Marketing independent sustainable brands

How can an independent sustainable fashion brand formulate their marketing strategy to attract new customers?

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19.06.2017
Clothes aren’t going to change the world. The women who wear them will.

Anne Klein

This ‘ethical fashion’, this sustainable fashion, that compiles to what fashion really is, that is borne out of passion, skills, heritage, artistry and bravery, is fashion. It’s everything else that isn’t.

Orsola de Castro

Waste isn’t waste until we waste it

Will.i.am

We are pro-fashion protest

Lucy Shea

A fresh generation are marching for revolution and they want to wear clothes that tell a new story. Let’s give it to them.

Naomi Klein

Buy less, choose well, make it last.

Vivienne Westwood
Disclaimer

1. This report, as part of the graduation project aimed at attaining the BA title from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, has been written and/or compiled solely by me.

2. This project report (or any amended form of it) has never before been submitted by me or anyone else in the framework of a learning assignment aimed at the attainment of a certificate or degree, within the AMFI programme or elsewhere.

3. The work that was necessary for the realisation of this project was performed entirely by me. All the data that have been collected are original.

4. All quotes from other sources are recognisable in the report by quotation marks and the sources of all my information have specifically been indicated.

Date : 18.06.2017
Place : Hamburg, Germany
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Signature
R. Stefaniak
Even before Amfi my senses were already alert to sustainability but Amfi has trained my eye and interest for sustainability even more: Starting with the second year project were we had to develop a fully sustainable brand, over sustainability reports and a constant confrontation and raising of awareness towards the topic.

Living close to de Hallen in Amsterdam, visiting the local goods market every few weeks I started to value the diversity of these little brands that all have their own character and charm. In Amsterdam this movement is already bigger but slowly Hamburg and other German cities are following the example.

When Bridge&Tunnel opened its doors I was fully convinced that this project would have a future. They bridged the gap between my hometown Hamburg and my second home Amsterdam with its sustainable, urban style denim products for hip people and gained me as their follower. Besides I started to engage with them privately as my mum knows the two founders from work and helped out at design markets and fairs. After all, I decided to dedicate my dissertation to B&T, because I feel that this is the field where something small can make a big impact.

During the research for my thesis I fully drove into the topic and I deeply belief that independent brands will shape sustainability and the social perception of it and also that my future path will guide me to a sustainable direction, because it became a factor that for me personally really matters.

I want to thank my coach Jorrit Lang for his guidance throughout the process, his flexibility to give me feedback via calls and the time he spent in reading through my documents.

Further I would like to thank Bridge&Tunnel for resources they provided, their enthusiasm towards my project, which always cheered me up again and the time they dedicated for joint meetings, calls and e-mails.

Last but not least, I want to thank my parents for their great support throughout the four years of Amfi, while particularly the first one was very tough. Especially my mum who always showed interest, helped me by providing a different view on projects and connecting me with people such as the founders of Bridge&Tunnel.
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Research Proposal

Rationale

‘Is fashion wearing out the world?’ (Siegle, 2012) – A question that gains increasing attention not only from Lucy Siegle. The damage fast fashion causes is vast and we will have to suffer from it for the rest of the time being. Oxford dictionary defines fast fashion as ‘inexpensive clothing produced rapidly by mass-market retailers in response to the latest trends.’ A system that makes the fashion industry the most polluting sector after the oil and gas industry (Conca, 2015). Over the past 20 years, almost 300,000 farmers have committed suicide, according to India’s National Crime Records Bureau, because of genetically modified cottonseed indebtedness. Facts that are as horrifying as fatal incidents in third world country factories, as Rana Plaza in 2013 when the building collapsed and 1100 people were killed. (Conca, 2015).

Meanwhile, an average German purchases 27 kilograms textiles every year – 14 kilogram of which are disposed at the end of the year (Ausset, 2015). One would expect that these facts are shocking enough to stop consumers from buying fast fashion products, but the reality proofs different: Since 1990, fashion consumption has increased by 500% (The True Cost, 2015).

The reasons for this increase are various: ‘Green washing’ plays a major role. It refers to a brand’s attempt to appear ‘greener’ than they actually are (Vermillion and Peart, 2010, p.70 cited Deen, 2002). The detection of such marketing deceits on sustainability made customer increasingly sceptic and it became difficult to communicate sustainability. Understandable, considering the latest news about the ‘sustainable’ showpiece enterprise H&M. Just as last year H&M presented its ‘Conscious Exclusive Collection’ around the time of the Fashion Revolution week. What customers do not know is that there are currently riots in a H&M owned factory in Myanmar. Employees are demonstrating for the increase of the minimum wage from 2,50€ a day to 3,86€ and the payment of overtime. The only reaction from company side was to fire the unionist. Everything else remained the same. In this factory H&M also employs kids under the age of 16 years (Daria, 2017).

But where can one make conscientious fashion purchases if even rule models such as H&M cannot be trusted anymore? The only tangible answer are independent brands, that are build upon a supply chain that is accessible for an average consumer since it can be traced back within a few steps and is openly communicated. Problem is that they are not much noticed on the marketplace yet.
Aim

My aim is to investigate how marketing of independent brands needs to be laid out to increase brand awareness, because they do not get the attention they deserve. Hence, I want to research into postmodern marketing because I hypothesize that it is the better method compared to traditional marketing to market independent sustainable brands nowadays if the goal is customer loyalty, an increase of brand awareness and customer acquisition.

In the second part, I want to research into an independent sustainable business called Bridge&Tunnel (B&T) to first see how they are currently performing their marketing and second what and how it can be improved in order to reach out to new customers. If my hypothesis is right my product will be a postmodern marketing strategy for B&T with the goal to increase awareness on the label and the topic sustainability to hopefully in the long run boost sales.

To get there my aims are the following:

1. Defining the meaning of slow fashion, the consumer and independent brands and how they are inter-connected

2. Research into the rule of green communication in postmodernism

3. Examining different marketing tools that can be applied by independent sustainable brands

4. Exploring B&T from an internal perspective

5. Exploring B&T as it is perceived from an external perspective

Research Question(s)

‘How can an independent fashion brand formulate their marketing strategy to attract new customers?’

