Can fashion evoke eco-sensitivity and/or social responsibility with young-aged consumers?
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International Fashion and Management

Can fashion evoke eco-sensitivity and/or social responsibility with young-aged consumers?

Practical Thesis
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I hereby declare that the thesis submitted is my own unaided work. All direct or indirect sources used are acknowledged as references.

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Preface

The couple Julie and Veit Kohlhoff, who are good friends of mine, were expecting their second baby girl by the beginning of this year. It was simply perfect timing when Julie asked me if I knew someone who might have time to help out in their company macarons from January onwards. Their family-run business for eco-couture children’s wear had just launched their second collection and was about to present their third at the kid’s wear show Playtime in Paris. As I was just about to apply for internships from February until June, I offered to combine my study curriculum with working for them. Julie and Veit said yes right away and were happy to have me on board. So I started my internship at macarons with a spectacular fashion fair in Paris.

The coming six months were work-filled, challenging and exciting. I became part of the (small) team quickly and started working autonomously after a short while. The children’s wear market was something absolutely new for me, as was the eco-conscious and green production of all of macarons’ garments. Still I made the tone of voice my handwriting and could help pushing the business further. Besides organizing the photo shoots, being responsible for the styling and the layout of the catalogue, the social media presence and the customer relations, I started developing online marketing campaigns and advertising newsletters.

With these campaigns, we usually tried to reach the conscious parents. Although macarons is producing clothes for children between 0-8 years, they are not childish and neither is their communication. It appears logical, in as far as eco-awareness and social responsibility, which build the business’ framework, are mature and important topics. But then after a while I wondered, aren’t children also interested in the nature? Don’t they want to ‘safe the planet’ and plant a tree? Do they understand what it means if garments are eco or fair? And don’t we have to educate them now, so they can act in the future? How would a campaign change, if not the parents were to be targeted but the children?

Every day during my internship I was surrounded by at least two or three children, bugging me with questions and offering me the opportunity to observe their behaviour. They were friends, or neighbours and their relationship to each other was not always the same. I realised quickly that they manipulate and convince each other and definitely all love most to play outside. These kids all have a pristine connection to nature and would do anything their friends do.

I am still working for macarons. I am often surrounded by children and almost always surrounded by fashion-conscious people. macarons gave me the best platform to start my research and even made me start my thinking process. Julie and Veit’s two children, Cléo and Cécile, are the most adorable, curious and intelligent little girls I have met so far. They have influenced my interest in and research for the topic of green-awareness within children enormously and have always served as direct probands. With my findings, I want to advise the company due to an economical concern in their growth, but also because of personal connection to the founders.
Summary

My internship at the eco-couture children’s wear label macarons motivated my research into the field of eco-consciousness with young-aged consumers. Observations on the market of both, eco- and children’s fashion resulted in a potential forecast for companies that offer ‘green’ clothing for children, and justified the continued research.

First towards children’s clothing preferences, which basically showed, that peers, friends, and family have the most significant influence on them. Clothes are used to reflect status and group belonging. Besides, if garments are connected to a well-known figure (cartoon hero), they can become favourite items more easily, also because the recognition value amongst peers is much higher.

Next, I had a look at marketing strategies in fashion, when targeted to children, and also included ‘green’ marketing approaches in my analysis. Adding value to a brand and its product is principal in order to attract children, likewise adult fashion consumers. The marketing approach that should create eco-awareness has to be easy understandable, though, and ideally connected to games and fun time. New media is a key component for the technology-savvy kids of today, who assign great value onto sharing information with friends.

Finally, in this context, the perception of being ‘cool’ caught my attention. It is children’s definition of a successful integration into a group and the reflection of prestige and acceptance. Clothes underline that cognition in you by others. With so called ‘messengers of cool’, marketers make use of this phenomenon, which is interwoven into youth relationships and behaviour.

Fashion can evoke eco-sensitivity and social responsibility with young-aged consumers, as long as the marketing approach, that sells the product, is comprehensible at an early age, offers a social platform to share own and follow friend’s activities, and includes fun that is appreciated by the targeted audience. The younger age groups, that do not yet own the capacity to join virtual activity, are indulged into the conscious world through their surrounding and the natural impulse for imitation. If that really leads to an understanding for eco- and social issues, remains questionable.
Introduction

More than ever, the topic of ‘green fashion’ has gained overall importance within business and society. The sensitivity for environmental care and eco-awareness has risen ever since the first pioneers have pointed their fingers on the severe impact of clothing production on nature. More and more consumers are developing a preference for products manufactured in an ecological and socially responsible manner. Almost every clothing brand is thinking about a more conscious collection or has already contributed one to the market as part of the brand portfolio. However there are a few brands, which try hard to distinguish themselves from global players and see their biggest competitive advantage in 100% fair and eco friendly production with the entitlement of creating the complete product, from raw materials throughout knitting/weaving and completion, appropriate to eco-standards.

The children’s eco-couture label macarons is one of these exceptional brands, taking the challenge even one step further by producing solely in Germany, for children aged 0-8 years. Founded in 2011, the family-run business is slowly establishing itself on the international kids wear market. Besides knowing that there are parents who care, the question appears, if there are children who mind wearing ‘green’ clothing and what possibilities marketing exposes to approach them on an eco-level.

Long since the significance of children and teenagers as direct as well as indirect consumers has caused marketers to evoke child-typical persuasion methods (such as nagging\textsuperscript{1}) through their products. They do that to add to the children’s actual spending, which contribute more than 40 billion dollars to the yearly market turnover, another 700 billion dollar of adult spending (Transcript 2008). Most of the time the targeted customer, the child, is not the actual purchaser but has an enormous psychological buying power and influence on peers and parents. Marketers try hard to cultivate a cradle-to-grave brand loyalty, which guarantees a lifetime bond between consumer and brand.

There are a lot of critical opinions about how advertisers target children as well as there are several examples from a marketing and business perspective, showing that children as consumers are highly significant for business today and even more if they keep up a long-term brand loyalty. Nevertheless, as the topic of ‘green’ fashion is becoming more and more important as well as children as consumers do, the question occurs whether young-aged consumers can be sensitised towards a conscious buying behaviour? And if so, whether fashion (clothes) can create this awareness. Respectively, can fashion evoke eco-sensitivity and/or social responsibility with young-aged consumers?

This thesis concentrates on different factors that influenced the research and that were discovered while elaborating the work, all with the purpose of answering the question stated above. In the first chapter (PART I), I will make a short explanation about the specific terms used in this question. That includes the attempt to define fashion, eco-sensitivity and the term young-aged consumer, in so far as relevant for the topic.

\textsuperscript{1} Will be explained in chapter 7.3, p.11
Since *macarons* is a globally acting company on the children’s wear market and in eco-fashion, we will have a look at these two markets separately to give a reflection of the business’ potential on the market and the overall market situation (for these two specific markets) in the following chapter (PART II). The parental buying behaviour and attitude towards expensive clothes will also be examined as part of the kid’s wear market observation.

The sub-questions will guide us further through the text (PART III), starting with:

- How children choose their clothes (chapter 6).

In this first chapter of examination we will have a look at the influences children face when choosing their clothes and also from what age they are able to make decisions independently concerning products to wear. In this instance, the importance of peer opinions will first be discussed.

Then we will behold marketing and its various techniques with extended research on:

- Marketing techniques in fashion (chapter 7.2)
- Marketing strategies targeted to children, and (chapter 7.3)
- What does ‘green’ marketing do (chapter 7.4)? With an additional case study of Nike (chapter 7.4.i)

This will help us to understand and use the influential power marketing keeps at hand. It will also be necessary to consider discussions respective to the ethical aspect of advertisement targeted directly to children.

As already marked out in the first sub-question, the perception of being ‘cool’ is important to children. Therefore, the last question addresses the phenomenon of ‘cool’.

- The impact of fashion on the perception of being ‘cool’
- Defining ‘cool’

Here we will try to define it with reference to diverse specialists, followed by an extended examination of the marketing aspect of ‘cool’.

- How marketers make use of ‘cool’

The possibilities clothing offers us to express ‘coolness’ will be the last observation we will conduct to collect information.

- Expressing ‘cool’ through clothing

The intense observation of ‘green’ consumers and ‘green’ families created the challenge of a stereotypical treatment. Are they actually all the same sort of consumers with the same kind of lifestyle and identical preferences? We will come to a proposition to that in the last part (PART IV) before concluding the findings.
The conclusion will extract the essence of these findings and will offer a unique approach towards the options a company like macarons has to target children directly and make them eco-conscious consumers.

Purpose

Through profound research on marketing techniques targeted to children and the status of eco-sensitivity in society (especially with young-aged consumers), I developed a marketing strategy for macarons. This strategy/campaign will visualize how marketing can evoke eco-sensitivity and social responsibility with young-aged consumers with the background of my findings and their implementation.

