brands may be used to project something that brand copies cannot and the idea that the practice or behaviour of consuming fake brands might be seen to symbolise an individual's fake behaviour *per se* (and appeared to result in the labelling of as an individual as 'fake') were particularly interesting. They lend support to the relevance of social belief systems and symbolic interactionism (Chapter 3).

5.4 Interaction

The third and final overarching pillar under which the key research themes were recognised to sit was social interaction. In the words of Blumer (1969: 282):

‘The transformation of taste, of collective taste, results without question from the diversity of experience that occurs in social interaction in a complex moving world. It leads, in turn, to an unwitting groping for suitable forms of expression, in an effort to move in a direction which is consonant with the movement of modern life in general’.

It is proposed that it is through interaction with others, with the stimulus (print images in advertisements) and with fashion brands that Greek women come to share their viewpoints. The discussion of the research findings in relation to social interaction includes the following key themes which were identified within the data analysis process:

- shared viewpoints;
- advertising as a means of brand communication and its influences;
- shared brand meaning, categorisation and coding;
- style influences.

5.4.1 Shared viewpoints

The responses of the participants in the Phase One interviews indicated the existence of shared viewpoints relating to the issue of fashion brands. This suggested a shared ‘understanding’ or ‘reality’ in terms of fashion brands and their worth. It was observed that there appears to be a general mind-set and mentality shared by the participants concerning fashion brands in general and their wearers. The common or

salient themes and patterns will now become our focus. The frequency with which the responses were offered in similar, identical or synonymous terms was what made the results interesting in terms of the amount of information gathered in order to form themes and patterns of common thinking amongst the Greek women under study. The results not only displayed the same type of response repeatedly but, as acknowledged in Chapter 4, no new information was offered after a certain number of interviews.

The initial purpose of the study was not to gather detailed information about specific foreign fashion brands but, instead, to discover how brands were perceived by Greek women. Through the Phase One and Phase Two interviews, it became apparent that the participants did appear to hold a particular attitude and mentality towards fashion brands. The participants seemed to possess a shared interpretation system through which they 'filter' fashion brands. This was, for example, clearly illustrated in the responses to Part 5 of the Phase One interviews when descriptions of the kind of woman participants thought might wear each of twenty named foreign fashion brands were elicited (see Table 5.2 for examples).

Table 5.2: Shared descriptors of specific fashion brand wearers (Part 5, Phase One)

Brand	Descriptors of women wearing brand (shared by)
'Gucci'	'Elegant' (Participants 3; 5) 'Stylish' (Participants 4; 6)
'Miss Sixty'	'Young women/ girls' (Participants 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8, 11, 14, 17; 18; 19; 20)
'Armani'	'Classic' (Participants 1; 2) 'Dynamic' (Participants 3; 4) 'Elegant' (Participants 5; 6; 8)

For some brands, namely 'Gucci', 'Miss Sixty' and 'Armani' (highlighted in Table 5.2), high levels of consensus were noted in terms of the descriptors offered. This not only suggests strength of brand association and brand meaning to exist for those brands but it also indicates the presence of some commonly shared thinking and commonly shared language amongst participants.

What was most interesting in the way the Greek women described the kind of woman they thought might wear each fashion brand was that, even if they used different

terms to describe the brands or the women wearing them, in general, there was a high consensus in terms of the positive or negative adjectives used. On the whole, the fashion brands and their wearers were perceived in a similar manner and most importantly, it was visible that the participants had a specific mind-set regarding these twenty foreign fashion brands.

The media was discovered to have a strong influence on the participants even though they themselves saw it as having a general influence only, rather than admitting or realising quite the extent to which it affected them. This may be because either the participants are affected on a subconscious level and do not realise they belong to the group of women whom they criticise for being driven by the media and/or fashion, or because they are unwilling to admit to that they belong to this group whom they criticise and from whom they try to distance themselves. This is illustrated in Participant 1's responses to questions about her own relationship with fashion magazines in Phase One:

[Interviewer: 'Have you ever purchased something you have seen in a fashion magazine?']: *'Yes'*

[Interviewer: 'Do you admire the branded items you see in magazines?']: *'Not really'*

[Interviewer: 'Do you feel branded clothing make others see **you** in a different way? How?']: *'Yes, basically it's the mentality. They see you more as 'okay' - she's wearing a brand'.*

Another example is Participant 12 (Phase One). When asked if she thinks that wearing brands enhances someone's social life, she replied *'no'* but when asked to elaborate if, for her, this means that wearing brands has an influence on one's image in terms of the perceptions of others, she commented, *'it's a plus'*. Later in the interview, when asked if she thinks foreign fashion brands are expensive by Greek standards, she replied that she thought they were but she thought that Greek women still buy them, *'cause we are psonares'*.

All of the findings regarding the participants' relationship to fashion magazines (Phase One) were related to social factors and social interaction. These findings make a further contribution to the research gaps regarding female Greek consumers and their perceptions of fashion brands, as will be discussed further in the next section (on Advertising as a means of brand communication and its influences).

The researcher was most interested in two basic ideas of symbolic interactionism: language (in terms of the words and terms used to describe fashion brands); and social interaction (with respect to shared meanings in order to identify whether there exists a socially-shared mind-set). With respect to these ideas, the participants were found to attach meanings to international fashion brand advertisements and they used the same language to do so, often referring to fashion brands using specific vocabulary. This became more apparent when the participants were asked what they meant by terms such as ‘good’ or ‘nice’, and they stated that they used these words to refer to brands in the same or similar contexts. It suggested that an interpretation process takes place and, more importantly, how, during this process, individuals interpret brands in the same way, displaying commonly shared attitudes. For example, this was displayed through the frequent use of the term ‘*psonio*’ or ‘*psonares*’ (a comparative, plural, term of *psonio*), a frequent slang term used in everyday Greek language in a negative context to describe someone as ‘showing off’ in an arrogant sense.

In Phase One, Part 5, when asked what type of woman wears the fashion brand ‘Louis Vuitton’, Participant 3, for example, replied: *‘here I could say ‘psonares’ (stuck-up, show-offs)*. Participants 6 and 7 in Phase Two also provided examples of how Greek women use this term. When asked about her views on women who wear branded items in general, Participant 6 replied: *they haven’t discovered more important things in life’*. When asked if she would refer to them as ‘*psonia*’, she responded: *‘some surely are’*. Participant 7 also stated that she thought that women who *‘only wear brands and refuse to wear anything else ‘cause [they think] it is inferior’ are ‘psonia’*. Participant 17 (Phase One) also expressed the view that she would refer to women wearing branded items as ‘*psonares*’.

The use of common language in the responses of participants in Phases One and Two supports the idea that social interaction through language, as a form of communication, is responsible for creating definitions and an understanding of one-self, others and objects. This is something that became clear through the participants’ descriptions which they gave to fashion brands and the words which they attached to those brands.

The similarities between the participants’ views expressed in the 20 semi-structured interviews in Phase One were very clear and appeared to be related to views that the participants held towards other individuals wearing fashion brands. The respondents often positioned themselves as ‘outsiders’, extracting themselves from their

social group and assumed a position of observation, commenting on, even criticising, other women for wearing fashion brands. This indicated that they did not consider themselves as examples of such individuals wearing fashion brands, unless they were asked to talk about their experiences specifically. In simple terms, the participants distanced themselves from their social group even though, when probed, they often displayed similar personal viewpoints towards fashion brands as the viewpoints that they reported other women to hold. This became a very interesting aspect of the research, as the respondents repeatedly stated that people wear brands *'just to show off'* (Participant 3, Phase One).

It has been argued in the past that socially-shared patterns and symbolisms of fashion brands exist (Elliot and Leonard, 2004) and that the ownership of 'fashionable' items fulfils social needs (Waide, 1987). Both of these arguments appear to be relevant to the findings of the present study. Greek women were labelled in a specific way when wearing 'X' fashion brand but the participants also labelled and categorised fashion brands themselves (as fashion brand consumers). The intentions behind individuals wearing fashion brands and how fashion brands can act as social tool may be considered in the light of the participants' responses.

In this study it was observed that the participants declared that this was done on a conscious level rather than unconsciously. Greek women, including the participants themselves, were observed to wear 'X' fashion brand in order to project or show something to others intentionally and they also reported that they make conscious choices when choosing how to dress (often relating to their self-images).

Brands were also found to act as symbols and provide clues about the socioeconomic status of their wearers as the participants associated fashion brands with wealth. This can be associated to Elliot and Leonard's (2004) finding that in Britain children hold strong views and stereotypes about the type of individuals who wear brands. In the present study, it was found that the participants held similar perceptions about women who wear fashion brands. Examples are displayed in the following responses:

'It is common, when they have the economic status, to wear brands' (Participant 2, Phase One)

'The higher (classes, wear them because) it is compulsory' (Participant 5, Phase One)

[‘What are they trying to say by wearing brands’?] *‘Apart from liking something, economic status’* (Participant 7, Phase One).

‘Depending on the brand you wear, people look at the economic level to which you may belong’ (Participant 10, Phase One).

5.4.2 Advertising as a means of brand communication and its influences on women

This section reflects on how the study findings inform advertising as a means of brand communication and its apparent influences on the participants. Since this was a theme which was explored in both Phase One and Two, the findings will be discussed separately for each phase. The topic area elicited a huge amount of information in each phase. It is discussed under the pillar of 'interaction' as the responses are interpreted in relation to the interaction between the participants and advertising.

Phase One responses

The participants held strong views about the media and its influence upon people. Past research suggests that advertising has negative effects on the psychological well-being of the consumer (Andersen & Paas, 2014) due to the models used. Fashion advertising, in particular, has been criticised, for its depiction of women and its contribution to gender stereotyping (Hawkins & Hanes, 2001). Further, it has been criticised for depicting ageing and size in a specific way, although it has been acknowledged that if the influence of advertising was not acknowledged to be impressive then brands would stop being advertised (Wolf, 1991). This suggests that advertising is recognised to deliberately promote extreme effects of products (sometimes challenged to be unrealistic) in order to promote sales and to 'sell the dream'. Through this, it is argued that consumers purchase 'hope' rather solely the functional values of an item.

The participants in this study described the effects of media advertising as: *‘influencing’* (Participant 9, Phase One) and *‘responsible for someone choosing brands’* (Participant 10, Phase One). They stated that the models were used in fashion brand advertisements to influence readers by, *‘making you long to have what they are wearing’* (Participant 12, Phase One) or even to promote a lifestyle with *‘lots of money, social life, expensive cars, expensive clothes’* (Participant 13, Phase One).

What is of interest is that, even though the participants, in the course of being interviewed, acknowledged the negative effects of advertising, at the same time, they agreed that fashion and brands are important to Greek women (even though none of them admitted being themselves 'hooked up' or keen on fashion brands). Rather, they referred to the Greek women as being '*psonares*' (big show-offs) through wearing fashion brands, again displaying a retraction to their own social group. Even though the participants belonged to Greek society themselves, they always spoke as 'outsiders' about other Greek women. Even so, they did reveal that fashion is a part of their own lives in some form based on the frequency with which they purchased fashion brands or read fashion magazines (Participants 1 and 2, Phase One) or even held the view that brands are chosen as a result of '*advertising and brainwashing*' (Participant 3, Phase One).

It was commonly stated that the models used to promote clothes were chosen for their specific body shapes:

'Clothes look better on a thin body' (Participant 4).

'It has been established that the good sense is the very thin' (Participant 5).

'A clothing item, the more minion the dimensions [of the item] you'll see it in, the more beautiful it is' (Participant 8).

[Models are] '*perfect in order to attract customers*' (Participant 11).

Negative views of the models used in advertising were also expressed, such as, '*the anorexic type prevails*' (Participant 1) and the participants referred to the media as manipulative through the use of negative terms such as '*brainwashing*' (Participant 3). They support the view that a thin body is better for dressing up and appear to share a view promoted by the fashion industry in relation to certain body shapes representing clothes more effectively. Through their views it might be observed that the participants perhaps themselves bought into 'the beauty myth' themselves (Wolf, 1991):

'It would be more [important] if I were a few kilograms lighter' (Participant 6).

'A garment looks better on them [models]' (Participant 10).

There exists an extensive body of literature on the negative effects of the media and the promotion of thin bodies as the 'ideal' image (Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008; Wolf, 1991; Borland and Akram, 2007). The findings seem to support such literature although it must be noted that this was not a factor initially considered as a point of interest to the study but rather a key finding that emerged from the interviews. Even so, it cannot be ignored as not only was it an issue which appeared to be important to the Greek women but also a factor that suggested a socially shared understanding of fashion magazines and weight 'norms'. Therefore, it was vital to include this information as a finding not only because of the high consensus of socially shared views, but also because it played an important role in Phase Two responses as well.

It was visible from the Phase Two interview responses also, that weight determines at least most of the participants' choices with regard to clothes. Furthermore, the participants refer to Greek culture and society as containing people obsessed with brands and that brands are an important part of a Greek woman's life but in all cases not one participant admitted that this obsession applied to her. This attitude was observed throughout the interviews regarding how the participants spoke of Greek women and how they are very much involved in and in favour of fashion but also how the participants themselves differentiated themselves from this mentality, claiming that fashion did not play such an important part in their lives. Even so, it was common and highly noticeable that the participants contradicted themselves regarding the importance of brands in their life, showing how they held some of the very attitudes that they criticised in other women.

Participant 3 (Phase One), when asked what she thought about women who wear brands and what kind of people they were, laughed and called them '*psonares*' (big show-offs). However, she also stated that as a first impression in a professional environment, wearing brands does help one to succeed as they make a good first impression in social surroundings. Also, even though Participant 3 mentions that she perceives brands negatively, when asked to talk about 'Burberry' in Part 5 of Phase One, she smiled, softened her voice, and referred to it as her 'favourite'. Having a favourite brand suggests that she is able to distinguish between them, has an opinion of them and has experience of brands. Moreover, in order to have a favourite brand it may be argued that she would need to have knowledge of other fashion brands. When asked about the 'Armani' brand, she stated that, when 'Armani' is worn, others say '*oh, she's wearing Armani!*' and that emphasis is paid to it. The same participant, despite claiming

not to have '*any particular view*' of brands, spoke positively about a number of brands like 'Dior': '*classic*', 'Valentino' and 'Versace': '*good quality*', 'YSL': '*chic*'.

The participants reported that they choose clothes by purchasing items that suit them, even though they fail to define the criteria that they use in order to decide what suits them. There is no indication of to whom, what or how they compare themselves in order to decide what looks good on them and what does not. This is a very interesting point which was investigated further in Phase two.

Phase Two

As in Phase One, the Phase Two interview responses offered a rich amount of information about the extent to which fashion magazine advertising was perceived to affects readers or not, and, if so, in what ways. Although Phase One offered some insight into the participants' views on the media and fashion magazines, a deeper understanding of how fashion brands are 'read' (in line with research objective 3 of the study) was sought by the researcher. Part B of the Phase Two interviews used a different method for exploring the topic area, using anonymised fashion brand magazine advertisements as prompts (as explained in Chapter 4). The consequences of advertising influencing in brand awareness were indicated through the participants' responses. The first advertisement shown to the participants was for the fashion brand 'Monsoon' (Figure 5.3).