To respond to this question I will have to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What is slow fashion, who are the consumers and independent brands and how are they inter-connected?
2. What is green marketing and what do independent brands need to know?
3. How to market green fashion in postmodernism with low budget?
4. Who is B&T and which values come across in their marketing?
5. Who are B&T’s competitor and customers and how do they perceive the brand?
Methodology

For my literature review I used the funnel method. I stared by reviewing the broader background of the topic and step-by-step narrowed it towards my goal.

RQ 1: In this part I will explain the meaning of the slow movement, define the consumer as well as independent brands and reason how they are inter-connected.

RQ2: I will first clarify what postmodern marketing is and explain advantages towards traditional marketing and the chances for sustainability. Further I will outline a postmodern marketing mix as suggested by Philip Kotler and Robert Lauterborn.
I will explain the chances of the internet and social networking sides for postmodern marketing and what needs to be taken care of. Besides I will present another suitable medium to showcase the companies’ culture, which is highly recommended for sustainable brands. I will explain which factor a postmodern marketing strategy must include when a company decides to communicate about sustainability to not to revive old memories and a method for niched targeting which had a lot of success in a few examples (famous examples: Patagonia and Harley Davidson).

RQ3: In the first step I will analyse state B&T’s mission and vision statement together with the origin of their name. Afterwards I will analyse how they translate this into a marketing mix and analyse whether this reveals the whole brilliance of B&T. According to a scheme I will also analyse their social media and evaluate how it can still be improved from a strategic perspective.

RQ4: In the first step I will analyse B&T’s direct competitor. I will analyse their concept, products and marketing to see how B&T needs to formulate its marketing to differentiate from competitor. In the second step I want to send out a questionnaire with open-end questions as they often reveal more depth information because they do not constrain respondents’ answers (Kotler, 2000). I want to proof that the information I gathered on postmodern marketing also counts for B&T’s customers with a few simple questions. My goal is to see whether B&T’s marketing communication meets the values that connect customers with the brand and whether there are connecting values in between customers, which could be targeted and help me with my target group identification. A second goal is to proof my assumption that many do associate different values with B&T than only social design (which is key of their marketing) and that they could win more customers by incorporating these connecting values in their marketing.

My product will suggest a marketing strategy for B&T. Hopefully this will increase shoppers’ awareness on the brand and perhaps even push sales in the long term.
Limitations

1. Due to a lot of information about marketing green fashion and sustainability it was difficult to consider all studies and theories published. I had to make a selection on the most relevant theories and exclude other from my literature review, which poses a natural selection.

2. Green communications, which is part of green marketing, can be tailored to target a variety of stakeholders. This research is limited to external communication targeting consumers.

3. Even though the aim was to approach the topic objectively, my engagement and personal interest in the brand Bridge&Tunnel, as well as my interest in sustainability could have influenced my research.

4. For examples in chapter 3.3. I had to limit myself on a few examples that I found suitable, which does not say that other examples are not suitable.

5. My research on the brand is limited to data that I could retrieve online. Results of the field research only consider a limited number of customers, which means others are excluded.

6. B&T has already adjusted their social media marketing towards the feedback of my research. The research calls upon the state of B&T’s marketing when I started my thesis, which poses the month of February.
1) Definition of the slow movement, the consumer and independent brands and how they are inter-connected

Introduction
In the first chapter I will describe the slow movement that is for a couple of years already breaking through the branches. Simultaneous a new group of consumers and a novel type of niche brands namely independent brands came alive who share this slow lifestyle. I will explain the meaning of all three social constructs and how they relate to each other.

1.1. Slow movement

As our world changes socially, environmentally and economically, our ideas and lifestyle choices as consumers and global citizens have begun to change as well. According to Heike Derwanz, in fashion this movement is called “Slow fashion”, which is not a trend as some people might argue, it is the zeitgeist (Heike Derwanz, 2015). It was first observed in the food sector at the beginning of the 80s in Rome, with a demonstration against a local McDonalds opening. From there on a philosophy developed throughout the branches, which is now grounded in pleasure and consumption with awareness and responsibility (E. Rex, 2007). It is a conscious set of ideas that embrace both simplicity and allures in an era of sustainability. Specialists argue, that sustainability can only merge in a slow lifestyle (Maureen Dickson, 2016).

1.2. The Consumer

By now two target groups of sustainability have been identified:

The first one are mainly working women from 30 to 50 years and mostly belong to the higher social class and educational level. Housewives and pregnant women or women with children are a very sensitive target group, as they are especially interested in green textiles for reasons of health according to Grønhøj and Thøgersen (2009). Also allergic people easily favour ecological clothing. They were the main focus group of green fashion brands until recently (Vetter, 2015).

However, a new conscious group of people developed throughout the past years, which are now identified as ‘LOHAS’: ‘Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability’ (Urh, 2012). This group of consumers are trying to flee Western monetary values shifting their centre of life to health and sustainability attributes (Oppermann 2008, p.94 cited by Janina Heim 2011). Most of them live in urban areas and maintain a hybrid lifestyle (see graph below), in which aesthetic plays a major rule. They are observed as active participants in the creation of products as so called – “co-producer”. This can take different forms such as co-working, swap-parties, recycling or renting of clothes (Karlsson, 2015). Whereby the Internet facilitates consumer engagement by means of organisation and communication around these social events (Rinaldi,
Nonetheless, many hard facts about them remain unclear: They cannot be advised any demographic nor age group and neither a gender nor a social class (ERNST & YOUNG 2008, p.2; see also Willer and Kilcher 2009, p.168 as cited by Heim, 2011).

Figure 1: LOHAS characteristics p. 3 (LOHAS. Or: The Consumption of Sustainability, Janina Heim, 2011)

1.3. Independent brands

‘in-de-pend-ence’ is ‘freedom from control, influence, support or the aid of others’ (dictionary.com).