Methodology

General observation and specialized research helped identifying the influences marketing and peers have on children’s clothing choices and their positioning within a group. To understand their behaviour, I observed children of different age who I could approach on an intimate level. Experiences like my internship and the two macarons photo shoots were helpful in this context. Besides, typical eco-family activities, like ‘De Pure Markt’ in Amsterdam, were observation venues were I could question random children and their parents.

I interviewed a Montessori directress and had casual talks with parents, as well as some email interviews. Also conversations with children were eye opening and inspirational. An unconstrained approach was in this case most effective, as children tend to speak more freely and honest when they are not aware of the importance of their words. Simple questions reflected their cognitive development. Here, a simplified questionnaire helped to identify general consumer tendencies and eco-awareness amongst children.

Books and articles gave me a specialized inside into the topics and the reference to sociologists and theorists helped me formulate definitions. Due to direct contact with marketing professionals and my own experience, I could implement advertisement theories with a more practical understanding.

Limitations

The localization and number of children observed impose limitations on the generalization of the findings for a national or even regional location. Although macarons is acting on a global scale, Germany and the Netherlands were the only countries I could involve in my research. Also, the preferences and perceptions of ‘cool’ reflect only a snap shot of taste at that point in time.

Unfortunately accurate numbers about the children’s wear market were often restricted to companies and could only be purchased, which left me with a slightly superficial examination of the market. Still for my research and to understand the situation, the findings are sufficient.
PART I: DEFINITIONS

This chapter defines the specific terms used in the research question to make sure that every reader has the same starting point and informational background. We see the necessity of that as terminology can often be interpreted individually or has a different meaning when referred to in another context. Fashion, eco-sensitivity and young-aged consumers build the framework of the overall research and are therefore important to be defined.

1 What to understand when talking about fashion

Fashion as a phenomenon that is strongly related to trends is fast living and continuously changing. What is in fashion is recognized by a majority of people as trendy and especially modern and is of popular nature. Fashion is always reflecting a very specific period of time as it is of the moment and subject to change. This also indicates that fashion cannot only be connected to clothes but to a complete attitude, behaviour and a particular but overall zeitgeist. Other than clothes, which we might only use to cover our bodies from nudity or to protect them from external influences, we use fashionable items primarily to make statements about ourselves, our tastes, our values, our identities; creativity, aspiration and desire are driving forces of fashion (Lea-Greenwood 2012). Fashionable items therefore have to be unique, personal and expressive. Besides aiming at being individual, with a specific way of dressing, we show that we are part of a sub-culture or peer group (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007).

As quickly as things can be in fashion, they can be out of fashion. This in particular circumscribes fashion leaders or innovators from adopters or the late majority (see Box 1). It appears that it might be necessary to react on this phenomenon in order to be a successful fashion brand and to pick up the power ‘alpha’ members have in a group. But we will come to that later.

Another theory that describes fashion innovation is the trickle-down effect (theory), originally introduced by Thorstein Veblen, an American economist and sociologist, in 1899 (Veblen 1899). This theory argues that a trend begins at the highest social class and spreads downwards, slowly, through the class structure. As soon as the lowest class has adopted (imitated) the trend, the elite class structure has to invent something new in order to symbolise class-division (differentiation). A few years after Veblen, Georg Simmel, a German sociologist, applied the theory to fashion and personal style (Simmel 1904), whereupon he established the trickle-up theory, describing the fashion life cycle the other way around. Here sub cultural groups play the leading part in fashion innovation. Besides the two extremes, the trickle-across theory (Blumer 1969), also known as the mass market
or simultaneous adoption theory, describes a horizontal information flow within society, rather than a vertical one\(^2\).

In my research question, I am referring to fashion as being clothes, which are fashionable due to the influence of the prevailing trend and social attitude towards eco-sensitivity and ‘green’ awareness. More specifically, I am referring to green garments that have been produced in a *conscious* and *eco-friendly* manner. By saying this, I mean a production with natural and certified\(^3\) materials and social responsible production methods. Although there are several accurate definitions of terms like *conscious* and *eco-friendly*, are they so clear to be defined? Discussions have been held ever since and it is obvious that conscious consumer behaviour, production, etc. is a momentary trend, which offers society to strive for a common goal again (just like they used to in communism, e.g.). So therefore, the use of these terms still needs to be seen from a critical perspective. Still, throughout my thesis, I refer to clothes as those described.

2. **What to comprehend when talking about eco-sensitivity**

Your senses help you to see, smell, hear or feel something. That makes it possible to understand and even care about a subject (if I couldn’t see/smell a cup of coffee, I wouldn’t care about it). Eco-sensitivity means that there is a specific care for ‘eco’, whereat ‘eco’ is short for ecology. It is the concern of environmental issues, to say it bluntly, the ideology of ‘we can make a difference and save the earth’.

In order to become aware of something, the confrontation with (e.g.) a problem is necessary. Some people consider protecting and preserving the environment to be one of the most serious ethical issues of our time. The (almost) daily confrontation raises the importance of taking action with aware consumers. People are looking for ways to lessen their individual impact on the environment. They do this by consuming eco-friendly goods or more conscious in general. What does eco-friendly actually mean? We will come to that when reaching chapter 7.4.

3. **Who are young-aged consumers?**

In general, young-aged consumers are children, but therefore that children of different age can have very different preferences they should be categorized in groups. Research indicates that they should be treated in four different segments: newborns to 3-year-olds, 3- to 5-year-olds, 5- to 8-year-olds, and 8- to 12-year-olds, when observing them from a marketing perspective (Rath, Bay, Petrizzi & Gill 2008). We will ascertain if this approach is also useful in connection to children’s fashion marketing and when raising eco-awareness.

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\(^2\) For more information on the three different theories either consult the original texts as mentioned above or find a brief explanation in Solomon & Rabolt 2004, *Consumer Behavior in Fashion*, Prentice Hall, pp. 20-21

\(^3\) The Global Organic Textiles Standard (GOTS), for example, is the worldwide leading textile processing standard for organic fibres, including ecological and social criteria, backed up by independent certification of the entire textile supply chain (www.global-standard.org/the-standard/general-description.html)
PART II: MARKET SITUATION

In order to be able to understand the market situation of both, children’s wear and eco-fashion, and to find out if they are growing and children’s eco-wear has potential, I examined those separately and in so far as relevant for my overall topic. Considering that *macarons* is a kid’s wear label, operating in the eco-fashion segment, these two markets appeared most relevant and also sufficient. The brand offers clothes for children aged 0-8 with highest revenues in sizes for 0-5 year olds.

Due to their market participation on a global scale, my research comprehends not only the European market for kids fashion, but also the U.S. and Asian market with focus on overall market trends and consumer behaviour. Although India is also gaining significance in the children’s clothing segment, I won’t consider this market in my research due to lack of relevance for *macarons* business. I am not taking it into account either, inasmuch the market offers not yet enough demand for an eco-couture kids wear brand.

4 Children’s wear market

Regardless of the level of wealth, all parents aim at a best possible supply for their children. Although birth rates in developed economies have a general downtrend, parents are more affluent and can afford to spend more on their children; consequently the market for baby- and children products is flourishing. Dependent on the actual number of babies and children and the purchasing power of the parents, the market establishes itself. According to the United Nations, the population under the age of five in developed economies, including USA, EU and Japan summed up to a total of 54 million in 2010. The average annual household disposable income was above 50,000 USD.

![Figure 1](source: Population data from United Nations; Income data from Euromonitor International)
Despite the financial crisis and a decrease in apparel sales, the children’s wear market belongs to the moneymaking segments of the fashion industry and keeps up gaining importance irrespective of the generic economic downturn. In the last years, baby and children clothing have witnessed rising sales especially because of the additional spending achieved through the trend of gifting clothes amongst family and friends (HKTDC Research 2013) plus the fact that mothers are willing to spend more for their children’s clothes than their own wardrobe (London 2012). Referring to Raffaele Napoleone, CEO of Pitti Bimbo (Koch 2012), Spain, Germany and France are still the largest global markets for children's fashion. Next to the established kid's wear shows, new ones are emerging every year, which also reflects the potential this branch of fashion is adding to the market.

It is difficult to define how much parents from different countries annually spend for their children's clothes since numbers and statistic always include other goods for children, such as shoes, toys, and furniture. However, a forecast of global retail sales until 2015 (only showing the sales of kids clothes) shows the growing potential the children’s wear market has (taking into account the limitations of actual number of children and purchasing power of their parents in a specific country, as mentioned above).

Additionally, specialists agree that the trend and growing demand towards luxury children’s fashion is creating a significant potential for sales in this segment. Hence more and more high-end designer labels launch a collection for babies and children and offer parents the opportunity to pamper their children with design clothes (HKTDC Research 2013).