(Figure 5.3: Advert for Monsoon dress used in Part B of the Phase Two interviews, advert removed for copyright reasons)

The advertisement was described by participants as:

'Autumny' (Participants 1 and 7);

'Nothing' and *indifferent* (Participant 3);

'Melancholic' (Participant 4);

'The model looks angry' (Participant 6);

'Nothing that will make you go 'wow!' (Participant 10);

'Neutral' (Participant 8).

There was a lack of overall consensus in the terms used to describe the advertisement but there was an observed level of agreement in terms of the connotations. In general, the advertisement failed to elicit positive comments on the whole, although the participants were not negative about the clothes and accessories of the brand when they were asked to talk about the product. There was only one exception to this. Participant 9 spoke in positive terms about the advertisement, saying that this advertisement made her feel, *'romantic'*. She liked the model's hair colour and the advert *'as a whole'*. It should be noted that she worked in the fashion industry, dressing shop windows so this might have acted as an influence on why her perspective might have been untypical of the other respondents.

When the brand was revealed, it was discovered that, overall, the participants felt that there was a mismatch between the advertisement and their experiences of the fashion brand. For example:

'In my mind, I had it less retro (the brand)'; 'I expected the whole style to be less classic' (Participant 2).

'As far as clothes go, the ones I have seen are a totally different style' [from the advertisement] (Participant 4).

'The advert as a whole isn't something that will catch your eye and you will buy it' (Participant 5).

There appeared to be a lack of understanding about the brand that was being advertised. There were no guesses about what brand it could be, even from those who knew and have shopped at 'Monsoon' in the past. This may make a major contribution to practitioners as it is an issue concerning the level of effectiveness of the communication between brands and consumers. From the participants' responses, it seems that the advert did not suit the company for this target group. Apart from the fact that there was confusion about what was being advertised, the guesses about which brand it might belong to varied in terms of both and price range but there was agreement about the type of woman that the advertisement was aimed at and the fashion style that was presented.

The participants reported that from the advertisement alone they viewed the 'Monsoon' brand as suitable for women around 40 years of age and as a brand that offered a more conservative style:

'In general, the concept of this company is simple. It refers, I think, to a different audience and not Greek. Clearly to a British audience. Different tastes, other criteria, they are more conservative' (Participant 5).

'Up to 40' [year-old women] (Participant 6).

However, participants who had experience of the brand were surprised to see that it was 'Monsoon' being advertised:

'No relevance'

[Interviewer: 'Do you know the brand?']: *Yes and I like the clothes but this specific ad....*

[Interviewer: 'Have you shopped there?']:

'No but from adverts and online sites, but this I wouldn't go to shop if I saw this being advertised.' 'This brings out a madam-granny look, a young girl wouldn't buy this but neither would my Mum because of the colour. She wouldn't go to see something red, dotted with a bow in front; it doesn't capture the older style either' (Participant 8).

[Interviewer: 'Are you surprised it is this brand?']: *'Yes'*

[Interviewer: 'Why?']: *'Cause as far as the clothes go, the ones I've seen are a totally different style. It looks a totally different style from Monsoon' (Participant 4).*

Even Participant 10, who liked the advert and thought it went with the brand, also believed that:

'They could have used more vivid colours and a different style than the established, they are unusual. The style could have used a little more attractive ad, something more playful, not so....she could have been more herself, someone else could have been with her, in the picture and more movement. The way she stands doesn't catch your eye that much.'

Again, shared views are expressed. The participants saw the advertisement negatively in most cases and for similar reasons (the setting and the style of the fashion item that is highlighted). There seems to be faulty or ineffective communication between the brand and the consumer, or at least what is being communicated to this group is most commonly a 'gloomy' feeling and it is not obvious what the advertisement represents. It was seen as an inappropriate way to advertise the brand in question and the participants suggested that more colours were needed to appeal to them as Greek women:

'I have it in my mind as colourful, happy, in general all their accessories and clothes are happier. The ad brings out to me dullness' (Participant 4);

'Don't think it is a brand for the Greek audience', 'the colours are not bright' (Participant 5);

'I don't think it is for the Greek audience', I wouldn't go to shop if I saw this advert' (Participant 8).

This implies that, when an advertisement fails to match the fashion brand image, the participants are unlikely to purchase the item and may also be confused about what is actually being advertised.

For advertisement 2 (Figure 5.4) once again shared perceptions were observed. It must be noted that the brand 'Miss Sixty', to which the advertisement relates, received high levels of positive feedback as a fashion brand in the Part 5 of the Phase One interviews when the participants were asked to talk about a list of 20 fashion brands.

(Figure 5.4: Advert for Miss Sixty dress used in Part B of the Phase Two interviews, advert removed for copyright reasons)

It is noteworthy that in Phase Two the reactions to the 'Miss Sixty' advertisement were that it was:

'Youthful' (Participant, 1, 2 and 3);

'for young girls' (Participant 1);

'happy, euphoria' (Participant 3);

'makes an impression, attracts the eye', lively concept' (Participant 5).

Overall, the advertisement provoked high levels of positive feedback from the participants. Further, it was seen that the words used to talk about the advertisement were the same as those used to describe the brand in Phase One. This suggests that the specific fashion brand is well known and the way that it is communicated to the consumer via the print media was effective for the participants as consumers. The participants displayed a shared idea of what item was being advertised, guessing that it was the boots, mainly because of their position within the photograph. Participant 9, who works as a window dresser, explained why she thought that boots were being advertised:

'the boots 'cause it is showing a lot of the leg, and usually when they are showing a lot of the leg they advertise boots, or the whole brand, an image of the brand'.

It must be stressed at this point that when the brand was revealed to the participants, their views of the brand and the advertisement were both positive.

Advertisement 3 for 'UGG' boots, presented earlier in Figure 5.2, also raises some very interesting issues in relation to shared viewpoints around fashion brand advertising. What is different in this case compared to the previous two advertisements is that even when they did not know what was being advertised the participants appeared to have knowledge about the brand even if though could not remember the name:

'Can't remember what it's called, one making winter boots, can't remember its name ucg? Usg? Possibly.... doesn't refer me to a brand just from the boots, which are a like a style that a company had launched anyway, now that they are the same exactly...now that I see them' (Participant 2).

The participants often failed to associate the advert with the correct brand name, even when they were familiar with the brand as actual consumers. There seems to be a failure in the communication process between the advert and the consumer regarding brand attachment to the advertisement. This communication is related to the messages

that may be unclear or the image not being representative of the brand, so it was difficult for participants to identify the brand. It indicates the importance of brand name recognition and brand style recognition (even where people get the name wrong), regardless of the marketing and promotion measures used to sell it to consumers.

The participants often found it difficult, if not impossible, to tell whether the item being advertised was cheap or expensive, quite often stating it could be anything from very cheap to quite expensive. When asked to guess the brand, the participants often failed. The advertisement hinted at the price rather than the product. Only when they saw the brand could they give an opinion on its price range. This shows that the items themselves did not mean anything to the participants in terms of symbolism but only when they know the brand could they attempt to attach a price to the item. Furthermore, the participants tended to have shared views regarding prices. Therefore, the advertisement alone did not effectively provide the consumer with brand information. This suggests that brand the advertisements are 'read' in conjunction with participant processing of brand name, brand symbolism and meaning, linked to consumer experience (providing clues about price). These factors appear to serve different purposes which work together in brand processing and the creation of brand perceptions that influence brand communication effectiveness in terms of consumption choice.

The case of advert 4, for 'Replay' jeans (Figure 5.1), was another example where the brand advertised was mistaken for or confused with other brands. The participants commonly stated that they thought that it was an advert for 'Diesel'. Every participant replied instinctively with this brand name as soon as they saw the advert, even before being asked. The response was almost a reflex, which shows that there must be something they identify and associate with that brand (Diesel) and the image communicated in the advertisement. When the brand was revealed, even though they remarked that all of the brands associated with jeans are the same, it was not apparent or explained why their immediate response on seeing the advertisement was to say 'Diesel'. It does raise the issue of brand differentiation and how for some fashion items brands may be difficult to distinguish between.

Phase One and Two responses in relation to key research questions

In Chapter 3 some key research questions were identified for exploration (in line with the third overall research objective of the study):

- How do Greek women 'read' foreign fashion brands?
- What are the meanings, views and opinions of foreign fashion brands held by Greek women as a result of how they 'read' the brands?
- What are the influences affecting Greek women in relation to their views, meanings and opinions of foreign fashion brands?
- What is the overall general mentality or mentalities of Greek women towards foreign fashion brands which follows the attachment of meanings

The results from Phases One and Two displayed patterns and similarities in the participants' views occurring when exploring reactions to brand advertising in Phase Two as, in Phase one. Similar positive and negative views were held concerning advertisements and brands. What was of particular interest was the extent to which the advertisements were commonly considered to be positive or negative. Even though the participants claimed that they did not particularly purchase brands, they seemed to have exceptionally high brand awareness. Brands that were known to them were also considered to be of greater quality than unknown brands: 'A great percentage of known (brands) *have quality*' (Participant 6, Phase Two). If they saw a brand which was unfamiliar, they assumed it to be of poor quality.

The way in which fashion brands were observed to be 'read' was interesting. Responses from Phase One and Phase Two collectively indicated that the views that participants held of wearers of fashion brands and the usage of brands for projection of status, in particular, appeared to influence the interpretation of fashion brand advertisements. In Part B of Phase Two when the participants talked about the advertisement for 'Louis Vuitton' (Figure 5.5) their views appeared to explicitly reflect their reading of fashion brands as tools for the projection of socioeconomic status:

'I think it refers to the type of kind of rich women the type...rich more high society, the whole concept with the driver and the dog right next to him and the kind of British vintage car, the driver, the lady with the elegant bag and the flawless gloves and coat look to me as if they refer to a really specific audience (group), a classic rich woman from the suburbs' (Participant 2);

'Very xliidi' (similar to extravagance,) something you don't see every day. So it takes you to something expensive, very good, something that isn't usual and not

many have, so obviously the product is for the few. And definitely here, it must be an expensive company making bags’ (Participant 6);

‘Xlidi, kind of’ (Participant 7).

‘Ok, I know what brand it is ha ha ha’

[Interviewer: What is it?]: *‘Louis Vuitton’*.

[Interviewer: What feelings does it bring out for you?]: *‘Luxury, jet set.’*

(Participant 9).

‘It looks more of an expensive product.’ (Participant 10).

(Figure 5.5: Advert for Louis Vuitton used in Part B of the Phase Two interviews, advert removed for copyright reasons)

These responses also display how there appear to be links made between an image in an advertisement and a lifestyle linked to a certain socioeconomic group. This can be related to the Phase One responses where certain brands were seen to be more suitable than others for certain occupations or social classes, displaying how the results from both phases complement each other in terms of informing the research questions in forming similar key themes. Participants 6 and 7 responded that seeing the advert gave them a sense of luxury and wealth, however they did express the relevance of self in brand advertisement interpretation, remarking that: *‘It shows you something you don’t have and can’t ever have so...it depresses you a little’, ‘You feel a little inferior’*.

All of the participants responded that they believed that the advertisement was for a ‘good’ brand, and they clarified ‘good’ as meaning expensive and of high quality. When asked which brand they thought it was, they mentioned other luxury brands such as ‘Chanel’ and at this point there appeared to be a process of brand categorisation occurring. They seemed to group brands together into similar categories as the ‘Replay’ advert, when participants responded that jeans brands were not highly differentiated. One brand that was categorized as similar to ‘Louis Vuitton’ was ‘Ralph Lauren’ (Figure 5.6).

(Figure 5.6: Advert for Ralph Lauren used in Part B of the Phase Two interviews, advert removed for copyright reasons)

This advert was described as *‘classy’* (Participants 1 and 9), *‘elegant’* (Participants 2 and 7) *‘chic’* (Participant 3), and *‘sophisticated’* (Participant 10). Even when the

participants could not guess the brand, they pointed out that it was not a brand like 'Replay' but one linked to a fashion house (Participants 4 and 6). The fashion brands 'Ralph Lauren' and 'Louis Vuitton' were both described and discussed in both interview phases in the same way and context. This shows that the participants shared similar views and opinions about certain fashion brands.

In this research, the participants displayed similar meanings, views and opinions regarding fashion brands, their advertisements, and their symbolic meaning. Advertising was shown to be an influential determinant regarding the participants' views of fashion brands, which were often referred to in negative terms. The participants appeared to regard the term 'brand' as referring specifically to as an expensive, known brand. This shows that a mutual understanding and views of Greek women existed within the same social group, justifying the choice of the symbolic interactionist approach. Some advertisements were seen to '*brainwash*' the viewer (Participant 3, Phase two) but the participants appeared to take seriously the images that they see in adverts. For example, there was a common view that clothes look better on a thin body; something which is commonly communicated by the media in all its forms. Even though the main images of thin women are through the media, especially the fashion-related media, the participants did not realise how their concept of clothes looking better on thin (not fit) women could be, at least partly, influenced by the media. Instead, they distanced themselves once more from their social group, stating that other women are affected by the media, rather than themselves.

What is significant is that, overall, the participants appeared to be more strongly affected by the media when the advertisements are for consumable, disposable goods, such as perfume, make up or moisturiser. These were all items that were cheaper and easier to purchase than clothes, in terms of both effort (such as trying them on) and being able to afford them. They mentioned cases where they themselves have seen an advertisement for a perfume brand or make-up brand and went to purchase it or to see it in the shop:

'I see a new foundation, that 'L'Oréal' has brought out let's say, and I'll say, oh this according to its presentation and projection covers my needs so let's go and buy it' (Participant 6).

[Interviewer: A brand, that you had never seen advertised, would you buy it?]:

No, not easily, that's true. Maybe it influences you a little (the advert) unless the sales assistant was that good that she would do the TV's job, tell me on the spot, be so good so I'll buy it (Participant 6).

This response suggests the power that advertising appears to have over her purchasing decisions and how she is open to persuasion from advertising. Regarding the same question, other participants stated that, with regard to purchases such as cosmetics brands, they are more influenced by the media as they are more likely intentionally to go and look at or purchase the item advertised:

'More likely cosmetics, not so much clothes. Cosmetics, perfume, not clothes' (Participant 8);

'Many times cosmetics' (Participant 10).

Following on from these responses, the participants elaborated how they consider the print media to be more persuasive in getting them to go and see a product, as that form of media often provides more details about products. The participants stated that they have often seen an item in a magazine advertisement and have subsequently gone out to purchase it:

'The magazine comes into your home or the hairdressers - somewhere you have the time to flip through whereas you may not have time to look in the shop windows very often' (Participant 2).

