

Haute École
Groupe ICHEC - ISC St-Louis - ISFSC



Enseignement supérieur de type long de niveau universitaire

The effect of website experience on brand attitude with trust as a mediator

Mémoire présenté par

"Laura WITTMANN"

Pour l'obtention du diplôme de
**Master en Sciences Commerciales-
MMS-60**

Academic year 2018-2019

Promoter:

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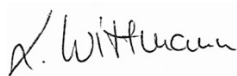
First of all, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those who contributed with their professional and personal support towards the success of this master thesis.

I would like to warmly thank my tutor Ms. Marie-Isabelle Muninger for her valuable advice during this time and for sharing her expertise with me. I also want to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Mohamed Selmouni for his support and encouragement throughout my quantitative analysis and for having accompanied and guided me with valuable suggestions throughout this thesis.

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Lastly, and most importantly, the final thank you is for my family and especially my parents, who have given me many opportunities the past five years to discover my own path and given me unconditional love, support and encouragement.

Thank you very much!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Wittmann', is shown on a light blue rectangular background.

Laura Wittmann

Brussels, Belgium May 22nd, 2019

ABSTRACT

E-commerce is expanding at a significant rate and understanding customers online is a key success factor in the online business world. As websites have become an integral component of a brand's strategy and limited empirical evidence exists, this study will emphasize the importance of webatmosphere and online experiences and the impact of brand attitude with trust as a mediator. Especially Gen Y responses to online marketing is expected to be tremendously unique and different as they process website information five times faster when compared to other generations. The aim of this research is to develop and test a comprehensive model that explains how website experience is related to trust and whether both show positive associations towards the brand on the website. To test the research framework, an online survey was distributed to a systematic random sample of 103 respondents. Findings from this research highlight that trust towards a brand and website is dependent on appealing website experience, a pleasing layout and design as well as agreeable flow. Besides, results demonstrate that an enjoyable website experience has the capacity to show association with trust and brand attitude, resulting in higher purchase intention and positive feelings regarding the brand on the website.

Key words: E-commerce, website experience, trust, flow theory, brand attitude, purchase intention, brand feeling, generation Y

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INTRODCUTION

At 8 pm in the evening, once the day seems to come to an end, online retailers experience a surge in shopping activity. Laptops are opened and serious shopping begins. Clothes, beauty products, blogs, holidays... Scrolling through Instagram or Facebook, checking stories or upload photos and videos. Spending time online is an integral part of our daily life routine.

The era of “being online” has drastically changed all traditional marketing and strategic business tools. Particularly, the concept of e-commerce and social media is forcing brands and companies to seek new interactive ways through their website and sales funnel in order to create awareness and engage with customers. Advances in technology and its integration in our lives rendered it essential for brands to redesign interaction and deliver features to provide the customer with an overall compelling experience.

E-branding, same as traditional branding, is supposed to create a certain image, however through tools and possibilities offered by technology and the Internet. The web page is the most important online flagship of a brand as it is highly visible, easy to access from several devices and the face of the brand. Concepts such as website experience and trust are becoming increasingly relevant in online shopping due to the critical role they play in shopping experience (Bilgihan, Kandampully, & Zhang, 2016). In spite of the growing importance of such concepts, very few studies have investigated both concepts with regard to brand attitude. Having identified this gap after an extensive literature review, the present thesis aims to contribute to existing literature on online experience and brand attitude. A successful e-commerce website is one that makes customers feel the site is trustworthy (Liu & Arnett, 2000) and design quality of the website positively affects trust towards the website (Bilgihan A. , 2016), which is why this thesis sheds light on trust as an important antecedent. On these grounds, understanding how consumers perceive website design becomes even more important, particularly as brand websites frequently represent the first point of contact between a brand and their customers.

A critical literature review will outline a range of e-commerce related topics and theories. We therefore first examine the importance of e-commerce and the new way of shopping, highlighting a changing consumer behaviour, notably for digital natives. The second section aims at outlining the significance of a unified online shopping experience, especially with regard to flow and experiences. This will pose many challenges to the design of websites and the understanding of webatmospherics and impacts of website elements will support the comprehension of a unified online experience. As these concepts pose obstacles for brands with regard to the implementation of an overall pleasing brand experience, the last

component of the literature review brand attitude is noteworthy as it acts as a summary brand evaluation that presumably results in behaviour and feelings (Spears & Singh, 2004).