Also reflecting the overall economic situation, the range of children's fashion available, extends from discount to luxury fashion and shows best sales in both extremes, either low-priced or highly expensive.
Eco fashion market

Eco fashion has never been as important and popular as it is today. With the fast-growing number of green consumers, no one thinks about Birkenstock and hemp clothing anymore when referring to ‘green’ fashion. Green is mainstream (Ottman 2011). The topic of sustainability is becoming increasingly important, as more people are worried about environmental issues than ever before (directly harming their and their children’s quality of living) and environmentally considered behaviour is now a core value of society. Therefore the market for environmentally and socially compatible clothes continues to grow. ‘Considering the mammoth production and big wastages at pre and post consumer phases, the fashion world is now very much concentrating on the environmental impact and developing sustainable business’, says Shaik Khalid Raihan, general manager of Beximco, one of the largest textile and apparel companies in South Asia (Texpertise Network 2013). This indicates, that besides the eco-fair product, the overall business’s operations have to be fair in order to satisfy the discerning consumers.

The inclusion of all business operations makes eco-fair so complex, which might be a reason for the number of eco-fashion labels, as part of the entire fashion industry still being comparably small (Texpertise Network 2011). More often brands are staying competitive by creating an additional clothing line to their collection, being more conscious and ‘green’, instead of launching an entire eco label (e.g. ‘Conscious Collection’ by H&M). Still it appears that ‘green’ is no longer a niche opportunity but through consumers forced to evolve into a core part of any company’s corporate philosophy.

According to a new global study by The Nielsen Company, consumers increasingly care about the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of fashion companies and are also willing to spend more on their goods when receiving transparent insights about the product lifecycle and sourcing conditions (and even already did so). There is a slight disparity of this willingness between Europe and Asia, which Nielsen explains may be cultural, as the scepticism towards CSR is not yet developed in Asian countries (Joblings September, 17th 2013). This might also be a reason why more and more factories and companies are getting themselves certified in accordance to the Global Organic Textiles Standard (GOTS), in which lately published figures show an increase of registered firms by 11% compared to last year.

Several new platforms and formats in the field of eco-fashion have come into being, (e.g. Showfloor Berlin and Green Showroom during Berlin Fashion Week, Fair Fashion’s Night in Düsseldorf, and Eco Fashion Week in Vancouver) showing the demand for eco-awareness and elucidation also from the retailer’s point of view. Even during the fabrics show Texworld in Paris, there is a complete day dedicated to sustainability and CSR.

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4 a leading global information and measurement company, which provides market research, insights and data about consumers (buying) behaviour
Conclusion

The purpose was to find out whether the market of children’s fashion as well as for ‘green’ clothing is growing and if eco-fashion for children has prospects. After investigating these two markets, I can say, it is obvious that both parts have high potential in the zeitgeist of today’s consumers. Kid’s wear is not only booming due to countries like China, with high birth rates, and developing wealth, but also in Western societies where parental care is becoming more important with parents getting older and more responsible gradually. Parents today are willing to buy more for their children because trends such as smaller family size, dual incomes and postponing having children until later in life mean that families have more disposable income.

This has also influence on their buying behaviour towards eco-goods. The will to be conscious and also to follow the ‘green’ trend is creating a significant potential for this specific market, which no longer can be called a ‘niche’ market (we can see a connection to the communal goal people want to strive for as mentioned earlier).

Consequently there is a great demand for the combination of both; children’s wear in high quality and produced with eco-standards. The several eco-fashion labels for kids wear are proving the hypothesis already. Still it is about the parents as consumers\(^5\) in the market research so far. The question occurs whether the awareness of their parents and of society in their surrounding can create enough curiosity for children (or young-aged consumers) to actually care for ‘green’ and make conscious buying decisions. Or if it probably is the other way around, that children influence their parents buying behaviour due to the congenitally exposure of advertisement and child-targeted marketing.

\(^5\) Which means they are the decision makers but not the actual end user
PART III: SUB-QUESTIONS

The following chapter will deal with the sub-themes that explain the topic more in depth and will answer several new questions that will hopefully lead to a better understanding of the problem statement with possible handling approaches.

First of all, we will have a look at how children choose their clothes. We will do that to find out which factors have influence at this juncture. This is followed by an observation of marketing techniques, both in fashion in general and when targeted directly to children, because we want to know how important this tool can be when adding value to a product. Also, ‘green’ marketing will not be disregarded in this context.

As already described in the first chapter (What to understand when talking about fashion), status and imitation are driving forces of fashion trends within society. Depending on the direction a trend chooses to trickle through the population stratum, the top or bottom class is keen on creating something new that is not acknowledged by society yet, guaranteeing differentiation from the masses. In how far the perception of being ‘cool’ has influence on that and especially, how fashion can model for this kind of cognition, will be examined in the last sub-questions.

6 How children choose their clothes

Throughout their development, children face different influential factors. This is connected to their abilities and the construction of their senses, as well as to their surrounding and social interactions. It seems prudent to look at children’s dressing behaviour from different perspectives, with three main manipulators:

- Reference group influence: parents and family
- Interpersonal influence: conformity
- Functional (utilitarian) value: comfort

Besides that, children from different social and financial backgrounds are confronted with diverse influential stimuli, due to the exposure to social-specific phenomena. Additionally, child consumers of different age have different attitudes, values, and behaviours (Hawkins 1998).
6.1 Reference group influence

Young children, age 3 to 6 are not yet very decisive when it comes to choosing what to wear.

“Most of their motivations are around colour and graphics”, says Darren Campbell, Head of Product Marketing at Onitsuka Tiger, about his two sons (interview ii. Appendix). Usually their parents are still the biggest influencers on young children’s wardrobe decisions and their preference and style is simply handed-down to the child. As stated by Simone Davies, directress of Jacaranda Tree Montessori, “it differs from child to child. There are some that care more about dressing than others. I think it has a lot to do with character and also the values they’ve been raised with so far” (interview i. Appendix).

Concerning an exploratory study by Cardoso, Araujo & Coque, at the age of 6 up until the age of 11, parents still continue to be important references for children’s clothing choices (Cardoso, Araujo & Croquet 2008, p. 25), although also others influences gain importance with increase of age.

6.2 Interpersonal influence

In preschool, kindergarten and later in school, children experience group forming and acceptance (or exclusion) by people other than their direct family. Not only is it a place to learn new skills and try new activities, it is a place to test interpersonal relationships with other children, most importantly through playing.

With role play children test their gender roles and through imitating others they learn how to (e.g.) use words and subjects that they cannot understand yet (e.g. children pick-up a word from their parents and try to use it in another context of which they think it has the same relevance; their surrounding’s reaction will teach them whether they used it correctly or not; if everyone laughs they know not to use it in this context again). This includes failures and successes and will have a great influence on a kid’s self-esteem and self-confidence. The playful approach is natural and unforced and offers children an independent possibility to learn and experience. Imitation is a basic learning technique.

In between the age of 6 and 12, children develop the tendency to work and socialize in groups (Grazzini 1988). Interactions between children and their schoolmates (e.g.) have an influence on their consumption habits (Ross & Harradine 2004).

When they get older, conformity and peer pressure (equivalent to interpersonal influence) have a remarkable influence on children’s clothing demands. This leads to the phenomena of identification through their clothes (Cardoso, Araujo & Croquet 2008, p. 2). The need to fit in often dictates the outward appearance. In other words, children are mostly focused on imitating their peer’s choices of dress. Their friends gain importance, often even above family, and the peer group has influence on them, also on matters of dress. Most children want clothes similar to their friends’, although a few children do choose to dress differently as a way of expressing independence (minority).
It is not necessary for them to wear the exact same garments but outfits they think might be criticized by peers are likely to be refused. Besides, children enjoy showing identification (with a group) with their clothes. This can be through badges or even a uniform and reflects the natural desire to belong or express closeness to people they like and admire (idols).

6.3 Functional value

Comfort is a reason for many choices. Materials should not be scratchy or rough; closures should not be too tight or complicated. According to Cardoso (2008), children prefer practical and informal clothes. It is common sense that clothes for children should be functional, although the durability is more a parental concern, with no actual influence on children’s purchase decisions.

Next to these manipulators, a complete and consistent retail experience has high influence on children’s attitude towards a brand, according to research by The Pineapple Lounge. Young consumers are drawn to shops that include animation and commotion of any type. This has the effect that clothes offered in these shops are preferred above others.

Furthermore, by the time they are 36 months old, children recognize an average of 100 brand logos (Zoll 1999). Brand consciousness develops at a young age. Of course other industries’ (like toy- and food industry and especially car industry) brands are better recognized than fashion brands in logo, as they are more present in children’s surroundings (e.g. school), and have generally accepted values (think of the McDonalds advertisement with a baby on a seesaw, smiling when espying the golden M and crying when leaving sight; products from these industries have a direct effect: they taste good, make fun, etc.). Still, school-age children may have preferences towards a specific brand of jeans or T-Shirt due to early (brand) priming.