This was in terms of the media's influence on consumers' fashion brand recognition, which in some cases appears to be subconscious. The participants clearly responded that they believed that brand advertising has an influence upon consumers:

'placing it in my head as a known brand, so I recognise it when...not all brands but some I can recognise, let's say, with my eyes closed by seeing an item or logo or just a shape...or a colour, so it refers me to...'

[Interviewer: 'So some characteristic then?']: *'Yes some characteristic familiar of the brand, erm...ok from then on some brands that alternatively...by brands do we mean in general or well known?'*

'Some brands which are to me relatively approachable...'

[Interviewer: 'Financially?']: *'Yes, obviously. Economically, an advert in a magazine or on TV ...not so much on TV... perfumes more likely. Anyway, in magazines mainly ok maybe they will make me say 'oh let's see that' in a shop, where can I find it so I can buy it lets say'* (Participant 2).

'The whole idea of good or bad from advertising you get to see what is around you, what is sold around you. The trends in fashion, the whole style which is in whatever season, erm...so it's reasonable to be influenced since that is where you see it 'cause you might not see it anywhere else, your neighbourhood, friends, you may not see the style that's in fashion this winter e.g. in the shops in your neighbourhood, to see it from ads' (Participant 4).

This reference to the 'good' or 'bad' displayed by advertising, poses an interesting question regarding how acceptable or appropriate a product becomes through its advertising and how these standards are set by advertising or at least accepted by the participants through this process. It suggests that advertising is a strong influence on purchasing decisions or even the acceptance of a brand or product. This supports the idea that advertising has gravity and influence as identified by previous researchers, such as Becker *et al* (2002) who examined the relationship between the media and eating disorders, and (Kavassalis *et al*, 2003), Mital (2008) and Tsang *et al* (2004) who considered the level of effectiveness of different types of advertising.

5.4.3 Shared brand meaning, categorisation and coding

The attachment of symbolic meaning to brands and the existence of brand coding processes appeared to be inter-linked. This section discusses the more specific meanings that the fashion brands appeared to have for participants and how these meanings become codes through which they communicate. It explores in further depth how Greek women talk about specific fashion brands and focuses on the ways in which brand descriptors reveal grouping or categorisation of brands.

Through an exploration of symbolic meaning attachment to fashion brands, a coding process was identified. The common use of the same or similar words used to refer to the term 'brand', fashion brands and the symbolic meanings attached to fashion brands were identified as 'codes'. Through this, it was observed, Greek women are able to effectively communicate when interacting as there is a clear, commonly shared,

understanding and use of terminology. This became apparent from the language used and the context of usage of words.

This coding system, which appears to be an outcome of commonly shared views held about fashion brands, is related to common meanings attached to fashion brands by Greek women. More specifically, the common use of specific words and terms and the symbolic meanings attached to fashion brands, act as a form of communication through which Greek women understand fashion brands and have share an understanding of fashion brands. Furthermore, shared views about how individuals perceive, understand and identify others when, for example, wearing 'X' fashion brand also reflects how this coding system works within this social group as well as how it emerges.

In the interview responses from both research phases, the coding system was used not only to differentiate between fashion brands' symbolic meanings and the meanings attached to those wearing them but also, in order to communicate and interact effectively. In this sense, effective interaction is seen to be an outcome of the shared language associated with fashion brand meaning.

The codes appear to serve different purposes. Apart from facilitating an effective communication process between Greek women, they also inform why Greek women use a process of categorisation. It is clear, especially in responses to Part 5 of the Phase One interviews, that even though 'age' slightly affects brand awareness regarding a couple of brands, like 'Max Mara', it does not appear to have any particular influence on perception or the descriptive terms used to refer to brands, although it does on purchasing behaviour, which is not our primary concern here. Even though participants of all ages described 'Miss Sixty' using the same term (youthful), the younger the participant, the most likely it was that they had purchased the brand themselves and held brand familiarity.

The participants commonly used identical or synonymous terms to describe not only certain specific fashion brands but also the fashion industry. A common response or comment was: *'you get what you pay for'*, referring to the price of an item and how it is reflective of the item's quality. An apparent contradiction was the perception of women who wear brands not being at peace with themselves or having unfulfilled psychological needs. The wearers of branded fashion items were perceived to be trying to try to fill a gap by purchasing expensive branded items even though the general view is that *'you get what you pay for'*, meaning expensive item are of better quality, linked to being a psychologically troubled individual? For instance, Participant18 (Phase One) appeared to make contradictory comments:

'I stand by you get what you pay for...' 'Some may wear them because by wearing them they have self-confidence to approach someone or could be pretentious'.

When asked if her attitude had changed as she got older, however, she said, *'the older I get, the more I want to buy something good if I can'* (referring to 'good' as meaning 'expensive'). For the interview participants, 'good' appeared to mean not only high quality but also expensive (the latter term being revealed, through probing, to be synonymous with high quality).

Even though the participants distanced themselves from the women whom they criticised, they also displayed strong views and a clear knowledge and awareness of fashion brands when asked about these in Part 5 of the Phase One interviews. When talking about the twenty fashion brands, they displayed not only knowledge of their existence but also further awareness of them and were able to readily articulate opinions about various brands. They seemed to be clear about their views on them, with few exceptions. At this point, it must be noted that, even though the twenty brands that they were asked to comment on were foreign fashion brands, the participants' levels of brand awareness were so high that they thought that these brands were possibly Greek! This in itself might be a fruitful area for further research.

The attachment of symbolic meaning to fashion brands was displayed through the ease with which the participants were able to verbalise perceptions. With the odd exceptions where brands were described positively or negatively, most of the fashion brands were viewed in a similar manner by the respondents. This supports the view that the participants create and share a coding process which then leads to the categorisation of fashion brands (and their wearers).

Further research might explore the link between wearing expensive brands to demonstrate one's socio-economic status and/or power within society, either consciously or subconsciously. The idea that brands are tools was a common sentiment expressed, referring to the way that brands are used (to project something). Studies by Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) and Piamphongsant and Mandhachitara (2008) as well as responses from the Phase One interviews suggest that, for Greek women, fashion brands are used as tools. As part of this, it was apparent that an underlying process exists through which the participants categorized fashion brands in terms of the codes they attached to them. This coding also appeared to take place in the interpretation of other Greek women wearing fashion brands.

The criteria for placing a brand or an individual into a category and the factors involved in doing so is interesting. In the past, a categorisation process has been suggested by Laroche *et al* (1986) in relation to the Brisoux and Laroche framework on the conceptualisation of the brand focusing on consumables. Even though the present research was not concerned with consumable goods or consumer purchasing decisions, the concept is similar. The ‘codes’ which are referred to linked to the unique symbolic meanings attached to fashion brands by the participants as Greek women, and this coding is used as a shared ‘reality’ through which they appeared to develop a mutual understanding and means of communication regarding how to categorize fashion brands. The ‘codes’ created facilitate a process of categorisation of fashion brands. This includes categorizing fashion brand wearers into different typologies. The participants displayed a tendency to categorize the brands using a number of different criteria, without being asked. They:

- a) Referred to specific brands in order to talk about certain views or situations:

‘A girl going to a club dressed in ‘Louis Vuitton’ maybe they’ll notice her, not feel part of the masses’ (Participant 2, Phase One).

‘If you see a ‘Prada’ bag, you say, ‘good for her’ (Participant 15, Phase One).

These examples show how a fashion brand seems to serve social purposes and that the participants believed that fashion brands matter to their social group.

- b) Associated different brands with different types of women, from different age groups and with different levels of socio-economic status.

This finding emerged mostly in Part 5 of Phase One where the participants were asked to describe the fashion brands and say who they thought they were designed for as well as how they would describe a woman wearing them. This was obvious for certain fashion brands like ‘Miss Sixty’. Another example of specific brands being placed in a specific category was ‘Burberry’:

‘For those working for a company, wanting to project a certain image.

‘Elegant...’ (Participant 3).

'Classic' [brand], *'wealthy'* [women who wear the brand], *'elegant'* [description of a woman wearing the brand] (Participant 5).

'Elegant' (Participant 10).

There were similar trends observable for the majority of the brands discussed in Part 5 of Phase One. Participants mentioned the different categories (not mutually exclusive) of women wearing brands: 'those wealthy and can afford them'; 'show-offs'; and 'those who cannot afford them and go into debt to purchase them'.

- c) Believed that fashion brands are associated with certain socioeconomic status.

This was seen in both Part 4 and Part 5 of the Phase One interviews. Participant 5 offered an interesting response as she distinguished between three classes and why the women in each wear fashion brands, displaying how brands are used as social tools in some cases and how they are associated with higher class. These views were seen repeatedly in the participants' responses:

'the higher (class) which is compulsory (to wear foreign brands), middle class 'cause they may like them and lower class 'cause they want to project' (Participant 5).

- d) Expressed the view that foreign brands are better than Greek ones or that others believe so.

This was quite visible not only in the Greek editions of the fashion magazines containing the advertisements to which the researcher made reference in Phases One and Two but also from the fashion brand choices that the participants made and their levels of brand familiarity. This finding supports a study by Kamenidou et al (2007) which found that foreign brands were perceived by Greek people to be better in terms of quality and aesthetics compared to Greek ones. In the current study, the participants remarked:

[*'Armani'*] *'Is one of the four best in the world' - 'I have bought, specifically, 10 years ago a 'Gucci' suit and it is like I bought it yesterday'* (Participant 1);

'They have connected brands with high socioeconomic status' (Participant 5);

'I have a friend working for 'Louis Vuitton. - I know they do a really good job in making it. A lot of quality' (Participant 6).

[Foreign brands are considered better than Greek ones] *'cause they are overrated and because they have been promoted better e.g.: Sex and the City, it was a shrine of fashion, how many women were influenced'* (Participant 8).
'A foreign item is better sewn, better quality than a Greek one which isn't always' (Participant 15).

These responses support previous research, which found that country of origin and price can affect consumers' perceptions of brands (Fionda & Moore 2009).

Another common view expressed was that social factors and the surroundings in which one has been brought up play a role in creating a desire to have certain brands as a norm for ordinary everyday use. Therefore, if one has been brought up in a certain environment or is working in a certain environment, *'one could be wearing brands because she learnt to do so when she was young'* (Participant 18, Phase One).

Women who wear brands were referred to as having a certain *'economic flexibility'* (meaning being able to make such purchases) and were placed in a different group to others who do not wear brands, as they are doing so simply to project status through what they wear. Participants referred to the symbolization of people who wear particular brands but emphasised that brands do not necessarily reveal one's actual socioeconomic status as brand purchases could be a result of a credit card or the items might even be copies. The participants agreed that a wearer who gets into debt to buy a brand is perceived negatively and one who consumes brand copies is herself accused of being 'fake'.

Categorisation seemed to take place not only of the wearers/non-wearers but also of the brands themselves. The placement of fashion brands into categories was quite visible in Part 5 of Phase One and Part B of Phase Two when the participants were asked to talk about specific fashion brands. Brands tended to be grouped in relation to: their target consumer groups (e.g., 'Miss Sixty' and age); wealth, prestige and socioeconomic status (e.g., 'Louis Vuitton', 'Gucci', 'Prada', 'Ralph Lauren'); and sex appeal, femininity (e.g., 'Replay') versus 'conservative' (e.g., 'Burberry') and masculine (e.g., 'Tommy Hilfiger').

Categorisation observed when the same or similar terms (verbal expressions of mentally-held 'codes') were used to describe a brand and the woman wearing it. This

may be linked to Becker's (1963) discussions of labelling as a social activity and the negative labelling of groups. In this study the wearers of brands were labelled either positively or negatively. When brands were described in a common way, this suggests that they belonged to the same category for participants. Indeed, some participants mentioned that '*X' brand is like 'Y' brand, 'they are in the same category'*'.

5.4.4 Style influences

Although there were 'hints' of factors which influence style in Phase One, it was in Phase Two that this emerged as a key theme. Participants talked about style in two ways: creation of and projection of a personalised style; and the way they dressed. They referred to their style as wearing clothes that suited them and made them feel comfortable both physically and mentally:

'I think it suits me, it is my style, it expresses me the way I dress' (Participant 1, Phase Two).

'It's comfortable' (Participant 2, Phase Two).

'I think it suits me' (Participant 4, Phase Two).

'I like it, it's my style. I've had it since I was young and I think it's what suits me' (Participant 5, Phase Two).

'I choose clothes that suit my body type' (Participant 8, Phase Two).

'It's a personal style' (Participant 10, Phase Two).

What was of interest was what makes Participants 2 or 8, for example, judge what suits their body type. How have all of the participants formed an opinion about which type of clothes are appropriate for what body type or even their own body type? There has to be a measure of comparison or shared knowledge that certain body shapes suit certain clothes or styles when dressing such as short skirts and tight clothes. This was an issue that was initially noted from the Phase One interviews when those participants made references to clothes that 'suit them'. Symbolic interactionism can support the idea that through shared knowledge individuals might come to believe that certain body types are

associated with a particular style of dress. A shared view that clothes look better on thin bodies was observed in both Phases One and Two.

When the participants were asked if their friends, family or work environment play any part in their clothing choice, they acknowledged that they could not dress as they wished at work or at special events. This indicates that their dress sense was being influenced by others or social factors rather than being purely based on their own taste or individual personality. They commonly reported, however, that they are not influenced by anyone else although they did say that they felt that there is a time and a place for certain styles of clothes and that one cannot dress as one would wish at work. There appeared to be shared understanding of how one should dress and what is considered 'appropriate' to wear in a specific situation.

Weight and body image were identified as factors influencing dress style. However, these could not be explored in great depth because they were acknowledged to present potential sensitive ethical issues. Some participants did, however, spontaneously talk about how their style has been affected by their weight. For instance, as reported in Section 5.2.2, when asked if the way they dress has changed over time, responses included:

'When I lose weight it does change' (Participant 3, Phase Two).

'In my case, I have been influenced by pregnancy, it changed my body a lot and can't yet control it. I can't find the rhythms I once had of my body and this annoys me a little and because of that I don't want to see it in the mirror and therefore I wear longer clothes, more baggy tops, etc.' (Participant 6, Phase Two).

Style was also found to be associated with money and the links that the participants made between fashion brands and socioeconomic status. However, when participants were asked why they dressed as they did and what influenced them, they often responded that they were not influenced by any factors and that they dressed as they wished. It was when they spoke about other Greek women and the styles adopted by those women that they suggested there to be potential influences on style, mainly external influences - society and social conventions; peer groups; and advertising.

5.4.5 Conclusion of interaction

The interviews presented a rich amount of data relating to the role of interaction with participants sharing a 'reality' related to fashion brand meanings, their categorisation and coding of fashion brands and their wearers.