The main of the present study is to test a general framework for understanding the relationship between website experience, trust and brand attitude. Given the potential importance of e-commerce, this master thesis attempts to perform a test on research hypothesis by empirically validating the proposed conceptual model as it explores the effects of website experience on brand attitude. Specifically, it is suggested that website appeal, layout, design and flow acts as a stimulus of trust, which will further show dependency on positive brand feelings and purchase intention.

Having established an overall academic understanding, the second part of this study will present the methodology applied for the experiment as well as statistical prove to further analyze the hypotheses. Concretely, the methodology will describe the research design, stimulus material and data collection process. The methodology is then followed by a discussion of results obtained, which serves as a summary and comparison of previous research and findings. The conclusion will provide relevant theoretical and managerial implications and key takeaways. Finally, this master thesis concludes with a description of the research limitations and suggestions for future research.

***“Design is a funny word. Some people think design means how it looks.
But of course, if you dig deeper, it is really how it works and what it delivers.”***

Steve Jobs

PART I – LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Importance of e-commerce

At the latest in the 90's, e-commerce was completely developed, and big players realized the potential in those early years. Today, Amazon is not only the largest online store, but is now also one of the top-selling retailers in the world alongside Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Costco Wholesale Corporation and The Kroger Co. Google remains the undisputed leader in global search engine rankings with over 88% market share (Statista, 2019). As of the year 2000, the e-commerce business started flourishing. Gradually shops, but also banks and other industries discovered the Internet as a trading platform. Meanwhile, Amazon, Google and Apple expanded their services. Through permanent development of their offers and the orientation tailored to the wishes of their customers, they could secure themselves a fixed place at the top of the online shops worldwide (Emagnetix, 2018).

E-commerce is expanding at a tremendous rate and an electronic atmosphere now has a significant presence in the world. The House of Marketing, a Brussels based strategic consulting and interim management company, published a unique e-commerce barometer in April 2019 revealing significant Belgium-based online merchants' insights. Belgian webshops across all segments realized 70 million transactions in 2018, which shows an increase of 16% in comparison to 2017 (see figure 1). Additionally, the e-commerce barometer revealed that the average basket value at Belgian webshops grew with 3% from 97€ in 2017 to 100€ in 2018.

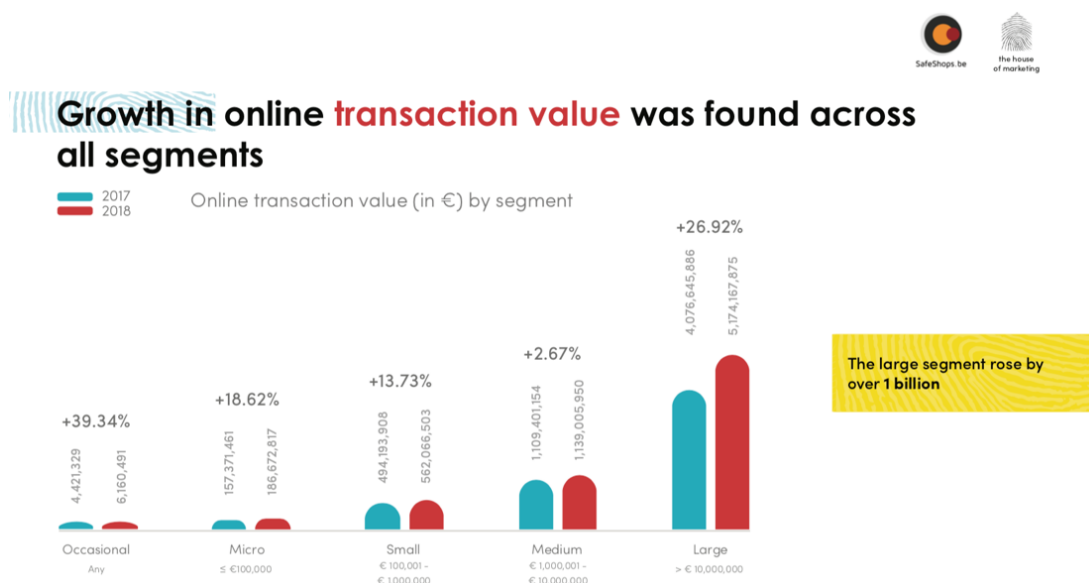


Figure 1: E-commerce barometer 2018, Source: The House of Marketing, public PDF download, 2019

With regard to intensified competition, 24k webshops were registered in 2018 which shows a double-digit growth of total online merchants that have been recorded (see Figure 2). Total online revenue in Belgium grew by 1.2 billion € compared to 2017 and reached the 7 billion € mark in 2018.