Children live through different stages of developed confidence whilst growing up and experiencing their social surrounding. There will be peaks and low points, arising from all different kinds of events. When children have the opportunity to make own decisions, their confidence is strengthened. In clothing selection this decision-making can be practiced. This also indicates that they want a level of independence from their parents (Solomon & Rabolt 2004).

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6 a company specialised on family research, offering information for children, teen and family brands to create meaningful relationships with the targeted customers
7 Marketing

7.1 Defining marketing ‘strategy’

According to the American Marketing Association\(^7\), marketing is “an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit an organization and its stakeholders”. Marketing tries to create consumer and company needs and wants and at the same time offers solutions to satisfy them.

A strategy is an overarching plan for long-, medium-, or short-term achievements of a company’s objectives (Lea-Greenwood 2012). Before planning, the objectives need to be defined and the outcome/goal has to be determined. Usually the resources to achieve these goals are limited and therefore an accurate plan is very important. All levels of a company’s organization are incorporated into one plan, a corporate strategy. Often this is linked to a mission statement in order to communicate the strategic goals internally as well as externally (employees, customers). A red thread should flow through all operations. Concerning the marketing function they are also known as the 4 Ps (product, price, place, promotion), which are guiding the common way of ‘how to get there’.

The following chapters will enlighten whether this classical approach is still prevailing in marketing today. We will have a closer look at fashion and ‘green’ marketing as well as child-targeted marketing and will crystallise the most effective methods from the findings.

7.2 Marketing techniques in fashion

Traditional marketing techniques do not really work with fashion. When it comes to clothing and fashion, convincing consumers of a specific need, or the solution to a demand, is way more complex than with everyday commodities. A brand that wants to be successful has to have an emotional value and an added meaning. Besides that, needs have to be continuously (re-) created and (re-) defined.

By (re-) defining and reflecting trends, fashion designers and buyers try to meet these ever changing needs. Trend forecasting influences the colours, the styles and the textures that are plentiful in store. However, colour, style and form are all very short-lived, which makes forecasting and marketing risky and complex. Besides, not every trend is accepted by the masses. Think about the variety of colours you can find in stores’ end-of-the-season-sales. Garments wont sell if a mismatch in (i.e.) colour leaves consumer needs unsatisfied.

Brands need to socially engage with the (adult) consumer and, at best, create a whole branded environment and communities. Just like with young-aged consumers, a complete and consistent shopping experience is key to successful branding. With fashion marketing has the task to sell a product and with it a lifestyle and collective beliefs. Therefore the

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\(^7\) One of the world’s largest marketing associations that provides resources and ways for marketers to connect with the people.
context in which marketers present a product says more about the product than the product itself and the message sold is about the wearer and not about the producer.

Factors like price deflation and getting the design and quality at consumers’ desires, tastes and needs plus managing the supply chain to provide innovation to the market make fashion marketing challenging (Hines & Bruce 2007).

7.3 Marketing strategies targeted to children

7.3.i Why are children important consumers for marketers?

According to the 2008 YTV Kids and Tweens Report⁸, 95% of children influence parental clothing purchases. With growing up, they want to assert their independence and aspire to be more than passive participants in daily rituals within their family lives. Children and teenagers therefore operate as direct as well as indirect consumers and have a significant value for marketers and their brands. According to James McNeal, professor of marketing at Texas A&M University, children represent three different strategies for making money:

- **Primary market**: own money

  Children have their own disposable income, contributing more than 40 billion dollars (Transcript 2008) to the yearly market turnover

- **Influence market**: parental money

  They have enormous influence on their parents’ purchases, adding another 700 billion dollars to the market turnover. Most of the time the targeted customer, the child, is not the actual decision maker but has an enormous psychological buying power and influence on peers and parents

- **Future market**: priming

  Marketers see children as a future as well as current market and hence brand loyalty at a young age (priming) helps in the quest of continued sales later (i.e. if you like a brand as a kid you are ‘sold’ for the rest of your life)

7.3.ii Ethical concerns

Advertisement targeted to children is highly criticized because children are receptive to marketing. “Montessori teachers say that from 0-6 children are like sponges. If you give them clean water, they’ll absorb clean water. This is how we have influence on brainwashing them, if you want to use the word. The same applies for the opposite of course”, says Davies.

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⁸ The YTV Kids and Tween Report is a national survey that tracks the lifestyles, attitudes and opinions of kids aged 7 to 14, based in Toronto, Canada
Here the definition of the absorbent mind is reflected, saying that children of this specific age group effortlessly assimilate sensorial stimuli of their environment (Montessori 1969). They cannot understand the persuasive character advertisement has, are credulous, and more likely to trust a message when conveyed by well-known characters, such as cartoon figures or mascots (American Psychological Association 2004).

Psychologists and activists all over the world are discussing the consequences and the ethical implication of marketers influence on children and teenagers on all kinds of platforms. Governments and campaigners fight for better child advertising standards and regulations. Consequently some fashion brands explicitly state that their advertisement for children's wear is meant for the parents and not for the child itself (see figure 3 for advertisement regulation statement of H&M). Still, the food and toy industry make radical use of methods that make their products adorable to children. And as the success to that is remarkable, the advertisement industry increasingly aims commercial patterns directly to young-aged consumers.

Due to Dr. Allen Kanner, a clinical child psychologist, children nowadays become more and more consumerist and overly conscious about material things, perhaps even at the expense of human qualities. They establish a growing, even insatiable, desire for material goods (Zoll 1999). That means that they might identify themselves through material goods with others, rather than through friendship build upon equal characteristics and behaviour. He also states that the age of the children targeted is dropping rapidly. This is due to the fact that consumer socialization begins with infancy. The two primary socialization sources are the family and the media (Solomon & Rabolt 2004).

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9 Understood as the process “by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning in the marketplace” (Ward 1980).
Toddlers accompany their parents to shops and start observing the market place with only a few months of age. According to McNeal and Yeh, youth marketing consultants (McNeal & Yeh 1993, p. 34), already by the age of four children make independent purchases (see Figure 4).

![Five Stages of Consumer Development by Earliest Age at Onset and Median Age at Onset](image)

**Figure 4**  
*Source: Adapted from McNeal & Yeh 1993*

### 7.3.iii Marketing approaches

Kids have become so desensitized to advertising that marketers are taking different routes to increase awareness of and excitement about their products (Solomon & Rabolt 2004). Besides evoking child-typical persuasion methods with their products (check Box 3), that influence parental purchases, practices such as repetition, branded environments/characters, product placement, celebrity endorsements and free prizes are effective in attracting children’s attention, making products stay in their memory, and influencing their direct purchasing choices (Calvert 2008, pp. 205-225). Here the packaging plays an important role, as it seeks children’s attention without them necessarily knowing what product is insight.

**The Nagging effect**  
The power children have, by repeated nagging, of influencing their parents to buy advertised or fashionable items; also known as *Pester Power.*  

**Box 3** *Source: Journal of Children and Media, 2011 issue*

However, the development of a child’s cognitive understanding has a great influence on their perception and comprehension of advertisement. This is dependent on age but also on social surrounding and educational level. The American Psychological Association (APA) has stated that, children younger than 8 are incapable of critically comprehending televised (or online) advertising messages and are prone to accept these as truthful, accurate and unbiased (American Psychological Association 2004). This makes young-aged consumers a particularly receptive group for advertisement in any kind.

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10 a scientific and professional organization that represents psychologists in the United States
7.3.iv Marketing’s benefit of a media-savvy generation

Children and youth nowadays are heavy media users. With media, I mean specifically social networking platforms, Blogs and gaming sites as well as apps and chat forums. They grow up with the Internet as a daily and routine part of their lives. “This makes them the most powerful young generation ever,” says Melissa Clark Reynolds, founder of MiniMonos11 at the Sustainable Brands ’11 event. Concerning Reynolds, this is due to the fact that children can inform themselves about anything, find out what is going on and keep in touch with friends. Especially when it comes to clothing, young consumers look for the information about fashion and brand name clothing in their social relationships and among their friends (Chowdhary 1988), which is easily and promptly done by the use of social media platforms. Sutherland & Thompson (2003) also speak of this generation as the generation of ‘power kids’, who know what they want and how to get it, resulting from their access to mass media (information) and their advanced ability to use new technologies.

