

**UNDERSTANDING BIRKENSTOCK FOOTWEAR: A
LADDERING STUDY**



**A THEMATIC PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF MANAGEMENT
COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
2021**

COPYRIGHT OF MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY

Thematic paper
entitled
**UNDERSTANDING BIRKENSTOCK FOOTWEAR: A
LADDERING STUDY**

was submitted to the College of Management, Mahidol University
for the degree of Master of Management

on
March 26, 2021



.....
Mr. Chatchawan Kasemrung
Candidate

.....
Assoc. Prof. Winai Wongsurawat,
Ph.D.
Advisor

.....
Assoc. Prof. Randall Shannon,
Ph.D.
Chairperson

.....
Assoc. Prof. Vichita Ractham,
Ph.D.
Dean
College of Management
Mahidol University

.....
Amin Nazifi,
Ph.D.
Committee member

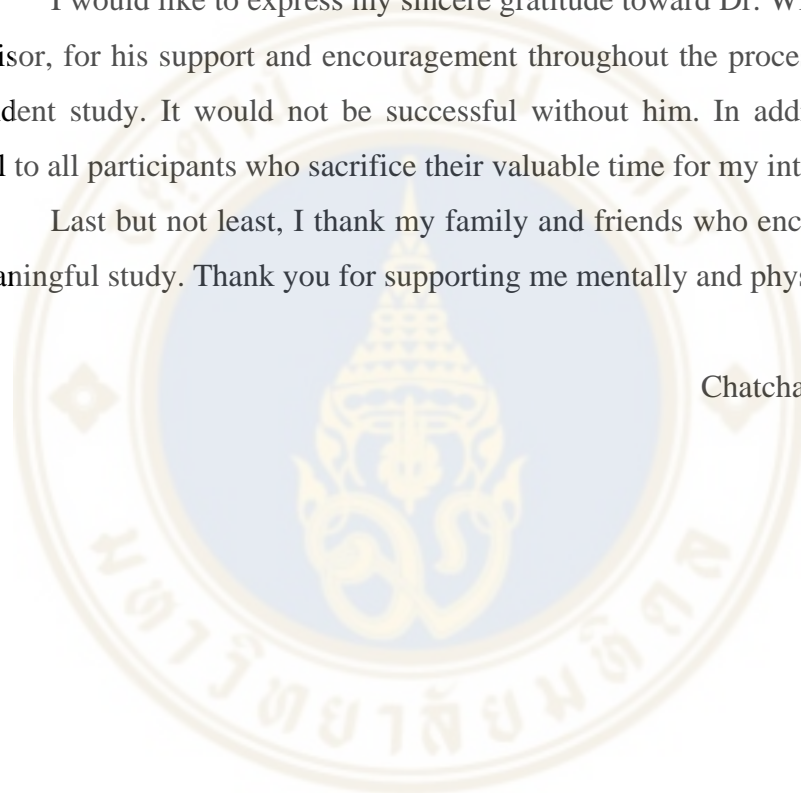
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this research could not have been possible without the participation and assistance of so many individuals whose names may not all be enumerated. These contributions are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude toward Dr. Winai Wongsawat, my advisor, for his support and encouragement throughout the process of writing the independent study. It would not be successful without him. In addition, I am very thankful to all participants who sacrifice their valuable time for my interview sections.

Last but not least, I thank my family and friends who encourage me to do this meaningful study. Thank you for supporting me mentally and physically.

Chatchawan Kasemrung



UNDERSTANDING BIRKENSTOCK FOOTWEAR: A LADDERING STUDY

CHATCHAWAN KASEMRUNG 6249017

M.M. (MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT)

THEMATIC PAPER ADVISORY COMMITTEE: ASSOC. PROF. WINAI WONGSURAWAT, Ph.D., ASSOC. PROF. RANDALL SHANNON, Ph.D., AMIN NAZIFI, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The author employs Aaker's brand equity model and presents Birkenstock's brand associations to understand the Birkenstock's brand equity. The study reveals Birkenstock's most salient attributes, customers-desired functional and emotional benefits, and relevant personal values. Some of the strongest associations are, for example, the quality that is minimal and the cork oak materials. Those brand associations have been discussed in detail. In addition, the author presents three main motivations of wearing Birkenstock and examines how motivations are originated. The Birkenstock's brand associations have many applications. The business practitioners may use the associations to form marketing communication messages that are relevant to the consumers, increasing the probability that Birkenstock shoes are the chosen during the consideration phase of customer journey.

KEY WORDS: Birkenstock/ Brand Equity/ Brand Associations/ Means-End Chain Theory/ Laddering

64 pages

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.1.1 Birkenstock	1
1.1.2 How brands grow	1
1.2 Research question	4
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEWS	5
2.1 Brand Equity	5
2.2 Mental availability	9
2.3 From means-end theory to laddering	11
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	15
3.1 Research Methodology	15
3.2 Data collection	16
CHAPTER IV FINDING AND ANALYSIS	18
4.1 Respondent profile	18
4.2 General findings	21
4.3 Laddering finding	24
4.4 Description of attributes, consequences, and values	24
4.5 Implication Matrix	26
4.6 Hierarchical value map	29
4.7 Attributes	30
4.8 Functional Consequences	34
4.9 Psychosocial Consequences	37
4.10 Personal Values	40
4.11 Themes: 3 motivations to purchase Birkenstock.	45

CONTENTS (cont.)

4.11.1 A healthy lifestyle motivation	45
4.11.2 A business casual look motivation	46
4.11.3 An effortless chic motivation	50
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	54
5.1 Conclusion and recommendation	54
5.2 Managerial implications	55
5.3 Future research	55
5.4 Limitations	56
REFERENCES	57
APPENDICES	60
Appendix A: Questionnaire	61
Appendix B: Certificates of Exemption (COE)	62
BIOGRAPHY	64

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.1	Towards a new view of marketing priorities.	2
2.1	Stages of loyalty and their vulnerabilities	7
2.2	Service quality dimensions	8
4.1	Respondent Profile	19
4.2	Demographic data of respondent	20
4.3	Description of attributes, consequences, and values.	25
4.4	Implication Matrix	27
4.5	Characteristics of Effortless Chic	53

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
2.1 A picture illustrating an overview of Brand Equity by David Aaker	6
2.2 The value of brand associations	9
2.3 A framework for CEPs by Byron Sharp and Jenni Romaniuk.	10
2.4 An illustration of indirect methods.	12
4.1 An illustration of Birkenstock editions.	18
4.2 An illustration of Havaianas flip-flops.	23
4.3 Hierarchical Value Map.	29
4.4 Relevant Associations for a healthy lifestyle motivation	46
4.5 Relevant Associations for a business casual look motivation	47
4.6 Thai culture poster by Government of Thailand. The left side shows discouraged, traditional clothing while the right side shows the mandated Western clothing.	48
4.7 The posted picture of Birkenstock being questioned why Birkenstock is not appropriate.	49
4.8 A considered-appropriate shoe.	50
4.9 Relevant Associations for an effortless cool motivation.	51
4.10 An example of ‘effortless chic’ style. A compromise between high-price items (Birkenstock sandals) and low-price items (a plain long sleeve shirt)	52

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Birkenstock

Birkenstock is a German footwear, originated in 1774. Given that Birkenstock has existed for centuries, it has a rich history and is very well-known for healthy footwear. According to its official website, Birkenstock's value has been consistent since its origin. It aims to deliver healthy, comfortable, and affordable footwear to customers worldwide. The author is not confident of when exactly Birkenstock was first imported to Thailand officially, but the author was exposed to Birkenstock shoes when visiting Central Salaya 5 years ago. The author wanted to find some durable sandals, and one of the author's friends recommended Birkenstock ones. Ever since that day, the author has bought two additional Birkenstock sandals and has been passionate about them. Over the past few years, the author has seen a large number of people wearing a pair of Birkenstock shoes and wonder why it just turned out to be extremely popular in Thailand. When asked about the reasons for buying, friends and acquaintances seemed to answer in a highly rational way. For example, "Birkenstock sandals are good because of their durability." The author speculates that emotional benefits should play an essential role to Birkenstock consumers and wonders how those benefits are important to the consumers.

1.1.2 How brands grow

Despite the popularity over the past few years, the author wonders how long the trend lasts and what Birkenstock should do to grow the brand. Authored by Byron Sharp, *How Brands Grow: What Marketers Don't Know* was first originally published in 2010. The author first heard of the book from Aj. Randall. It was one of the books that Aj. Randall recommended reading as supplements for two classes: Strategic Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior. Contrary to traditional marketing theories,

the books offer evidence-based information that counters the myths taught in many marketing textbooks. For example, in his book, Sharp (2016) challenged the concept of loyalty written in many marketing textbooks and provided a new view of marketing priorities. For example, Kotler and Armstrong (2010) suggested that customer loyalty was economically justifiable. He explained acquiring a new customer was five times more expensive than keeping an old one, so the loss of existing clients was costly. On the contrary, Sharp (2016) argued that customer defections were natural, and a brand should prioritize acquiring as many recurring customers as possible instead of getting current customers to make a repurchase. He further criticized that Kotler's emphasis on customer loyalty was flawed as it was assumed that there was no cost in keeping current customers loyal. Therefore, as shown in Table 1. Sharp (2016) recommended marketers to pay attention to a new view of marketing priorities instead. A new view of marketing priorities serves as a guideline to assist markets in acquiring new customers. These priorities include building and refreshing memory structures. The relevant memory structures of the potential buyers must be researched in order to understand what kinds of product attributes are regarded as cued retrieval in a buying situation. Those structures not only help marketers understand the journey of how customers think of the product category in a buying situation, but also answer how customers think and feel about the brand.

Table 1.1 Towards a new view of marketing priorities.

Past World View	New World View
Positioning	Salience
Differentiation	Distinctiveness
Message Comprehension	Getting noticed, emotional response
Unique Selling Propositions	Relevant associations
Persuasion	Refreshing & building memory structures
Teaching	Reaching
Rational involved viewers	Emotional distracted viewers

Sharp (2016) discussed many of his findings that he has researched for years. He argued that customers did not take the brand evaluation seriously. Many marketers overemphasized how the customers thought of the brand. He even showed

the evidence that the customers did not see the brand as differentiated as the brand assumed. In addition, he presented a 'duplication of purchase law,' which showed that the consumer base of each brand overlapped with the competitive brands. In other words, it is natural that customers sometimes buy products from competitors.

Sharp (2016) proposed that to grow the brand, marketers should pay attention to the two most valuable market-based assets: physical availability and mental availability. The first one simply refers to how easy it is to find and buy the brand. To illustrate, Nike has a higher level of physical availability than Under Armour. In Thailand, one can find Nike stores in almost every shopping mall. However, Under Armour is only available in urban shopping malls such as Central or The Mall. Romaniuk and Sharp (2016) provided more details on physical availability. It is composed of three dimensions: presence, relevance, and prominence. Presence refers to whether the brand is on the shelves where the potential buyers are. Birkenstock shops should be located at the hospital outlets. The brand should research the potential buyers, asking where they purchase a product and having it sold there. Relevance refers to whether the product is buyable. It is about overcoming barriers to purchase. Such barriers include a variety of sizes, price-point ranges, and payment choices. Prominence refers to whether the brand is easy to find. The shop should be distinctive enough to break through a cluttered shopping environment.

Meanwhile, mental availability refers to the buying situations where consumers notice or think about a particular brand (Sharp, 2016). For example, Coke has a higher level of mental availability than Big Cola. It is highly likely that one might mention Coke or Pepsi when asked about soft drinks' brands. Big Cola rarely pops up in one's mind. Therefore, a brand must leverage mental availability in the area where physical availability is already established in order to grow the brand. Mental availability is also the focus of the study.

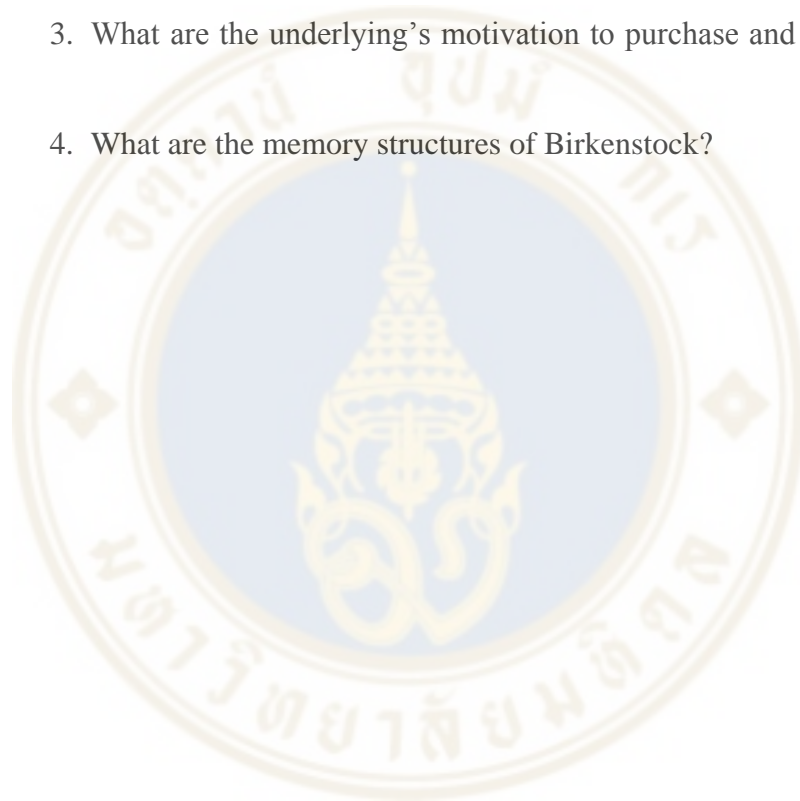
This independent study's primary focus is to understand Birkenstock from the customer's perspective. An interview technique, called laddering, is employed to reveal Birkenstock's users' underlying attitudes, feelings, and emotions. The study result offers two main implications. First, it explains the relevant memory structures that the current users have about Birkenstock, allowing us to better understand the brand. Second, Birkenstock can use the result to strengthen mental availability by building and refreshing consistent brand memory structures. As a result, it increases the brand's

propensity to be thought or noticed in buying situations, positively affecting the company's bottom line.

1.2 Research question

This independent study aims at answering the following question:

1. What are Birkenstock's most salient attributes?
2. Apart from functional benefits, does Birkenstock have any emotional ones?
3. What are the underlying's motivation to purchase and use Birkenstock shoes?
4. What are the memory structures of Birkenstock?