Indie Brands® is a format owned by Anneloes van Gaalen (Paperdoll), it is a registered trademark. Even if the term is not widely spread yet, the phenomenon is; I found no other suitable term describing this type of brand that compromises sustainable, innovative, niche startups. According to Wouter independent brands’ birth was in postmodernism (Mossinkoff, 2015). Van Gallen further adds to her description of independent brands that they are either developing something new and does not exist on the market or by reinventing a product in an innovative new way. Their philosophy is mostly grounded in heritage, sustainability and innovation (van Gaalen, 2011). They are delivering unique value to a special customer group (Mossinkoff, 2015). Vivian Doumpa forecasts that the independent brands movement described by van Gaalen points into a direction ‘in the field of the new artisan economy’, which is an upcoming, growing urban development in the first
instance noticeable within western countries (Gebig, 2015). Social entrepreneurs of these brands do a lot themselves from marketing, over designing and perhaps even part of the production. Many among them are ‘digitally and culturally androids’, probably LOHAS who are targeting people like themselves (Couto, 2016).

The mission statement of many small brands is anchored in social ideologies. Hence, these brands are rather driven by their mission statement than simply profit (Floor, 2009 cited by Eriksson 2014). James Veenhoff, founder of ‘House of Denim’ in Amsterdam, and Sander Jongerius’ (KICI) agree that cooperation, education and investment within the industry and across adjoining sectors are the keys to going green (Gaalen, 2015).

(For further information on the difference between independent and conventional brands see process book section ‘Independent Brands in Germany’ p.23)

1.4. Conclusion

‘What is slow fashion, who is the consumer and independent brands and how are they inter-connected?’

The literature review showed that LOHA’s and independent brands are both results of the slow movement. As independent brands are predominantly targeting LOHAs and independent brands founders are in most cases LOHA’s themselves, one could not live without the other. Independent brands are selling a (slow) lifestyle, which goes beyond the simple meaning of the product thus implicates a new era with more transparency. These young founders are entrepreneurs from their heart and driven by social ideologies with which they want to make a sustainable impact on society. The LOHA consumer as active co-producer and interested in community welfare supports this process.

The slow movement brought a completely new dynamic to the globalized market that blossoms out new ideas and values bringing hope for a more tranquil future.
2) What is postmodern marketing and what do independent brands need to know?

Introduction

This chapter will build up on the framework of consumer, brand and movement that I have discussed in the previous chapter and will add a new dimension to it: marketing of sustainable (independent) brands with and for the new consumer. First of all, the transition in marketing will be discussed including an adjusted version of the marketing mix designed by Philip Kotler. The chapter will get more concrete by introducing online marketing as a contemporary medium for delivering values of the zeitgeist followed by a list of different success factor for marketing independent sustainable brands. Last but not least tribal marketing as indirect method of brands integrating into the consumer landscape will build the peak of postmodern marketing.

2.1. Marketing +

‘Green marketing is mostly about making (breakthrough) green stuff seem normal – and not about making normal stuff seem green’ (Grant, 2010). Grant adds that, as green fashion is still perceived as something utopian in customers’ eyes it lies in the rule of marketers to help the new and different products become socially accepted. That is where the challenge lies and what many companies have not understood yet (Grant, 2010). A presentive of the brand independent brand Etrican says ‘people buy our clothing because they like it; the fact that it’s sustainable is a bonus’ (2017).

This is where marketing is at: Moving to postmodernism it is currently experiencing a shift from goods-centred marketing to service-centred marketing (Dena Simaite, 2015). The market is seen from a consumer/demand perspective. In this view marketers cannot continue to practice traditional marketing theories as they have done the past years: Selling a fictitious desirables, which is anything but authentic and the truth. Instead, they have to create markets ‘by educating and communicating with the public’, whereby engagement is two sided – the consumer has finally gotten a voice.

From hierarchy to network

Own illustration on the basis of Noun Project illustrations
Transparency is key for success (Kotler as cited by Constantin von Mahlzahn, 2015). With the creation of shared values as a result, clothes are not that easily thrown away due to the emotional connection that has been built (Fletcher 2014 as cited by Eriksson, 2014). Positive about this view for companies is, that they take an active part in shaping the market for its products and visions. By using persuasive media, postmodern marketing can aid to sell new lifestyle ideas, which can help people to more sustainable choices (Rinaldi, Testa and Rinaldi, n.d as cited by Lisanne van Rietschoten 2012). Hence a brand refers not primary to the product that they are selling rather to the context of consumption (Adam Arvidsson, 2005). It eliminates the belief that a green consumer already exists or as a spokes person of independent brand Etrican says ‘sustainability won’t sell your brand’.

2.2. 4Ps & 4Cs

According to Philip Kotler, ‘marketing mix is the mixture of controllable marketing variable that the firm uses to pursue the sought level of sales in the target market’ (Kotler, 2000). It constitutes out of the 4Ps (7Ps): Product, price, place and promotion, (people, physical evidence, process) whereby the last three can be changed in the short-run, according to the demands of the market. Robert Lauterborn gave the suggestion that the four Ps of the company correspond to the four Cs of the customers’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Customer solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Customer cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Communication</td>
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</tbody>
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(for further information on the difference between traditional- and postmodern marketing see process book ‘Problems associated with green marketing’ p. 25)

2.3. Online marketing

The Internet and Web 2.0 have empowered proactive consumer behavior in the information and purchase process (Burmann, 2008). According to Bernd Cova (2009) social media networks as concepts of service-dominant-logic made advertising more personal again. More precisely they allow brands to befriend individuals (Aguilera, 2014). Brands can cooperate with consumers to increase brand awareness (Dabrowski, no date). As consumers usually perceive information that others provide as more trustworthy (Pornpitakpan...
2004 as cited by Dabrowski), user-generated content has a greater effect on the brands overall perception than solely firm-created content.

It is highly recommended for brands to follow a clear strategy with approximately 1 post every three days (Lisanne van Rietschoten, 2010). Thereby a vital mix of lifestyle, product as well as educational elements on the topic sustainability is recommended, as not every customer is equally interested in sustainability. It should be noted that every channel has its own purpose and should be treated individually, however the message needs to be coherent throughout the field. All social media channels together allow a 360° view of the brand and its’ lifestyle as if it was a vivid person.