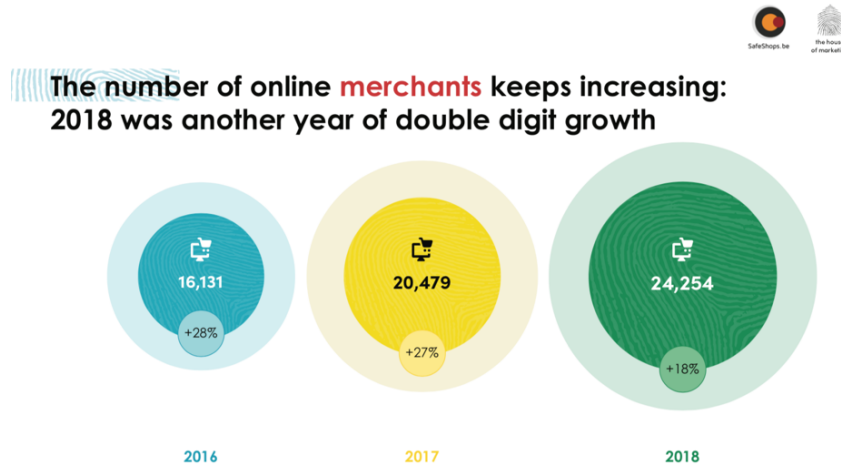


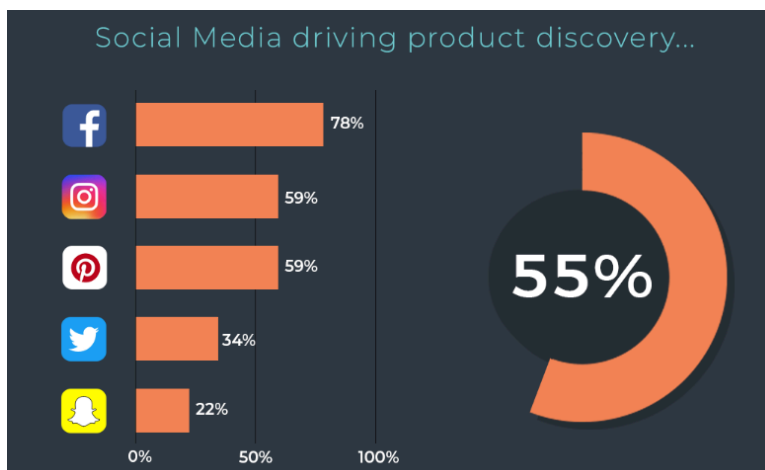
Figure 2: E-commerce barometer 2018, Source: The House of Marketing, public PDF download, 2019

Nevertheless, understanding webatmospherics and attributes remains unclear due to limited recent empirical evidence that has been obtained and examined (Wu, Quyen, & Rivas, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to describe antecedents of online shopping experience with regard to webatmospherics and its effects on brand attitude with trust as a main mediator.

Since online retailing is a relatively new research context but with a widespread potential, e-vendors and brands face challenges to identify and explore the factors influencing consumer preferences (Demangeot & Broderick, 2010). Researchers have made many efforts to develop a range of concepts to examine online shopping environments, but most concepts are independently investigated which is why a more robust research model is needed.

1.1 The growth of social media in e-commerce

Society is changing and technology plays an increasing role in our daily lives. This change in human behaviour is also being reflected in the change of consumer behaviour and is the basis for our future marketing, communication approaches and e-commerce strategies. Nowadays, you can scroll through a brand's social media feed and immediately purchase a product featured in the post. Brands need to critically review their purchasing process as customers can choose from a wide range of apps and tools.



According to “Social Media Today” (Edwards, 2018), 95% of online adults between 18 and 34 years old follow a brand on social media. 75% of customers state that they use social media as part of the buying process and an impressive 55% of people make a purchase after discovering the product on social media (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Source: <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/the-rise-of-social-media-in-ecommerce-infographic/543420/>, Dec 2018

However, social networks are not primarily about search queries but rather about having an appealing user content without specifically looking for it in the first place. If an Instagram user likes a particular post or website, it is public to its personal Instagram network. The followers then see what has been liked by their network and can decide whether to consider these recommendations as interesting or “commentable”. Casually speaking, social media can also be described as a kind of digital word-of-mouth propaganda. For online shops, social media is therefore a great way to both attract new customers and create relationships with current customers. The marketing of the shop or products in social media channels should certainly be considered in the marketing planning of an online shop.