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEWS

In order to understand Birkenstock, relevant past studies involving brand researching are reviewed. Aaker's brand equity is first reviewed to discuss the framework to understand a holistic view of one brand. Then, mental availability is reviewed as it is an important framework to research the memory structure of the brand. Finally, means-end theory is reviewed because it is another important framework to research how Birkenstock customers think of the brand.

2.1 Brand Equity

Brand equity model is a popular topic that has been implemented in both the academic and business world. It explains how much one brand is worth more than the others from a consumer's perspective. From the economic point of view, a brand equity model is useful in terms of signaling. It reduces the uncertainty and risks perceived by consumers. For example, if one visits a local restaurant in Samut Songkhram, and there are two bottled water choices, namely Mae Klong water and Minere water, it is likely that one orders Minere water even though it is one Baht more expensive. That being said, Minere has a higher level of brand equity than Mae Klong water.

Brand equity is a concept that has been taught in every marketing class. David Aaker and Kevin Lane Keller developed two well-known frameworks for brand equity models. While Keller (2016) focused on brand knowledge derived from an associative network memory model, Aaker (2009) defined brand equity as a combination of marketing assets that can be categorized into five factors: Brand loyalty, Name awareness, Perceived quality, brand association, and other proprietary brand assets. This independent study used Aaker's brand equity model as a guideline to explain Birkenstock's brand equity.

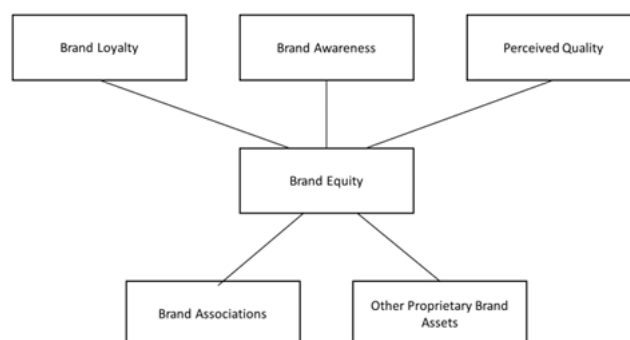


Figure 2.1 A picture illustrating an overview of Brand Equity by David Aaker

The first dimension of Aaker's Brand Equity is brand loyalty. It is a degree to which a customer has the affection for a brand (Aaker, 2009). In his view, brand loyalty serves as the core of a brand's equity, influencing the customers to ignore the competitive brands despite their superior performance. It allows the brand to take a breath if the competitors manage to deliver superior offerings to the customers. In other words, once the competitor's product attribute exceeds the level of performance provided by a brand, it is logical to assume that the consumers are likely to switch to the competitor brand. However, in a real-world setting, the customers have some attachment to a brand they use. They have no incentives to switch over to a competitive brand unless a product is substantially inferior to competitors. For instance, even if Android performance exceeded Apple's performance a long time ago, there were still many consumers who stayed using the iPhone. Aaker (2009) suggests that brand loyalty is unique from other brand equity dimensions because loyalty does not exist without prior customer's use experience. TaghiPourian and Bakhsh (2015) summarized different types of loyalty from one dimension to four dimensions (Table 2.1). Aaker's brand loyalty falls into two-dimensional loyalty because it includes only cognitive and affective stages of loyalty. In other words, Aaker's brand loyalty covered only the perception of product qualities, and emotional attachment and attitude toward brand. In his view of brand loyalty, intention to repurchase and willingness to overcome possible obstacles are not included in his definition of brand loyalty.

Table 2.1 Stages of loyalty and their vulnerabilities

Stage	Features	Vulnerabilities
Cognitive	Perception of qualities and superior features	Superficial, lower loyalty
Affective	Formation of attachment and attitude toward brand	Exposed to switching
Conative	Commitment or a plan to repurchase	Plans may not lead to action
Action (Behavioral)	High willingness to act	May weaken performance

Name awareness, also known as brand awareness, refers to the situation where customers can recall or acknowledge that a brand is included in a set of certain product categories. Aaker (2009) further noted that brand awareness had three levels: brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind awareness. For example, CMMU is the business school of Mahidol University. The author, earning a bachelor's degree from Mahidol University, can easily identify that CMMU is one of Thailand's business schools. The author can recall that Sasin is also one of the business schools as well, and CMMU is the top-of-mind brand. However, CMMU does not achieve the highest level of brand awareness or even gain brand recognition at all to some people - even Mahidol undergraduates. When asked about a business school for a master's degree in Thailand, those people simply mentioned either the National Institute of Development Administration or Sasin School of Management. Despite the aided recall, they are unaware of the brand. Name awareness of a brand is like a memory chunk in a human brain. The larger the memory chunk is, the easier a person can recall and store information about the brand. A brand that achieves top of mind is considered a high equity brand.

Perceived quality is the overall quality of a product or service perceived by customers (Aaker, 2009). As the name suggests, it must be only perceived by customers. The actual level of quality may exceed or even be inferior to the perceived level. According to Aaker (2009), high quality does not equal to high customer satisfaction. People can be unsatisfied with the product that is perceived to be high quality. For example, Apple computers such as iMac are considered high-quality, but many people hate the Apple computers due to their overpriced position. Although perceived quality

is regarded as the critical factor that affects firm's performance in the long run (Aaker 2009), it has some drawbacks. It accelerates the level of expectation of the performance level by a brand. As a result, customers may become unsatisfied even if the firm performs at its consistency level. One of advantages of the brand that achieve high level of perceived quality is, for example, the ability to command a price premium. It increases customers' willingness to pay as the brand was believed to deliver superior offerings, compared to brands' competitors. In addition, Ladhari (2009) explained that service quality is composed of five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Table 2.2). Aaker's perceived quality refers to an intangible, overall feeling about a brand, which is derived from the use of the products. While ServQual model refers to five dimensions of service quality, Aaker's perceived quality covers only two dimensions of ServQual model, which are tangibles and reliability. In other words, Aaker's explained that overall feeling about a brand is derived only from attributes of the products that the brand is attached to, not the empathy carried by brand employees.

Table 2.2 Service quality dimensions

Dimension	Definition
Tangibles	Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and written materials
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
Assurance	Employees' knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
Empathy	Caring, easy access, good/communication, customer understanding, and individualized attention given to customers

Brand association is anything that is embedded in customers' memory regarding a brand and has a different level of strength (Aaker, 2009). Brand association is usually based on direct experience or exposure to the brand's communication. Aaker

(2009) provided the example of McDonald's associations, which were fun and kids. The German products are usually associated with beer and high-quality vehicles. Sasin is associated with prestige and a school for connection. Positive brand associations provide competitive advantages over the competitors. Aaker (2009) suggested a few benefits of brand associations (Figure 2.2). For example, associations aid customers to process and retrieve information from a brand. Given that independent study focuses mostly on how individuals perceive emotional benefits or what they think of the brand, explaining Birkenstock's and brand association is centered in this study.

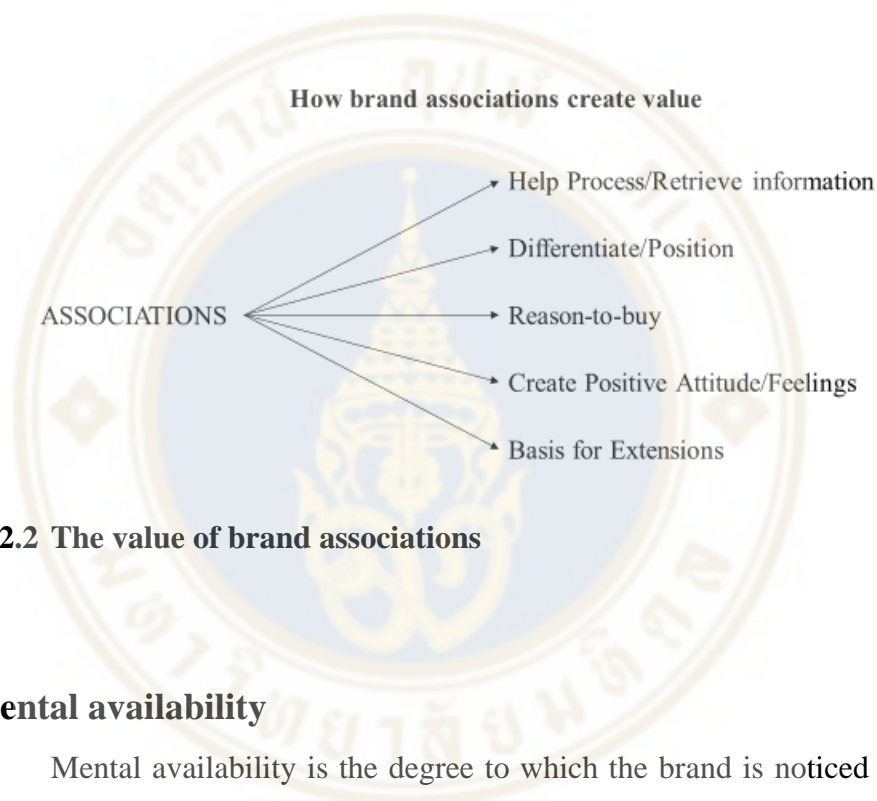


Figure 2.2 The value of brand associations

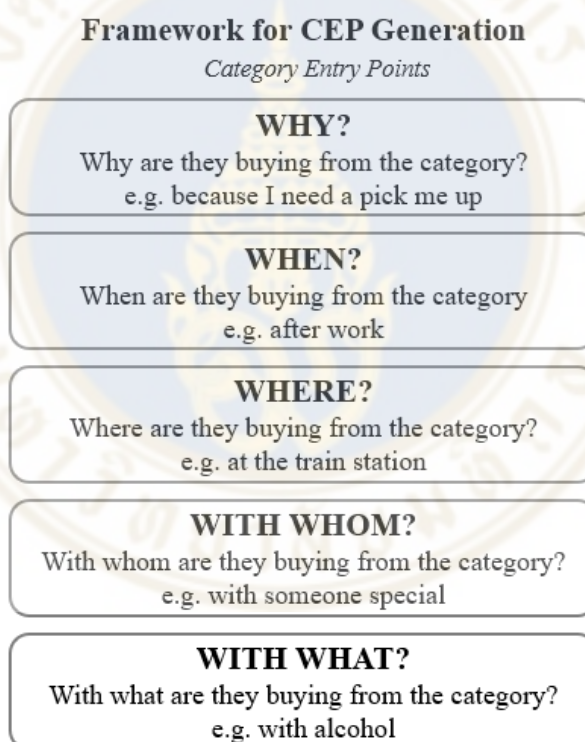
2.2 Mental availability

Mental availability is the degree to which the brand is noticed or thought of (Sharp 2016). It shares similarities with name awareness and brand association proposed by Aaker (2009). Mental availability works by refreshing and building memory structure (Sharp, 2016). A brand should research and identify what kinds of information that customers seek during the buying situation. Then, a brand should consistently communicate a relevant memory structure. The more extensive and relevant memory structure, the higher probability that a brand is noticed or thought of in buying situations (Sharp, 2016).

Mental availability extends beyond name awareness and brand association because it takes account of the customer's relevant information at the start of buying process. For example, the author has seen a Coke campaign that aims to create or strengthen a customer's memory structure (Positioning, 2019) It tries to link drinking a can of

cola with lunch meal. As a result, it increases the probability that customers order a Coke can during lunch meal, increasing the Coca Cola's bottom line.

In the second book, Romaniuk and Sharp (2016) developed a useful framework for researching a relevant structure called category entry points (CEPs). A CEPs framework illustrates the customer's thoughts at the first stage of the buying situation. It begins with questioning why, when, where, with whom, and with what. The objective is to extract a memory structure of the product, refine it, and translate it into marketing communication that is relevant to the customer. A CEPs framework also served as a guideline for the interview questions to develop a message relevant to consumers; thus, maximizing mental availability.



Adapted from Sharp & Romaniuk: How Brands Grow Part 2

Figure 2.3 A framework for CEPs by Byron Sharp and Jenni Romaniuk.

2.3 From means-end theory to laddering

Aaker (2009) discussed two methods to understand the brand: direct approaches and indirect approaches. Direct approaches referred to the straight-talking questions: What brands did participants use? Why? What did brand associations live? What emotions were associated with the brand? Nevertheless, direct approaches had limitations. Researchers encounter the 'unwilling' and 'unable' problems. Respondents may be unwilling to provide the actual answers as their responses were a little private, feeling uncomfortable to reveal the answers. Respondents coped by providing overly rational answers to deal with their cognitive inconsistency. For example, respondents' answers may focus on the product's craftsmanship rather than feeling socially accepted in style. In addition, respondents may be unable to provide the actual answers. They had no idea why they use the products as respondents may never think about the matter thoroughly.

To strategically deal with the difficulties of direct approaches, Aaker (2009) suggested indirect approaches to question what brands meant to the respondents. Aaker (2009) suggested nine techniques of indirect approaches, illustrated in Figure 2.4. Personal Values Driving Choice was a selected technique used in this study. In addition, Since the independent study aims to answer Birkenstock's emotional benefits and determine the underlying reasons for consumption, laddering is considered to be the best method employed to understand the brand from customers' perspective. It seeks to uncover the benefits of product attributes and understand how they are important to customers. The underlying rationale of laddering interview and Personal Values Driving Choice has its origin in means-end theory.

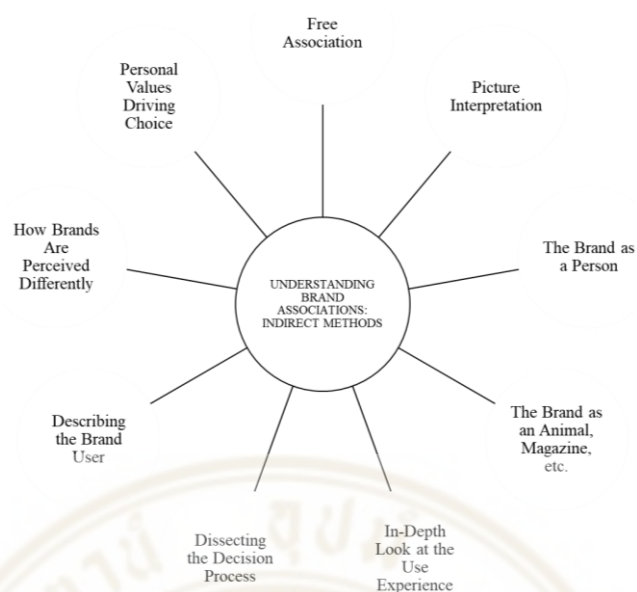


Figure 2.4 An illustration of indirect methods.