Nowadays many companies consolidate their marketing with a blog as part of their website to share content to engage consumers with the lifestyle that they want to suggest with their products and ideally pass it on. This is especially popular among slow fashion brands, because it is the way of living and consuming that makes the difference. It is the more appropriate platform to share depth information on sustainability compared to social networking sides as consumers can choose on the themes that they would like to read.

(for social media marketing (Facebook/Instagram) see p. see marketing channels p. 52)

2.4. Success-factor

There are a few factors that make up the success of marketing especially for sustainable brands, which offer possibilities that have never been possible with traditional advertising. The list below shows the important ones for independent brands. (For a full list see process book p. 19-21, chapter ‘mainstreaming green fashion’)

1. Simplicity: As we live in the age of speed every message should contain catchy, short text with simple wording, because otherwise consumers might not read it or immediately feel bored by sustainability. As a representative of the brand Etrician says that their approach is to focus on a simple message suggesting ‘small changes that every individual can make to their lifestyle’ as no one wants to hear about sustainability from a fashion brand (ecochicdesignaward.com).

2. Personalization: Show customers their personal benefit: For instance, that clothing does not need to be replaced nor repaired as often or that one garment can be worn on many different occasions as explained by the founders and owners of Linda Store and Uniforms for the Dedicated.

3. Claim specificity: Supporting sustainable statements with facts such as the brand ‘Honestby’ who is 100% transparent and publishes not only at which places the different pieces where made, but also the earnings of every step including the mark-up. Consumers know exactly for what they spend their money (honestby.com).

4. Engagement: Engagement can take place offline by attending events, talks or selling on markets, but also...
online by interacting with the community, involving them in conversation and the decision making process, while asking for consumers’ opinion. It goes as far that consumers become part of the design process by customizing their shoes (NikeID). The ultimate goal of consumer engagement is ‘word of mouth’ as 67% of consumer purchase decisions are at first place influenced by ‘world of mouth’ (Moffitt, Dover, Tapscott, 2010, cited by Lisanne van Rietschoten, 2010).

5. Desirability: This could be partnering with celebrities or bloggers by making them brand ambassador or taking part in exclusive events. Another option is to create a capsule collection with a celebrity or with another brand that is already wider known.

2.5. Tribal marketing

Another postmodern phenomenon re neo/consumer tribes, who first appeared in the 90s in research of Cova and Cova and Michael Maffesoli. Those consumer tribes come alive when members identify with one another, have shared experiences and emotions and engage in collective social action, all of which can be facilitated through a variety of brands, products, activities and services (Cova and Cova, 2002). For brands it builds a different type of targeting: instead of targeting characteristics that are attributed to a person the way traditional marketing works, tribal marketing is targeting values, which are part of a lifestyle. Tribes are perhaps re-emerging online, but they are now fluid networks of inclusion, rather than static, exclusive sets. With the Internet tribes become less fixed so that one person can belong to multiple tribes at the same time (Grant, 2010).

Some brands also hire a brand ambassador, a person people can identify with who might even be sort of inspiration for them. Bloggers are one example, who can make use of their social media followers and help to create conversation around the independent brands’ stories and the general movement (J. Sachs, 2013 as cited by Gebig, 2015). Brands founder can also act as rule models seen in the example Anine Bing (aninebing.com).

A famous example for tribal marketing in fashion is Patagonia, who targets hikers. As they are active in the nature these people have a special interest in keeping the planet clean. By purchasing from Patagonia consumers are not only receiving sustainable clothes, Patagonia also cleans up the planet for them, by donating 1% of sales (patagonia.com).

2.6. Conclusion

‘What is postmodern marketing and what do independent brands need to know?’

As the literature review proofs postmodern marketing is the ideal partner for independent brands and their
customers. It constitutes the ideal basis to communicate sustainability from the background as bonus to amazing products for aesthetically driven consumers who worse ship sustainability. Postmodern marketing also builds an easier way to reach consumers who are not engaged in sustainability yet by offering them to take part in their hybrid lifestyle and indirectly educating them on a fun, inclusive level.

A reason why green communication had such bad reputation and not impacted a lot of consumer perception yet is the single focus on the sustainability of a product, which did not appeal to the consumer (Schneider, 2014). Concluded can be that green marketing had a very narrow focus so far and not explored the whole set of instruments that are available. Sustainable fashion is still lacking in engagement, desirability and personal benefit, which can be delivered by a mixture of tools shaped. An easy and convenient way to introduce a brands lifestyle and values is tribal marketing, where a brand becomes ‘member’ of a consumer group. With the existence of social media this has gotten a lot easier.

Last but not least, it became clear that postmodern marketing also helps to overcome problems that have so far been associated with marketing and hindered sustainability from becoming socially accepted: The selling of fictitious desirables that are anything but true (Grant, 2010).
3) Who is B&T and which values come across in their marketing?

Introduction

In the following chapter I will look at B&T’s concept mainly its’ brand identity as well as the marketing mix. As social media builds their main channel for marketing I will evaluate their actions according to a scheme on a structural and content basis supported by examples. The conclusion will reflect on the overall picture that one will get from B&T’s marketing and how it can be improved to understand the whole story of the business.

3.1. Brand Identity

Vision: B&T would like to build bridges into the main labour market for disadvantaged people. They want to provide them access by giving the opportunity to participate in working life to gain confidence.

Mission: ‘We design society’ – all design products are made of recycled textiles, which are produced locally and fairly in Hamburg Wilhelmsburg by men and women who could not find a job on the main labour market. Many of these people are creative and bring skills from their home countries that are great for textile production. However, B&T does not only do something good for foreigners: They also bring manufacturing back to the city by creating unconventional encounters between design and employment policy.

The two founders define B&T as a social design start-up, however I categorized them as independent brands, because social design (sustainability) is one of three pillars of B&T and independent brands.