Social media users are especially tech savvy and open for spontaneous and impulse purchases. According to Springer Professional (Krah, 2018), 86% of online purchases result from social media actions. Social media influencers stimulate engagement and online word-of-mouth.

Companies and especially brands largely trigger consumer engagement by partnering with influencers rather than doing it themselves through their brand profile as influencers’ channels have far greater reach than corporate channels. Martin Falzl of the Institute for Customer Insight at the University of St. Gallen says that “In addition to other communication and distribution channels, influencers also have confidence and credibility benefits”. The fashion industry is a good example for this phenomenon. According to a study, nearly one in four converted euros of a total 3.4 billion turnover of fashion articles is influenced by social media (Krah, 2018).

1.2 The new way of shopping

Molenaar, a professor at the Rotterdam School of Management researches the impact of technology on marketing, the developments of e-commerce and the Internet of sales. In his book *“Shopping 3.0 – Shopping, the Internet or Both?”*, he states that *“buyers are using all channels for information and shopping. Mostly information is first gathered from the Internet before checking in the store.”*¹. When the Internet arrived, retail was being revolutionized and offers today a huge potential for brands to reach a far greater number of consumers. Yet, inconsistency across different types of channels is an obstacle today, notably in an online environment.

Generally speaking, digital consumers actually are no different from the ones entering a store. As it is in any other sphere of marketing, people are the most important element. Shopping behaviour is changing because of the evocative and enabling nature of technology. The web is no passive medium, users are in control of what they see and selectively choose what they want to see. For e-commerce companies, websites are the place where their business takes place. It is the website that converts traffic into prospects and/ or customers and transforming them into valuable business transactions. A website is the “look and feel” and more importantly, a conversion engine for the traffic that is gathered throughout other digital channels.

Especially millennials demonstrate a preference for visual and experiential retail and industry specialists predict that by 2025 retail stores need a good reason for physical stores to exist. As our daily routine is heavily influenced by digitalization, it is predicted that by 2025 customers will manage 85% of their relationships with firms without any human interaction (Vilner, 2015). Another important insight that “The road to 2025 - retail reimagined” published in 2017, was the new convenience shopping. The easier and more effortless constitutes the new way of shopping and newer generations expect the latest technology to be applied in their customer journey. By 2025, integrated efforts will be the norm, which means that brands need to grant their customers a consistent experience by creating holistic touchpoints no matter on which channel they get in contact with the brand (Swensen & Singh, 2017).

1.3 Changing consumer behaviour

The consumer behaves at least partially differently than in traditional shopping environments. Nowadays, consumers get brand and product information from the Internet, they no longer

¹ Cor Molenaar, *“Shopping 3.0 – Shopping, the Internet or Both?”*, 2010, published by Gower publishing limited, Introduction page

trail around in shops but shop at home while feeling cozy and relaxed with their smartphone, tablet or laptop. Online shopping is linked to moments of convenience, efficiency but also moments when you just want to browse a bit online. The ORCA model (see figure 4), introduced by Molenaar in 2010, illustrates different interconnected touchpoints of various channels consumers use in order to search for information, evaluate and purchase. The customer has more choices than ever before, and every purchase is basically just one click away and retailers compete not only locally but with every other retailer in the world. Webshops and brand websites, which this thesis focuses on, present only one possible touchpoint within the whole framework of the online customer journey. Even though this model has not been validated academically yet, when applying it to multichannel theory it offers utility and understanding of buying behaviour online.