Gutman first proposed the means-end theory in 1982. It was a model that aimed to explain the linkage between perceived product attributes to personal values. Gutman (1982) defined means as a perceived product attribute that consumers interacted with and ends as personal values that consumers seek to achieve. According to Gutman (1982), the means-end theory's premise is that individuals decide to select products or engage in activities with certain attributes necessary to achieve desired consequences. Those consequences are thought to reinforce an individual's personal value. In other words, values are the real reasons why people purchase or consume the products. Personal values subconsciously motivate people to seek the desired benefits obtained from the product's distinctive attributes.

The means-end theory hypothesizes that attributes serve as a base that satisfies functional and psychosocial benefits. Those benefits serve as the tools to achieve a higher level of personal values. The means-end theory merely exists to explain the rationale underlying why such benefits are essential to the customers. For example, customers may not consume a light beer because of low alcohol drinks (attributes), but they seek a sense of belonging (personal values) from their friends as they can enjoy chat with friends longer (benefits).

Reynolds and Olson (2001) discussed the enhanced version of the means-end chain framework. The enhanced version enriches the understanding of each level in the model. An attribute is divided into two levels, namely concrete attributes and abstract attributes. Consequence is divided into two levels, namely functional benefits and psychosocial benefits. Value is divided into two levels, namely instrumental values, and terminal values. However, according to Reynolds and Olson (2001), the six-level model was deemed unnecessarily complicated. It was not practical for a business application or even for most theoretical points of view. They further noted that a four-level model was seen as more appropriate for a standard means-end chain analysis. A four-level model consists of attributes, functional consequences, psychosocial consequences, and values.

A four-level model were applied in this study. It should help the author understand how consumers think and feel about the brands and their behaviors. It provides a better understanding of what consumers actually seek from wearing Birkenstock footwear.

Pioneered by Reynolds and Gutman (1988), laddering is an in-depth interview developed to understand how customers convert product attributes to meaningful benefits concerning their personal values. Based on a means-end theory, laddering involves an interview format asking a series of “why is that important to you?” questions. The researcher begins by asking if the products contain any distinctive attributes. Each elicited attribute serves as a ladder to understand the higher level of one’s personal values. The researcher can use a laddering technique to understand one’s ultimate values. A means-end theory and laddering have been applied in a variety of studies, for example, zoo visitor’s motivation (Klenosky & Saunders, 2007), consumer perception regarding wildlife meat (Radder & Grunert, 2009), purchasing intention for fashion luxury goods (Amatulli & Guido, 2011), shopping motivation (Dennis et al., 2007), and older women’s motivation to exercise (Berlin & Klenosky, 2014).

In addition, laddering study enables a brand to revitalize its core brand’s equity. According to Wansink (2003), the set of meaningful means-end associations can be uncovered from laddering interviews. Those associations allow a brand to devise a new differentiated position derived from customer’s personal values. Consumers can easily retrieve the information from that marketing campaign regarding new brand positioning because the message is highly relevant to them. Plus, the insights drawn

from laddering interviews can be developed to implement a marketing communication campaign that improves a brand's memory structure. A study conducted by Reynolds et al. (1995) demonstrated the effect of a brand communicating messages derived from a laddering study. Surprisingly, the result showed that the messages' effectiveness was even more robust to those who are not loyal to the brand. It was explained that those persons had experienced a personal, relevant message; thus, they had more to learn about an advertised brand.



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methodology

The main purpose of this independent study is to understand why consumers buy and use Birkenstock footwear. The proper methodology to understand the “why” question is a qualitative research, using laddering technique. Because the study aims to uncover consumers' underlying motivation to purchase and use Birkenstock, the laddering technique is employed to help the author understand consumer behavior.

The laddering interview can be further divided, namely soft laddering and hard laddering (Reynolds and Olson, 2001). The soft laddering approach refers to open-ended interview questions. The researchers give the respondents full freedom to express a particular topic. The researcher merely listens to the natural flow of respondent speech and observes distinctive attributes told by respondents. Then, the research begins probing elicited attributes, asking “what is the benefit of them?” and followed by “why is that important to you?”. Reynolds and Olson (2001) proposed that a minimum sample size of at least 20 participants was recommended in the soft laddering approach. Meanwhile, the hard laddering approach did not require a one-on-one interview at all, removing the potential bias caused by the researcher (Reynolds and Olson, 2001). It refers to self-administered questionnaires using computerized data-collection devices. In this approach, respondents are forced to elicit distinctive attributes. They answer open-ended questions using an open text box, identifying up to three most important distinctive attributes. The same procedure as soft laddering applies, asking about each attribute's benefits and why it is important to them in the computerized devices. While there is no specific guideline of what an appropriate sample size for the hard laddering approach is, Park et al. (2019) conducted a hard laddering study, having up to 251 online participants taken part in the study.

In this independent study, the soft laddering approach is used to examine the means-end association of Birkenstock. The results can be used to generate Birkenstock campaign messages relevant to consumers to refresh memory structure.

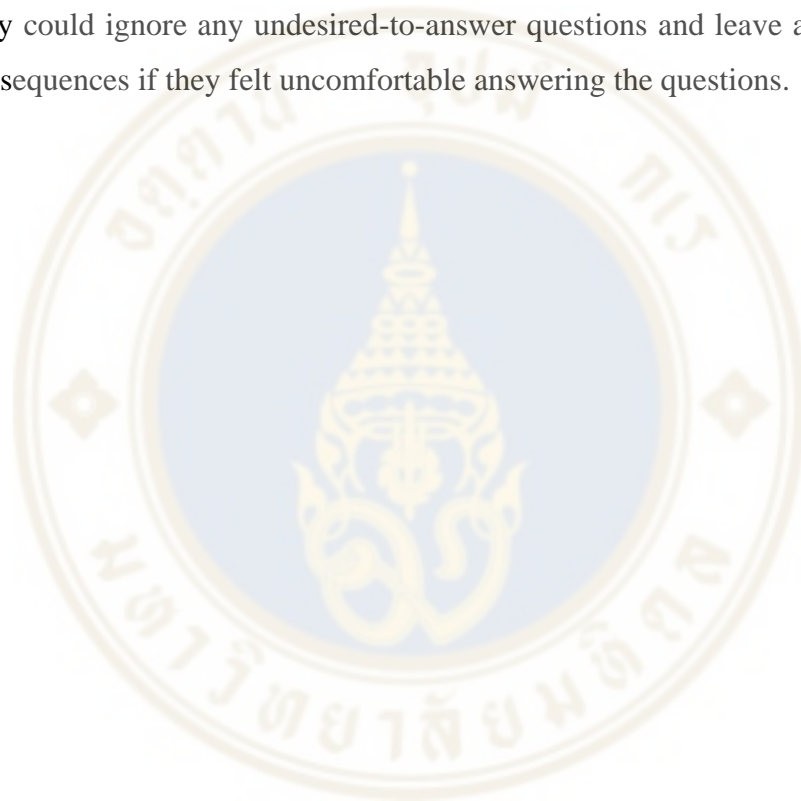
The interview was carried out in three stages. First, the participants were asked general questions regarding Birkenstock. The examples of first-stage questions were what kinds of editions participants own and where the participants bought Birkenstock. Secondly, participants were questioned about why they preferred to wear Birkenstocks over other types of shoes. The purpose in this stage was to elicit distinctive attributes of Birkenstock from the customer's perspective. It was the beginning part of a means-end chain theory. Lastly, a series of “why” questions were asked to gain an understanding of benefits and personal values.

Each attribute served as an initial step of each ladder for the researcher. After that, the researcher began probing the benefits derived from mentioned distinctive attributes. Then, the benefits responded by participants were examined further. The benefits were analyzed further by asking why they are important to the customers. Those answers were regarded as personal values, which were the highest level of a means-end chain framework. The process was finished when the participants completed the ladders of each attribute.

3.2 Data collection

A total of 20 participants were recruited. Interviews were conducted between October and December 2020. Each interview lasted between approximately 7 and 30 minutes. Initially, participants from this study were recruited from the chain of the author's network. Anyone over the age of 18 who owned at least 1 pair of Birkenstock shoes was eligible to be interviewed. Qualified participants were contacted to arrange a time and place for the interview. Additional participants were recruited through a snowball sampling approach. After the author completed the interview, the initial participants were asked if they knew someone who was qualified to be interviewed. Then, the referrals were contacted and asked if they were comfortable participating in the study. The interview took place at a variety of locations such as shopping malls or community malls. The selected sites were based on participants' convenience.

Given that the laddering interview was mostly focused on the respondents' elicitation, not Birkenstock's attributes, attempts were made to create a relaxed environment. Participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers, and no opinions were to be judged. The author was merely an observer in the study. Appointments were scheduled in advance, and the research purpose was explained. The author described the interview method and objectives to the participants. Their anonymity was assured, and the recorded tape would be destroyed once the project was completed. The consent form was handled before the interview began. Before the interview started, they were reminded again that they could ignore any undesired-to-answer questions and leave any time without any consequences if they felt uncomfortable answering the questions.



CHAPTER IV

FINDING AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Respondent profile

As shown in Table 4 and 5, 20 interviews were conducted. The majority of participants were male (65%), between the ages of 21 and 25 (70%). All of the participants completed at least Bachelor's degree (90%). Of those participants, about a third (35%) were participants who worked in the business management and administration field, followed by hospitality and tourism (20%). The most common net personal income category was between 25,000-35,000THB (50%). Participants were evenly split between 1-pair-owned participants (45%) and 2-pair-owned participants (45%), and other ten percent was the participants who owned more than two pairs of Birkenstock shoes. A total of 34 pairs of shoes were obtained. The most popular Birkenstock's edition was Arizona, which accounted for 65 percent of total pairs of shoes, followed by Madrid (21%). Besides, 75 percent of the participants reported they owned at least one pair of Arizona. It should be noted that Madrid was the most popular edition among female participants. About 70 percent of the female participants reported that they owned at least one pair of Madrid.



Figure 4.1 An illustration of Birkenstock editions.

Table 4.1 Respondent Profile

No.	Gender	Overseas purchase	Editions owned					Laddering results				Interview time
			Boston	Arizona	Zurich	Madrid	Barbados	Attributes	Functional consequences	Psychosocial consequences	Personal values	
1	M	no	1	-	-	-	-	3	1	2	3	0:12:55
2	M	no	-	1	-	-	-	4	3	1	4	0:12:51
3	M	yes	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	2	2	0:29:04
4	F	yes	-	-	-	1	-	3	2	1	3	0:13:25
5	M	no	-	3	1	-	-	3	1	2	3	0:16:53
6	M	no	-	1	1	-	-	3	1	2	3	0:22:30
7	F	yes	-	1	-	1	-	4	3	2	4	0:15:27
8	M	no	-	2	-	-	-	3	1	2	2	0:16:45
9	M	no	-	2	-	-	-	2	1	1	2	0:06:35
10	M	no	-	1	-	-	1	3	3	-	3	0:19:46
11	F	no	-	1	-	-	-	2	2	-	2	0:11:19
12	M	no	-	2	-	-	-	2	1	1	2	0:09:47
13	M	yes	-	1	-	-	-	2	1	1	2	0:10:15
14	M	no	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	2	2	0:09:04
15	F	yes	-	1	-	1	-	3	2	1	3	0:14:09
16	M	yes	-	2	-	-	-	4	-	4	4	0:18:38
17	F	yes	-	-	-	1	-	4	3	2	4	0:16:39
18	F	yes	-	2	-	-	-	2	1	1	2	0:21:54
19	M	yes	-	1	-	-	-	3	2	2	3	0:15:22
20	F	yes	-	-	-	3	-	5	1	4	5	0:29:17

Table 4.2 Demographic data of respondent

Observed data	Options	%
Gender	Male	65.0
	Female	35.0
Age	21-25	70.0
	26-30	30.0
Monthly salary	15,001-25,000	30.0
	25,001-35,000	50.0
	>35,000	20.0
Education (completed studies)	Bachelor's degree	90.0
	Master's degree	10.0
Jobs (by occupational fields)	Architecture and construction	5.0
	Arts Communications	10.0
	Business Management and Administration	35.0
	Finance	5.0
	Hospitality and Tourism	20.0
	Manufacturing	10.0
	Marketing, Sales and, Service	15.0
Usage (years)	< 1	20.0
	1	20.0
	2	10.0
	3	15.0
	4	25.0
	> 4	10.0
Number of pairs owned	1	45.0
	2	45.0
	> 2	10.0

4.2 General findings

During the warm-up phase, multiple general questions were asked to get participants to be familiar with the topic. The first question is how long they have been wearing Birkenstock shoes. The usage length varied from a month to 5 years.

“About a month since I started wearing it.” (10-M)

“5 years, since I was a freshman.” (20-F)

When questioned about how they got exposed to Birkenstock sandals, the majority of participants (70%) stated that they saw their social circle wearing a pair of them before they saw them on social media.

“In my college, sandals are allowed. Most lads there wear Birkenstock. Before that I didn’t know the brand, but when I saw many of my friends wear it, I began to think this was a cool brand [...]” (7-F)

“[...] I’ve first heard it from my friends. Then I started to see ads on social media.” (10-M)

Generally, it would take about a year for participants to purchase the first pair of Birkenstock shoes. The most common reason for such a delay was due to its high price, which made them hesitate to purchase its first Birkenstock shoes. When participants were asked how long it took to purchase ones, the typical reasons were:

“Quite long. It’s the price. It was unaffordable for me compared to normal sandals I had bought, [...]” (8-M)

“About half a year. [...]. That’s primarily because it’s very expensive; it cost 3000-4000 a pair.” (12-M)

“Quite a while. [...] Birkenstock cost 3-4,000 THB in Thailand; a very high price tag given that I was just a college student.” (19-M)

The purchase reasons varied from person to person. Most mentioned explanations were health related. For example, one participant encountered a foot-health problem. Thus, finding a pair of shoes that provided an arch support for the feet was a must at that time.

“My heels hurt. It hurts whenever I walk. Even when I wear sneakers, I can still feel the pain.” (11-F)

The second common explanation was purely emotional-related. Some participants neither thought Birkenstock of a healthy issues nor shared a health-conscious attitude. They simply wanted a sandal that boosted wearer's confidence.