CORE VALUES:

• Empowerment (relating to social design).
• Creative versatility: denim jeans come from different people and make the product versatile.
• Local production

NAME: Part of the naming is already explained in the vision. Additional to that, B&T’s location, Wilhelmsburg, is an island only connected by bridge or tunnel with Hamburg. Many social disadvantaged people as well as immigrants are living there. Long it used to be a district disadvantaged from politics and shows comparison to the situation of Manhattan in NY, which already changed long ago and gives reason for hope in Wilhelmsburg.

3.2. Marketing-Mix: 6P’s

PRODUCTS: B&T’s first collection ‘Denim Love’ compromised accessories and interior design products, all made of old denim, which they have reused ‘upcycled’. This conveys uniqueness to every item. Customers are also offered the opportunity to bring their own denim of which B&T creates a product according to
their wishes. All products include a tag with the name of the producer inside to create personal meaning. Products the collection compromises are: weekender, backpacks, carpets and seating furniture for kids. In January B&T complemented its collection with first fashion items. All product groups have their own name. Customers purchase local produced, high-quality, well thought out designs with social background. So far B&T does not state anything about a return policy or product guarantee.

PEOPLE

FOUNDER: B&T is founded by Hanna Charlotte Erhorn, expert for design, and Constanze Klotz, who is responsible for communication and strategy (see interview in the appendix). They seem to be all over the place like vibrant bees (see appendix for examples). As entrepreneurs they are responsible for internal and external relations, which becomes visible on social media: Award ceremonies as ‘Mum entrepreneurs’ or ‘social entrepreneurs’, events, talks and design markets. B&T is their life. From what can be seen on social media, I would regard them as LOHA’s. (for examples see process book ‘marketing mix’, ‘the founder’)

Employees: B&T employs six internationals. Two of them are experienced professionals the other three have gained some experience in the field of textile production by interest or their cultural background. Aside from that, max. three refugees get the chance to intern at B&T for a duration of 3 weeks to 3 months. In most cases they do not speak German very well and are unfamiliar with the culture.

This international environment also makes up a lot of B&T’s corporate culture, as communication with hands and feet is part of the daily business, which takes a lot of time (Klotz, 2017). She adds that product names
are also given by employees and have origin in their culture. The sweaters names DERYA and DAMLA e.g. are Turkish and mean: Sea & Drop. According to Adam Arivdsson (2005) the social life of employees is main resource for organisational identity as people connect with the lifestyle they are submitting.

**PRICE:** Prices for B&T’s products developed out of the effort to sew an item and to prepare the fabric. B&T just has to pay little (0,50€ per kilo) for fabric since they are deconstructing old denim jeans, which they use as a resource. Additionally they have to pay for leather, zippers, GOTS certified sweat etc. that they combine with the used denim. All employees receive ”tarifliche” Löhne which is more than minimum wage. The prices that result are situated in the higher segment. As stated in the research aim, those prices are comparatively high considering that B&T does not have to pay much for fabrics. According to Constanze Klotz (2017) high prices can be ascribed the high number of working hours needed for the production, because interns need to be trained, which takes a lot of time. Since designs are timeless and not bound to a season B&T does not have sale discounts.

VK Kollektion #1: Denim Love
Laptop Sleeve: 69€
Backpack: 189€
Weekender: 229€
Carpet small: 299€

**PLACE:** Due to an already very low profit margin (Klotz, 2015) B&T decided to only sell via direct sales online with on-demand production, which means they have a very low inventory to save costs. Apart from that they are present in two digital green market places, four offline stores in Hamburg, occasionally present on design markets as well as in local pop-up stores in summer 2016. Focus of these markets is mostly on local production or independent labels.

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:** B&T’s production takes place in Hamburg Wilhelmsburg (see ‘name’ for further description). The ‘STOFFDECK’ is an open sewing- and screen-printing workspace also regarded as co-working space. It is an industrial space, where many creative startups have their workshop. If customers like to see how their designs are manufactured they can get a sneak peak there (Klotz, 2017), though this is not officially communicated by
The online experience constitutes out of different channels: Webpage & online shop, as well as social media: Instagram, Facebook & Pinterest.

**PROMOTION:** As social entrepreneurs Costanze and Charlotte take part in talks and discussions about sustainability because they want to spread awareness. Until now social media builds their only medium for advertisement together with events such as the ‘fashion revolution week’, which is currently on. They receive additional promotion from the outside, due to high media attention. They were mentioned in different newspapers and magazines such as Deutsche Bahn News, Lufthansa, Couch magazine and Hamburg Startup Szene (100 articles until may 2017). The focus of most articles was on social design made by refugees.

On social media they partly communicate about refugees but only within long image descriptions as seen on Instagram, a platform that is not made for long texts (digitalmarketing-conference.com). I suggest that if they want to continue to communicate it only supported by simple messages so that consumers immediately understand it without getting bored, which can lead to rejection.

(For post & article examples see process book ‘marketing mix’ p. 63)

Throughout RQ7 I will analyse whether the 4P’s of B&T’s marketing mix are responding to the 4C’s of Customers that Robert Lauterborn suggested.

### 3.3. Online marketing scheme

By following a guide that I assembled out of two different marketing guides for fashion brands written by Evelyn Frison (2016/17) and Alicia Johnston (2016), I will analyse how B&T has so far maintained their online marketing communication and what could still lack, i.e. how it could be improved.

**BUILD CONTENT THEMES:** B&T has specific themes that they centre their posts around: Sustainability, employees & daily business at STOFFDECK, product pictures, pictures and posts accompanying Charlotte and Constanze on events, behind the scene at a photo shot and few pictures showing B&T products worn on holiday. Videos have most likes, perhaps because they are all very catchy, charming and humorous, thus really show the fun, loving character of the two founder that people connect with. In most of the other
content themes a clear tendency cannot be identified. However, from my perception this is not enough to convey a (slow) lifestyle.

Further categories I observed at about you, who is German pioneer in e-commerce could target (slow) food, be more seasonal such as Easter posts and suggesting outfit combinations with the products, perhaps presented by customers.