Advertising has been found to act as a means of brand communication and influence participants. Style was found to be something that was influenced through social 'norms', accepted the 'time and a place' for what to wear, displaying the power of social conduct and socially created standards for 'acceptable' or 'appropriate behaviour'.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the key findings from the Phase One and Phase Two interviews under three pillars: self; meaning; and interaction. These pillars are related to three basic principles of symbolic interactionism identified in Chapter 3. The pillars were found to be a useful way to present the data that had emerged from the participants in relation to the conceptual thinking presented in Chapter 3. The findings can be related to existing literature regarding brand meaning and influence of the images used in advertising. Eight key themes were identified, all related and influenced by three pillars: self, meaning and interaction. A discussion of the results is presented in Chapter 6, where the initial thoughts (Chapter 3) are compared to the findings through a display of the conceptual thinking and a framework presented after data collection and analysis and considered in relation to literature presented (Chapter 2).

Chapter 6:

Discussion

This chapter revisits the original research aim and objectives of the study and draws conclusions in the light of the empirical findings discussed in Chapter 5. Shared viewpoints were observed between the participants (as Greek women) on their own views of fashion brands and their perceptions of other Greek women and the observed relationships of those women with fashion brands. Reflecting on the results overall, this chapter considers how the research findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how Greek women 'read' foreign fashion brands and the conclusions that may be drawn for fashion brand advertisers and academic scholars from the shared 'reality' observed as a result of how brands are 'read'.

Eight key themes had been identified presenting significant issues to be considered in relation to the study's initial research aim. In particular, this chapter highlights the existence of socially shared viewpoints between Greek women through the identification of fashion brand identities, symbolisms and meanings within a specific social group.

6.1 Research objectives and research questions

The research aim was to examine the views, meanings and opinions held by Greek women of foreign fashion brands advertised in fashion magazines. Further, the research was interested to discover to what extent are these meanings, views and opinions socially shared.

The initial research objectives outlined in Chapter 1 were:

1. To review academic literature relevant to brand communication in the context of foreign fashion brands, the use of advertising as a means of brand communication, brand symbolism and brand meaning; and the impact of print images upon female Greek consumer perception.
2. To develop conceptual thinking in relation to the effective communication of foreign fashion brands to the female Greek consumer within the context of one geographically distinctive area, Athens, Greece.

Additionally, two research questions were posed in Chapter 3:

- How do Greek women 'read' foreign fashion brands? This is a key issue to explore in order to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of foreign fashion brands held by Greek women. Through this, a better understanding of the effectiveness of fashion brand advertising process might be gained.
- What are the meanings, views and opinions of foreign fashion brands held by Greek women as a result of how they 'read' the brands? This question is also of high importance to the study, as greater knowledge is sought in terms of the meanings that Greek women attach to foreign fashion brands and what those meanings are. This will offer a chance to identify if any patterns of socially-shared fashion brand meanings are evident for Greek women and whether or not there exists a shared 'reality'.

6.1.1 Shared 'reality' and understanding

It has been found that Greek women share a 'reality' and understanding of the term 'brand', attach symbolic meanings to fashion brands and see fashion brands as social tools and a means of projection. The discovery of shared brand symbolisms and meanings was of initial interest, an important key point in terms of the research, as it has been discovered that there exists a shared 'reality' in terms of foreign fashion brands. This is in line with the second question set in Chapter 3.

This, in relation to the broader focus of Chapter 3, is linked with a symbolic interactionist approach in terms of language and the symbolic meaning of items. In this study, the Greek women perceived the term 'brand' to mean known, expensive and luxury brands. Secondly, they attached meanings to fashion brands and, most importantly, shared a mind-set around foreign fashion brands in particular. They perceived fashion brands in the same way and, when referring to specific foreign brands, commonly employ the same manner and context. The meanings that fashion brands have for Greek women are shared. This shared brand meaning shows the attachment of specific meanings to different brands, such as people's socioeconomic status can be identified by the brands they wear as well as the use of expensive fashion

brands in order to project a particular image of themselves. In terms of projection, there are two types: the brand can project one's real or actual socioeconomic status; or be intentionally used to project something else which is not reflective of the individual's status.

6.2 Reflecting on the literature review

The researcher's interests and experiences acted as a catalyst in terms of the subject area. Personal interaction with the specific group of interest (Greek women aged 20-40) was the initial point of interest in the subject area and the birth of 'hunches'. Following these 'hunches', past research studies acted as a foundation upon which to build the aim and objectives of the current research. As mentioned in previous chapters, the research which acted as the main inspiration in terms of focus and methodology was Elliot and Leonard's (2004) study. This was the main study in terms of inspiration and relevance with respect to the symbolic process that takes place in groups with regard to fashion brands and attachment of these brands to individuals who share certain socioeconomic characteristics. Further, the shared meaning of fashion brands that are advertised in fashion magazines and the interpretation of those fashion brand advertisements were also of interest.

It must be stressed that the use of symbolic interactionism, although chosen as the most appropriate approach for the study, assisted rather than 'shaped' the findings of the study. The study used the theory as a lens but the research design did not preclude the identification of symbolic interactionism as either inappropriate or appropriate. In terms of inspiration, Kamenidou *et al*'s (2007) study also contributed to the focus of this DBA study. This focused on the reasons why Greeks consumers preferred imported rather than native brands with regard to apparel. It can be related to the findings of this study regarding the Greek women's perceptions of foreign fashion brands. Although the Kamenidou *et al*'s (2007) study was not carried out in Athens as the present one was, its purpose was to identify why foreign brands were favoured. That study also looked at fashion brands and found that the participants not only viewed foreign brands as being superior to Greek ones in terms of quality but also saw foreign brands as being 'always in fashion'. The present study built on the research by Kamenidou *et al* (2007) by exploring further how Greek women understand foreign brands. This included gaining a

more in-depth understanding of the reasons behind those opinions and, more importantly, of fashion brand advertising's effectiveness in this process.

As is conventional in undertaking qualitative research, the findings take the researcher in fields of literature and theory not initially considered in Chapter 2 (literature review) as it became relevant after the identification of the key themes.

Crucially, Goffman's (1959) 'presentation of self', has been found to be highly relevant in relation to the findings, especially individual's understanding of social conduct of what is acceptable or the 'norm' in relation to dressing accordingly. Further, the coding and categorising of fashion brands has emerged as a relevant issue through labels placed on brands and wearers. There was a common understanding in relation to how Greek women 'presented' themselves in different situations like weddings or at work. Although Goffman's writings are not recent, as with Mead's (1934), and times evolve, their initial ideas proposed can be found to be of relevance in contemporary society through participants display of a socially constructed 'reality' related to fashion brands and how this is a common understanding of their suitability to according situations. The notion of 'a time and a place' mentioned by participants in how to dress is such an example.

Laroche *et al* (1986) in relation to the Brisoux and Laroche framework on the conceptualisation of the brand focusing on consumables has also been found to become relevant to the research findings in respect to how it explains the categorisation process of products when 'reading' the fashion brand. Section 6.3.6 offers a discussion of how the new literature is relevant to the present study and its findings.

6.3 Reflecting on the process of consumer interpretation of fashion brand magazine advertising

The findings allow for the conceptual thinking presented in Chapter 3 to be revisited. In particular, Figure 3.1 and its visual representation of a process of consumer interpretation of print images in fashion advertising may be expanded upon. Figure 6.1 incorporates the knowledge gained from the empirical research in this study. It draws attention to the iterative nature of the interpretation, particularly in terms of how 'outcomes' feed back into influences and, in turn affect, decoding and reading of the fashion brand. The existence of social and cognitive actions underlying the process signals implications for fashion brand advertisers to be mindful of these actions when

attempting to achieve more effective advertising communication through the images used. The next section displays figure 3.1 of the initial thinking and 6.1 of how the thinking has evolved after the data collection.

6.3.1 Re-visiting the process of consumer interpretation of fashion brand magazine advertising

A more detailed understanding of the process of consumer interpretation of print images of fashion brands in advertising has been gained through the empirical research. Indeed, the interviews have provided clues to the existence of a process, one that is far more complex and socially-defined than the loose visual sense-making attempted in Figure 3.1, initially based on the researcher's own 'hunches' and the past findings of other researchers at that stage. The acknowledgement of a 'transmission of codes' and 'decoding', the influence of 'social values and norms' and 'familiarity', and the 'categorisation of fashion brands' are highlighted in Figure 6.1.

Figure 3.1:

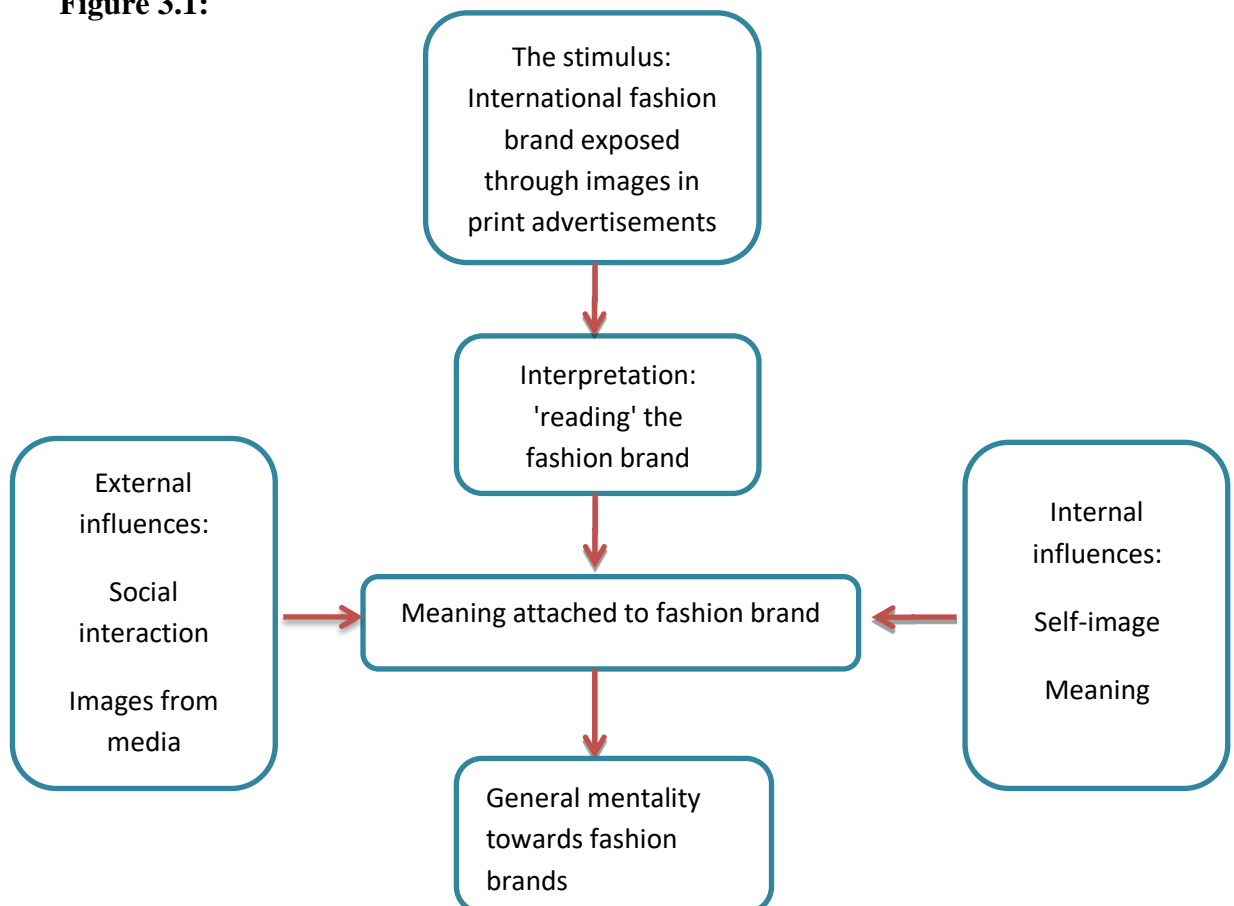
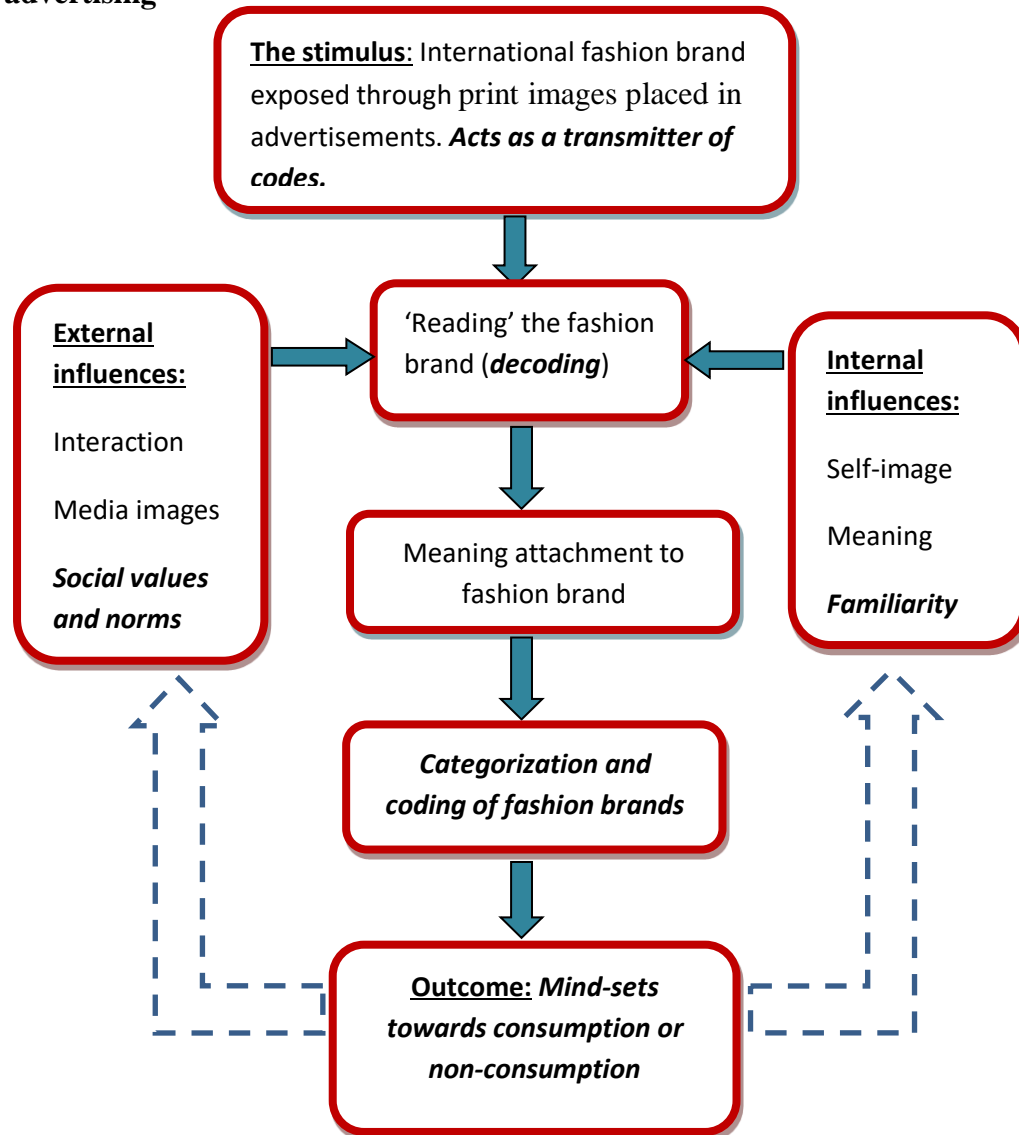


Figure 6.1 will now be discussed in relation to how understanding of the process has been informed by the empirical data collection and how moving from Figure 3.1 to

Figure 6.1 should not be seen as the result of model or theory testing but as development of conceptual thinking through sense-making. The ideas presented in bold fonts are the new ideas emerging from the findings.