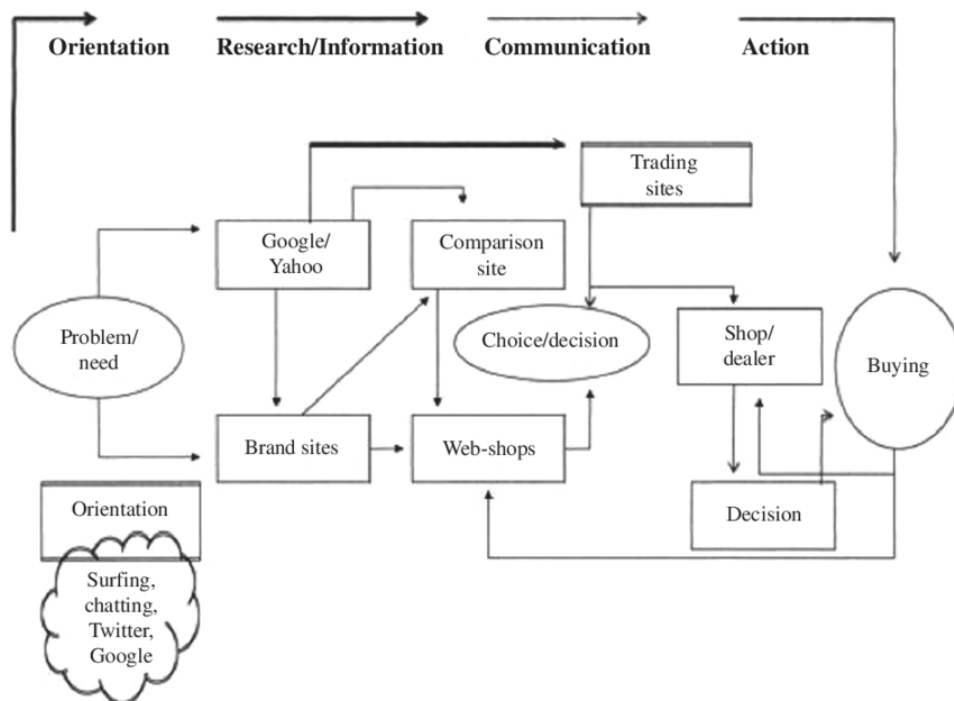


Figure 4: ORCA buying model, Source: C. Molenaar, *Shopping 3.0*, Gower Publishing, 2010

Buying online has become a personal experience, personal choice and personal motivation. In particular, psychological factors such as experience, involvement and flow apparently influence the Internet use of the consumer. The experience in using the Internet is of fundamental importance for further use. Due to the interactivity, consumers perceive a greater degree of control when using the Internet. Successful exercise of this control has a positive impact on Internet usage (Fritz, 2013). A user-friendly website influences thus the attitude towards the internet and website.

Involvement, understood as the degree of consumer involvement and interest, is also an important driver of consumer behavior on the Internet. As has been proven empirically, consumers interested in online offerings are more likely to collect more information (Fritz, 2013).

Apart from that, according to Saprikis et al (Saprikis, Chouliara, & Vlachopoulou, 2010), non-experienced and experienced consumers differ in their thoughts, beliefs and feelings towards online shopping. Knowing and purchasing the brand before visit the website may though result in different attitudes and behaviors.

Each transaction on a website consists of several steps that are supposed to turn a user into a customer in the last step. These steps form the conversion funnel on a website. The conversion funnel (also called conversion path or sales funnel) is named after the image of a funnel: Many users open a website and thus fall into a funnel, but only a few will ultimately make an order (the direction to which the funnel is pointed to). The recipe for success of a strong conversion funnel is often described with the AIDA model (see figure 5). It explains the four stages a user needs to go through on a website to finally decide to buy a product or service: Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. The AIDA model emerged as the first advertising model in history (Barry, 1987). Since the amount of people entering the funnel are decreasing from the moment of attention, it is referred to as a funnel. Even though, the model is the oldest model in the field of marketing, the conversion funnel is a powerful tool for understanding the barriers users are most likely to encounter when buying - and most importantly, how to avoid such barriers (Höfs, 2018).

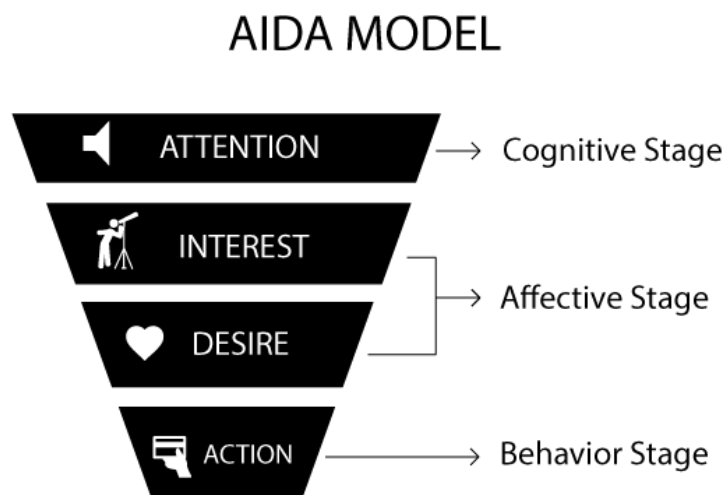


Figure 5: AIDA purchase funnel

ATTENTION

This is the first step in the conversion funnel. Here, the user's attention is aroused to increase the visibility of the page. This usually happens with ads and content marketing.