"I felt like this Birkenstock shoe was already becoming a thing, so I jumped on the bandwagon and bought one too." (13-M)

"I was looking for sandals that are nice-looking. I had been wearing typical flip flops – I thought it was a little too casual. I wanted to have sandals that I can wear going to malls with confidence and politeness. (16-M)

Given that the price is costly in Thailand, half of the participants reported that they either made an order from a third-party retailer to ship from abroad or waited for an opportunity to buy Birkenstock shoes overseas.

"I wanted it right away, [...]. But I did wait to get it from Japan because it cost less." (16-M)

"Luckily, I got a chance to go to Germany, where the price was half as high." (19-M)

Participants were questioned about their alternatives to Birkenstock. Answers from male participants were wide-ranging, from trendy sneakers like Converse to Adidas sandals.

"I really have no idea. Adidas, I guess." (9-M)

"Come to think about it, Adidas was not a bad choice. I also looked into Adidas.com to see if there was anything that I really liked, but then Birken just crossed my mind. So, I went to Birken's official store." (10-M)

However, female participants appeared to have a significant pattern for the alternative. It is a toe-post sandal, called Havaianas.

"Yes, there was Havaianas. I had been wearing Havaianas. Then I grew bored of it, so I switched to Birkenstock." (4-F)

"Havaianas. Because at the Pre-College program, only sandals with straps to fasten the heel are allowed." (7-F)



Havaianas

Figure 4.2 An illustration of Havaianas flip-flops.

When asked about how often participants wore a pair of Birkenstocks, they generally provided pretty much the same answers. It appeared Birkenstocks completely replaced their everyday sandals.

“Quite often. Almost all the time except for when I’m at work. Even when I go out, if it’s not necessary that I wear sneakers, I would pick Birken.” (10-M)

“I’ve worn it for 2 full years since I bought it: at work, at outings, at college, everywhere and every day.” (17-F)

If the sandals were allowed in workplaces, participants did not hesitate to pick Birkenstock.

“Every time I work because I bought this pair of shoes because I put them on when I work in the kitchen.” (1-M)

“For flip flops, I wear them every day, even when I go to work.” (2-M)

Usually, raining and a requirement for a certain degree of formality appeared to be two major barriers of why participants did not wear Birkenstock on a particular day.

“I wore it all the time at college except for exam days where I had to wear sneakers. And when it rains or where there are water puddles, I won’t wear it, [...]” (7-F)

“When I need to be very formal, for example, when I have a formal appointment with university teachers.” (16-M)

4.3 Laddering finding

To generate attribute-consequence-value linkages of the Birkenstocks' owners, the questions "what do you like about Birkenstocks? Or can you name 2-3 things you like about Birkenstocks?" were asked to elicit important attributes from participants' perspectives. The answers were deemed distinctive attributes and were served as the first step of the ladder. Most participants could tell and elaborate right away what kinds of attributes they valued most and why they preferred the mentioned attributes.

"At first, it is nice-looking, minimal shoes. It has a very simple design. Second, which is the most important, the shoes support and fit my feet perfectly." (10-M)

"The design. It goes well with any of my outfits. I don't have to be like "if I'm wearing these shirts and pants, then which shoes can go with them?" As a plus, it's very durable – very long-lasting." (17-F)

However, as expected, some participants' answers were a little knee-jerk, which required an extra effort to probe for answers. The researcher had to nudge participants further, asking participants to take a breath and urge them to think about the distinctive attributes of Birkenstock thoroughly. In some cases, the researcher needed to ask the participants about their alternatives to Birkenstock and questioned why they picked Birkenstock over their alternatives to elicit distinctive Birkenstock attributes. Such initial knee-jerk answers included:

"I like the brand." (3-M)

"It makes me look good." (5-M)

"It's very durable." (9-M)

4.4 Description of attributes, consequences, and values

Table 4.3 illustrates elicited findings. The researcher managed to obtain twelve attributes (A), fourteen consequences (C), twelve values (V).

Twelve attributes are brand, chunky design, contoured slab, cork oak, durability, expensiveness, leather, minimal design, naturally produced, strapless, synthetic rubber, vintage design.

Nineteen consequences were divided into two types of consequences, namely functional consequences, and psychosocial consequences. There were six functional consequences: comfort, injury prevention, smell-less, longer product lifespan, orthopedic contours, and versatility. Eight psychosocial consequences are appropriateness, brand supporter, craftsmanship, feel healthy, professionalism, suitability, uniqueness, and well-known.

Twelve values included achievement, conformity, environmental-friendly, exclusivity, lust for life, security, self-confidence, self-direction, self-esteem, simplicity, thrift, and well-being.

Table 4.3 Description of attributes, consequences, and values.

Attributes		Functional Consequences	Psychosocial Consequences	Values
Brand	(A1)	Comfort (FC1)	Appropriateness (PC1)	Achievement (V1)
Chunky design	(A2)	Injury prevention (FC2)	Brand supporter (PC2)	Conformity (V2)
Contoured slab	(A3)	Longer product lifespan (FC3)	Craftsmanship (PC3)	Environmental-friendly (V3)
Cork oak	(A4)	Orthopedic contours (FC4)	Feel healthy (PC4)	Exclusivity (V4)
Durability	(A5)	Smell-less (FC5)	Professionalism (PC5)	Lust for life (V5)
Expensiveness	(A6)	Versatility (FC6)	Suitability (PC6)	Security (V6)
Leather	(A7)		Uniqueness (PC7)	Self-confidence (V7)
Minimal design	(A8)		Well-known (PC8)	Self-direction (V8)
Naturally produced	(A9)			Self-esteem (V9)
Strapless	(A10)			Simplicity (V10)
Synthetic rubber	(A11)			Thrift (V11)
Vintage design	(A12)			Well-being (V12)

4.5 Implication Matrix

The Birkenstock implication matrix is shown in Table 7. The implication is a tool to integrate the frequency of association and produce the hierarchy value map, which illustrates the strength of linkages among attributes, consequences, and values produced by laddering interviews. The values before the symbol (:) indicated the number of times that items were mentioned, while the figures after the symbol indicated the number of higher-level items linked. For example, expensiveness was mentioned three times and was linked to two consequences: appropriateness and well-known.

Looking at the frequency of items, from the twelve attributes, contour slab and strapless were the most mentioned items (10 times), followed by minimal design (8 times). From the six functional consequences, versatility was mentioned most often (8 times), followed by injury prevention (6 times). From the eight psychosocial consequences, appropriateness was mentioned most often (7 times), followed by professionalism (6 times). From the twelve values, conformity was mentioned most often (10 times), followed by self-confidence (9 times).

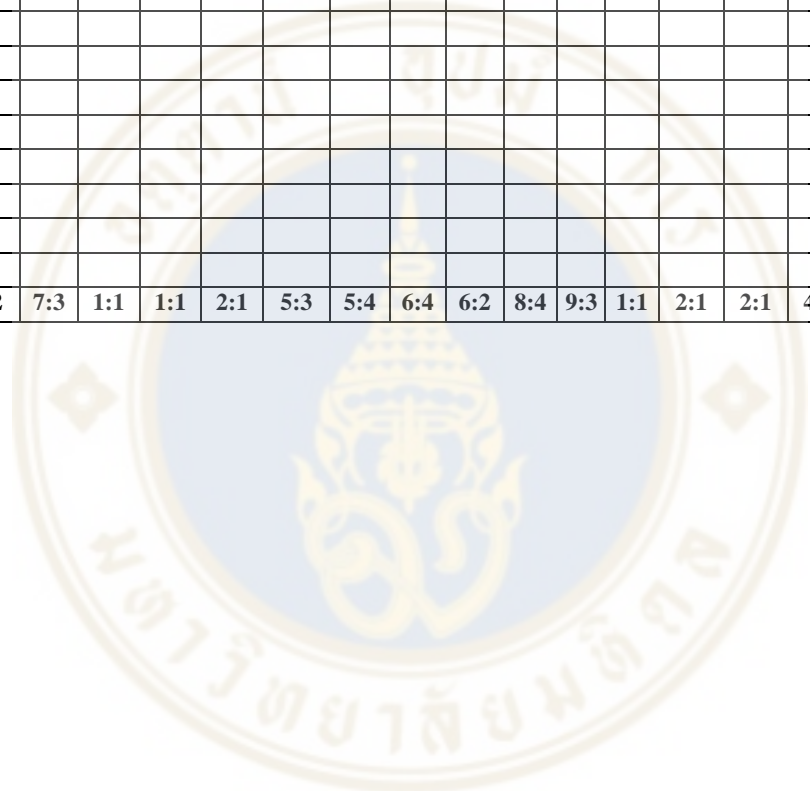
Looking at the number of linkages that items led to, from twelve attributes, contour slab and cork oak had the most linkages (5 times), followed by strapless (4 times). From six functional consequences, comfort has the most linkages (3 times), followed by injury prevention and versatility (2 times). From eight psychosocial consequences, well-known had the most linkages (4 times), followed by appropriateness and uniqueness (3 times). From twelve values, self-confidence has the most linkages (5 times), followed by achievement (4 times).

Table 4.4 Implication Matrix

Category	FC1	FC2	FC3	FC4	FC5	FC6	PC1	PC2	PC3	PC4	PC5	PC6	PC7	PC8	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12	Total
A1														4													4:1
A2												2															2:1
A3	2	4								2		1	1														10:5
A4	1			2		1	1						2														7:5
A5			4																								4:1
A6							1							2													3:2
A7									1		3	1															5:3
A8						7					1																8:2
A9								1																			1:1
A10	1	3					5				1																10:4
A11					2																						2:1
A12												1	1														2:2
FC1															1				2							1	4:3
FC2																				4						2	6:2
FC3																									4		4:1
FC4													2														2:1
FC5																						2					2:1
FC6																								6	2		8:2
PC1																5						1		1			7:3
PC2																	1										1:1
PC3																							1				1:1
PC4																										2	2:1
PC5															2	3											5:2
PC6																						4	1				5:2
PC7																		2				1	2				5:3
PC8															2	1						1		1			5:4
V1																											0:0
V2															3												3:1
V3																											0:0

Table 4.4 Implication Matrix (cont.)

Category	FC1	FC2	FC3	FC4	FC5	FC6	PC1	PC2	PC3	PC4	PC5	PC6	PC7	PC8	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12	Total	
V4																											0:0	
V5																												0:0
V6																												0:0
V7																												0:0
V8																												0:0
V9																												0:0
V10																												0:0
V11																												0:0
V12																												0:0
Total	4:3	7:2	4:1	2:1	2:1	8:2	7:3	1:1	1:1	2:1	5:3	5:4	6:4	6:2	8:4	9:3	1:1	2:1	2:1	4:1	9:5	4:3	2:2	6:1	6:2	5:3		



4.6 Hierarchical value map

Figure 4.3 illustrates the hierarchical value map. The hierarchical value map (HVM) is a graphical description of a laddering interview that summarizes the chain relationship between attributes, consequences, and values produced by a laddering interview. It depicts a meaningful mental map of the participant's view toward Birkenstock. The thicker arrow indicated the strength of the linkages. The darker the color was shaded, the more frequently the item was mentioned. According to Reynolds et al. (1995), the cutoff level should be the one that provided the most informative set of item relations since there were no universal criteria to handle the selection of cutoff level. The cutoff level was varied and mostly based on heuristic judgement that fitted the purpose of the study (Borgardt, 2020) In this independent study, the cutoff level of three is chosen for items to be depicted. The cutoff level of two is determined for linkages to be shown. Therefore, for items to be projected in the mental map, items must be mentioned at least three times and must be linked to a higher level of items at least two times.

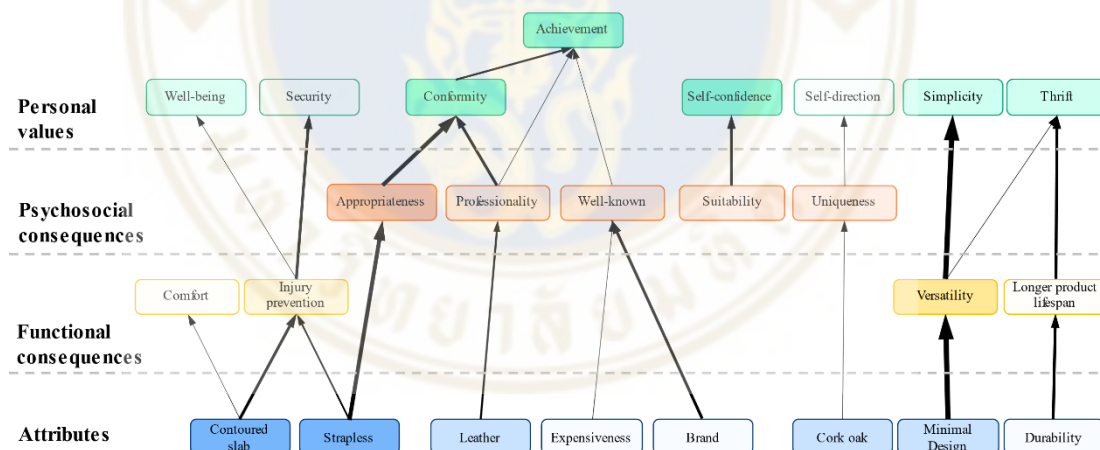


Figure 4.3 Hierarchical Value Map.

4.7 Attributes

Key excerpts of mentioned attributes from the laddering interviews are listed below.

1. Brand was mentioned four times, and it led to one consequence, well-known. Participants explained that they preferred Birkenstock to ordinary flip-flops because of its reputation. Users considered a pair of Birkenstock shoes as an expensive fashion accessory, which provided a feeling of wearing something like a high-priced watch or wrist band.

“I like it because it is a brand name. I always think flip flops and sandals are like an accessory, just like a watch. People will recognize it, and many people around me wear it too.” (2-M)

2. Chunky design was mentioned two times and was linked to one consequence, namely suitability. From the participant’s point of view, chunky design meant the style of Birkenstock that looked buckle-heavy. It was so unappealing and unique that it was cool to some participants.

“Birkenstock looks manly. It’s very functional. It goes with jeans.” (18-F)

3. Contoured slab was mentioned ten times and was linked to five consequences: comfort, feel healthy, injury prevention, suitability, and uniqueness. The strongest linkage from contoured slab led to comfort and injury prevention. Besides, it is interesting to note that, among twelve attributes, contoured slab and cork oak are two attributes that have the highest number of linkages to consequences. It indicated that each Birkenstock’s user perceived the benefits of contoured slab variously. Contoured slab refers to an insole that is anatomically shaped to the participants’ feet, which provides softness and incredible arch support.