This also gives marketing an efficient pathway into children’s lives and homes. Brands who are aiming to attract a younger audience are advised to “get social or get forgotten”, says Emma Worrollo, managing director of The Pineapple Lounge (during the UK Market Research Society conference this year). Another participant stated that young people become increasingly brand-savvy and will remain loyal to the brands they feel drawn to and valued by (Melius 2013). With the use of apps they feel empowered and it gives them a sense of freedom. Worrollo is also convinced that children can become effective brand ambassadors. Social interaction and the exposure to the media favour the material attitude of children (Moschis & Churchill 1978).

‘Buzz’-marketing is exactly translating that into a strategy to target young-aged consumers. Marketers also speak of viral marketing or name it the ‘word of mouth’ method. The idea is to find the coolest kids in a community and make them wear or use a product and create a buzz around it so that others will notice and want to buy it. By using trendsetters or ‘messengers of cool’ (see Box 4), brands can achieve to connect to the elusive youth market and snatch the ‘cool’ status for their products.

Viral marketing is particularly well suited to the Internet, where young people especially use social networking platforms to spread the word about clothes and other products. It takes advantage of children’s friendships by encouraging them to promote products to their peers. As a matter of fact, children always want to conform to the concept of ‘cool’, which I will extend in this section’s chapter 8 and following.

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11 MiniMonos.com is a virtual world for children who want to be environmentally active; by May 2013 it has been shut down; the blog and Facebook page are still active though
7.4 What does ‘green’ marketing do?

Other than expected, ‘green’ marketing is not about making a product appear green but creating a strategy to make the company’s operations and finally the product ‘green’. This claims the successful and profitable integration of environmental and social considerations into a business.

What do we actually perceive when talking about ‘green’ or ‘greener’ products? One definition I could find expounds ‘green’ products as having a lighter impact on the planet than alternatives\textsuperscript{12} and a reduced environmental footprint (Ottman 2011). They can also additionally be sectioned into more ‘sustainable’ products, which in turn add a social dimension.

How can a social dimension be added to a product or how can a product add a social dimension to our purchase experience? Obviously this is not possible without marketing. Consumers who want to lessen their environmental impact buy ‘greener’ products because they are convinced that these products mean less harm to the planet. That means through marketing, consumer goods are made more dimensional in order to take away some of the customer’s responsibility and assign it to the product itself. Consequently, the action they have to take so as to be ecologically conscious is quite little; they only have to purchase a ‘green’ product, which is doing the job for them. ‘Green’ already implements doing things differently, in the contemporary notion. Particularly consumers who are not fully committed to the ‘green’ way of living are likely to be attracted by this marketing tool, making conscious purchase decisions more easy. Although environmental concern runs high and consumers say they are trying to educate themselves, there are still many issues that they do not fully understand.

When looking at the global population and the result of 83% of consumers being environmentally concerned, in a more or less extreme way (Natural Marketing Institute 2009), green marketing approaches are highly demanded on the market. Of course the exercise of this environmental sensitivity is not solely focused on the fashion industry but mostly carried out in relation to water and electricity usage, garbage separation, and car-sharing, to mention a few. Nevertheless, consumers like the LOHAS\textsuperscript{13} want to live the conscious big picture, which also includes shopping for sustainable, ‘green’ clothes.

To be ‘green’ is cool. Environmental soundness is a new dimension of quality. It is hip to carry a ‘I’m not a plastic bag’ reusable tote bag and designers enjoy making stylish new clothes from organic cotton, plastic bottles or other innovative materials perceived as being ‘greener’. This shows that there are outwardly focused ‘Greens’ who want their values to be projected through the product they wear and the things they do. This is exactly why ‘greener’ products still need to be effective and (especially) attractive and brands that want to be sustainable and competitive have to deliver on performance. This means that the alternative products work as good as the conventional ones, while their price is the same or a premium price can be justified through a compelling value proposition (Ottman 2011).

\textsuperscript{12} Alternative products are those that have an (severe) impact on nature and are called ‘brown’ products.
\textsuperscript{13} Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability
7.4.i  Case study: Nike

Nike, the world’s leading designer, marketer and distributor of athletic footwear, apparel, equipment and accessories for a variety of sports and fitness activities, is a good example of a multinational corporation that has included corporate social responsibility into its overall business strategy. With this case study we can have a closer and practical look at a company that managed to take all aspects of ‘green’ marketing into consideration, whilst staying fashionable, urban and innovative. Besides, Nike incorporates the consumer strongly with its projects. In fact, that strategic move might have rescued Nike and has facilitated its survival on the international sportswear market.

With its headquarters in Oregon, USA, Nike operates on a global scale in over 120 countries. Fiscal year 2013 saw an increase in revenues from continuing operations up to $25.3 billion with sales grow in each of its product segments and on all four global markets. 15 years ago that was different. Nike had to face intense scrutiny and brutal attacks due to its global supply chain management priorities and policies. All over the world customers were boycotting Nike, burning their trainers instead of wearing them, with the effect that the company’s earnings dropped by 69% in 1998.

Nike had contracted manufacturers in poor Asian countries, although working conditions and child labour were a public issue. As a result, the consumers demanded more responsibility from Nike. By rejecting its responsibility, the company had to face a huge global and public outrage. Additionally to the backlash came a deeper realization: ignoring supply chain responsibilities was not wise. The company’s global reputation, which is a key source of competitive advantage, was at stake. Consequently, Nike decided to be more responsible. Through conducting training programs for the factory managers and offering language courses for the employees, so that they could have more intense interactions with colleagues in factories. Their idea was, to improve Asian labour conditions via providing leadership and guidance to factory managers (Sharma 2013).

“There is no finish line for environmental efforts - we can always go further”

Mark Parker, CEO

Today this painful experience has transformed Nike into a sustainable global enterprise. On its homepage Nike openly communicates its passionate commitment to sustainability and innovation with the goal “to decouple profitable growth from constrained resources” (Parker 2011). Sustainability is no longer about risk management for Nike; it is a definite tool for company growth and means to create a competitive advantage. And above all, the ‘restrictions’ that go along with sustainable company operations create the opportunity for innovation (“design the future”). Nike’s latest innovation features a running shoe out of knitted fabric (Nike Flyknit technology) with the benefit of enormous waste reduction. Just like a fully-fashioned garment, the fit can be tighter and there are hardly any material leftovers. The ‘Reuse-a-Shoe’ campaign gives outworn trainers a second life. They are grinded into sport surfaces, such as courts, turf fields, and tracks in the reassembling process. Design innovations and recreations do not only bring new and unique products but are used to minimize the environmental impact (footprint) Nike has, up front.
To make its supply chain greener, Nike has produced a list of manufacturing-restricted substances, which guides suppliers on toxic chemicals that are not permitted in Nike apparel and footwear. “The target is to achieve zero discharge of hazardous products across all pathways in our supply chain by 2020”, says CEO Mark Parker.

Nike has won several prices for eco-innovative product designs (such as the IDEA award for design excellence for their Trash Talk recycled shoe), and is literally taking it one step further by actually adding the social engagement dimension and corporate social responsibility aspect to its ‘greener’ products. This includes the triple bottom line of social, environmental and economic engagement, which Nike communicates as “to drive business growth, build deeper consumer and community connections, and create positive social and environmental change” (Nike, Inc. 2011).

So as to be more transparent, Nike decided to offer extended information on its business operations, including detailed insight into design processes, a list of all worldwide factories manufacturing its products, and its actual impact on nature.

Besides environmental engagement, Nike has taken a leading position in combating certain societal problems. One of them is childhood obesity. With creating a “physical activity action agenda” Nike inspires and motivates children to play outside and become more physically active. By supporting schools with resources and opportunities the integration of sports and activity becomes part of children’s daily lives again. As a positive side effect that means product placement and advertisement for Nike products in schools and the creation of an intense brand relation (quite effective as we learned earlier!).

With an enormous worldwide reach, through manufacturers and customers, the sustainable-oriented changes Nike undertakes as a company will have impact on global consciousness. How important the topic of social and environmental sustainable business operations is for society today is reflected in Nike’s incomparable sales and image boom after the backlash in 1998. Nike manages to be trustworthy through transparency and creates a competitive advantage out of its sustainability approaches and innovations.
The impact fashion has on the perception of being cool

The interest of this thesis lies in the creation of an eco-sensitivity only with young-aged consumers. The impact of ‘cool’ and its definition will therefore be focused on children and teens and their specific understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon. Due to cognitive abilities (as explained in chapter 7.3, p. 11) their acknowledgement of ‘cool’ differs from the one of adolescents and adults and is more likely to be influenced by marketing and especially by peers. Conscious about this differentiation, we will interpret findings with the knowledge gained about this specific age group and their typical behaviour.