**MAKE A PUBLISHING CALENDAR:** An internal publishing calendar helps to a diverse communication without boring the customer, while following the red threat of the concept. The goal is to create a coherent lifestyle image, while entertaining and engaging the customer (Johnston, 2016). From analysing B&T’s social media, I assume that they are not following a publishing calendar. They are pushing out a minimum of two posts a day. On Facebook even more due to sharing of external content such as articles. They seem not to be very selective which is why their social media page looks a bit chaotic and could confuse the image that customers have in their mind. Their posts are identical on Facebook and Instagram, but it can be observed that similar posts get more likes on Instagram (Example 25.04. 12 Facebook likes and 127 Instagram likes).

**CREATE A VISUAL STYLE GUIDE:** A visual style guide coherent to brand aesthetic is not maintained by B&T – there is no visual coherency in the layout of images and articles. Example: MailChimp. They build a consistent photocomposition by using a simple background with one dominant colour on every image, allowing the subject to stand out (Johnston, 2016) (see process book ‘marketing mix’, ‘visual guide’ for an example). They post approx. 1 post every 3 days, which is why they can be much more selective with their images.

Factors that have influence on the coherency of the brand image: Backgrounds, White space balance, Dominant colour(s), Subject (Johnston, 2016). (An extension to this point can be found in chapter ‘Communication of sustainable fashion through the label’, p. 36)

**PROMOTION:** Promoting each other’s business through content in emails, blogs, newsletters is by now only applied by other businesses and magazines for B&T. B&T has so far not shared much content for their partners yet, however this could be changed with a content page. This way not only other businesses but also B&T’s customers profit from it, because they get insider knowledge on how to extent their slow lifestyle. Besides a blog is suitable to display own media attention the way it can be seen in the example below.

Example: This is a very nice interactive example I found at MUD Jeans. It shows different citations but does not come across as over communication as the citation is constantly changing.

**INVOLVING CUSTOMERS:** As “involvement is a motivational state that energizes and directs consumers’ cognitive and affective processes” (Peter & Olson, 2010), it is also an important element to synthesize behaviour change (Lu, n.d.). Examples are surveys, contests, “friends and family” or “customer appreciation day” or factory visits as organized by the brand Reformation. This is not part of B&T’s strategy so far, but it could increase their customer proximity and make consumers feel more valuable as it is asked for their opinion. A post example during the fashion revolution day could have been ‘and who wears our clothes?’ as...
customer response to ‘I made your clothes’ pictures. Or to underline the versatility of their clothes: ‘That’s how we wear it, show us your version!’

Example: US brand Levi’s challenged their customers to find the most innovative and sustainable air-drying solutions for clothing in their consumer campaign called ‘Care to Air Design Challenge’ (Johnston, 2016).

3.4. Conclusion

‘Who is B&T and which values come across in their marketing?’

B&T’s core values are empowerment, creative versatility and local production embedded in a very smart concept and communicated under a meaningful name. Marketing wise there are still many undiscovered opportunities such as factory tours to underline their locality and the offering of a product guarantee to give proof for the great quality. B&T’s communication mainly gains its character through the founders’ humorous and loving way of presenting the brand, however so far this type of promotion has been standing quite in the background of rather static refugee images. I can assume that this way of presenting an already very controversial topic as perceived by many consumers, does not make it easier to relate and connect to it, thus not to B&T.

However with a different focus I see a chance in elaborating both of the topics: Refugees on a more emotional level that customers can connect to, such as telling stories about their culture or escape from their home country as well as showing more of the founders and their lifestyle. The latter can help customers to comprehend and personally relate to (social) sustainable values that the founders are holding and besides understand the deeper value behind the products. To create a more coherent picture of the brand I recommend following the suggested structure throughout all online marketing channels.
5) Who are B&T’s competitors and customers and how do they perceive the brand?

Introduction
Arriving at the most narrow part of my research (the funnel), I will analyse B&T’s competitors as well as their target group. It is aimed to get an understanding on how B&T needs to differentiate from other market players and what their unique selling point in this view is. On the basis of a target group questionnaire I want to get proof that the previous research conducted also applies to B&T and its customers and evaluate whether B&T’s marketing has so far met and attracted the consumer, thus been affective, or not. With the aid of a consumer-group identification I want to enable a more personalized targeting and give suggestions on how to extent and improve B&T’s marketing.

4.1. Competitors

Based on the research, which proved that consumers’ purchase decision in fashion are primary based on the product appearance (Huws, 2013) and that sustainable products are mainly valued for other attributes like design, colours, quality, and price (Karlsson, 2015), I defined B&T’s competitors based on a mixture of product design and product features. Two of the primary competitors that I found have almost identical product designs and they are all sustainable/upcycled.

PRIMARY COMPETITORS
Naked Society caters two product lines: One made of recycled denim, produced in Denmark and the other one produced in Africa and made of recycled natural materials. Ethnic minority women manufacture denim designs. Their communication focus lies in culture and society as raw material contains hundreds of stories. Part of their denim collection is also made of upcycled denim.
As educational initiative they gathered denim jeans in schools. Their prices are slightly higher than B&T’s but I describe this to the Danish price policy. Communication platforms are social media as well as a homepage (see process book ‘Competitor’ p. 112)

Dzaino: ‘Dzaino is a Berlin based fashion label for sustainable design. Each product is a unique item. All products are made of used jeans or GOTS, certified Denim, to support a sustainable production chain in the fashion industry’ (dzaino.com). Their product categories are: Travel + City + Yoga, all three are currently very popular among young people. (B&T features almost the same products, however not listed in these categories.) Their targeting has a stronger focus on men, which I attributed the fact that they are very present on pictures. The weekender e.g. costs almost 100€ less than at B&T. The two feminine founders seem to be friends around the same age as Constanze and Charlotte. They make use of the same communication channels as B&T and Naked Society, but on top of that cater three offline stores. (See process book ‘Competitor’ p. 113)
Founder, Constanze Klotz, told me that they define their competitors according to four different categories: upcycling, employment of refugees, social design, independent labels working with denim.

I argue this by questioning: who buys an accessory only because the company employs refugees, if he actually needs a backpack? – Since I assume that no one does that I would also not consider these labels as B&T’s competitor. They could be taken into account as promotion partner perhaps.