“[...] the shoes can adjust to your foot shape, which prevents strain or muscle tiredness.” (7-F)

“Birkenstock is like my perfect shoes because their shape just goes perfectly with my feet. It’s as if the shoes are a mold, and when you put your feet into it, the mold adjusts itself slowly to your foot shape, and perfectly so.” (10-M)

4. Cork oak was mentioned seven times and was linked to five consequences: appropriateness, comfort, orthopedic contours, uniqueness, and versatility. Like contoured slab, cork oak yields several distinct benefits to Birkenstock’s users. The two strongest

linkages are orthopedic contours and uniqueness. While cork oak leads to various consequences, cork oak's connotation is pretty much the same for each participant. Generally, it refers to Birkenstock's wooden material, which makes the shoes appealing and fits many dressing styles. For example, when participants were asked what it was about Birkenstock that made it suitable for most outfits, the typical answers were:

“The color of oak wood.” (8-M)

“Wooden shoes are a fit for every occasion [...]” (17-F)

5. Durability was mentioned four times and was linked to one consequence, which was longer product lifespan. Participants claimed that Birkenstock's shoes were very durable. As a result, they preferred Birkenstock shoes to their alternative everyday shoes.

“The main reason I chose Birken was its durability. And when you have one pair of shoes that's durable and where you can wear for most occasions, you can save a lot of money [...]” (7-F)

When questioned about what made Birkenstock so durable, most participants appeared to have no clue what specific parts of the shoe contributed to Birkenstock's superior durability. They instead listed many parts of Birkenstock's materials in response to the question.

“The materials. Doesn't matter which part (the leather, the sole, the footbed), all of which seem very intact, durable, and resistant to wear and decay.” (15-F)

Therefore, durability refers to the overall perception of Birkenstock being long-lasting and resistant to worn out. It is considered as an abstract attribute of Birkenstock.

6. Expensiveness was mentioned two times and was linked to two consequences. Expensiveness led to two consequences, namely versatility and appropriateness. As the name suggests, expensiveness refers to Birkenstock's quality of being high-priced.

“I think people think of Birkenstock as something similar to the iPhone. Everyone knows this is not just a cheap brand.” (20-F)

Expensiveness was not mentioned by participants explicitly. Participants often skipped their answers to the benefits of expensiveness, such as versatility and appropriateness. The author needed to probe how Birkenstock could deliver such mentioned consequences as appropriateness and versatility.

“First off, it’s expensive. [...] When we humans know the price tag of a product, the value of that product increases automatically. So, when you’re wearing an expensive accessory, you’ll look formal too.” (19-M)

“[...] you can just wear short jeans with a random t-shirt and still look fabulous if you have a Proenza bag. That’s it. I mean...it’s like an item that signifies one’s wealth. The same goes for Birkenstock.” (20-F)

7. Leather was mentioned six times and was linked to three consequences: craftsmanship, professionalism, and suitability. The strongest linkage was directed to a consequence, named professionalism. Leather refers to the Birkenstock having a strap that is made of leather.

“I personally like leather shoes, and Birkenstock is.” (8-M)

“I like the fact that they are leather shoes. Sometimes I want to feel comfortable, but I don’t want to put on sneakers. Birkenstock helps me with that; I can look quite formal—more so than other typical rubber flip flops.” (12-M)

8. minimal design was mentioned eight times and linked to two consequences: versatility and professionalism. The strongest linkage was directed to versatility consequence. Minimal design refers to the quality of being plain and simple. Several participants reported that they preferred Birkenstock shoes to their alternatives because of Birkenstock design. When asked to elaborate more on design, participants’ answers were related to the quality of being plain and simple.

“The colors and design are not very fashionable; the colors are not showy.” (1-M)

“I feel like it’s a minimal brand. It looks good even when I wear it with my t-shirt or pants or whatsoever. The shoes do not stand out from my overall outfit in any unmatched way, mainly because they’re white in color.” (11-F)

9. Naturally produced was mentioned one time and was linked to a brand supporter consequence. As the name suggested, a participant reported one of the reasons why Birkenstock was preferred over alternative brands during the consideration stage because the materials were natural.

“Yes, I prefer Birken. The material was better too. It was made of cork – natural materials.” (7-F)

10. Strapless was mentioned ten times and was linked to four consequences: comfort, injury prevention, appropriateness, and professionalism. The strongest linkage was directed to appropriateness. A strapless attribute surprisingly emerges from a study. It refers to the quality of non-toe-post sandals that provides more foot coverage than typical flip-flops. Given that Several participants viewed Birkenstock as their alternative shoes to regular flip-flops, it explained why Birkenstock was seen as a pair of shoes that offered more foot coverage despite it being sandals.

“I had been wearing Havaianas (a mainstream brand of flip flops). Then I grew bored of it, so I switched to Birkenstock.” (4-F)

Although stating implicitly, several participants reported that strapless property was one of the critical factors why Birkenstock was the most desirable choice of shoes. During the attribute elicitation process, participants were asked why they like Birkenstock. Interestingly, Participants frequently skipped Birkenstock’s attributes to the benefits of wearing Birkenstock. The typical responses were related to Birkenstock’s properties that allowed participants to wear them on occasions.

“It’s appropriate in almost all situations, regardless of how you dress. Birkenstock isn’t too casual; it’s appropriate and polite.” (20-F)

When participants were asked why Birkenstock was more appropriate, most of the responses were related to two shoe properties that were non-toe-post and offered more coverage. With that being said, Birkenstock shoes gained the quality of being strapless.

“I think it’s because Thai people also judge others based on how their feet look. Feet can tell so much about one’s own background.” (19-M)”

“Take Arizona for example, it won’t expose my feet. Even if I’m wearing Madrid, which happens to have only one strap, at least it covers a much larger part of my feet than flip flops do.” (20-F)

Interestingly, the appropriate consequence was highly likely to be elicited when participants prefer strapless and cork oak attributes together.

11. Synthetic rubber was mentioned two times and was linked to one consequence, which was smell-less. Synthetic rubber attribute refers to the quality of shoes being made of rubber. A participant reported that a rubber-like model was preferred because it could be cleaned without difficulty.

“[...] but eventually I chose the rubber model because it was easy to take care of.” (2-M)

Synthetic rubber could be a subset of a brand attribute since it is possible that a participant may attach particular importance to the Birkenstock brand itself and merely saw a synthetic rubber as a peripheral attribute. However, after the produced consequence, which was smell-less, was reviewed, it was clear that synthetic rubber was a distinct attribute as it was leading to a totally different consequence.

“More importantly, it doesn’t smell. Leather sandals can give you unpleasant smells, but rubber ones don’t.” (2-M)

12. Vintage design was mentioned two times and was linked to two consequences: suitability and uniqueness. Participants reported that Birkenstock was preferred because of its design that conveyed vintage; thus, it suited their dressing lifestyle.

“I have worn Converse before. I feel that it [Birkenstock] has the same identity as the wooden design conveys vintage.” (3-M)

“Personally, I like to wear vintage clothes, hence Birkenstock.” (6-M)

When asked about what participants meant by ‘vintage’, they seemed to be uncertain of the definition they provided.

“[...] I don’t really know if it’s actually ‘vintage.’ At first, it [Birkenstock] didn’t strike me as vintage, not at all. I only knew so because the shop owner at Chatuchak told me.” (3-M)

Based on the interviews, vintage design refers to users’ perception of Birkenstock being slightly old-fashioned but cool-designed.

4.8 Functional Consequences

Key excerpts of mentioned functional consequences from the laddering interviews are listed below.

1. Comfort was mentioned four times and was linked to three values: achievement, lust for life, and well-being. As the name suggests, comfort refers to a participant’s state of physical ease and freedom from pain and soreness. Comfort was the main benefit derived from wearing shoes that contained contour slab, which provided incredible arch support.

“So, when it comes to typical flip flops, my legs and my feet, especially my soles, will always hurt. But Birkenstock doesn’t have that because the weight of my body would be distributed evenly across all parts of my feet.” (10-M)

“In my opinion, I think it’s like the shoes are built for the shape of my feet. This helps alleviate pain around my heels because I feel like my heels are protected, which as a result leads to the feeling of comfortability.” (11-F)

2. Injury prevention was mentioned six times and was linked to two values: security and well-being. The most robust linkage was directed to security. Injury prevention refers to a participant’s effort to prevent an emergent accident. In other words, participants foresaw a possible cause of injury that was related to feet, so they wore Birkenstock to avoid situations such as toe-post rubbing and slippery floor.

“I think it’s protective. Good shoes can support more weight, decrease the pressure around your foot sole, and reduce ground touch. This is just a guess, but I think good shoes help prevent injuries.” (5-M)

“On my recent holiday, I went to Koh Tao, where I had to go through many slopes. I was wearing both flip flops and Birkenstock that day. There was a whole lot of difference. It was much safer with Birkenstock.” (19-M)

3. Longer product lifespan was mentioned four times and linked to only one value: thrift. Longer product lifespan refers to Birkenstock’s long-lasting quality. Participants reported that they preferred Birkenstock shoes because they no longer needed to buy new shoes frequently once they owned Birkenstock.

“The benefit is that I can wear it anywhere and don’t have to switch shoes a lot. It’s like one pair of shoes for every occasion. This is different from other brands, where you can wear a pair of shoes for like 1-2 months then you have to buy a new pair.” (17-F)

4. Orthopedic contour was mentioned two times. Orthopedic contour was the only functional consequence that did not have any direct linkage to value. It led to a psychosocial consequence: uniqueness. Orthopedic contour refers to Birkenstock’s property that printed the user’s specific foot shape.

“[...] shoes made of cork can remember your foot shape and then adjust to it, [...]” (7-F)

“It fits my foot very well. Add to that, the shoe shape adjusts to the wearer’s foot shape.” (17-F)

5. smell-less was mentioned two times and was linked to one value, which was self-confidence. The consequence’s meaning is straightforward as its name suggests. It refers to the fact that Birkenstock does not cause an undesired smell when participants are in public. Smell-less is the benefit derived from Birkenstock’s synthetic rubber. A participant explained that synthetic rubber alleviated the pain of cleaning leather-like sandals, removing undesirable odor.

“[...] it doesn’t smell. Leather sandals can give you unpleasant smells, but rubber ones don’t. I haven’t had smell problems for quite a while now.” (2-M)

Undoubtedly, a smell-less consequence led to a self-confidence value since it boosted participants’ confidence in a public place.

“Other people can smell it [undesired smell], which can make you look really bad in the eyes of others. I don’t want to be like that. It affects my confidence, especially during work. This is not different from a person having bad odor. It’s unpleasant. I’d rather not have it.” (2-M)

“I once smelled something from my friends’ shoes. It was nasty. I don’t want to have that. So whenever I wear unbreathable shoes, I’ll get nervous.” (7-F)

6. Versatility was the most mentioned functional consequence (eight times) and led to two values: simplicity and thrift. The most robust linkage was led to a simplicity value. It is interesting to note that versatility is primarily formed by minimal design as it leads to versatility six times.

“As I said, I like to have one pair of sandals that go with various occasions, rather than having different pairs for different occasions” (2-M)

Generally, versatility refers to Birkenstock’s ability to be adapted to many different outfits.

“it’s good that I can wear the sandals to many occasions and with many outfits, be they shorts or pants. It’s like they don’t have to match certain outfits because they can match pretty much all outfits.” (2-M)

“I like the fact that it fits most of my outfits, whether they are formal or casual. It looks just fine.” (15-F)

4.9 Psychosocial Consequences

Key excerpts of mentioned psychosocial consequences from the laddering interviews are listed below.

1. Appropriateness was mentioned seven times and was linked to three values: conformity, self-confidence, and self-esteem. The strongest linkage was linked to conformity. Appropriateness refers to a participants' notion that wearing Birkenstock can provide mental security to users. In other words, it is a participant's feeling of being suitable for the particular circumstances. Participants no longer felt uneasy on occasions as Birkenstock was regarded as an appropriate pair of shoes that could be worn anywhere. Unlike typical flip flops, participants could wear a pair of Birkenstock shoes and be permitted to step inside a place that required a certain degree of formality, especially a government area.

“Because at most formal places, flip flops are not allowed, but sandals like Birken are actually fine. So, I think Birken is more appropriate at places.” (15-F)

Besides, the notion of appropriateness includes a conscious thought of wearing something that shows respect to other people or places, so participants does not feel worried later on.

“For example, at college, I will look a bit impolite with rubber flip-flops. It's like I don't respect the place since the university rules make it obvious that flip flops are not allowed.” (12-M)

“I used to wear it at college, and the teachers were fine with it. However, when I wore flip flops, the teachers sort of thought it was a bit impolite. (I actually thought to myself that flip flops and sandals weren't any different.)” (15-F)

Participants usually put Birkenstock in the same category as typical flip flops; thus, they considered Birkenstock shoes appropriate for many places. Participants were asked further why flip flops were considered inappropriate then. Usually, the answers are related to feet's exposure.

“This particular belief is exposing too much of your feet can be informal.” (19-M)

This explains very well why appropriate was significantly associated with a strapless attribute since Birkenstock shoes were not seen as a flip flop and offered more

foot coverage. One participant shared a fascinating insight regarding Birkenstock's appropriateness.

"I have the insight to share with you, though. Long ago, when I owned a restaurant, my friends used to tell me that I had to dress very politely, to set an example for the waiters – that I shouldn't be wearing sandals, or I would attract the kind of waiters and customers who dressed similarly. One day I put on my Birkenstock, and my friend wore typical flip-flops. That friend of mine was criticized for wearing flip flops, but I wasn't! So, that friend was trying to make a point that I was wearing sandals too. But the criticizer said it's Birkenstock, which implied the politeness of the brand, despite it being sandals." (16-M)

2. Brand supporter was mentioned one time and was linked to one value, environmental-friendly. Brand supporter refers to the participant's emotional state, highlighting the importance of using natural materials. A participant genuinely and actively used Birkenstock sandals and was considered a brand advocate, enjoying the benefits of brands that employed eco-friendly production activities. When asked what it meant by supporting the brand, a participant replied:

"I don't produce waste to the world, directly or indirectly." (7-F)

3. Craftsmanship was mentioned one time and was linked to one value, self-direction. Craftsmanship refers to participant's ecstasy triggered by wearing products that have leather components. When asked about the benefit of a leather attribute, a participant perceived that Birkenstock was a craft product, so it was high-quality.