8.1 Defining ‘cool’

‘Cool’ has become part of marketing for many companies targeting (not only) the youth market. It appears to have a high value to both the marketer and the teenage demographic and is understood to be a tribal kind of identity that is continuously changing and is hard to capture. ‘Cool’ is something that is acknowledged in you by others, involves originality, self-confidence and must be apparently effortless (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007). “If you have to try you’ve already failed; if you want it too bad you’re just chasing your tail” (Rankin, photographer of Dazed and Confused).

8.2 How marketers make use of ‘cool’

Marketers are fully aware of the significance ‘cool’ has to sell a product and in order to be able to get a hold on this elusive attitude they have an immense interest in so called ‘messengers of cool’ or ‘cool hunters’ (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007) and sometimes might even create one themselves (also see chapter 7.3.iv box 4, p. 14). This leads back to the phenomenon of ‘alpha’ kids, who are supposed to be accepted in, or even leading a peer group, and hence have a convincing influence on others. They are ‘bought’ by marketers to act as pioneers and role models with using a specific (new) product. Douglas Holt, assistant professor in advertising and sociology at University of Illinois, argues that there is a strong desire to consume goods in ways not available to those with less [cultural capital]14, whereat he speaks of cultural capital as “distinctive tastes, skills and knowledge” (Holt 1998). Innovation and originality are key components of the understanding of cool. This is what viral marketing strategies create and how these allow marketers to incorporate ‘cool’ into their products.

With the existence of ‘cool hunters’ the necessity of ‘cool’ is highlighted and also the importance of including ‘cool’ characteristics in commercial goods so as to creating a competitive advantage.

14 Refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. Examples can include education, intellect, style of speech, dress, or physical appearance (Wikipedia, Cultural Capital). The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu first used the term in ‘Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction’ (1973), whereupon he enhanced the definition in several other contexts and following publications.
8.3 Expressing ‘cool’ through clothing

As Hannah van Schijndel, from the department of Clothing Design and Technology at Manchester Metropolitan University, states in her paper about youth identity ownership (Cassidy & Schijndel 2010), which investigated the correlation of teenager’s development of the self and the perception of ‘cool’, for children and teens the cognition of being cool is highly valued as it leads to acceptance from their peers. Their expression of identity is largely through their clothing; they use fashionable items primarily to make a statement about themselves, their tastes and values, and especially to show a group belonging. This implies the acquisition of status and prestige and satisfies the quest to be ‘cool’.

Conclusion

Not until the age of six do children know how they want to dress. They start developing their preferences for colour and rather know what they do not want to wear than having an accurate idea of favoured garments. When they grow older and contact with their peers becomes more overriding, conformity creates the major motivation for clothing choices. The process of getting dressed on their own is a first step into independency for young children and therefore very important for the creation of a child’s personality. However, most of the time the actual result is a wild mismatch of patterns and colours.

Through my observations, during the macarons photo shoot, I have recognized: if children like what they wear (in the sense that they like how it looks like and it appears comfortable to them) and they get positive feedback from their direct surrounding (including family and peers), children behave more freely, open and confident and it makes them feel more valued. They appear happy and satisfied. Feeling involved with a brand has the same effect. “Focus group results indicate that kids want to be treated with respect and want their opinions to be valued. Consequently, they respond strongly to products that seem to be made just for them” (Solomon & Rabolt 2004, p. 373).

The examination of fashion marketing and marketing strategies targeted to children showed that successful marketing nowadays is no longer only organizing the determining factors but creating desires and needs. As Max McKeown, an English writer and specialized researcher in innovation strategy, (2011) puts it, "strategy is about shaping the future" and is the human attempt to get to “desirable ends with available means”. This obviously shows a change/development within marketing strategies from the classic approach of simply organizing achievements to a contemporary move towards designing the consumption future.

Additionally, a closer look into ‘green’ marketing, with the case study of Nike, clarified that conscious consumers aim to feel that they can make a difference, and want to express that they do. This on one hand shows their will of empowerment, but on the other hand also their attempt to compensate guilt. The same applies to children particularly the momentary generation of 6 to 12 year-olds. “I really think that at that age they start thinking of solutions. Solutions to problems and challenges we might have created. But that is their
generation; they grow up with a problem-solving and concerned mindset” (interview i. Appendix). Likewise adults, young-aged consumers are more likely to tackle a social or environmental problem when they can show-off with it. The creation of a socialising (sharing) platform is therefore key to customer-brand engagement and an important tool to create eco-awareness and social responsibility with children. Here the importance of peer perception and the creation of status is a driving force.

Children want to be taken seriously and are willing to contribute their part to a common social goal already at a very early age. This makes them feel powerful and grownup, adding value to their self-esteem and, if visible, also to their appreciation by friends. Usually children are open-minded and curious and, most importantly, (kids of today) technology savvy. If a topic or concern seems to be interesting to them or ‘trendy’ within their peer group, they will search the web or social platforms independently in order to get all the information needed to participate.

Marketing makes prosperous use of that through viral marketing and by “making people feel that without their product you are a looser. Kids are very sensitive to that. If you tell them to buy something, they are resistant. But if you tell them that they’ll be a dork if they don’t and popular if they do, you’ve got their attention,” summarizes Nancy Shalek, president of the place-based media company NBC On-Site. Through that the importance of being ‘cool’ is highlighted and the following paradox made visible: the definition of ‘cool’ supposes it to be of inwardly nature whereas the cognition of ‘cool’ can only be in an external way. This implies that the understanding of ‘cool’ has changed from a former believe or attitude towards a visualization in dress and expression through clothes and also behaviour.
PART IV: ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

9 Eco typologies

The topic of this thesis demanded an accurate monitoring of eco-conscious consumers and their behaviour. More specifically, families with children aged 0-8 (or slightly older) and an (more or less) obvious awareness towards conscious living, including also a conscious buying behaviour.

Whilst diving deeper into that subject, I realized that there are various kinds of ‘eco-families’ who can be categorized in three typologies. The fact that there are diverse perceptions of ‘green’ living indicates that dissimilar awareness can be raised in children, which again has to be approached and targeted in different ways. This also means that not every ‘Eco’ is interested in the same products, as preferences and priorities differ. As individuals prefer to form groups of like-minded, the emergence of different eco-tribes\(^\text{15}\) is a consequence.

Although I am mostly referring to the parent’s behaviour in my typologies, it is important to understand that these types are families (which indicates the existence of children) as the way they consume is mostly influenced by their children and could be different when individuals were observed in single status.

9.1 The Rooted Ecos

This type of eco-family can be often seen in Amsterdam. I would even go so far to categorize them as typical Dutch Ecos, but as my observation only included Amsterdam (in the Netherlands), I cannot make such an overall conclusion. They can definitely also be found in parts of Germany. The Rooted Ecos are young parents (age 25-35) or even an older generation of parents with a first child being born in an advanced age (40+). They use alternative energies (solar power) and shop solely in food health shops and at local markets and might even grow their own vegetables.

Eco-awareness is in their way of living and more intrinsic (though obviously detectable) in the sense that they do not feel the need to show off with awareness. Rooted Ecos rather live conscious due to a conviction. They probably do not have a very high income but spend all money on aware living. As this also includes spending money wisely, clothes might be passed on from siblings or swapped with friends. Clothes worn directly on the skin are important to be from ecological materials, the design comes secondarily. Additional features (next to eco-friendly) like functionality are also significant to them (Patagonia).

Social responsibility and eco-awareness are not newly adopted. Rooted Ecos have lived a conscious live ever since their youth and continue to be conscious with their children. They are likely to convince (or try to) others in their surrounding of their way of living.

\(^{15}\) Tribes are understood to be organically and voluntarily formed through individual identification with a group (Veloutsou & Moutinho 2009, pp. 314-322)
9.2 The Urban Ecos

Young or middle-aged parents (20-35) who have started living eco-consciously with the birth of their children. Therefore that their prior live was not occupied by eco-regulations, they have an elaborated understanding and demand for style. Urban Ecos are used to expressing themselves through their clothes. They expect ‘green’ clothes to be just as fashionable as ‘normal’ clothes (Kuyichi).

When they do groceries, they preferably shop in eco-supermarkets (EkoPlaza, Denn’s Biomarkt) but also go out to eat a lot. Urbangs spend more on outwardly focused goods, like clothes, than on food and have a slightly higher income than Rooted Ecos. The eco-focus for clothes is nevertheless mostly lived out when buying clothes for their children, as the parents do not want to miss the opportunity to shop designer brands (like Acne, Levis, Filippa K., Denham) and make fashionable statements.

For them, it is important to spend a lot of time with their children. They are convinced but do not want to convince others. This type can be found in all countries I have observed (Germany, France, The Netherlands) with slight demographical variations.