Figure 6.1: The process of consumer interpretation of fashion brand magazine advertising



6.3.2 The stimulus as a transmitter of codes

The stimulus, in this case specifically print images in fashion magazine advertisements, was originally considered and referred to as a 'stimulus' through which individuals become aware of fashion brands and are exposed to the promotional strategies intended to create a fashion brand identity (Chapter 3). In the light of the study findings (Chapter 5), the role of the stimulus in creating awareness appears to be more complicated. It is linked to the levels of familiarity that the reader of an advertisement has not only with the specific, named brand but also with other brands categorised as 'similar' within a choice set of brands. In addition to acting as a 'stimulus', it is also recognised to influence consumers through the images it projects and acts as a transmitter of codes. Although initially perceived more as a means of information, through which the consumer becomes aware of the brand, it has been found that the images act in more ways through which brands are communicated to Greek women. Through the 'stimulus' they come to receive greater information to that of the item such as brand identity, acting at a similar level of influence to the other two influences - 'internal influences' and 'external influences'. However, it is singled out as a concept on its own as it follows marketing strategies which are planned in order to make communication possible between the product or service and the consumer, and it attempts to communicate effectively regardless of or independent of internal and external influences.

Another reason why the stimulus is portrayed in Figure 6.1 as a separate type of influence is because it is not socially-controlled, (like external influences), nor individually-controlled, (like internal influences). Even though it may be argued to be an external influence, it is not socially created, like is its outcome. In the context of this study, the stimulus is conceived to act as a means of communication which Greek women are exposed to.

6.3.3 The influences

Internal and external influences are both seen as instrumental in terms of how individuals 'read' fashion brands. The influences act as the first stage that participants go through or face which includes the main influences responsible for informing the individual, exposing him/her to the images and the messages that are received in terms of fashion brands and media images.

The external and internal influences were considered to have an impact after initial exposure to the fashion brand and shape the 'reading' of the stimulus, as the Phase

One and Phase Two interview findings have suggested. The influences are the starting point from which one obtains all of the information, whether it is created through the social group or self-perception, experience. All of these are influential in their own unique way but combine to affect the way in which Greek women come to 'read' or understand the fashion brand.

External influences

Interaction with the images in advertising and social interaction has been found to act as an external influence on how Greek women come to understand fashion brands as well as the way which they 'read' foreign fashion brands through advertising practices. Through interaction, Greek women come to discover the 'acceptability' of a fashion brand within a social group as well as shape a shared way of understanding it. Social interaction makes it possible for individuals within a group to gain a sense of acceptability of the fashion brand but, most importantly, to receive messages around the concepts of 'acceptable', 'norm', 'ideal' and shared reality in general. Understanding such social norms has an impact on the way that Greek women are able to perceive a fashion brand.

In the same way that norms and ideals are created through interaction they are shaped through the stimulus as well, only through a different process. The social 'norms' created through interaction are equally important to those created via the stimulus. Even though the processes are different, their effects are equally important. It has been identified that stimulus has a relatively strong influence, particularly in terms of a woman's weight and body shape. It has been revealed in this study that a thin 'ideal' female body shape is considered to be promoted by such medium but, also, it has been observed that this has a significant impact on Greek women in terms of what they consider to be attractive and/or beautiful, in relation to fashion brand advertising. The assessment of fashion brands and decisions to consume or not consume certain brands also appears to be bound up in wanting to look 'as good as' models advertising certain brands (e.g. jeans brands) and whether or not the reader of the advert perceives the ideals of beauty being sold through the advertisement as being attainable or within reach when compared to her own self-image.

The key themes identified in Chapter 5 support the idea that interaction and images do act as external influences upon Greek women. Even though initially considered as influences, they were not expected to have the importance that they do in terms of shaping fashion brand meaning or in the way that weight, for example, became

such a focal point in terms of the models employed in fashion brand advertising. It was initially considered that the images in fashion magazine advertisements might act as an influence on the 'reading' of or interpretation of fashion brands. It was considered this would be due to the image of the model as a whole rather than just the model's weight. Further, it was considered that the image of the models would have an effect not only in terms of weight but also in terms of figure but, as the two interview phases have revealed, size became an issue regarding body image, e.g., in terms of how thin the model is. What was found was that weight was linked with 'thinness' and participants shared an attitude where weight appeared to determine what they wore and there was a shared understanding of not being able to wear what they liked due to their weight. Here, the relevance of social values and norms in the understanding of body shape and body image is noted and can be related to literature regarding ethical issues implicated in advertised images targeting women and how images in advertising are influencing women negatively (e.g.: Kilbourne, 2000) creating 'norms' and ideals of beauty. This is an issue which has emerged so vividly through the participants' responses to act as a factor of influence that could not be ignored

Internal influences

The internal influences considered which were shown to be determinants were self-image, meaning and familiarity. These are seen as internal influences as they emerge from an individual's self-perception. It seems that Greek women assess themselves in terms of how they think they look and how they 'should' look. They value themselves in terms of their self-image and whether they think that their image is 'acceptable' within their social group, linking it to their weight, size and body image overall not in terms of being fit and healthy but purely being thin.

It was initially considered that individuals would have a specific self-image and meaning for it. These were considered as the determinants, as the uniqueness of individual perceptions was considered. Even though acceptability within a social group is seen as an external influence, self-image was considered in terms of how Greek women see themselves and how that is influential in terms of a shared 'reality' within their society. This could be linked to Mead (1934) and how social interaction can contribute to how individuals make sense of and understand the 'self'. What was discovered offered interesting findings in terms of how Greek women distance themselves from their social group and how they considered that their self-image was not influenced by external factors, even though it has been found that they are indeed

influenced and that their self-image is not subjective in terms of how they come to 'see' themselves. From the findings, it is clear that internal factors can have an influence upon Greek women in terms of the meanings that they attach to fashion brands but these are less significant than external influences in respect to the aim and objectives of this thesis.

Weight and body image are two factors which were initially included in Chapter 3, as they were expected to be two factors that, played a significant part in influencing the participants' views both in terms of dressing up and as media influences deriving from the fashion advertisements in magazines. It has been found that they played a greater role in the participants' fashion brand choices than initially thought and was found in the past literature as, discussed in Chapter 2.

Greek women seem to place greater emphasis on the way their body looks rather than on the suitability of an item in terms of their age. The participants stated that, in most cases, weight and body image are factors which affect the way they dress and their purchasing decisions as well, as there are items they would only wear if they were slimmer as these types of clothes are thought to look better on thin bodies. There is a common understanding that clothes look better on thin women but what is of great interest is that only thin bodies were seen as suitable rather than fit or healthy ones. This provides an insight into another influence of the media, as models are always thin rather than fit. In this study, the participants were concerned with being thin but none of them was concerned about the health aspect of being fit as they stated that clothes look better on thin bodies, not healthy ones. Instead, the participants focus on size and weight rather than having a physically healthy appearance. The participants even expressed the view that in general, all clothes look better on thin bodies, a view which they seem to share and one that appeared uncontested in their responses.

Body image on the whole is an important factor. In the responses, no specific weight references were made, but rather the idea of 'thin' bodies being more attractive was expressed. The participants were not being specific about clothing size but rather about body type, e.g., 'thin'. This, in relation to symbolic interactionism, displays how interaction within a group has created an idea of an accepted, 'ideal' or even attractive body type and how this is socially constructed, demonstrating not only the importance of interaction within a society to create a shared meaning or symbolism but also how self-description is so relevant to this study and how it is affected by the stimulus and the interaction individuals have within their social group. Most of the participants expressed the view that clothes look better on thin bodies, as they have mentioned frequently in

their responses during the interviews in both phases. Even though the literature has clearly suggested that body image is of importance to women, it was found that it has a greater impact on this social group than past studies have suggested.

These factors led to another factor, self-image, which is linked to projection and reflection, and is also mentioned in the external influences in Figure 6.1. Self-image is quite important to these women, as they hold the view that, to be acceptable or desirable within their social group, a certain body type or image is required. This includes a wider form of acceptance than that of the society to which they belong. Self-image was not a factor considered in the initial thinking presented in Chapter 3 but was found to be one after the completion of the research and was seen to be a view commonly held amongst the Greek women studied. These women saw their weight to be so important- that it affected their fashion brand consumption and that this is why they feel that they cannot wear anything they like at times or tend to shop more, or feel more like shopping when they lose weight as they are not the 'proper' weight. This can add to existing literature and theory in regards to the negative influences the images in fashion advertising have upon women, creating 'ideal' or 'accepted' notions related to body image and size as participants appeared to have a shared understanding of weight as something which is negatively or positively (in the case of thinness) received by their social group. This leads us again to the ideas of symbolic interactionism and how interaction adding to the idea of 'shared reality' and common understandings within a society, shown clearly in the present study throughout the participants' views. Furthermore, these results display the importance of body-image and self-image which are closely related to the perception of the self.

It was found that advertising alone appeared to have more influence in adding to existing brand knowledge rather than creating knowledge on inexperienced brands. The participants in Phase Two of the study, in particular, when asked to talk about a set of actual fashion brand advertisements openly compared and contrasted the advertisements to their experiences of or familiarity with the named brands. When 'mismatch' occurred between their experience and the advertisement there was a tendency to 'reject' the advertisement.

6.3.4 'Reading' the fashion brand (decoding)

The three previous parts of Figure 6.1 - the stimulus; external influences and internal influences - all link into the third box of the process which represents how the individual comes to 'read' the fashion brand. This acts as a way of decoding the

information which is offered through the stimulus, the external influences from friends, family, colleagues, and images as well as the internal influences that individuals are experiencing. All three contribute to how the individual attempts to understand the fashion brand, make sense of it and decode the information received in order to create a view, opinion and meanings, which will be examined in the next section. This 'stage' is where the reader goes from receiving information about the fashion brand to interpreting it.

This can be related to existing literature on how through advertising 'values' are made between brand and consumer through advertising (Meenaghan, 1995), which was seen 'in action' in Part B of the Phase Two interviews when the participants' reactions to fashion brand advertisements were observed. They verbally expressed the clues that they used in an attempt to understand the brand being advertised, its intended message and whether or not it was 'for them' displaying how cultural meanings derive from the individuals world (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998) and how through it, consumers are 'socialised' (Petit & Zakon, 1962).

6.3.5 Meaning attachment

The stimulus, external and internal influences appear to combine to create meaning. These meanings emerge from the process of understanding the fashion brand and the ways in which Greek women attach social meaning to fashion brands. All the influences contribute to this- in different ways, but particularly the stimulus and external ones. Through the attachment of meanings, Greek women come to understand the social standing of a given fashion brand as well its power and social utility. This can be linked not only to symbolic interactionism but also to the numerous studies on the symbolic meanings of brands, e.g.: Phillips (2009), the consumption of goods for their symbolic meaning, and Dichter (1960; 1985), and the fulfilment of symbolic needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Brand identity is not created at this stage but rather is completed through the exposure to the stimulus, thereby shaping an identity for the brand and the external influences which influence this identity. Through interaction, the Greek women come to have a mutual, common, shared understanding of foreign fashion brands and their meaning. Such consistency between shared meanings has been discovered to exist not only in terms of the general meaning of fashion brands but also in very specific ideas and thinking around specific foreign fashion brands.

This is found to be linked to literature regarding how brands are a form of expression (Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008) and are used as a non-verbal

language between Greek women in order to ‘understand’ other women. Further, past literature on brand communities can be found of relevance as a consumer feels part of a society through a brand, fulfilling social needs (Waide, 1987).

With respect to the specific symbolic meanings attached to foreign fashion brands, it appears that the consumer then goes through a stage involving creating codes in order to categorise fashion brands in respect of those meanings. This was observed in relation to Part B, Phase Two and also may be reflected upon in consideration of Part 5, Phase One when participants spoke about specific brand associations and alluded to the grouping of brands according to what the brand represented and who they thought that it was aimed at.

6.3.6 Categorisation and coding

Categorisation and coding refer to how the participants categorise fashion brands in terms of their symbolic meaning. The symbolic meaning attached to foreign fashion brands were considered along the lines of the general mentality, understanding or perception Greek women have regarding foreign fashion brands. This categorisation includes employing certain words when discussing these fashion brands, which then become ‘codes’ used to communicate. Existing literature of individuals being ‘coded’ through their clothes (McCracken & Roth, 1989) can be linked to this finding. Further, this can add to past literature in regards to ‘labelling’ or discriminating against brands (Blummer, 1969, Elliot & Leonard, 2004) and their wearers by offering a greater understanding as to how brands have symbolic meanings attached acting as ‘social tools’, categorised in terms of their ‘value’ and ‘power’. The findings suggest that meaning is a more complex issue than was initially considered. It is not simply created or attached but involves a whole process which results in the categorisation and coding of the fashion brands, thereby placing them in specific categories based on a number of different factors, for example, origin.

Categorising and coding are two inter-related factors and the codes act as specific symbolic meanings and words attached to fashion brands, assisting the categorisation process in positioning foreign fashion brands within certain categories which are often characterised in terms of their suitability for a specific socioeconomic status. Through this process, fashion brands are positioned in certain groups as are their wearers using the same criteria. Categorisation has in the past been shown to occur with

regard to consumables as well; for example, Laroche *et al* (1986) studied a number of different characteristics, such as price and quality.

Although this study differed regarding the nature of the item being categorised and the type of categories involved, it does provide support for earlier studies of brands such as that by Laroche *et al* (1986), as it suggests that individuals do use a categorisation process when reading fashion brands. The codes used relate to the meanings attached to the fashion brands and, through them, links can be made between fashion brands in terms of those brands perceived in a similar manner, placed in the same category, and so forth. At this stage, the use of the fashion brands as a means of projection by the individual takes place. This, again, in relation to the symbolic meanings attached to the fashion brand and how the fashion brand appears to serve purposes other than utilitarian ones, supports their role as a social tool. Past literature in relation to hedonic and symbolic consumption is seen to be relevant as it has been found in the past products are purchased in terms of their social meaning to act as social tools. In this research study it has been found that brands do indeed act in such a way, used as a form of self-projection.