INTEREST

Users become aware of the homepage through an ad or search engine. Now it is important to convert the interest into the product or service offered on the site. By working with relevant content, using engaging graphics and engaging customers with attractive offers, interest is triggered and the engagement between the website and visitor is increased.

DESIRE

Going further in the funnel, the next step is to raise the user's need to buy the product or service. A certain basis of trust needs to be created that guides the user with the intention to purchase through the conversion funnel. Personalization and targeted marketing campaigns are successful measurements to maintain the user's desire to purchase. This thesis focuses mainly on the desire step of the conversion funnel as it researches brand attitude and its dependency on website elements with trust as a mediator.

ACTION

The "action" is the last, essential step. The website already caught the customer's attention, generated interest and caused a desire to buy on the website. The user has come so far in the conversion funnel, that he seeks to convert the purchase need into a targeted action - the purchase. "Add to cart" buttons or "buy now" should be noticeable, big enough and last but not least attractive. Within the research context of this master thesis, purchase intention is being used as a post positive brand attitude.

1.3.1 Digital natives – generational development

Humans have always been surrounded by transformation and constant change. We adapt ourselves and modify our habits in order to integrate new styles of working and living that are arising especially from the integration of technology. Some people do not even know a life anymore without the Internet whereas others experienced the emerge of the Internet much later in life. With regard to social media, e-commerce and digital marketing, generational development became a very popular topic for psychologists and sociologists. But why is everybody fascinated by "digital natives", "the net generation", "Google generation" or "the millennials"?

Digital natives have been interacting with technology from their early childhood onwards. They tend to see the world rather horizontally than divided into hierarchies and in contrast to

digital immigrants, are rather value-oriented. Studies even confirmed, that digital natives' brains are more actively engaged in scrolling through Facebook or a website in comparison to reading a basic printed text (Čut, 2017). The net generation likes to multi-task and referring back to the ORCA framework in chapter 1.3 first checks social platforms, browses on brand websites and decides whether to purchase online or in store.

The power and importance of social networks are important to digital natives since they use the Internet as a source of trust and a platform to express themselves (TheHartmannGroup, 2010).

For a generation not even knowing a life anymore without the Internet, online and offline is the same thing. Digital and physical are combined and there basically does not exist any difference. This generation is always online, very sociable, well-informed and literally breathes through digital tools. These generational developments point out obstacles for online retailers and forces them to integrate these core concepts into their business strategy in the context of buying behaviour and shopping experience. The millennial generation is routinely conceptualized as "digital natives". Popularly known as "Generation Y", most researchers define the millennials as a generation born between 1980 and 2000 (Bolton, et al., 2013). It is an important geo-demographic segment to target and marketers are seeking to understand their attitudes, behaviors and traits. Bilighan et al., reported in 2016, that the responses of the Generation Y to e-commerce is likely to be different from previous generations and in general, this generation tends to be more involved in online activities and online shopping (Bilighan, Kandampully, & Zhang, 2016). According to (Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009) the generation Y has a massive purchasing power, which is why retailers and brands must focus on satisfying this specific shopper segment. Shopping is rather seen as a form of entertainment and this research can provide valuable insights for both academia and businesses on generation Y's behaviors.

In the context of e-commerce, it is critical to investigate the generation's behaviour since the gen Y heavily values online user experience while shopping online. Theoretical and empirical research is limited, especially since it is a very sophisticated generation (Bilighan A. , 2016).

This thesis addresses the important aspect of millennials because it is assumed upfront that most of the quantitative data collected will results from respondents born between 1980 and 2000. It is therefore key to understand characteristics of this generation in order to better grasp on the outcomes and implications of this paper.

2. Unified online shopping experience

In today's competitive e-commerce environment where the competitor is only one click away, the creation of a holistic online shopping experience across multiple online channels is a key success factor. New developments in e-commerce along with the wide adoption of social media and mobile technologies have enabled brands to create a unified online experience and interact with their customers anytime and anywhere. A study made in 2015 revealed interesting antecedents that provide customers a compelling online experience online. The findings of the research indicate that antecedents such as the ease of use, perceived usefulness, hedonic and utilitarian features and perceived enjoyment influence the online customer experience (Bilgihan, Kandampully, & Zhang, 2016). However, the study lacks important online triggers such as trust and does not further elaborate on brand attitude and brand experience, which will be explained further on in this thesis. The adoption of a unified online marketing strategy allows brands to follow the customer along the whole relationship cycle. The study also points out the fact, that until now there exists limited research on unified online customer experience and the different touchpoints when and where the consumer connects with the brand.