9.3 The Luxury Ecos

The Luxury Eco families distinguish eco-awareness as a privilege and a means to reflect their wealth. They are shopping in fancy eco-supermarkets and delis in high fashion shopping streets (e.g. Marqt, Manufactum brot&butter) and it matters most to them that their contribution to ‘saving the earth’ is visible. Actually they are not very green in their way of living, particularly because they consume a lot. Their sense of style and fashion (‘eco-chic’) is mostly dominated by the adoption of style from celebrities or other Luxury Ecos. Brands they wear are outspoken in design, pattern and quality (Etro, Prada). Hand-made garments that benefit a good cause are also likely to be bought and worn with confidence by the Luxury Ecos (e.g. hand-woven scarves). They do not feel the need to convince others of eco-aware living as they utilize it to exclude (being exclusive not excluded) themselves from the ‘brown’ masses.

Luxury Ecos purchase the conscious collection from designer labels, for their children and themselves. They are median aged (35-45) and have a high income.

For a visualization of the eco typologies conduct the appendix (iv pp. 38-40).
PART V: CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The influence fashion can have on children is strongly depending on their age and mental development. The age of about 6 years is a significant one, as children’s perception of their environment changes fundamentally from then. Irrespective of age, the most relevant triggers for children are fun, play and acceptance through their environment. This is why eco-sensitivity can be evoked by telling stories around products, using the assets of new media and creating iconic figures for identification.

The purpose of this thesis was to find out, whether fashion can evoke eco-sensitivity and/or social responsibility with young-aged consumers. In order to answer this question, we had a look, amongst others, at the phenomenon of fashion in general, the influential factors for children’s clothing decisions, and marketing techniques targeted at these consumers, also with reference to the ethical concerns connected to marketing manipulation.

Children are curious and eager for knowledge. They evolve through parental education and during their adolescence peers and friends form significant influential and manipulative factors. At this juncture, imitation is key for younger children and allegiance for older ones.

With younger children (0-5) it can be witnessed that they often imitate things experienced through their surrounding in a non-reflected manner. Though, thereby that their cognitive development is not yet fully evolved, children most of the time do not understand the background or the goal of a copied operation. They gradually enjoy colours and forms and confront the (marketing) world open minded and nonbiased. As also yielded from the interviews, children age 0-4 do not mind what they are wearing and are neither aware of the impact they obtain through their clothes by others. However, children can develop a preference for symbols and iconic figures at an early age. This is how a Superman costume or a Bob the Builder T-Shirt still can become a favourite garment. The recognition value created by these icons makes children feel directly and individually addressed. After all, cartoons are only made for children (this is what they think). Well-known and appreciated characters suggest trust and credibility.

With an increase of age and mental development they generate a more sophisticated attitude towards products and society. By the age of about 6 years they begin to notice omnipresent problems and social topics, for which they want to offer assistance and support. In some extent the attempt of problem solving only concerns themselves (children decide to become vegetarian) but can also have general benefits (car idea from interview with Simone Davies). That children of today are extremely technology-savvy plays a significant part in that. The Internet keeps endless possibilities at hand, not only for independent research, but also to stay in direct contact with friends and peers, which opens another (filtered) source of information.
Eco-awareness and social responsibility are topics not yet actively present in young children’s minds. Given that their parents still have the predominant influence at that age, parental values and attitude towards nature can, at most, rub off on children unconsciously. Here, only a playful approach can motivate young children to grapple with the topic of sustainability.

It takes until the age of 6 that they become active. Kids aged 6 to 8 are reported to encourage their parents to buy ‘greener’ products and try to engage themselves. Be it creatively at home or actively in organisations and online platforms. Especially their demand for a level of independence can create single ‘green’ warriors within families. Children actually are environmentally concerned. They do not have to be educated, they rather do so themselves. This means that the whole explanatory part of eco-sensibility is not the concern of a company that wants to generate children as consumers of their eco-fair clothing.

For these older children (6-14) it is especially important to become part of a community and to be accepted and tolerated by peers. This, of course, is reflected in their choice of clothing. If we combine the affinity for technology with the importance of peer-groups, it becomes obvious that social networks and exchange (share) platforms are effective instruments for children to create and preserve their status and perception, in addition to the physical appearance. Individual pleasure and fun are driving forces for taking action. Even better if others share the sensation.

In contrast to young children, this age group does not want to be approached in a too childish way, when confronted with ecological subjects, as it makes them feel disrespected and not taken seriously. Gradually, children of that age start tackling social and environmental problems on their own behalf. The fact that they have access to all kinds of information makes them conscious and concerned consumers. Just as for adult consumers: the allocation or approach of a problem should not be too complex, abstract, and difficult to understand if a child’s attention shall be raised. When communicating with children it is important to transport a message in an age appropriate way, as explained before. Specific and age-based treatment is vital for successful branding and customer generation. A lack of understanding quickly leads to disinterest. Although they are willing to deal with a challenging and complicated topic, and are generally curious, they still remain children, whose biggest motivation lies in fun, play and commotion, ideally when shared with their friends.

Although (especially ‘green’) parents try vehemently to protect their children from it, a confrontation with fantasy characters and figures connected to brands and their logos is daily business. Even in school, familiar mascots can be retrieved that gradually burn themselves into children’s memory. Products that are connected to such figures consequently have a competitive advantage compared to their anonymous competitors. Especially the aspect that mascots communicate via multiple channels makes them real and trustworthy for children. The good thing about that – at least from a marketing perspective: you can make them deliver any kind of message and children will appeal to it and, most of the time, believe it. Certainly this can be (and has been) exploited by misleading young consumers. On the contrary though, it can also be used to make an “adult” and important topic more easily approachable for children.
However, it remains questionable whether children would really wear eco-fashion due to actually understanding its significant value for the environment and society. If high profile of a product and its brand is generated through a mascot or iconic figure and the transmitted message is omnipresent, wearing a garment of this brand serves rather as a recognition value amongst friends and a display of individual engagement. Of course this is used to establish status and prestige within peer-groups and to raise ones perception of being ‘cool’.

So can fashion evoke eco-sensitivity and/or social responsibility with young-aged consumers? On the one hand it can, if this fashion functions as a tool for children to communicate and exchange their engagement with their peers. Children as consumers, be it in a direct or indirect way, are no passive objects; what they share is more important than who they are.¹⁶ This applies to the digitally driven generation of children today, age 6 to 14 (or older) in particular, who are able to virtually interact, research and engage with a brand and its products. In this context, the story sold with the clothes can evoke eco-sensitivity rather than the actual product itself. Media marketing and advertisement campaigns using both, viral techniques and newer media, are therefore efficient pathways into children’s lives and minds.

On the other hand, you cannot be sure whether small kids actually understand the bigger picture or simply imitate what they are exposed to. Through observation it became visible that younger children (0-5) preferably acquire tastes and preferences from others, the same age or slightly older, by imitation.

Either way, eco-sensitivity and the awareness for social issues is something that can be raised in children through marketing and advertisement. Be it criticised or not; young-aged consumers are the future of society, and with this the future of the market, and an early imprinting of common values can only make them more conscious consumers. Not necessarily green ones, though.

Interviews and observations will continue until the final presentation, to probably add new information, further support the findings and conclusions, and to stay up-to-date in the quickly changing world of children tastes and preferences.

How the findings can be applied to a company’s strategic goals can be seen in the following chapter, introducing the product.

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¹⁶ Referring to Cova’s description of consumer tribes (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007)
PART VI: PRODUCT

11 Strategy to make a brand the ambassador of eco-awareness to children

Through the thesis observation and findings we have learned: children do not need to be educated in environmentally aware living. The constant exposure to media of any kind offers more than enough information and different options to gather those. An individual approach to tackle an environmental problem is way more appealing to young consumers than an educational procedure.

11.1 Being the link through offering playful and individual approaches

A company like macarons should act as a connector between the product and an eco-activity for children, when trying to evoke eco-awareness and social responsibility with young-aged consumers. At this juncture, the fashion itself should not be in the foreground. The aim is to win children as additional customers. Approaching them by the same means as their parents, namely through the product’s positive features and the appeal to their social responsibility, is therefore not necessary and also not even effective.

Way more expedient is it as a company, to offer tools and ways for children, which enable them to individually act eco-consciously and to participate in environmental protection. Here, a playful approach is key. For younger children this could be the motivation to draw or colour in drawings that feature eco-topics (like different transportation) and for older ones the empowerment to make an own statement through creation (take photos, build something). Additionally, any kind of creativity fosters the individual development and makes an easy and joyful examination of this serious topic possible. Children that grow up making individual choices are likely to be decision makers and peer-influencers as consumers. Therefore, an impression of guidance should not be dominant, but the offer of autonomous activities.

Ideally, the child can share its eco-involvement with its friends and peers. This, as we found out, is of utmost importance for young consumers, as the perception of their peer-group creates status and individual standing. It is too for the company. Through online- and social platforms, the spreading of activities, connected to a brand name, raises brand awareness and consequently brand popularity among children. This has the same effect offline (in school or kindergarten). As a result of that, a brand and its clothes automatically develop into a symbol for eco- and social engagement. A corresponding branded garment serves then as a figurehead.