The participants intentionally appeared to project what they want to show to others, whether or not truly reflective of their current socioeconomic status, and through fashion brands understand the socioeconomic status of others based on the fashion brands they wear. There is another aspect of projection which is the coincidental projection which simply offers hints or clues about the individual in terms of their personality. This can be associated with the findings of Goffman (1959), as many links can be made to his propositions in ‘the presentation of self’. Goffman, expresses the view that stereotypes are attributed on individuals based on their appearance and that individuals dress according to different social situations. Although Goffman’s findings date back to the 1950’s, it is visible that his initial stance on individuals’ adaptation according to the way they wish to present themselves remains relevant in contemporary settings and, most importantly, for the present study. In this study it was found that projection is a key theme, as became- apparent from the participants’ attempt to present or identify others’ socioeconomic status.

More interestingly, Goffman notes that ‘performers’ (as he refers to them) are ‘*moulded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of society*’ (Goffman, 19;44). This may be related to the common understanding that Greek women appear to have of fashion brands and their wearers as well as the suitability of presenting oneself in specific fashion brands on specific occasions. Most importantly,

Goffman states that ‘material wealth’ is expressed and associated with social class as the materials act as status symbols. This is a very interesting and highly relevant point to include as it appears that the Greek women tend to express this view in terms of fashion brands and their understanding of a person’s socioeconomic status through the brands worn.

It has appeared that the process of symbolic attachment to fashion brands is a much stronger determinant than initially considered. At the pre-data collection stage, symbolism was considered in terms of the meanings that fashion brands have for individuals but Phase One and Two responses displayed more factors involved in the symbolism of fashion brands than a simple meanings attached to it. Meanings were found to act as communication codes used by the participants, resulting in a categorisation process which will be discussed next. The discovery of symbolisms created and attached to fashion brands offered greater information than initially expected. Greek women do not only share an understanding of the symbolisms and meanings of fashion brands to a great extent but also use meanings as labels which are placed on fashion brands and their wearers. These labels then act as ‘codes’ which are used to communicate effectively. These ‘codes’ basically represent the unique symbolic meaning that a fashion brand has, are shared and are used as a key tool in an effective communication process within this social group.

This may be related to Mead’s (1934) theory of projection and can reinforce the symbolic interactionist approach of how one understands oneself through interaction with others and through the symbolisms that are created in society via language. This provides very useful information for both academics and practitioners as it offers insights into the symbolism that fashion brands have for people in terms of meaning and labelling fashion brands and their wearers. Coding fashion brands suggests the importance of language as a means of communication and a shared reality as the coding process suggests a need to label both people and items using specific terms. Through this, it may be argued, an understanding of fashion brands and their wearers can be achieved and used in everyday interaction.

Researchers such as Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) support the idea that brands are a strong force and that a product is purchased for the meaning behind it rather than its function alone (Levy 1959). It is apparent that the utility of the item comes second to the Greek women in this study as they consider an expensive item to be ‘good’. This has been displayed in the present study by responses such as: ‘you get what you pay for’ which seems to be a popular idea for evaluating the worth of the item in terms of its

quality, inferring that fashion brands must be of good quality because of their price. This has added value to existing theory as participants displayed symbolic meaning attached to fashion brands to be common and how this is a 'shared reality'. Of course, it must be noted that, even though the Greek women were not chosen in terms of any specific factor but instead they were drawn from a purposive, convenience sample, they all seemed to be middle class and their views of expensive might possibly vary from those belonging to lower or higher classes.

This again is related to displaying self-image as well as style, as they consider that 'X' fashion brand has a certain meaning where as another fashion brand does not, thereby provide support for the existence of a categorisation process by attaching fashion brands and the women wearing those brands to categories. The most important factor of this outcome is its relation to the symbolic interactionist approach as it displays the attachment of brands to the symbolism they have and lends support to the use of the methodology and methods chosen to carry out the research.

6.3.7 Formation of views and opinions

Following the attachment of symbolic meaning to foreign fashion brands, Greek women create 'codes' which are the words they use and attach to those fashion brands. This process acts as a 'labelling' system, where the Greek women display a need to place labels upon each fashion brand and their wearers in order to make sense of them and position them within their social group. These labels act as 'codes' through which Greek women are able to communicate with each other efficiently through a shared language, (often non-verbal as discussed in Chapter 3). These labels were not only found to be necessarily the same words or terms used and attached to fashion brands but are also used within the same context. The meanings, labels and 'codes' are then used to place brands into categories which then act as a factor which helps them to form views and opinions about a fashion brand and its wearer. This can be related to symbolic interactionist theory of how fashion can act as language (Blumer, 1969) through which Greek women communicate non-verbally, through the labels attached to fashion brands. Further, it is a display of how symbolic interactionism, can be used as a framework in order to gain a greater understanding of the consumer in relation to their interaction with fashion brands. This could be identified through Phase One, Part 5, when participants were asked to describe the brands, the type of women they thought would wear each brand and how they would describe that woman. The labels Greek women placed on fashion brands and how they differentiated between those fashion brands by describing

them and categorising them differently, indicated how they differentiate between fashion brands, attaching labels to them.

This was taken further than initially considered. It was thought to be of importance to consumers, as they would place different brands in different categories in terms of their price for example, but it has been found that this process occurs in many other ways. There is a more complex process involved, as there are many determinants involved in categorising and ‘coding’ fashion brands as the meanings attached to them are a result of a complex thinking process that is socially influenced through interaction and the stimulus. The categorisation process does not only exist in the way Greek women perceive a fashion brand to be of high quality or not, but is also a result of a mutual and common shared symbolic meaning attached to fashion brands, as are the ‘codes’. These meanings created are responsible for communicating within the society and this leads to the grouping and placement of fashion brands and their wearers into categories.

The participants displayed behaviour through which fashion brands are placed into categories mostly concerning factors such as price in order to project the quality of the item, prestige and suitability to one’s socioeconomic status as well as the profession of the wearer (e.g. a lawyer or doctor would need to dress smartly). This may again relate to Goffman’s ‘The presentation of self’ (1959: 40), where he uses the same example of a lawyer who dresses differently when meeting a client and when attending various events. Goffman (1959) can be seen to hold relevance as explained (section 6.2) and these findings can be seen to ‘build up’ this idea of dressing ‘accordingly’ depending on the social situation one is present.

Furthermore, the categorisation process which Greek women apply when interacting with other women depends upon the brand worn and women appear to be understood, identified, perceived and characterised by that fashion brand. It is seen that Greek women not only ‘read’ fashion brands but also the wearers. This is something that has been displayed also by Elliot and Leonard (2004) and Kamenidou *et al*’s (2007) studies on fashion brands. The categorisation process seems to be a factor which exists because of the stimulus, internal and external influences which all come to influence the individual in different ways. These influences are not only responsible for the perception of the individual in terms of fashion brands but also assist in the creation of the symbolic meanings attached to fashion brands and the individual, which are then placed under a category through a process of labelling and coding. This process leads to the use of fashion brands as a means of projecting oneself in which it is displayed how

brands are used either to try to project what the wearer wants others to see or as a simple display of how they, as individuals, actually want to be seen. This will be explained in the following section.

6.3.8 Outcome: Mind-sets towards fashion brands

The last ‘stage’ displayed’ in Figure 6.1 refers to the outcome of the stages and process which Greek women go through when forming views, opinions and meanings about fashion brands. This offers greater knowledge on the overall mentality that Greek women have towards foreign fashion brands and how this is formed through the previous ‘stages’.

The influences, stimulus and attachment of meanings to fashion brands through a labelling, coding and categorisation process results in the formation of views, the meanings attached to fashion brands and the opinions of those fashion brands. The formation of views is a result of the influences and stages which have been analysed and this is the outcome of those. In this final ‘stage’, it is the individual’s overall view and opinions which result from the previous stages. This is where the common views, meanings and opinions of Greek women are identified, as it can be seen that the Greek women have a shared reality.

A socially-created culture around foreign fashion brands was identified as existing amongst the Greek women. This was displayed not only by the similar mind-set they have of fashion brands but also by how they refer often to what others think. This suggests that interaction contributed to the forming of a socially shared view within a group.

The culture created around brands concerns the mind-set and attitude of Greek women towards fashion brands and the relationship formed between individuals and brands. There is a specific culture existing around fashion brands, which is relevant to consumerism and fashion brands in terms of their meaning to the consumer. Hedonic and symbolic consumptions of brands is displayed in the mentality of Greek women associated to existing literature on their association to specific statuses (Mayo & Nairn, 2009) as a display of ‘power and status’ (Leibenstein, 1950). The term ‘brand’ has been found to hold a specific meaning for the respondents of this DBA study, used to refer to expensive, known fashion brands created through a social culture, different to the traditional culture, in which they share an understanding of fashion brand meaning but does not relate to the traditional Greek values of family and religion. Existing literature on brand communities through which social and cultural relationships are built

(Schembri, 2009) can be related to the culture found to be created by Greek women in relation to fashion brands. It could be suggested that this culture which is created around fashion brands will inevitably affect the consuming or non-consuming of brands.

Further, this 'stage' can offer a further exploration of the Kamenidou *et al* (2007) findings, building on existing knowledge of a greater understanding of the Greek consumer as to why and how these women come to feel the way they do towards foreign fashion brands. This can contribute greatly to promotional strategies adopted by practitioners in creating more effective print images and can benefit academics in relation to gaining a better understanding of the mental processes Greek women go through and their 'emotional states' which may be of particular interest to social scientists.

6.4 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed how the research findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Greek women. How Greek women 'read', understand and attach meanings to foreign fashion brands has been discussed with a 'shared reality' present in terms of brand meaning. The findings on fashion brand meaning may be used by fashion brand advertisers and academic scholars to gain a better understanding of this social group and their perception and emotions towards foreign fashion brands.

The chapter has also highlighted the role of print images within advertisements, which act as a stimulus resulting in a form of influence. This influence is considered to work on a whole independent level to other 'internal' and 'external' influences as it has been found that the image shown can be powerful.

This adds to existing knowledge regarding image effectiveness and the brand communication process between consumer and brand. The research objectives and questions posed early on in the project were discussed reflecting on the literature review (Chapter 2) and the chapter has presented new literature that emerged from the research findings, Goffman (1959) and Laroche (1986). These authors were found to be of relevance to the data collected. Further, the chapter revisited the conceptual thinking (Chapter 3), focusing on the process of consumer interpretation of fashion brand magazine advertising. By presenting an updated version of the conceptual framework (6.1), the two were compared in order to display the development from the initial 'thinking' to the outcome after the data collection, analysing the updated framework.

From the chapter certain 'big issues' were identified which are discussed in the next chapter. These 'big issues' are discussed in terms of what they mean for and how they contribute to academic knowledge and fashion brand advertising practice.

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the contribution of the research to knowledge and practice, highlighting the 'big issues' which emerged from the data. Suggestions for further research, limitations and challenges faced are discussed. The chapter focuses mainly on how the findings build on to existing literature and how these findings add to professional practice and academic knowledge.

The chapter concludes with a section of the researcher's journey, how it has affected her as a researcher and a practitioner and how she will use this knowledge in her personal, professional practice and academic career.

7.2 Contributions of the research

This study offers contributions to both knowledge and practice. The findings offer a rich insight into the views, opinions and meanings of Greek women about foreign fashion brands and how they 'read' fashion brands in print images (placed in advertisements of fashion magazines).

It is acknowledged that the findings of the study were multifarious as discussed in Chapter 5. However, overall, four 'big issues' may be highlighted:

- the importance of socioeconomic status (and a perception that fashion brand consumption is seen to be reflective of that status);
- the projection of self in relation to that status (through fashion brand consumption);
- the influence of print images in fashion advertising on the additional accrual of brand knowledge (positioning images as a stimulus that, where brand awareness exists, adds to consumer perceptions of the brand and allows for an assessment of 'self-congruity');
- the significance of values and norms for the 'reading' of fashion brands (with implications for their effective communication).

These issues are discussed, in turn, before specifically considering contributions to knowledge and contributions to practice in direct relation to them.

7.2.1 The importance of socioeconomic status and projection of self through brands

For the Greek women in this study reporting on their own views of and relationships with fashion brands for themselves and other Greek women, socioeconomic status appeared to be a pertinent issue. Greece was found to have the highest proportion of luxury branded items in the AC Nielsen 2008 report (Perry & Kyriakaki, 2014) in accordance with the results of the present study, it is suggested that there is a wider-materialism and overconsumption which is part of this Greek culture. Even though the economic crisis does not allow overconsumption at the same level as it used to a decade ago, for example, the attitudes do not appear to have changed. The knowledge gained, contributes to a greater understanding of the meanings, views and opinions Greek women have of foreign fashion brands, their overall mentality towards fashion brands and their meaning as well as their view offering an appreciation of fashion brand wearers. This is of importance for academics as a greater understanding of perceptions and emotions in terms of how Greek women ‘read’ fashion brands and use them as ‘social tools’ and ‘codes’ which are used as non-verbal language through which they communicate.

The study acts as a point of interest to practitioners in order to gain a better understanding in relation to how fashion brands are linked to socio-economic statuses, class and occasion. In this way practitioners can benefit from a more effective branding and communication strategy to promote these brands more effectively.

The way in which the participants understood and used fashion brands, means that the items have lost their utilitarian function and instead are perceived and employed as social tools to reflect individuals’ socioeconomic status even when, in some cases, it is not a true reflection of their current socioeconomic status (i.e. the item is not affordable without credit, saving or buying replicas). Existing research has found brands being attached to specific statuses (Mayo & Nairn, 2009) which the present study builds on, by displaying its existent in Greek women.

There appears to be a reflection of wider social values here in the responses towards brand consumption. Higher socioeconomic status appeared to be desired or at least worthy of admiration, projected through the wearing of brands and also venerated through brand wearers (except in cases where brand copies or fakes are identifiable).

In relation to the significance of socioeconomic status, a key observation was that the Greek women saw fashion brand consumption as a marker of this status. Indeed, it emerged as a key reason behind the consumption of fashion brands in this social group - to gain admiration from others by projecting (high) socioeconomic class, wealth and being able to afford expensive items.

Projection was initially seen simply as a way for individuals to use brands for dressing up as a simple reflection of their character, or intentionally to project what they wished to show others and the image they wanted to show off or even express themselves, as suggested by Piacentini and Mailer (2004). One key intended message (as argued in section 6.1.1) appeared to be related to socioeconomic status and how Greek women project their status through fashion brands, but most importantly how they come to understand one's socioeconomic status by the brands they wear.

The research shows that this form of projection seems to have stronger and deeper roots than just simply wanting to show off to others. This very interesting new dimension which was discovered through both phases has shown projection can, at times act like a kind of vicious circle. This is because individuals wear fashion brands to project what they want to say to others in terms of who they are but also, on the other hand, for those who do not buy fashion brands with such an intention, what they wear is seen wanting to be seen as an individual in a world of consumerism.