4.2. Primary research: Target group questionnaire

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
As there was a lot of information about postmodern marketing and green communication on the web, as well as many studies that have already been conducted I have not seen the need to do the same again. However, I want to proof that this information also counts for B&T’s customers with a few simple questions. My goal is to see whether B&T’s marketing communication meets the values that connect customers with the brand and whether there are connecting values in between customers, which could be targeted and help me with my target group identification. A second goal is to proof my assumption that many do associate different values with B&T than only social design (which is key of their marketing) and that they could win more customers by incorporating these connecting values in their marketing. At the same time, I want to measure whether the P’s for promotion answer customers C’s (see above for further information).

I decided for open-end questions as they often reveal more depth information because they do not constrain respondents’ answers. Open-end questions are especially useful in exploratory research, as I was looking for insight into peoples thinking rather than in measuring how many people think a certain way (Kotler, 2000). (For further information see process book ‘field research’ p. 105)

LIMITATIONS
Since B&T could not give me any customer data I was dependent on social media for the research of customers. I could only use Facebook as medium for research and to get in touch with them. The result of the questionnaire is therefore limited to few customers’ opinions and an analysis of profiles that are following social media. It could perhaps be that B&T has an offline target group, which I could not include in my research and analysis.

RESULTS
1) None of the respondents makes purchases based on the criteria sustainability; two mentioned production, but only as a third or fourth criteria. Most important were design and quality. This shows that their P for products promotes design, but not quality, except for local production, which points out the quality standard. However, B&T would have nothing to loose by offering e.g. a repair guarantee for five years, as designs are very robust and the price very high.
2) None of the respondents had a connection with the label because it is sustainable. Answers were mainly the personality and/or personal connection to the founder, the great designs and the atmosphere at the Stoffdeck because they paid a personal visit, which proofs my assumption. B&T’s P for physical environment of the marketing mix does not respond to this yet, at least it is not officially communicated. I think this could build an opportunity for them. Three respondents heard of B&T via WOM, which can also still be triggered more with online marketing than it is employed now.

3) Many like to spend time with family and friends and as most respondents are in the same age as the founder. The result of my profile analysis suggests that they have family and young kids on their own, as they were present on many images. B&T could include this in their stories as the two founders have family and kids to offer customers a connection away from refugees and social design. Hamburg, the Alster, harbour and harbour city connects the respondents, as these are some of their favourite places in Hamburg and could be part of B&T’s weekend stories.

4) Most respondents prefer a simple message. They also mentioned wanting to hear specific claims, as well as no moral. To get informed about brands they use Instagram at the first place followed by Facebook. One brand I found interesting marketing wise is Anine Bing. The founder is in the same age and created a brand around her lifestyle. Categories of her blog feature: Fashion / Work / Career / Lifestyle (kids/personal/travel) / home / beauty / around the world, which gives customers a diverse platform to connect with the brand.

**INTERVIEWEES**

Out of 80 questionnaires that I send out I received only 13 answers (see process book ‘field research’ for questions/answers & interviewees).

Among the interviewees were seven women and two men. Except for the former intern of B&T they were all roughly between the age of 28-40. By analysing their profiles I found out that many are employed in the creative sector (photography, one owns a fashion brand, blogger etc.). Based on their answers that they like to co-create at home or professionally as blogger, care about sustainability but perceive aesthetic as more important value and their explicitly on how sustainability should be communicated lets me assume that they are following the LOHA lifestyle, which means that they already hold green values. According to their pictures they all like to travel and their age indicates that they are digital natives – generation Y, which supports my hypothesis. Except for one of the men they all come from Hamburg.

I searched for a model to classify B&T’s consumers, only on the basis of a Facebook analysis. I found a tool called sinus-milieus, which gives a holistic view on important aspects of people’s life. It is a postmodern analysis emphasising on the social-cultural diversity in societies by giving a precise description of people’s orientations and sensitivities, life goals, values, attitudes, lifestyles and social background. It is a view ‘from the inside out’ instead of ‘outside in’ as it has traditionally been.
From the limited resources that I had with social media as basis for my analysis I could recognize two milieus of people who are both part of the upper class. Roughly 10 million customers could be reached in these target groups. I can assume that different products attract the two consumer groups, as some products such as the backpack and festival bag are cheaper and used by younger people whereas the weekender, the pouffe as well as the carpet are more expensive and probably only bought by established family households. This would fit the two milieus that I could identify:

Target group 1 from 25-35 years

MOVERS AND SHAKERS MILIEU (8% of German population, 5,68 mio)

The ambitious, creative avant-garde:
Transnational trendsetters – mentally, culturally and geographically
Mobile; networking both on- and offline;
Non - conformist, seeking new frontiers and new solutions
Target Group 2: 36-45 years old

LIBERAL-INTELLECTUAL MILIEU (7% of German population: 5,04 mio)

The enlightened educational elite:
Discerning view of the world,
A fundamentally liberal outlook and post material roots;
Desire for self-determination and personal development

(Further customer profiles can be perceived on p. 60-63 in my process book)
4.3. Conclusion

The competitor analysis revealed that B&T’s products do not differ much to the ones of competitor, which surprised me. Also their communication is too similar to be medium of differentiation. A competitive advantage could be a content platform with different categories, such as denim, social design, creative hotspots in Hamburg, B&T’s favourite recipes, outfit of the day → that’s how versatile our product is etc. This could present all different values behind the product – the brand’s lifestyle – which is part of the package that a postmodern brand is selling.

Also B&T’s customers analysis proofed that the connection followers have so far with the brand is not simply based on sustainability, rather a combination of different factor (lifestyle), which are either the personality of the founder or even a personal connection, great designs and the atmosphere at STOFFDECK. Most of them have heard of B&T either via WOM or because they met the founder somewhere. None of the respondents answered that they have discovered B&T via their marketing, which proofs that building a personal connection is crucial. It is the genius quality of postmodern marketing translated with help of social media. Nevertheless, if it is not applied correctly it is useless.