11.2 Taking advantage of peer-perception

After this popularity is achieved, a socio-natural phenomenon continues to generate awareness with young-aged consumers: the wish to look like and, as a matter of that, to be like peers and friends, forces the late majority to adapt to the pioneers. As wearing (e.g.) macarons clothes stands for eco-engagement, interpersonal influences (peer-pressure) consequently make children eco-aware. In second instance, branded fashion can thus evoke eco-sensitivity with young-aged consumers.
In this context, being ‘green’ and wearing ‘green’ clothes becomes personally relevant for children. The actual benefits of eco-consciousness not necessarily pull the trigger, but fashion can function as a messenger and intermediary for children to get involved with the topic after all.

11.3 Five eco-points equal a T-Shirt

To get even more involved with the child-consumer, a rewarding system can guarantee a longer brand-bond. Besides, the reality is: children might care more about rewards than saving the planet (at least until an advanced age). Through sharing eco-involvement with the brand, children can collect points, which in turn lead to a reward. If a garment can be worn as a reward, it receives even more trophy status, hence higher recognition amongst peers. Creating an iconic figure that communicates the message can generate extra brand identification.
4 steps to become an eco-awareness ambassador

1. OFFER ECO-ENGAGEMENT TOPICS ON YOUR HOMEPAGE AND WEB SHOP
   There should be different approaches for children of different age
   MAKE THEM FUN & GIVE THEM AN AUTONOMOUS CHARACTER

2. GIVE CHILDREN THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THEIR ENGAGEMENT

3. SELECT AN ICONIC CHARACTER
   Children can relate to that and it functions as means of identification

4. DEVELOP A REWARDING SYSTEM
   Which guarantees that young-aged consumers stay longer busy with your brand
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Appendix

i. Interview with Simone Davies, directress of Jacaranda Tree Montessori

Me: In my emails I informed you already about the topic of my thesis.

Davies: Right. Could you give me a quick heads-up?

Me: Of course. I am trying to find out in how far fashion can sensitise children towards conscious living and eco-awareness.

Davies: Exactly, I remember. A very interesting topic and I have thought about it already. I think that the parents have a leading influence on their children. In general I would say that parents are more conscious than their children. The children I work with here are up to 4 years and I cannot see any actual awareness for eco-concerns.

Me: So would you say that young children are not yet able to understand these concerns?

Davies: In Montessori there are three, or actually four age groups that are differentiated. And the last group includes adolescents age 18-24! This age group is often expected to be grown up but isn’t that exactly the time when you make all the stupid and childish decisions you regret later?

I think until the age of six children are simply observing and taking in information and inspiration. Montessori teachers say that from 0-6 children are like sponges. If you give them clean water, they’ll absorb clean water. This is how we have influence on brainwashing them, if you want to use the word. The same applies for the opposite of course.

If we use good language, social responsibility, care etc. children will soak that in and that will influence their future behaviour and attitude towards things. So parents are responsible for the ‘good’ things.

Me: How will that behaviour change when they get older?

Davies: I can see it with my own children right now. At the age of 6-9 or probably even until 12 they start thinking about what is good and what is bad. What is right and how they can make a difference? Recently my kids said “Mum wouldn’t it be cool if we could invent a car that soaks up all the pollution and makes fuel out of it”. I really think that at that age they start thinking of solutions. Solutions to problems and challenges we might have created. But that is their generation; they grow up with a problem-solving and concerned mindset.
Me: Who or what do you think is influencing them most at the different stages in age and development?

Davies: When they are really young, until the age of three or maybe even until six, their family and parents have the most influence on their development. From 12 onwards peers are more important. But you know what they say: it takes a village to raise a child. So we should actually be more concerned about social developments and the child’s surrounding.

It is stunning that by that early age they can already recognize several brand symbols! I think it is with around 2.5 years that they can verbally express and recall brand logos!

Me: Can you see any preferences in dress with the children you work with?

Davies: I wouldn’t say preferences in dress but they do know that they want to wear “that pink tutu”. And it differs from child to child. There are some that care more about dressing than others. I think it has a lot to do with character and also the values they’ve been raised with so far.

Me: Do you think products that are connected to a (known) character are more likely to attract children?

Davies: I am pretty sure about that. Although I always tried to keep it to a minimum with branded toys and garments, some of them I could simply not get around with my children. Thomas The Tank Engine became such a vivid friend of my children that they wouldn’t want to leave him at home alone; “Mooooom, it’s Thomas!” And there was this show on Australian television; I don’t remember how it was called. I think it was ‘Roary the Racing Car’. There were several coloured cars singing real stupid songs meant for toddlers. But my daughter was so in love with ‘Roary the Racing Car’ that she wanted to invite it to her birthday! She simply thought it was real!

In this show they also tried to educate the children with songs about healthy stuff (“fruit salad is so yummy in my tummy”). I am sure that there is quite some potential for ‘good’ brainwashing through cartoon characters.

Me: Thank you very much for your time Simone and for sharing your view and experiences. That was very helpful and interesting.

Davies: It was a pleasure and I think it is a very interesting topic. Let me know what you come up with when concluding your findings.

Me: I will do that for sure.
ii. Interview with Darren Campbell, Head of Product Marketing at Onitsuka Tiger

Me: How many children do you have?
Campbell: Two boys, Oscar and Oliver
Me: How old are they?
Campbell: Oscar is three and Oliver just turned six.
Me: Could you describe a shopping experience with your children? What are they attracted to when shopping? Do they know what they want?
Campbell: Believe it or not they become really animated when we do food shopping. They have really diverse pallets so like trying new things and understanding where things come from. They want to acquired tastes such as Olives, Anchovies and seafood. We kind of give them open licence as long as it’s not cr*p.
Me: What about other shops than supermarkets?
Campbell: In toyshops they gravitate to areas of their specific interest but do have some mutual interests. Animation is really important be it digital or in person. They like commotion! They like chill out zones too so sitting in Starbucks for half an hour is not a challenge. The same can be said for restaurants. We allow them to be little people not little children.
Me: Do they make their own (independent) purchase decisions?
Campbell: They influence decisions but don’t make them when it involves clothing. Most of their motivations are around colour and graphics. Materials etc do not form any part of their decisions. Their mother is the biggest influencer of their wardrobe and she seeks out uniqueness usually on line. We rarely shop high street because of quality and fair trade reasons. Scandinavian brands at this moment in time are flavour of the month.
Me: Are there other products where they do have more influence than when purchasing clothes?
Campbell: Where they do have greater influence is when buying toys, books and DVD’s. They have specific interests and this influences most things so Oliver is all about mechanics (cars, bikes, planes etc) and Oscar animals or dinosaurs.
Me: Thank you very much for your time.
Campbell: Certainly. I hope the answers help a little but shout if you need anything else.
iii. E-mail interview with Sophia Ignjatovic, Designer at Geschmeidig

Me: How many children do you have?
Ignjatovic: Two girls

Me: How old are they?
Ignjatovic: 1 year and almost 4

Me: Could you describe a shopping experience with your children? What are they attracted to when shopping? Do they know what they want?
Ignjatovic: The one year old does not make her own decisions yet; however, she screams when being dressed!

The older one has a very keen sense of fashion and knows exactly what she wants to wear and how to combine her outfits. She likes to dress three times a day and gets her own clothes if she is allowed to. While shopping she also knows what she wants. As she is a girl she likes skirts, dresses and leggings and tights are a big thing at the moment. Girly colours also frequently attract such as pink, etc.

Me: Do they make their own (independent) purchase decisions?
Ignjatovic: They make guided purchase decisions.
iv. Visualization of eco typologies

THE ROOTED ECOS

Photo sources: up: Philipp Langenheim, middle left: Robbie Lawrence, middle right: via daddytypes.com, down left: Neudorff, down middle: Marco Annunziata, down right: Thomas Heß
THE URBAN ECOS

Photo sources: up left: own, up middle: Jordi Huisman, up right: Ailie Liefeld, middle left: via emmas.blogg.se, middle right: own, down left: via babycinokids.com, down right: Ashley Neese
LUXURY ECOS

Photo sources: up left: Tim Street Porter, up right: Dani Brubaker, middle left: via deananddeluca.com, middle: via pinterest.com, middle left: via kulturtrends.com, down right: eco-made
v. Some of the probands and observation venues

from left to right: Philipp, 5, Stella, 7, Mathilda, 6, Jasper, 3 1/2, Cléo 3, Helena 4

Kid’s carousel at ‘De Pure Markt’, Amsterdam, Park Frankendael

Linus, 4

Oscar, 3

Helena and Cléo kidding around during the macarons photo shoot