The whole concept of intentional projection is again related to the individual's self-image and concept of style in terms of awareness and perception. Symbolic interactionism and the concept of the self in terms of how social interaction within a group creates concepts of the 'self' are seen as remarkably relevant in this case. Through the process of awareness and perception explained earlier, where the individual is exposed to, a creation of shared understanding of the same fashion brands, the same or similar context for the meaning of those fashion brands is created. Linked to the idea that fashion brands display one's socioeconomic status or profession as expressed in Phase One by the participants, there is something deeper within this concept of projection. Patterns have emerged deriving from repeated responses which display a link between specific brands and socioeconomic status. In Phase Two, it was clearly shown how these brands are used in order to project a certain image to others even if, in these cases, the brands do not 'fit' the status of the individual. This therefore offers very rich insights into how an individual tries to show to others something that is sometimes not reflective of their current status. This could offer ground for further research as the Greek women seemed to express a need to show that they belong to a socioeconomic

status which they do not. It would be interesting to research from where this need derives from and why it is related to wealth and the lifestyle that accompanies it instead of trying to project other qualities, perhaps in terms of individualism or even rebelling against the *status quo*.

7.2.2 The influence of advertising on the additional accrual of brand knowledge

It was observed that the ability of advertising to add to or accrue brand knowledge was not simple. In fact, when actual examples of fashion brand adverts were looked at by the respondents (Part B, Phase Two), respondents appeared to possess very 'sketchy' existing knowledge about some of the brands even when the brands were revealed. Brand knowledge appeared to be acquired and built up through direct experience with brands or brand competitors perceived to be similar in terms of categorisation. The ability of a specific fashion brand advertisement to shape or change this knowledge must be questioned. On the one hand, the advertisement might have the ability to influence levels of awareness and understanding of a brand (in terms of its categorisation against other brands, for example). Alternatively, the level of influence or impact alone appears limited and must be appreciated within a broader social context of meaning-making and fashion brand interpretation.

A socially-created culture around foreign fashion brands was found to exist amongst the Greek women. This was displayed not only by the similar mind-sets they appear to have of fashion brands but also by how the participants referred often to what others think. This suggests that interaction contributed to the forming of a socially-shared view within a group. Practitioners can use this knowledge in order to comprehend the Greek consumer on a greater scale, further than that of brand meaning. A greater understanding into the more complex processes involved can benefit practitioners in creating more effective images in print advertisements by the understanding of how images are 'read' and translated. The research has displayed a shared 'reality' amongst Greek women, this can be a powerful 'weapon' for practitioners, targeting this social group with the notion it adopts a shared mind-set therefore made easier to gain audience 'reach'.

Academics can also benefit as greater knowledge is gained in relation to Greek women and the complex process involved in how meanings, views and opinions are constructed through social interaction, which could be of great interest to symbolic interactionist supporters as a culture around brands is socially build.

This concerns the mind-set and attitude of Greek women towards fashion brands and the relationship formed between individuals and brands. There is a specific culture existing around fashion brands, which is relevant to consumerism and fashion brands in terms of their meaning to the consumer. It must be distinguished that this culture is socially created and is different to the traditional culture. It is still a type of culture created by this social group in which they share an understanding of fashion brands and their meaning but does not relate to the traditional Greek values of family or religion for example. This is how the concept of style is created, by interaction and the shared understanding of fashion brands and those wearing them.

The concept of style, which is a result of the individual's overall image, was found to be important with regard to external influences. It was found to be important to the participants, as the results indicated this to be central factor in terms of the individuals' self-projection to others, which takes place in terms of the image of the individual. From the individual's personal image and self-projection a new factor is derived, which was not considered in the original thinking in Chapter 3, which is the 'concept of style' which is part of the image. This factor was found to be important as it is linked to the display of one's image but also displays the symbolic use of fashion brands.

The concept of style which emerged from the respondents' answers once more justified the research approach chosen. This is considered directly relevant to the symbolic interactionist approach and to the 'self', and this finding could offer room for further research for both practitioners and academics of social sciences particularly, as style seems to hold a special meaning for the respondents. This factor of the concept of style, seems to be related but also independent of fashion brands as style as a whole has a symbolic meaning related to what an individual is as well as a concept which is created by the individual herself so, even though fashion brands have a symbolic meaning for the participants, style is shown also to serve similar needs or purposes to fashion brands.

What is particularly vital to refer to at this point is that style is a more complex idea, as style is multidimensional and not a single, fixed thing. Style consists of different ingredients, mixing different brands together to create an image which includes more than clothes, such as accessories or hair styles, whereas brands are seen to have a separate symbolic meaning and a unique personality. Additionally, dress style is not something that is ready to purchase, a fixed idea or concept, like a fashion brand, which has a certain identity and meaning. Style is created and made up by the individual

carrying it – you cannot buy style whereas you can buy a brand as it is linked with the personality of the person wearing it and each personality is unique. Style is a more personal issue but could be also copied and does not contradict the fact that each brand has a certain symbolism which is shared amongst this group so for instance, if a woman wants to look like the Hollywood movie star Angelina Jolie, she will copy the style of the star but not necessarily the specific brands that she wears.

Referring to the images, the Greek women displayed an attitude about projection. This is very interesting for further research both for academics and practitioners in order to understand the distinction which individuals make between the symbolism of fashion brands which at the same time includes a personalised unique style. Since style is a more multidimensional concept, further research might consider the reasons and factors that are of importance when an individual is creating their style. This could offer in depth information on the participants' view of attaching their personality to a style and what are the decisions involved in deciding upon that style. This process can offer a vast amount of information on the personality of the consumer in terms of the factors that are important in their creation of style.

7.2.3 The significance of specific, named brands in the 'reading' of fashion brands

The Greek women decoded, categorized, coded and stereotyped fashion brands and their wearers. The attachment of meaning and symbolism to a brand acts as a coding process and system resulting in placing fashion brands and the women wearing them into specific categories. This was shown by the way a specific brand and its wearer was characterised and how these opinions were shared amongst the Greek women. They tended to stereotype fashion brands and their wearers, which resulted in the attachments of specific meanings, viewpoints and opinions about fashion brands and those wearing them. For example, certain fashion brands were considered to be appropriate for young women whereas others were considered more suitable for older, more mature women. This same 'agreement' applied to certain fashion brands having specific characteristics and being suitable for certain occasions such as weddings. This finding is associated with the stereotyping referred to by Elliot and Leonard (2004).

Stereotyping did not simply involve considering certain fashion brands suitable for certain ages or for certain occasions. It was identified that the wearers of the brands were characterised, stereotyped and discriminated against in a certain way. This included making aspersions about the socioeconomic status of the woman wearing the brand as well as her character, for instance, labelling her as '*psonio*' (show-off) or

‘elegant’. The wearers received much more stereotyping than the brands themselves. A woman’s character was characterised positively or negatively simply based on the fashion brand she wore. The fashion brand appears to act as a means of ‘reading’ Greek women, offering information about the wearer which exceeds fashion brand preferences. This was observed most clearly when the participants were asked to speak about specific, named brands.

The implication is that there is a need for fashion brand advertisers to operate within a shared frame of reference to their target group audiences. The extent to which this can happen using traditional cross-cultural marketing techniques requires critical consideration. To be effective in advertising foreign fashion brands there is a need to acquire deep knowledge and understanding of potential consumers at a very personal level to be able to best communicate in a relevant and meaningful manner.

The ‘reading’ of fashion brands does not only offer great knowledge to academics in relation to consumer perception of fashion brands but also contributes to practice as a greater understanding on a wider context of the consumer and the way fashion brands are communicated to them can be used in order to improve this process. The particular study can act as a useful framework, under which other cultures or social groups can be studied in order to discover the meanings, views and opinions towards fashion brands.

7.2.4 Contributions to knowledge

The intended contribution to knowledge of the study was articulated in Chapter 1 as being able to increase understanding of the extent to which and how groups of individuals create and attach meanings to brands in the context of fashion, with implications for consumer behaviour literature.

Key contributions to knowledge may be emphasised in relation to these original intentions and in the light of the identification of the ‘big issues’ identified earlier:

- Socioeconomic status and the projection of self in relation to status emerged as a key underpinning factor in fashion brand consumption;
- Print images in advertising emerged as a stimulus that might add to rather than primarily drive consumer awareness, knowledge and brand perceptions and here the ‘social’ dimension of theories such as self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1986; Jamal and Goode, 2001) might be further explored.

- Wider social values and norms emerged as a significant influence on the process of brand communication and the advertising of fashion brands.

7.2.5 Contributions to practice

The intended contributions to practice were articulated in Chapter 1 as being able to inform practitioners (namely fashion brand advertisers) to assist effective brand communication. In relation to this, the following contributions to practice may be emphasised:

- Socioeconomic status and the projection of self in relation as a significant influence on the reading of fashion brand advertisements and fashion brand consumption;
- Print images in advertising emerged as a stimulus that might add to rather than primarily drive consumer awareness, knowledge and brand perceptions and here the issue of brand communication through advertising should be considered;
- The relevance of wider social values and norms as a significant influence on the process of brand communication and the advertising of fashion brands.
- The application of a sociological framework for carrying out contemporary marketing research using an approach such as symbolic interactionism in order to approach consumers more effectively in fashion brands promotions.

In terms of contributions to practice the study has offered an opportunity to see how the female Greek consumer ‘reads’ foreign fashion brands through the stimulus of print images advertised (in fashion magazines) and the process they go through in forming a mentality towards them. This has been discussed in depth, earlier in this chapter.

Practitioners can benefit from this research by adopting the symbolic interactionist framework in order to effectively understand consumers. This research has displayed how using a sociological approach such as symbolic interactionism to carry out marketing research, can assist in gathering ‘valuable’ information through the rich data. This will enhance knowledge on the way the consumer is to be approached. Practitioners can gain a deeper knowledge of consumers in relation to how to promote their brands more effectively and the knowledge that consumers need to be treated more like the complex beings they are and not be treated as a passive audience open to accepting anything.

This research also contributes to the effective communication of fashion brands through print images, building a more effective brand identity in the Greek market. The Greek market has been understudied, although highly involved with fashion brands (Perry & Kyriakaki, 2014) and their meanings. Since a better understanding of the Greek consumer is gained in terms of the mentality held and how fashion brands are perceived, a better and more effective brand identity strategy can be adopted in building and promoting the brand. The knowledge gained can inform practitioners in different levels as an essence of the of the consumers' 'mentality', achieved in relation to how they understand fashion brands and the print images advertising them. This study has displayed how such knowledge can contribute to consumer understanding, important for promotional practises adopted.

Strategic planning of a fashion brand in accessories for instance can also benefit through the understanding of the Greek consumer and how she is to be 'approached'. Mostly, the present study informs practitioners in relation to an understudied group greatly involved with fashion brands, such as Greek women.

Even though, at present, the Greek market is suffering because of the economic recession, it can be seen that foreign fashion brands are still very powerful and that the perceptions of the female Greek consumers have not shifted and are still seen to use fashion brands as 'social tools'. Economic recession may have affected the buying power and purchasing frequency of foreign fashion brands but the perceptions and the gravity of foreign fashion brands should be acknowledged as still significant for female Greek consumers.

Practitioners can benefit from this study by developing clearer insights into a market which, although it seems to be attracted to luxury fashion brands, has not so far been particularly researched. The information provided in this study in relation to the overall mentality of Greek women towards fashion brands, contributes to greater understanding of the female Greek consumer and how brands are 'read', understood, decoded and more importantly the existence of a shared mind-set or mentality towards foreign fashion brands (Figure 6.1). The significance of wider social values and norms for the 'reading' of fashion brands (with implications for their effective communication) can be used by practitioners in order to study the more effective communication process between foreign fashion brands and the female Greek consumer through the print images placed in advertisements of fashion magazines. Appreciation of the influence of the images in advertising on the additional accrual of brand knowledge might add to a better understanding of the female Greek consumer perceptions of the brand.

Overall, the present study has offered useful insights into the process that the female Greek consumer goes through when interacting with foreign fashion brands through the images in international magazine advertisements. This information can benefit practitioners on two levels: firstly, to gain a better understanding of the female Greek consumers and their relationship with the images within advertisements and the level of influence and effects it can have and, secondly, how through this understanding, advertising and promotional practices may be improved.

The findings can help international fashion houses to apply their promotional strategies more effectively. They offer practitioners a better understanding of female Greek fashion brand consumers in terms of:

- how the female Greek consumer ‘reads’ the advertisements - this can inform marketing decisions in terms of how a foreign brand is to be promoted in this consumer group;
- the existence of a categorisation and coding process - this can be used as a basis by practitioners to understand how Greek women use the brand as a social ‘tool’. The meaning of a fashion brand to a Greek woman and the symbolism it has for her can provide fashion brand marketers with valuable information on how to target the female Greek fashion brand consumer;
- consumer responses to fashion brands with multiple branding lines (e.g.: the ‘Sixty group’ offering ‘Miss Sixty’, ‘energie’) - this can aid fashion brand companies in appreciating why some of their brands might be more successful than others. Practitioners might be assisted in terms of having information which will benefit more effective communication with the Greek female fashion brand consumer through images in fashion magazine advertisements.

7.3 Suggestions for further research

The research has offered great insight into the way the female Greek consumer interacts and understands foreign fashion brands and their wearers, as well as offered a better understanding of the general mentality towards them.

Academics can take the opportunity and further discover why certain fashion brands are linked to perceived factors of wealth such as socioeconomic status but also grab the opportunity to further look into how ‘thin’ bodies may be seen as more important to

have than fit bodies. This would require a much more sociological analysis of the role of fashion brands in society and their relevance and meaning to social groups.

Practitioners may consider looking further in greater detail, the process which has been suggested the female Greek consumer goes through in order to form a view, meaning or opinion of fashion brands. There is a lot of ground unexplored in terms of the female Greek consumer and the relationship they form with fashion brands. It has been of interest to discover participants suggest brands in consumables like cosmetics may be treated differently. Therefore, it would be interesting to discover how fashion brands which have created brand extensions and sell cosmetics (e.g.: 'YSL' or 'D & G') are being perceived.

Another interesting study which could evolve from these findings is how individuals use brands to project themselves and how brands have symbolic meanings but that style is equally important even though it is individually created, so what is the precise difference between a brand and style? Moreover, the outcome of this study might be used as a basis for related comparative studies:

- between the group used and other Greek women who live abroad;
- of Greek women living in Greece, some of whom grew up abroad.

This would facilitate deeper understanding of the interpretation of 'foreign' fashion brands. These suggestions require further exploration of female Greek consumers, female consumers of other nationalities and Greek consumer as a whole.

7.4 Limitations of the study and challenges faced

A number of research limitations and challenges may be acknowledged.

7.4.1 Limitations

Even though most of the participants in Phase One and 8 of the 10 participants in Phase Two were acquaintances of the researcher, I was able to distance myself from them even during the interviews and during the analysis of data. Here, the work of Goffman (1959) was of interest to me in terms of being able to 'distance' myself as a researcher from a community in which I might be identified to be a member and recognising the role that my own self might potentially play in my work. I acknowledge that I am a Greek woman and, as such, cannot fully separate myself from issues relating to Greek

female perceptions of fashion, dress and style. The researcher's experience with some of the participants did not seem to create an urge to obtain more information from particular individuals, nor did the researcher make judgements on whether they were being (consciously or unconsciously) inaccurate in their responses, which could have resulted in me pursuing specific aspects of their relationships with fashion due to my knowledge of those women through a higher level of familiarity with them.