"It's my perception that products from Europe are crafts. [...] Germany is commonly known for producing top-quality leather." (16-M)

4. feel healthy was mentioned two times and was linked to one value, well-being. The word 'feel' was intentionally selected as participants neither experienced any foot pain nor pursue protection from foot injuries like injury prevention. It was merely an aspiration to keep their feet healthy. Feel healthy refers to participant's perception that their feet were staying healthy.

"Even though I couldn't say for a fact that they are shoes for health, I felt like they were." (6-M)

When asked how participants' mentioned attributes could lead to feel healthy, several participants seemed to have no clues, stating that "I heard it from someone else."

“I’ve just heard it from someone else, though I myself also think it’s true, mainly because it adjusts to my foot shape.” (5-M)

“I heard it was shoes for health, so I believed what people said.” (13-M)

5. Professionalism was mentioned six times and linked to two values: conformity and achievement. Professionalism was primarily formed by a strapless attribute (three times), and the strongest linkage was directed to conformity (four times). Professionalism may partly overlap with an appropriateness consequence in the sense that participants may perhaps desire to dress appropriately in proper places. However, the professionalism consequence here had a totally different connotation from appropriateness as participants seek to dress formally in order to have a professional look, instead of being proper in particular circumstances.

“Others may question that you come to work or walk in a fashion show. The color tone of Birkenstock is quite black and dark, which meets my demand.” (1-M)

“Simply put, when you wear Birkenstock to meet someone who you need to be formal with, it’s appropriate, thanks to its ‘formal-looking’ design.” (14-M)

In other words, participants thought of Birkenstock as shoes that boosted their professional look as shoes were purchased for business-related purposes.

6. Suitability was mentioned five times and linked to two values: self-confidence and self-direction. The strongest linkage was directed to self-confidence (four times). Suitability refers to positive emotion obtained by maintaining one’s appearance. In other words, participants felt at ease as Birkenstock kept them dressing in their preferred styles.

“It’s my individual preference too; I’ve liked leather shoes for a long time. Leather shoes are neat. I like to be seen as neat, so I think wearing leather shoes, I can project neatness.” (8-M)

“I feel empowered. I feel complete in terms of how I look. It’s like a shield, in a way that it makes me feel safe, feel free from being looked down on, and feel very confident. I won’t have to worry about how others will look at me.” (20-F)

7. Uniqueness was mentioned five times and linked to two values: self-confidence and self-direction. Uniqueness refers to participants’ positive feelings from being differentiated from other individuals. Uniqueness resulted from cork oak materials, which provided both a wood-like color and a personalized footprint. To illustrate,

participants told cork oak was so soft that it was capable of printing orthopedic foot shape. Later on, that capability provided participants a sense of uniqueness as there was only one pair of shoes in the world that perfectly fitted the participant's feet.

"My mom tried my shoes once and said "How could you wear these? It hurts so much." So I said that's because our feet were too different in shape." (7-F)

8. Well-known was mentioned five times and was linked to four values: achievement, conformity, self-confidence, and self-esteem. It was constructed by two attributes, brand (four times) and expensiveness (two times). Well-known refers to participants' emotional benefits that Birkenstock is recognized by people looking at participants. Participants reasoned that they preferred to wear Birkenstock because it could signal what kinds of people they were.

"So when you're wearing an expensive accessory, you'll look formal too. For example, you can compare a woman wearing Hermes vs a woman wearing flip flops bought from a wet market. Even though both are wearing shoes that look very similar, perceptions are totally different. A woman in Hermes will have that aura and will look polite and hi-so." (19-M)

4.10 Personal Values

Key excerpts of mentioned personal values from the laddering interviews are listed below.

1. Achievement was mentioned eight times. Three consequences formed achievement: comfort, professionalism, and well-known. Besides, there was one value leading to achievement value, which was conformity. Achievement refers to career-related importance. Consequences like formality and well-known were instrumental in career progression, especially participants whose work required meeting new clients occasionally,

"I mean if others wear it and I wear it, it is easier for us to get along. There will be phrases like 'Oh you're wearing ones just like me?' somewhere along with the conversation." (2-M)

"I often have meet-ups with my clients. Flip flops obviously affect my credibility; I would make a negative first impression." (14-M)

“[...] it [Birkenstock] could be a topic of conversation with my potential clients (since I was a salesperson). Usually, it’s hard to initiate a conversation with prospects, but I could talk about my Birkenstock – something like where I got it, why I bought it, and how much I got it; or I could just talk about it [...]. I think it has a lot of indirect value.” (19-M)

Even comfort consequence was seen as necessary in career progression. A participant, who worked as a chef, reported comfort was important because Birkenstock provided the capability of working longer hours with ease.

2. Conformity was mentioned nine times. It was constructed by three consequences: appropriateness, professionalism, and well-known. A combination of appropriateness and professionalism mainly contributed to conformity (eight times). Conformity refers to the importance of fitting in two matters. The first matter is to stick to workplace rules and regulations.

“Is it [minimal design] important? It is because it is more like a discipline. It is their rule, like don't put on something showy or flashy. Kitchen shoes should be monochromatic, black, like working in a hotel, something like that. There is a rule stated.” (1-M)

The second matter is to conform to the social customs and traditions by wearing appropriate outfits to show respect to places. Participants would like to stay obeying the unspoken cultural rules. Participants embraced an implicit culture of ‘poo-yai’ and ‘poo-noi’, where participants needed to show courtesy to the superior (e.g., Parents’ friends and teachers). Participants inferred that wearing Birkenstock was important because it was one of the means to show respect to the others since it was seen as more appropriate than typical flip-flops. Participants felt mentally safe as they complied with social norms.

“It just feels like I am the kind of person who knows there’s a time and place, who dresses appropriately.” (15-F)

“[...] when I go to The Mall or Siam, I won’t have to worry about who will judge me negatively based on how I look. I will be safe from that sort of judgment with Birkenstock on.” (20-F)

3. Environmental-friendly was mentioned one time and was formed by brand supporter. Environmental-friendly refers to participants’ importance of taking

care of the environment. A participant expressed the biosphere's concern, explaining that waste could be reduced by using the product made of sustainable materials.

“I feel like I can contribute something to the society (by supporting brands that are environmentally friendly).” (7-F)

4. Exclusivity was mentioned three times and was formed by uniqueness. Exclusivity refers to participants' importance of owning something unique and not bought or used by most people. Participants reported that they feel delighted, using the product that only belonged to the participants.

“It's like it's made just only just for me, belonging to only me. This is very similar to Freitag bags where each one of them is unique – you can't find another Freitag bag that's like yours, ever.” (7-F)

“It's like I have the shoes that belong to me, only me. It's part of me; only I can wear them. If others put them on, they'll feel like the shoes are not meant for them.” (17-F)

5. Lust for life was mentioned two times and was formed only by comfort. Lust for life refers to participants' importance of getting the most out of their life. They desired to live a full and rich life, having vitalizing energy and good mental health to enjoy the whole day. Participants reasoned they could do a lot more activities as a result of the comfort provided by Birkenstock.

“My life is much better. When I get home, I no longer have this feeling of “Ohh, my feet hurt. I'm so tired. I need a rest.”. You know in the past I used to massage my feet with hot therapy [when I get home]. But recently I haven't had that bad experience anymore because Birkenstock has totally solved it.” (11-F)

6. Security was mentioned four times and was only formed by injury prevention. If conformity meant mental safety, then security represented physical safety. Security refers to the importance of being free from physical hazards such as slips, trips, and falls. Participants reasoned that injury prevention was important because they were no longer worried about possible threats from accidents.

“I used to hurt my foot when I stumbled upon something a long time ago. After that, I decided to go for sandals that weren't that tight, hence Birkenstock” (4-F)

“No slip, No fall. Being hard to fall, I’m not likely to hurt myself. I don’t have to waste time looking after myself during the recovery process if that happens.” (13-M)

7. Self-confidence was mentioned nine times and was formed by five consequences. Suitability mainly contributed to self-confidence (four times). Suitability was important because participants preferred to keep themselves in the preferred dressing styles. Such styles include the image of masculinity or vintage appearance. As a result, participants’ confidence was boosted.

“I can be confident in myself. To the eyes of others, I can come across as ‘polite and mature.’” (18-F)

“I feel proud that I get to express myself outwards. It’s like I am confident in my body, in the way I look, or around the people I’m talking to.” (20-F)

8. Self-direction was mentioned four times and was formed by three consequences: craftsmanship, suitability, and uniqueness. Self-direction was mostly constructed by uniqueness (two times). Self-direction refers to the importance of personal independence in terms of fashion. Participants preferred to have their own style of dressing. They did not appreciate following mainstream fashion trends.

“Actually, I didn't want to blend in with others per se. I don't like anything mainstream. Birkenstock is almost like a niche brand here [in Thailand].” (16-M)

“I think of myself as an artist or a designer. I think I really am one of those; I’m not pretending nor a wannabe. The thing is one has to be oneself. [...]. Being able to express myself is my happiness.” (20-F)

9. Self-esteem was mentioned two times and was formed by appropriateness and well-known. Self-esteem refers to the importance of appreciating one’s own worth. Participants would like to have a positive self-image.

“I want to be good-looking in the eyes of other people. That’s that.” (8-M)

“[...] wearing something expensive enhances one’s self-image.” (19-M)

10. Simplicity was mentioned six times and was only formed by versatility. Simplicity refers to the importance of living simply. Versatility consequence was important because it could make participants’ life much more comfortable. For example, they do not think whether the shoes would match the outfit or not. Participants simply pick Birkenstock and leave the places.

“Most importantly, I can save a lot of time by not having to think too much on my outfit. When my outfit is simple, all it takes is one look at the mirror and then I’m ready to go. Simple as that.” (10-M)

“[...] especially during workdays where there is not much time. Putting on my makeup takes some time, but I’m still fine because I don’t have to worry about my shoes. [...] I only have to worry about my shirts and pants, but I’m totally worry-free about my shoes.” (11-F)

11. Thrift was mentioned six times and was formed by two consequences: longer product lifespan and versatility. Participants valued the importance of using money carefully and not wastefully. Even though Birkenstock was pricey and cost 3-4,000 THB in Thailand, Birkenstock was seen as economical. Participants thought of it as a worthy investment. Participants reasoned that long product lifespan and versatility were important as a large amount of money could be saved from using Birkenstock; thus, they could use the money for something else.

“I can put on it for a long time, no need to change often. Some brands may be 50% cheaper, but you change them often. But this [Birkenstock] is a worthy investment. You pay once and will never have to think about it again for a couple of years.” (1-M)

12. Well-being was mentioned five times and was formed by three consequences: comfort, feel healthy, and injury prevention. Well-being was different from security. Participants reasoned that the purpose of wearing Birkenstock was not so much to be safe from physical hazards. Instead, it was participants’ inspiration to keep their feet healthy. Participants valued the importance of ‘health is wealth.’

“I’ve heard that feet are one of your vital organs, like another heart of yours. [...] I think you have to look for the best for your feet when it comes to buying shoes.” (6-M)

4.11 Themes: 3 motivations to purchase Birkenstock.

4.11.1 A healthy lifestyle motivation

Under the first theme, users tend to be motivated by the healthy perspective; thus, they have an active interest in keeping their minds and bodies healthy. They acknowledge the importance of wellness, longing for both the absence of injury and the state of being mentally healthy. They typically look for comfort and injury prevention benefits.

Comfort and injury prevention are important as they can help achieve a greater level of wellness. Contoured slab is instrumental in achieving those two main benefits since it has been a great comfort to users and offers protection against possible physical harms. Users reasoned that Birkenstock was so comfortable that they could enjoy hours of walking without any soreness because of its perfect fit between the user's foot shape and a Birkenstock slab. For a strapless benefit, users tend to compare Birkenstock's experience with their typical flip-flops'. They explained that, sometimes, they have blisters due to toe post rubbing caused by wearing flip-flops. Once users switch their everyday flip-flops to Birkenstock, the problem disappears, explaining how strapless is seen as instrumental in achieving injury prevention benefits.

The user's motivation is also resonated with the values Birkenstock is standing for. According to the Financial Times interview (Stoppard, 2019), Oliver Reichert, a Birkenstock's chief executive, said that Birkenstock was meant to manifest values like freedom and well-being.

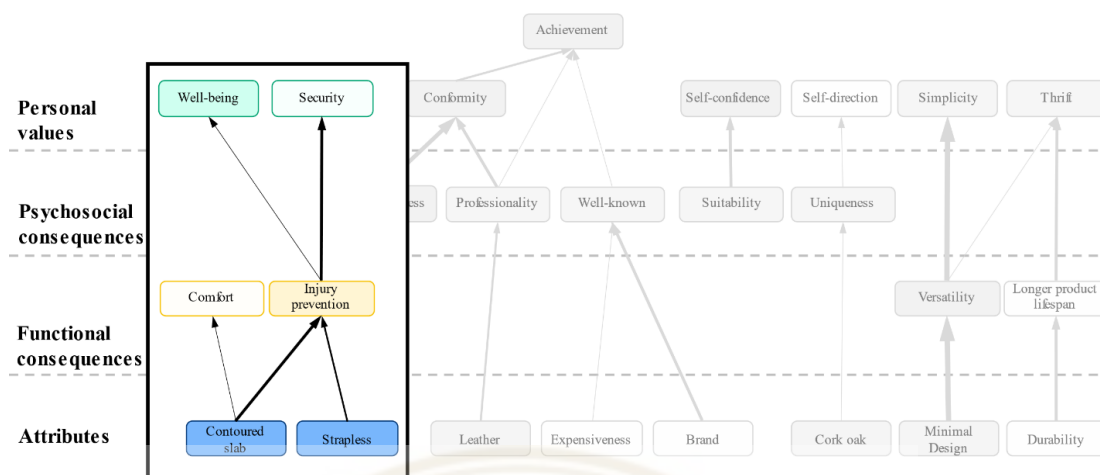


Figure 4.4 Relevant Associations for a healthy lifestyle motivation

4.11.2 A business casual look motivation

If a healthy lifestyle is considered an approach motivation – a step taken to have mind and body healthy, then users have an avoidance motivation under the second theme. Users acknowledge the antipathy toward feet in Thai culture; thus, they dress properly according to unspoken rules that apply to how one should dress even in a situation where formality is not required. Birkenstock is a tool to avoid getting public disgrace as users know what to wear when going to certain places. Users regard Birkenstock as a social shield that save face – just like a talisman.