Another study conducted in 2016, investigated the relationships among website trustworthiness, website attitude, brand attitude and purchase intention. The findings show that website dimensions such as aesthetic appeal, customization and usability have significant impacts on consumer attitudes and trust (Wu, Quyen, & Rivas, 2016). In comparison to the previously mentioned research, W.-Y. Wu et al., investigated brand attitude and trust and recommend that e-retailers should raise the top-of-the mind awareness for their brands as it enhances trust towards the website. Nevertheless, this research does not take into account hedonic items such as the flow experience previously mentioned. Furthermore, their definition of e-servicescape consist of only four sub-dimensions: aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality, and financial security.

2.1 Flow theory by Novak

According to Fritz (Fritz, 2013), flow experiences can emerge from involvement and are a key factor for the explanation of consumer behavior on the Internet. He refers to flow as the holistic feeling that people experience when they completely surrender to an activity or completely concentrate on one thing. Such experiences captivate the entire attention of the person. Novak defines flow on the web as *"a cognitive state experienced during online*

navigation that is determined by high levels of skill and control, high levels of challenge and arousal and focused attention, and is enhanced by interactivity and telepresence”².

Findings of Parasuraman and colleagues showed, that while efficiency features deal with designing the website customer interface, fulfillment features relate to the website’s behind-the-scenes infrastructure (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005).

Other studies related to flow on the Internet confirm the impact of flow dimensions on post attitudes. A study published in 2017 by Saïd A. Ettis examined the relationship between online store atmospherics, color, flow experience and consumer behaviour. Findings confirmed, that two major flow dimensions such as perceived enjoyment and concentration have direct and mediating effects on purchase intention and revisit intention (Ettis, 2017). The research of Ettis summarizes the main characteristics of (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) work, which states that enjoyment is emotionally intense and an experience that includes pleasure:

“In flow, involvement in the activity is deep but effortless; enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their actions; concerns for self are wiped out; and finally, the sense of duration of time is distorted. The mixture of all these elements causes a sense of deep enjoyment”³.

There are several debates concerning the dimensions of flow due to a broad set of related elements. This research focuses on two major dimensions of flow: First, appeal and enjoyment deriving from the activity and second the levels of arousal due to design and layout elements. Nevertheless, it seems that flow experience is a crucial link to webatmospherics and consumer behaviour, however little is yet known about online atmospheric cues that actually improve flow experience for the consumer (Lingling & Xuesong, 2014). In addition to that, previous studies did not investigate brand attitude that occurs as a result of website experience but rather analyze the different elements in separate frameworks. This research thus attempts to contribute towards the understanding of flow on a website that consumers are exposed to and its impacts and brand attitude. It is assumed that flow experience while browsing on a website enhances post attitudes such as brand attitude and purchase intention.

Hypothesis: Brand attitude consequences such as purchase intention and positive feelings are dependent on flow experiences on a website.

² Novak, T.P., Hoffmann, D.L. and Yung, Y.F., „*Measuring the customer experience in online environments: a structural modeling approach*”, Marketing Science, p.22-42, 2000

³ Saïd Aboubaker Ettis, “*Examining the relationships between online store atmospheric color flow experience and consumer behaviour*”, Journal of retailing and consumer services, Volume 37, p.43-55, 2017

2.2 Framework for user experience (UX)

User experiences are defined as experiences created and shaped through technology. Providing a positive and enjoyable experience to the user is a crucial aspect in creating a user experience. Experiences through technologies has been changing customer experience and offers huge potential for e-retailers and brands to evoke emotions. Digital natives transform into an experience society that *“values less instead of more, uniqueness instead of standardization, concentration instead of diversion and making instead of consuming”*. The challenge we face with regard to user experience is not only technology or interface related but rather experience related. Experience is a complex concept and many researchers attempted to define it. However, most outcomes and findings are not straightforward. According to psychologists, an *“experience emerges from the integration of perception, action motivation and cognition into an inseparable, meaningful whole”*. Hassenzahl observed positive experiences resulting from technology and found several components that led to pleasure. According to him, an experience is a holistic and dynamic episode of time. Mobile devices are known for creating experience and positive emotions are evoked through fulfilment of human needs and their fulfilment makes an experience pleasurable (Hassenzahl, 2011).