The sample size of the study must be acknowledged to be small in view of the desire to focus in-depth within the constraints of time and money. This must be recognised to be a limitation. However, because the study did not intend to make generalisations about Greek women in general and instead set out to explore the meanings, opinions and viewpoints of foreign fashion brands held by Greek women in depth, I feel that this is a limitation that must be weighed up against the level of detail that was able to be acquired.

Several additional challenges arose during the interview and analysis process. Firstly, the translation of words from Greek to English without losing their meaning and context became a challenge. Frequently, words could not be translated into English in the transcripts to be analysed, as there was no equivalent English word. An example of this was 'psonio', which roughly translates as 'show-off or a person who is, - full of themselves, but there is no one word equivalent. '*Hlidi*' is another common word used to talk of wealth, luxury and perhaps extravagant lifestyle, but again there is no single English word that conveys all of these attributes in combination. This was a challenge in terms of effective translation in order for the analysis of the findings not to lose valuable information in the translation process.

The process of exploring subjective meanings might also be recognised as a limitation. The participants could not understand how an advertisement could make them feel anything, so in terms of the wording of interview questions 'feel' seems to be an inappropriate word to use in Greek. This, however, did not seem to be an issue in Phase Two Part B as, when the participants discussed the adverts and then the brands, they mentioned their views and feelings. Therefore, the problem seemed to occur when the researcher asked directly how they felt on seeing an advert and the respondents were more comfortable when they themselves were left to bring up their thoughts and feelings through their past experiences. They had a problem in general with passive rather than active questions such as: 'how does it make you feel?'. They found it easier to describe feelings or engage in reflection in 'live' situations and this is why they brought in all of their views when they were left to refer freely to the adverts.

Participants did not consciously acknowledge themselves to be influenced by external factors especially by fashion. Even in cases where the participants mentioned that they did like, for example, a friend's dress sense and might have been slightly influenced, they always insisted that they followed their own style. The participants contradicted themselves repeatedly throughout the interviews. This was a challenge for the researcher as it created confusion in their responses and how reliable these were. Although this was problematic, during the evaluation and reading of the transcripts, it was clear that, when they were asked directly and precisely about what influenced them, they replied that nothing did. When asked if their job had an effect on the way they dressed they responded that, even though there might not be major restraints, they could not wear whatever they liked, so this was also shown to be an influence.

Also, Participant 6, for example, when asked about the influences responded: *'No. I'm not influenced usually by fashion, I try to wear things that suit my personality'*. She was then asked if friends, family or work have any influence and she responded that one cannot go to work wearing anything you like. Later, she contradicted herself as, even though she states that she is not influenced, she does say that she has issues with her body and does not feel comfortable; therefore, there must be some kind of influence either from her social interactions or from other means like the media. When asked whether she is influenced by advertising, she responded that advertising *'definitely to a great extent'* contributed to her views about brands, as it is *'brain washing'*, but when asked about the effects of advertising on her, she said that it was *'informative'*. Such contradictions occur throughout the interviews but these were the most obvious examples, so this challenge meant that extra care was needed when evaluating and reading the transcripts in order to achieve a precise analysis of them. The interview questions had often to be revisited clarification in order to get a clear answer.

7.4.2 Challenges

Three challenges were identified within the research process. The first was the participants' attitude towards giving interviews. They seemed slightly conscious of being 'correct' or knowing the answer even though they were informed that there were no wrong and right answers. The participants were clearly concerned about giving the 'right' answer although this study was not based on testing them but instead, on their views and knowledge.

The second issue faced, which is of upmost interest, is that participants appeared to experience difficulty in attaching words to describe the brands but were very

comfortable about attaching words women who wear that brand. Even though this difficulty did not apply to all of the participants, it was a common outcome and a pattern of shared views was found. What is of further interest is how the participants grouped certain brands together also in part four, where they categorised the types of people wearing brands without being asked to do so. Furthermore, in part 5, there appeared repetitiveness of the words applied to specific brands. It is of interest, though, that the participants seemed to refer to their peers in a certain way but distanced their behaviour and attitude towards brands from the behaviour of their peers. This resulted in a constant contradiction in their responses as they tried to separate themselves and their behaviour towards brands from what they considered the relationship of society and Greek women who, in their opinion, were 'fashion crazy'.

Furthermore, ethical issues arose, as the researcher had to avoid exploring certain responses in greater detail to avoid upsetting the respondents, even though this information might have made an important contribution to the research. These respondents tended to concern weight and of body size, and whether the respondents felt that their clothes size was available or unavailable to them in clothes shops. Therefore, in order to avoid making the respondents feel uncomfortable asking them to talk about their weight was avoided after a certain point. It must be noted that this appeared to be an issue for women of different sizes, not just women who considered themselves to be overweight. This became a real issue, as there was a lot of information that could have been brought out, but further questioning appeared inappropriate. In relation to the original research aim and objectives, the results produced a lot of information, and even more than initially expected. The outcome of the research was found to be richer than expected and satisfactory in terms of the approach chosen, which was symbolic interactionism. Also, the methods used, which were qualitative in nature, were shown to be a good fit. Firstly, the choice of approach was justified, as the participants showed that brands do have symbolic meanings for both themselves and the society in which they live. Also, the study showed that the participants share these meanings, viewpoints and opinions of the society in which they live in. In simple terms, there is a mutual understanding of fashion brands and what they mean within contemporary Greek society.

The final challenge concerned the researcher rather than the participants which was her everyday interaction with the Greek women in the past and during the research. This became an issue when writing the thesis especially when analysing the results, as there were many findings which were considered everyday knowledge instead of

findings that were worthy of mention. In trying to tackle this issue, the type of analysis chosen assisted, as it entailed listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts many times, reflecting upon the responses.

7.5 Reflections on the research 'journey' and impact to personal and professional practice

As the group under focus has largely been neglected in terms of research, I wanted to discover more about Greek women and how they 'read' fashion brands. My personal experience of this social group was a driving force for the study in wishing to discover more on the process involved in how they hold the views, meanings and opinions of foreign fashion brands are formed. Through the years of personal interaction I had observed certain vivid behaviours towards fashion brands and how they displayed them 'triggering' an interest in finding out more about what I witnessed every day, which appeared to be a specific attitude towards fashion brands. This interest was enhanced by the fact that I grew up in the UK which made me see Greek women as having a specific sense of dress style and use of fashion brands in contrast to other cultures. This was recognised in fashion brands which seemed to be something that these women used as a mean to display and project themselves, 'label' and discriminate against others. This became a point of interest as it showed that there seemed to be standards and social 'norms' which those women follow a 'process' to differentiate between fashion brands.

Previous academic studies had suggested that the Greek market had received relatively less attention in comparison to other markets (namely, the UK and US markets), and a lack of understanding of female Greek consumers as a discrete consumer group was apparent. It was visible that there was a lack of knowledge and understanding to exist in terms of how the Greek women understood, perceived and interpreted fashion brands. The initial point of inspiration which was the understanding of the way Greek women use fashion and fashion brands was lacking in literature 'sparking' an interest for discovering more about this group.

In conducting this research, many factors which I had initially considered emerged from the data, such as the way fashion brands are categorised for instance. In particular, the significance of 'self' and wider social values and norms became apparent through 'social conduct' of what is considered appropriate to wear and when. The issue

of body image was revealed to be pertinent, in particular. This made the research exciting but it also raised ethical and emotive dimensions and for me it brought a great sense of responsibility towards the participants as a researcher. This was a very interesting but also challenging point during the research as it was necessary to set boundaries to oneself. Even though a great amount of information was coming out, it gave me a greater sense of boundaries that I, as a researcher had to set for myself as to not disrespect participants by making them feel uneasy, embarrassed or upset. As I gained greater knowledge of Greek women and their special relationship with fashion brands I noted the personal significance of the research topic to be much greater than I had initially anticipated and there was a clear point at which the research had to stop.

In terms of my own development as a researcher, the process of studying for a DBA went far beyond the acquisition of academic skills but I feel that it had a transformational influence on my practice as a researcher.

I began the research wishing to contribute to knowledge and practice in the area of fashion brand marketing but as I end the research, I must reflect on the study's influence on me as a Greek woman and a member of Greek society. I have been left questioning my own view of self, my actions in relation to wider social values and norms and, perhaps most interestingly, my own relationship to fashion brands and style in terms of their meaning and social value but also how through them a process of 'stereotyping' occurs when interacting within different social groups. A greater understanding of a social group with which I interact with was gained and I have been found to have become more sceptical about the thinking processes that occur when evaluating a new acquaintance regarding their fashion brand choices.

As a result of the research I now am more confident in pursuing a career in research in relation to the 'self' on a greater scale. Symbolic interactionism, a sociological approach applied to research of a contemporary society has been of utmost interest and great experience, offering to me the chance to explore how 'old' ideas interested in social phenomena can contribute to contemporary issue. Also, the framework is seen to add 'value' for contemporary marketing research and find it offers so much in research as it benefits from its original ideas, applied to contemporary settings. As a researcher the use of symbolic interactionism was found to offer a great understanding of Greek women and their perception of foreign fashion brands giving room for the more in-depth processes they go through and in-depth meanings and symbolisms they have of those fashion brands. Most importantly, I have come to realise

that when doing research, you come to learn more about yourself as well as what you research.

In terms of professional practice, the research has offered a greater understanding of the way brands are ‘understood’, processed and perceived, using that knowledge as a tool in building my own brand. More precisely, the research will contribute to creating brand identities for customers and starting my own business of an electronic-shop with handmade and custom made jewellery using crystals, for women aged 20-40. A greater understanding of promotional practises and the processes women go through when are introduced to a brand have also been sought. Knowledge gained has contributed extensively to how the brand identity was created, the factors considered in the promotional practices, even the way the logo is being designed to act as a ‘label’. The in-depth accounts of emotions and meanings towards fashion brands and categorisation and labelling of brands is a valuable asset for the creation of the brand and its identity.

This facilitated the practical issues in creating a logo, how to do so in order to project what was desired and other characteristics. Since a greater understanding was gained from the research in terms of the way a brand and its image is ‘read’, understood and interpreted, this has given me leverage in today’s competitive market in terms of building an effective brand personality and brand image for the target group by being able to bring across messages to the consumers more effectively.

Great impact in terms of my new business was in the strategic planning. Writing the business plan and mission statement for the team designing the logo and website, I came to understand that the determinants and decisions I was making in planning and building the brand have been influenced by the knowledge gained. More specifically, the way I was addressing the potential customer in my ‘about us’ section for the website, was clear to have been influenced by the interviewee’s perceptions. I found myself addressing potential customers in a way I understood the women I interviewed wanted to be addressed and ‘treated’ by the brand or company.

A greater understanding of how I should plan the business and ‘target’ the potential customer was sought in the way I expressed the aim and objectives of the business. The factors I took into account in the decision-making process in creating and building the brand and its image were driven by the knowledge I gained from past research from studying the literature and from the greater understanding and knowledge I gained from the research.

In this attempt, I realised that importance of other activities such as following 'Facebook', 'Pinterest' and 'Instagram' have contributed extensively. A better understanding was gained of social media and the promotional practises available which I aim to use not only as knowledge but also as promotional practises in both my future academic and professional plans.

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Appendix 1: Phase One interview

Part 1)

- 8) Are you born/bred in Athens?
- 9) Age?
- 10) Married?
- 11) Children?
- 12) Educational level?
- 13) Home owner?
- 14) Working? What is your profession?

Part 2)

- 8) Do you read fashion magazines?
- 9) Do you purchase fashion magazines?
- 10) Do you follow fashion?
- 11) Do you follow fashion online?
- 12) Do you buy brands?
- 13) Do you wear only brands?
- 14) Have you ever compared yourself to the models in magazine?

Part 3)

- 7) How often do you read fashion magazines?
- 8) On average how many magazines do you purchase every month?
- 9) Have you ever purchased something you've seen in a fashion magazine?
- 10) Do you admire the things you see in magazines and are brands?
- 11) Do you think by wearing brands others see you differently? How?
- 12) Do you think that models used in fashion magazine advertisements influence readers as far as the image they have?

Part 4)

- 21) What is your opinion of women wearing brands? What kind of people are they?
- 22) Do you think by wearing brands it helps one succeed in their personal life?
Social life?

- 23) Do you think wearing brands has no influence at all?
- 24) Do you think foreign brands are too expensive for the Greek market?
- 25) Do you think if someone is wearing a brand others see them as more capable or worthy than someone who isn't wearing expensive brands?
- 26) In your opinion what is it that makes one choose brands?
- 27) Do you think the brands one chooses to wear symbolises who they are?
- 28) What is your opinion of fashion?
- 29) Do you think brands promote a specific lifestyle?
- 30) Do you believe one wears brands in order to project something?
- 31) What are they trying to say?
- 32) Is fashion created for a certain audience?
- 33) Do brands promote a specific lifestyle?
- 34) Do you believe brands advertised in fashion magazines affect readers so they desire that brand?
- 35) Has your attitude towards brands changed throughout the years as you got older?
With the economic crisis?
- 36) What is your opinion of the models used in fashion magazines?
- 37) Do you believe the models used in fashion magazines advertisements promote an unhealthy body type? Why do you think they are used?
- 38) Do you believe this type of models is attractive? Do the readers see them as attractive?
- 39) Do you believe the Greek women try to look like these models?
- 40) Do you think these models promote a certain lifestyle?

Part 5)

I will tell you 20 brands:

- 21) Armani
- 22) Burberry
- 23) Chanel
- 24) Dior
- 25) D & G
- 26) Donna Karan
- 27) Gucci
- 28) Guess

- 29) Lacoste
- 30) Louis Vuitton
- 31) Max Mara
- 32) Miss Sixty
- 33) Prada
- 34) Ralph Loren
- 35) Roberto Cavalli
- 36) Sisley
- 37) Tommy Hilfiger
- 38) Valentino
- 39) Versace
- 40) Yves Saint Laurent

- 2) Do you know it?
- 3) What sort of women wear it?
- 4) How would you characterise a woman wearing this brands?

Appendix 2: Phase Two interview

Part A)

- 5) Why do you dress the way you dress?
- 6) Has the way you dress changed with time?
- 7) Do you prefer specific brands to wear?
- 8) Do you believe advertising has contributed in your view or behaviour towards brands?

Part B)

I'll show you some adverts

Advert x: seeing this adverts how do you feel? What is the essence that it brings out?

What do you think it advertises? What brand do you think it is? What is the message you think this ad is trying to give?

Reveal brand: Now that you see what brand it is, your view of the specific advertisement changes?

Part C)

What is your educational level?

Married?

Children?

working?