Birkenstock fits in a style of clothing that is less formal and provides a professional and businesslike impression. Users in this group merely look at the emotional benefits and do not regard healthy perspective as a critical factor in purchasing Birkenstock. That's why appropriateness, professionalism, well-known, and suitability are important because users would like to fit in society's unspoken rules. The leather projects a businesslike impression as it conveys a feeling of wearing business leather shoes. For most users, the perception that toe-post shoes have been not appropriate originated during their undergraduate study. They explained that teachers did not allow them to wear sandals in the class, or academic personnel refused to proceed with students' academic forms. Since Birkenstock replaces a toe-post strap with one or two wide-coverage leather straps, users justify Birkenstock as an accessory that conveys the new 'formal wear' image.

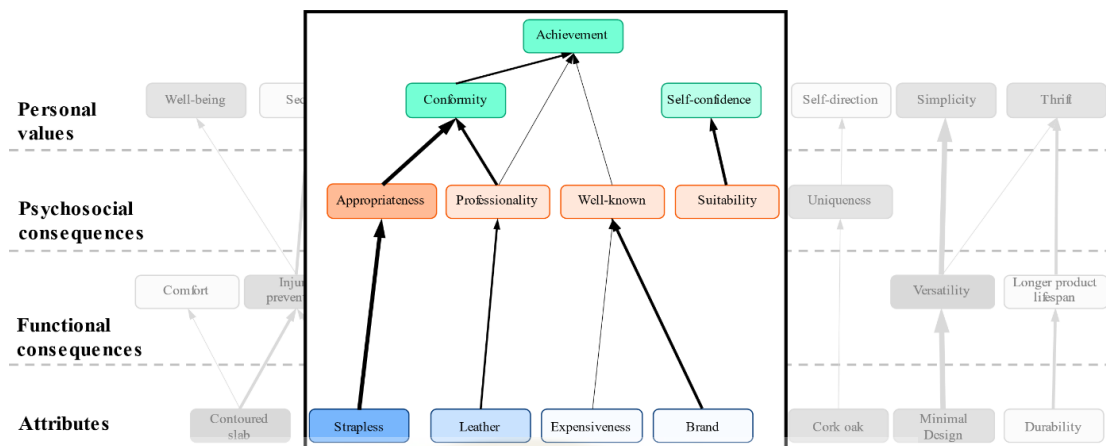


Figure 4.5 Relevant Associations for a business casual look motivation

What influenced participants' perception regarding the standards of formal wear in Thailand most likely originated when Phibun Songkhram was a prime minister (Van Esterik, 2020). At that time, he promoted nationalism and defined what 'Thainess' meant. Phibun issued a series of 12 cultural mandates (Puangpin, 2012). They were a guideline of how Thais should have behaved in order to be a civilized country. According to Mandate 10, how Thai citizens should dress in the public was explained. It described what kinds of dresses were appropriate or inappropriate. For example, men were not allowed to be shirtless in the public. Women had to wear a sarong or skirt, and a pair of shoes with ankle straps was necessary when they were in the public. The government even released posters illustrating do's and don'ts of how to dress (Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6 Thai culture poster by Government of Thailand. The left side shows discouraged, traditional clothing while the right side shows the mandated Western clothing.

However, at that time, Mandate 10 was not sacred enough since a large number of people still ignored that cultural mandate (Puangpin, 2012). The government could not penalize those citizens as their actions were not considered a law violation. There were no such laws stating that citizens committed wrongdoings if they did not follow state customs from the edicts. Therefore, in order to persuade Mandate 10, Phibun told government departments in general to notify citizens doing business with government officers that they had to dress appropriately. If citizens failed to do so, they were not allowed to enter into the government bureaus, or government officers would reject their requests. Since then, not dressing properly has been against the norm, especially in government-associated areas such as universities. In addition, dressing properly has showed one's knowledge of *kalatesa*, which was expressed through dress, language, and manner (Ukosakul, 2005). *Kalatesa* is beyond the concept of appropriateness and politeness from western culture as failing to show the knowledge of *kalatesa* implies a disrespect towards the other people.

Nowadays, the standards of formal dress from Mandate 10 had not deviated from the old day very much. Wearing pants instead of shorts when going to the government

area is perceived to be a social norm. A pair of shoes with an ankle strap is appreciated. Besides, Thais has also embraced the Western standards of formal dress that the leather-like shoes convey an even more formal image. Such exceptionally formal occasions like the opening ceremony and orientation require attendees to wear leather-like shoes. As a result, some people perceive that wearing leather-like shoes is one of the ways to show kalatesa. It explains why Birkenstock offer a perception of formality to a certain extent.

There was still drama ensued regarding wearing Birkenstock in a university (NationTV, 2019). Netizens complained about receiving warnings because they wore Birkenstock shoes (as illustrated in Figure 4.7), which were flagged as inappropriate shoes, during an exam. The problem occurred because new generations interpreted appropriateness and politeness differently from the ancient unspoken rule from Mandate 10. The new generations perceived that wearing leather-like shoes was appropriate enough to attend the examination. They also misinterpreted the purpose of must-have ankle straps derived from Mandate 10. They believed the purpose was to cover the area of foot exposure as much as possible, so sizable Birkenstock straps covering instep of the foot would do the same job as ankle straps. In other words, Birkenstock was believed to be appropriate as those large straps of Birkenstock covered more parts of the feet compared to regular sandal. However, proctors did not see the situation this way. They just followed the university rule, which was highly likely to have originated from Mandate 10. The shoes must have an ankle strap to be regarded as appropriate shoes. A shoe, illustrated in Figure 4.8, was still considered appropriate to enter the examination room even if a wearer looked barefoot.



Figure 4.7 The posted picture of Birkenstock being questioned why Birkenstock is not appropriate.



Figure 4.8 A considered-appropriate shoe.

Perhaps, the notion that leather-like sandals become the new ‘formal wear’ is highly unlikely and not close at hand. Mandate 10 was deeply embedded within Thai culture and influenced the attitude towards the importance of kalatesa. Unless someone with high authority bothered to do something about it, the social norms of an appropriate dress were unlikely to get updated. Nevertheless, Birkenstock shoes were considered and appropriate, at least from new generations’ perspective, and were popular for new generations who sought an image of professionalism derived from Birkenstock.

4.11.3 An effortless chic motivation

Life is busy. Most of the participants said that they were often in a hurry, especially in the morning. Choosing what clothes to wear to the workplace and what makeup to wear is time-consuming. Usually, they were late for work or failed to attend a university class in time because they were picky about what clothes to wear. As a result, they have a strong desire to minimize the effort in how they dress. Here comes Birkenstock to solve the issue. Participants pursue to live a life of simplicity. They value the importance of simplicity. Birkenstock’s minimal design conveys a perception that it suits several outfits, providing users a life of convenience. Birkenstock’s durability plays an important role as well. It allows users to use the product for a long time, amplifying Birkenstock’s versatility benefits. That is why Birkenstock is considered a long-lasting fashion item that is worth the investment. In other words, Birkenstock kept users good-looking while offering a no-brainer decision to their life. Their fashion style was related to the term called ‘effortless chic’.

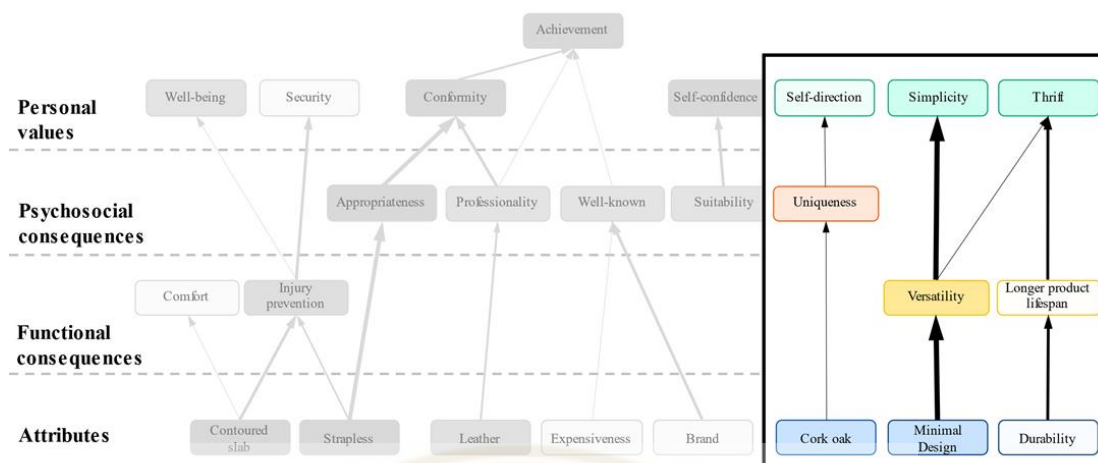


Figure 4.9 Relevant Associations for an effortless cool motivation.

Effortless refers to the quality that required no physical or mental exertion. Chic refers to the quality that is elegantly stylish. Even though the definition of the word ‘chic’ means something fashionable, individuals may perceive the meaning of ‘fashionable’ differently. In other words, unlike other fashion terms like ‘elegant’ and ‘formal’, individuals may depict ‘chic’ style in a way that is not the same as other people. Even though the origin of the word ‘Chic’ was still controversial, it was associated with ‘cool’ in a way that was Parisian as one origin suggested that it was derived from French stylishness. Published in *Vogue*, an American monthly fashion and lifestyle magazine, the meaning of the word ‘chic’ has been semantically shifted over time (Schneier, 2012). The consensus meaning was difficult to pin down. The word ‘chic’ also expanded to a variety of usages such as heroin chic (Nash, 1997), Parisian chic (Walker, 2015), and poverty chic (Halnon, 2002). In addition, ‘chic’ was also linked to quality that was minimal. A contributing editor at *Harper’s Bazaar*, Bateman (2015) provided a chronological meaning and usage of the word ‘chic’. For example, in 1938, *Harper’s Bazaar*, an American monthly women's fashion magazine, acknowledged the aptitudes of Cristobal Balenciaga, the founder of a Balenciaga luxury fashion house, and reported that "Balenciaga abides by the law that elimination is chic." As a result, it explained why the word ‘chic’ was associated with the quality that was minimal. The word ‘chic’ here refers to the fashion quality that is plain, yet stylish.



Figure 4.10 An example of ‘effortless chic’ style. A compromise between high-price items (Birkenstock sandals) and low-price items (a plain long sleeve shirt).

Nam and Ha (2017) conceptualized the idea of ‘effortless cool’. They provided the definition and characteristics of ‘effortless cool’ in modern fashion (Table 4.6). According to their definition, ‘effortless chic’ did not mean that individuals needed to wear low-priced fashion items and showed a lack of effort in dressing. Rather, it was the idea that the luxury items were not distinctive from the overall outfits and seemed so natural that they were well-matched with low-priced items. Birkenstock is well-suited to the characteristics of ‘effortless chic’ in modern fashion (Table 4.6). It provides ease of wearing, and its uniqueness also fills in the Unconventional ‘effortless chic’ dimension. The design is classic plain, conveying neutral tones. It is the luxury item that simply matches with the low-priced items, providing a sense of balance between looking dressed up and laid-back simultaneously.

Given that Thais place value on face and status, and conspicuous consumption, staying good-looking and trendy is necessary for Thais (Shannon, 2017). It appears that the majority of Thais aspire to achieve ‘effortless chic’ quality. Nevertheless, Thais who have embodied ‘effortless cool’ ranged only from undergraduates to the fresh workforce. It is because these people usually have low disposable income compared to the experienced workforce. Undergraduates may not have enough allowance to purchase outfits full of luxury brand names. Even though starting to work and earning some money, a fresh workforce is not that different from undergraduates. Unlike an experienced workforce, they

may not make a large amount of money, so they do not have enough disposable income to purchase a full set of luxury items. These two groups rather spend money on a piece of ‘effortless chic’ clothing that is the most worthwhile. If they decide to go with luxury shirts or pants, chances are they are able to wear them once a week.

As a result, Birkenstock becomes the most wanted item to achieve everyday ‘effortless chic’ style. Plus, Birkenstock nourished a thrift value because choosing Birkenstock over other costly luxury items was financially justifiable. Therefore, with its durability, minimal and versatility, participants under the final theme prefer to wear Birkenstock shoes every day and feel worry-free because shoes are resistant to be worn out, saving their money.

Table 4.5 Characteristics of Effortless Chic

Meaning of Effortless Chic					
	Functionality	Simplicity	Eclectic	Unconventional	Luxury
Design & Detail	Ease of wearing	Simplicity but elegance	Day dress using glamorous detail of evening dress	Somewhat accommodate TPO (Time, Place, Occasion)	Natural, elegant, classic design
Styling	Relaxed silhouette	Fulfilling multiple purposes	Compromising between high-price and low-price items	Genderless	-
Fabric	Sew-simple and easy-to-wash fabrics	Simple or non-pattern fabrics	Seasonless fabrics	Day wear using fabric of evening dress	high-end natural fabric with smooth touch
Color	-	Basic & classic color in black, white, neutral tones	-	-	-

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion and recommendation

The study explores the brand associations of Birkenstock by employing laddering techniques in order to understand the brand at both functional and emotional level. The results from a laddering study revealed distinctive attributes, benefits, and personal values of the Birkenstock users.

The chain relationship of laddering results illustrated the most salient items in each level. In attribute level, Birkenstock users viewed contoured slab and strapless as the most distinctive attributes. Birkenstock users looked for versatility in the functional consequence level as it was the most mentioned item in this level. Appropriateness was regarded as the most critical benefit in the psychosocial consequence level. Conformity was the most mentioned personal value.

Three types of motivation were discovered: a healthy lifestyle motivation, a business casual look motivation, and an effortless chic motivation. The origins of each motivation were also analyzed. Three types of motivation examined to understand each level's linkages, explaining how attributes, consequences, and personal values are related. The associations were then used to form the memory structures of how users view Birkenstock. Those memory structures served as a tool to understand Birkenstock from the user's perspective and provided a marketing implication for Birkenstock. The hierarchical value map could explain how consumers related distinctive attributes to their own personal values. It can be used as a basic guideline for advertising managers in order to refresh the relevant memory structures of Birkenstock.

5.2 Managerial implications

Given that copycat products are everywhere in the competitive market, marketers may use the existing, relevant memory structures of Birkenstock to communicate with potential customers. Such salient attributes may be portrayed in the advertising campaigns in order to increase probability that Birkenstock gets noticed from the potential buyers. Hierarchical value map may be translated into a Q&A guideline for front-line product consultants so that potential buyers may receive the information that is relevant to them in a buying situation. In other words, even though the products are considered pretty much the same, the brand may use hierarchical value map as a guideline in order to communicate how a product can deliver higher level of benefits and values differently.