Still in between current consumers and founders a clear connection can be observed: Both parties have family, maybe kids, are of the same age, part of the creative industry and identified as LOHA’s. The majority lives in Hamburg and likes to spend time at the same places. What does not coincide yet, is B&T’s marketing, as it does not meet the preferences of the target group: Most important purchase criteria of their target consumers are design and quality and they like to hear specific claims without moral when it comes to communicating sustainability. B&T does not communicate moral but also no specific claims.

As consumer values are not met by B&T’s marketing my explanation to the fact that customers still remain loyal is that values have been build via the personal connection and that this perhaps single impression is enough to keep them interested in the label, which shows what an amazing concept B&T has. It also proves that my hypothesis was correct: B&T’s marketing does currently not build a sufficient basis to attract new customers.

As the literature review as well as the survey proof these connections are only developed by persuasive media, which means communicating (slow) lifestyle. Even if B&T’s target profile is already engaged in sustainability it is still not enough to convince them from a brand. LOHA’s are known as hybrid, which means that even if they value sustainability, aesthetic and lifestyle are still more important.

As B&T’s founder are LOHA’s themselves and have a lot in common with their target group, it can come across very natural if they simply communicate their own lifestyle. It shows that they have unconsciously already been targeting a tribe, but that the effort they have given into their social media marketing has not
had much effect so far. Once they rearrange their marketing and customers see that Constanze and Charlotte thus B&T is one of their peers they are automatically also more interested in B&T’s values hence, social design and sustainability.
5) Hypothesis proof

The aim of my research was to investigate how marketing of independent brands needs to be laid out to attract consumers. I hypothesised that postmodern marketing is the better method compared to traditional marketing to meet its target group.

‘How can an independent fashion brand formulate their marketing strategy to attract new customers?’

To give an answer to this question I defined the following chapter questions:

1. What is sustainability, green, eco... or what everyone is talking about?
2. What is slow fashion, who is the consumer and independent brands and how are they inter-connected?
3. What is green marketing and what do independent brands need to know?
4. How to market green fashion in postmodernism with low budget?
5. Who is B&T and which values come across in their marketing?
6. Who are B&T’s competitor and customers and how do they perceive the brand?

We have seen that the target group ‘LOHA’s’ of independent brands (B&T) live a slow lifestyle. At the same time they are hybrid and aesthetic driven – values that are more important than sustainability, but different than other consumer groups they have no reluctance ‘green phobia’ against it. Independent brands’ founder are LOHA’s themselves, which means that by promoting their own (slow) lifestyle, it is likely that they can raise attention for their brand, because this group of customers can connect with these values.

This is basically what postmodern marketing is about: Context and service-driven, as well as transparent and collaborative. Social media and blogs are the ideal way to deliver the brand’s lifestyle. Even if it sounds very simple it needs be constructed carefully by following a clear scheme. Education is not the only value that counts: Consumer like humour, personality and they do not like moral judgements.

The competitor and target consumer analysis proofed that B&T’s marketing has so far not been very effective, since it was very much focussed on promoting social design, as this is one of their main values. It showed that even if the consumers perceive this as nice aspect of brand it is by far not all. Indirectly B&T has been targeting people who share similar values and lifestyle, because they are people who sympathise with the founder and that is how they know B&T.

It is a combination of different factors namely a personal connection to the founders, a great atmosphere at STOFFDECK and high quality products that create (in most cases) the linking value between B&T and its customers. These are values emphasized by postmodern marketing, as it is context and service-oriented. The aim of postmodern marketing is to see the market through customers’ eyes to continuously create meaning and value to stay on top of customers’ minds, on a highly competitive, dynamic and demanding
market. Traditional marketing in comparison has a single focus on the product and is not suitable for marketing a concept ‘sustainability’ because it can only make sense for customers if it comes with a slow lifestyle – a set of values (E. Rex, 2007).

In B&T’s case these unique values that separate them from their competition would be:

- Empowerment (social design)
- Creative Versatility
- Local production

Traditional marketing reflects a completely different mindset and is meant to target a more static market ruled by the power of the strongest. It would go against independent brands’ social, collaborative philosophies. As sustainability used to be a new phenomenon in society people need(ed) to be educated and engaged in it. On the basis of traditional marketing customers would not understand the importance of the topic and the meaning behind the products as it is about the front-loaded advertisement piece to get quick attention, which quickly fades again (Gebig, 2015). In fact, traditional marketing is the actual reason for the problematic of sustainability: It has manipulated customers’ perceptions in a very sensitive topic. Traditional marketing is radical and its simple goal is quick profit, while postmodern advertising is leading with a story and value first - suitable to deliver independent brands’ values. This is the reason why its profit only comes over time, but therefore it caters lower costs compared to traditional marketing, which is very cost intense.

Overall it proofs my hypothesis that postmodern marketing is the better way to promote independent sustainable brands compared to traditional marketing.

As a product I want to suggest a content platform ‘blog’ for B&T to support their marketing activity and to guide it (even stronger) into a postmodern direction. A blog is the voice and personality of a company. It enables B&T to persuade people with their personality and values the way they have done it with their already existing customers, only on a broader scale. It gives valuable insights and information for customers and therefore builds a trusted resource.

With its strategic use and constantly renewed content it constitutes to higher search rankings of the website and besides increases brand awareness. Comparing to social media a blog gives a better overview on the content and a way to select topics and articles of interest. It is the only online marketing medium that can display depth content, to build an emotional connection with customers and to discuss complex topics such as sustainability (Aguilera, 2013). Social media is more visually oriented but especially Facebook can be used to support the blog by referring to blog posts. Integrated social media sharing buttons build a convenient way for customers to share content directly from the blog without any detours.

To conclude, a blog is the only accessible marketing medium that B&T is not maintaining yet and all other channels can be structured around the blog content.
Biography


Cort, T. (2011, 10 21). Businesses can't afford to ignore the sticky issues. The Guardian.


The True Cost [Motion Picture].

I PROBABLY WON’T WEAR THIS DRESS AGAIN BECAUSE IT’S ALREADY ON MY INSTAGRAM

MADE IN CHINA 100% FAST FASHION