In addition, marketers can use the hierarchical value map to raise mental availability by refreshing relevant memory structures of Birkenstock users. The implication should result in Birkenstock getting noticed and thought of when users are considering buying new pairs of shoes. When relevant memory structures are refreshed over time, it reminds customers of Birkenstock's existence, increasing the chance that Birkenstock being placed in customer's brand repertoire.

5.3 Future research

Birkenstock may further leverage mental availability by considering Distinctive Assets metrics, developed to trace mental availability. The metrics refer to two measurements that are matter for mental availability (Romaniuk, 2018). Those two are Fame and Uniqueness. Distinctive Assets metrics allow the brand to track its distinctive assets such as color combination, packaging closures, and style of advertising (Romaniuk, 2018). Those assets play an important role in raising mental availability for Birkenstock.

5.4 Limitations

There are four main limitations in this study:

1. Given the study's resource and time constraints, the sample size is very limited compared to other studies that employ laddering interviews. For example, Radder and Grunert (2009) used a sample size of 40 participants in studying perceptions of African wildlife meat. Berlin and Klenosky (2014) had a sample size of up to 70 participants in the study of older women's motivations for exercising. However, in this study, a total of 20 participants were recruited.

2. A sampling method may not be applicable on a country-level scale. Snowball sampling was selected in this study. The findings may only represent a particular group of people who live in Bangkok or the author's social circle.

3. The level of the researcher's experience should be concerned. Given that the nature of the laddering interview is very complex, highly experienced interviewers are required. The interviewer must have conducted various qualitative research and have a crystal clear on the means-end chain theory as it is the crucial instrument in conducting laddering interviews. The study of Birkenstock's brand association is the first qualitative study that the author conducted. It is possible that the interpreted results from the content analysis may be slightly deviated due to an inexperienced researcher.

4. Given that only one researcher conducted the laddering study, the study has an issue with triangulation. Laddering studies were usually conducted by more than one researcher. They achieved investigator triangulation, for example, motivation for exercise (Berlin & Klenosky, 2014), motivation in mobile shopping (Park et al., 2019), and zoo visitor's motives (Klenosky & Saunders, 2007). It is possible that the results were subject to the intrinsic biases of the researcher.

REFERENCES

- Aaker, D. A. (2009). *Managing brand equity*. New York: Simon and schuster.
- Amatulli, C., & Guido, G. (2011). Determinants of purchasing intention for fashion luxury goods in the Italian market. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, 15*, 123-136.
- Bateman, K. (2015). *The History of the Word "Chic"*. from <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a10095/the-history-of-chic/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Oxford%20English,some%20might%20argue%20to%20death>.
- Berlin, K. L., & Klenosky, D. B. (2014). Let Me Play, Not Exercise! A laddering study of older women's motivations for continued engagement in sports-based versus exercise-based leisure time physical activities. *Journal of Leisure Research, 46*(2), 127-152.
- Borgardt, E. (2020). Means-End Chain theory: a critical review of literature. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu, 64*(3), 141-160.
- Dennis, C., King, T., & Wagner, T. (2007). Shopping motivation revised: a means-end chain analytical perspective. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 35*(7), 569-582
- Gutman, J. (1982). A means-end chain model based on consumer categorization processes. *Journal of marketing, 46*(2), 60-72.
- Halnon, K. B. (2002). Poor chic: The rational consumption of poverty. *Current Sociology, 50*(4), 501-516.
- Keller, K. L. (2016). Reflections on customer-based brand equity: perspectives, progress, and priorities. *AMS Review, 6*(1), 1-16.
- Klenosky, D. B., & Saunders, C. D. (2007). Put me in the zoo! A laddering study of zoo visitor motives. *Tourism Review International, 11*(3), 317-327.
- Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2010). *Principles of marketing*. London: Pearson education.
- Ladhari, R. (2009). A review of twenty years of SERVQUAL research. *International journal of quality and service sciences, 1*(2), 172-198.

- Nam, H. J., & Ha, J. (2017). A Study on Effortless Chic in Modern Fashion. *Journal of the Korean Society of Clothing and Textiles*, 41(6), 994-1009.
- Nash, A. (1997). *The Model Who Invented Heroin Chic*. *The New York Times*. From <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/09/07/arts/the-model-who-invented-heroin-chic.html>
- NationTV. (2019). *The girl posted a snout of "Strappy Heels = Polite"*. From <https://www.nationtv.tv/main/content/378754866>
- Park, H. E., Yap, S. F. C., & Makkar, M. (2019). A laddering study of motivational complexities in mobile shopping. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 37(2). Positioning. (2019). *Coke sends consumers a campaign to invite consumers "Turning ordinary meals into special moments" celebrates happy times through meals with marketing activities focused on creating a 360-degree experience*. From <https://positioningmag.com/1252220>
- Puangpin, N. (2012). The Declaration of "State of Popularity" during the Government of Marshal P. Piboonsongkram (1948-1944). *Historical Journal*, 20-44.
- Radder, L., & Grunert, K. G. (2009). Consumers' perceptions of African wildlife meat: A laddering study. *Journal of food products marketing*, 15(2), 164-174.
- Reynolds, T. J., & Gutman, J. (1988). Laddering theory, method, analysis, and interpretation. *Journal of advertising research*, 28(1), 11-31.
- Reynolds, T. J., & Olson, J. C. (2001). *Understanding consumer decision making: The means-end approach to marketing and advertising strategy*. Mahwah, N.J: L. Erlbaum.
- Reynolds, T. J., Gengler, C. E., & Howard, D. J. (1995). A means-end analysis of brand persuasion through advertising. *International Journal of research in marketing*, 12(3), 257-266.
- Romaniuk, J. (2018). *Building distinctive brand assets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Romaniuk, J., & Sharp, B. (2016). *How Brands Grow. Part 2: Including Emerging Markets, Services and Durables, New Brands and Luxury Brands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schneier, M. (2012). *What Is Chic?* From <https://en.vogue.me/archive/culture/what-is-chic/>

- Shannon, R. (2017). Thai Consumers and Sustainability: Where Is the Story Going? In C. Griffin & D. Mccaughan (Eds.), *Thailand 2020: 10 Principles for Marketing Success* (pp. 5-7). Japan: Rakuten
- Sharp, B. (2016). *How brands grow*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stoppard, L. (2019). *Why Birkenstocks are summer's sexiest shoes*. From <https://www.ft.com/content/06e0242a-681d-11e9-b809-6f0d2f5705f6>
- TaghiPourian, M. J., & Bakhsh, M. M. (2015). Loyalty: From single-stage loyalty to four-stage loyalty. *International Journal of New Technology and Research*, 1(6), 48-51.
- Ukosakul, M. (2005). The significant of 'face' and politeness in social interaction as revealed through Thai 'face' idioms. In R. T. Lakoff & S. Ide (Eds.), *Broadening the horizon of linguistic politeness* (pp. 117-125). John Benjamins Publishing.
- Van Esterik, P. (2020). *Materializing Thailand*. Oxford: Berg.
- Walker, H. (2015). *Inès de la Fressange brings Parisian chic to the high street*. From <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ines-de-la-fressange-brings-parisian-chic-to-the-high-street-73nsxwq8ls3>
- Wansink, B. (2003). Using laddering to understand and leverage a brand's equity. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 9(3), 297-306.



Appendix A: Questionnaire

คำถามหลัก	คำถามต่อเนื่อง	คำถามต่อเนื่องที่ 2
คำถามเกี่ยวกับเรื่องทั่วไปของผลิตภัณฑ์ คุณใช้ birkenstock มานานแค่ไหนแล้ว คุณรู้จัก birkenstock ใต้อย่างไร พอจะจำช่องทางใดหรือใหม่ เช่น (เพื่อน โฆษณา ดารา หรือ โฆษณามีเดีย)		
นานใหม่มากกว่าคุณจะใช้ birkenstock หลังจากที่คุณรู้จักมัน	ทำไมนานขนาดนั้นละ / แล้วอะไรทำให้คุณตัดสินใจซื้อล่ะ	
ตอนนี้คุณมีรองเท้า birkenstock คู่แล้ว	รุ่นอะไรบ้าง (อาจจะโชว์รูปภาพ)	
คุณซื้อ รองเท้าที่ใด	ชื่อปัด / ร้าน birkenstock เลยหรือไม่ / หรือช่องทางออนไลน์	คุณไปกับใคร พอจะจำได้ไหม / เกี่ยวข้องกับคุณอย่างไร
ณ เวลานั้น คุณได้มองมาตัวเลือกรองเท้าอื่น ๆ หรือไม่ นอกจาก birkenstock	ยี่ห้อใด	แล้วทำไม ไม่เลือกคู่เหล่านั้นละ
คุณใส่ birkenstock ปกติไหม		
คุณใส่ ในโอกาสใดบ้าง	ทำไมไม่ใส่รองเท้าผ้าใบล่ะ	
คำถามเกี่ยวกับคุณสมบัติของผลิตภัณฑ์ ขอมอบรางวัลเกี่ยวกับ birkenstock มีอะไรไม่ชอบบ้างเกี่ยวกับ birkenstock ช่วยอธิบาย คุณสมบัติที่ชื่นชอบเกี่ยวกับ birkenstock ใตใหม่ อะไรใน birkenstock ทำให้คุณเคียดอย่างนั้นละเกี่ยวกับ (ผลที่ตามมา)		
คำถามเกี่ยวกับผลที่ตามมาของ คุณลักษณะ ทำไม (คุณสมบัติ) นั้นสำคัญกับคุณล่ะ (คุณสมบัติ) นั้น ให้อะไรกับคุณ (คุณสมบัติ) นั้น ทำให้คุณรู้สึกอย่างไร (คุณสมบัติ) นั้น มีประโยชน์อะไรบ้าง		
คำถามเกี่ยวกับค่านิยมที่มีอิทธิพลของ ผลที่ตามมา ทำไม (ผลที่ตามมา) นั้นสำคัญกับคุณล่ะ (ผลที่ตามมา) นั้น ทำให้คุณรู้สึกอย่างไร สมมุติถ้า birkenstock ไม่สามารถให้ (ผลที่ตามมา) นั้นได้ล่ะ		
คำถามในกรณีให้ ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม ข้ามขั้นบันได ผมสงสัยเกี่ยวกับ (ผลที่ตามมา) อะไรทำให้คุณเคียดอย่างนั้นละ		



Appendix B: Certificates of Exemption (COE)



สำนักงานคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในคน
อาคารสำนักงานอธิการบดี มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล
โทร. ๐-๒๘๔๙-๖๒๒๔-๕ โทรสาร ๐๒-๘๔๙๖๒๒๔

ที่ อว ๗๘.๐๑๓๐/๐๑๑๒๕
วันที่ ๒ พฤศจิกายน ๒๕๖๓
เรื่อง แจ้งผลการพิจารณาโครงการวิจัย
เรียน นายชัชวาล เกษมรุ่ง

ตามที่ท่านได้ส่งโครงการวิจัยเรื่อง “การศึกษาเกี่ยวกับรองเท้า Birkenstock โดยใช้เทคนิคการสัมภาษณ์แบบลำดับขั้น (Understanding Birkenstock Footwear: A Laddering Study)” รหัสโครงการวิจัย MU-CIRB 2020/332.1510 มาเพื่อขอรับการพิจารณาจากคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในคนชุดกลาง มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล นั้น

ประธานคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในคนชุดกลางฯ พิจารณาแล้วมีความเห็นว่า โครงการนี้เป็นการวิจัยที่มีความเสี่ยงต่อผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยน้อยมาก และได้ให้การพิจารณาแบบ Exemption Review ประเภทการเก็บข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์

จึงได้ออกเอกสารรับรองว่าเป็นโครงการประเภท Certificate of Exemption ซึ่งท่านสามารถดำเนินการวิจัยได้ตั้งแต่วันที่ระบุในเอกสารรับรอง โดยใช้เอกสารชี้แจงผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัย หนังสือแสดงเจตนายินยอมเข้าร่วมวิจัย และเอกสารอื่น ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้อง ซึ่งได้ประทับตรารับรองโดยคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในคน โดยไม่ต้องส่งรายงานความก้าวหน้าของโครงการวิจัยมายังคณะกรรมการฯ อีก แต่หากมีการปรับเปลี่ยนโครงร่างวิจัยที่จะทำให้มีความเสี่ยงต่อผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยเพิ่มขึ้นจากที่ได้รับการรับรอง ขอให้ท่านดำเนินการแจ้งคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในคนเพื่อพิจารณาอีกครั้งหนึ่ง

จึงเรียนมาเพื่อโปรดทราบ

(ศาสตราจารย์เกียรติคุณ ดร.วริยา ชินวรรณ)

ประธานคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในคนชุดกลาง
มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล ชุดที่ ๒

สำเนาเรียน: รองศาสตราจารย์ ดร.วินัย วงศ์สุรวัฒน์



COE No. MU-CIRB 2020/166.0511

Mahidol University Central Institutional Review Board
Certificate of Exemption

Title of Project: Understanding Birkenstock Footwear: A Laddering Study

Protocol Number: MU-CIRB 2020/332.1510

Principal Investigator: Mr. Chatchawan Kasemrung

Co- Investigators:

Affiliation: College of Management, Mahidol University

The criteria of Exemption: Research involving the use of interview procedures and:

- Recorded information CANNOT readily identify the subject (directly or indirectly/linked) OR
- Any disclosure of responses outside of the research would NOT place subject at risk (criminal, civil liability, financial, employability, educational advancement, reputation)

MU-CIRB is in full compliance with International Guidelines for Human Research Protection such as Declaration of Helsinki, The Belmont Report, CIOMS Guidelines and the International Conference on Harmonization in Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP)

Date of Determination: 5 November 2020

Signature of Chairperson:

Wariya Chinwanno
(Emeritus Professor Dr. Wariya Chinwanno)

MU-CIRB Chair

MU-CIRB Address: Office of the President, Mahidol University, 4th Floor, Room Number 411

999 Phuttamonthon 4 Road, Salaya, Nakhonpathom 73170, Thailand

Tel: 66 (0) 2849 6224, 6225 Fax: 66 (0) 2849 6224

E-mail: mucirb@gmail.com Website: <http://www.sp.mahidol.ac.th>