Figure 6 shows Hassenzahl’s framework of user experience. The model created in 2003 conceptualizes user experience from the design feature and user perspective. The framework suggests, that emotional responses of users are evoked by appeal, pleasure and satisfaction that result through interaction with the product. In this study, we follow this approach of user experience and try to adapt it to webdesign instead of product design. Outcomes and consequences are supposed to be the same for website features.

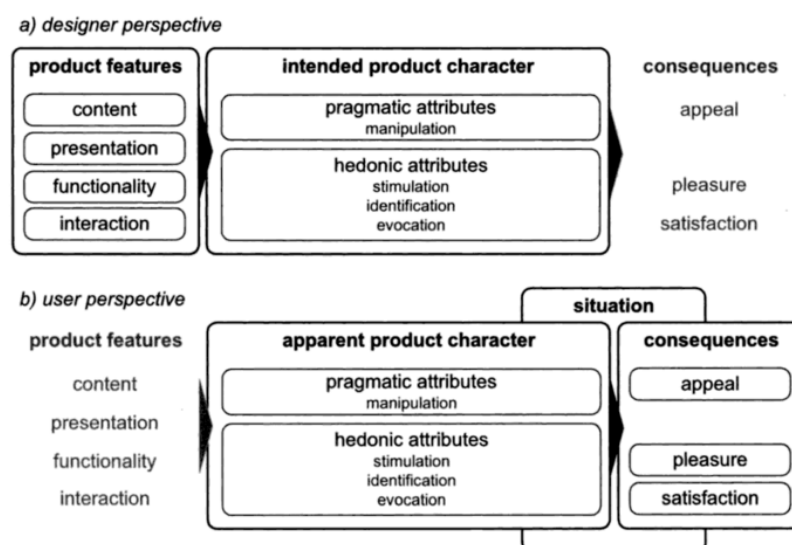


Figure 6: Hassenzahl's "Model of User Experience"

3. Webmospherics

Everybody knows the old expression: "A picture is worth a thousand words". According to a study by Adobe, using images in Facebook posts resulted in 650 % higher engagement in comparison to normal text posts (Vijay, 2018). Visual communication is an important aspect in e-commerce, especially since the website is the only direct way to communicate with the customer. Within a 1/10 of a second, humans are able to grasp a sense of visual scene and images express more powerful experience when compared to text content (Vijay, 2018). Something that is more visually appealing is likely to have a positive impact on our opinion. Websites can be seen as equivalent of sales people in a physical store. Both represent the face of the brand and are therefore a crucial touchpoint within the customer journey. A first impression is a lasting impression and about 94% of first impressions are design-related (Unknown, Super Hospitality , 2018). Therefore, appealing webatmospherics can build relationships with not only potential customers but also existing one. In order to create a positive online experience, it is important that each brand creates the right environment on its website. It is important that managers understand the impact of webatmospherics not only to create brand identity but also to influence behaviour, emotions and attitudes of the target market.

To better understand the concept of creating a unique experience, we must go further into defining an atmosphere. According to Kotler, the atmosphere is the voluntary design of space to create specific effects for customers. More concretely, it is about developing an environment to produce specific emotional effects that increase the probability of a purchase (Kotler, Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool, 1974). If we apply this concept to the Internet, we can call it "webmospherics", a neologism that consists of the words "Web" and "atmosphere". According to Okonkwo, this concept was popularized in 2002 at the IBM e-business Conference in Birmingham, as well as in 2002 by Harris and Dennis in their book "Marketing the E-Business" (Okonkwo U. , 2007).

3.1 Website appeal

It is essential to design web pages according to users' expectations and desires and to entice customers to maintain virtual interaction with the firm or brand (Bilgihan, Kandampully, & Zhang, 2016). Kim and colleagues highlight the importance of both functional and hedonic aspects of user experience design. An e-commerce website can thus stimulate feelings and perceptions toward a website which may result in purchase intention.

The visual design of a website is the most important criterion in judging the websites credibility and quality (Bilgihan, Kandampully, & Zhang, 2016). It is also important to mention,

that creating a unified experience online requires a general understanding of aspects such as aesthetic appeal, flow, consumer behaviour and trust. Establishing the link and connection between such aspects may help e-commerce marketers create a compelling online atmosphere. Creating a pleasing experience online moreover requires hedonic and utilitarian features on a website. In 2013, (Floh & Madlberger, 2013) found that online virtual atmospherics cues can trigger impulsive purchasing behaviors and consumer spending in a positive way whereas enjoyment acts as a mediator.

A fitting example of successful web design and website appeal is the homepage of “Notanotherbill.com” (<https://www.notanotherbill.com/>); see figure 7.

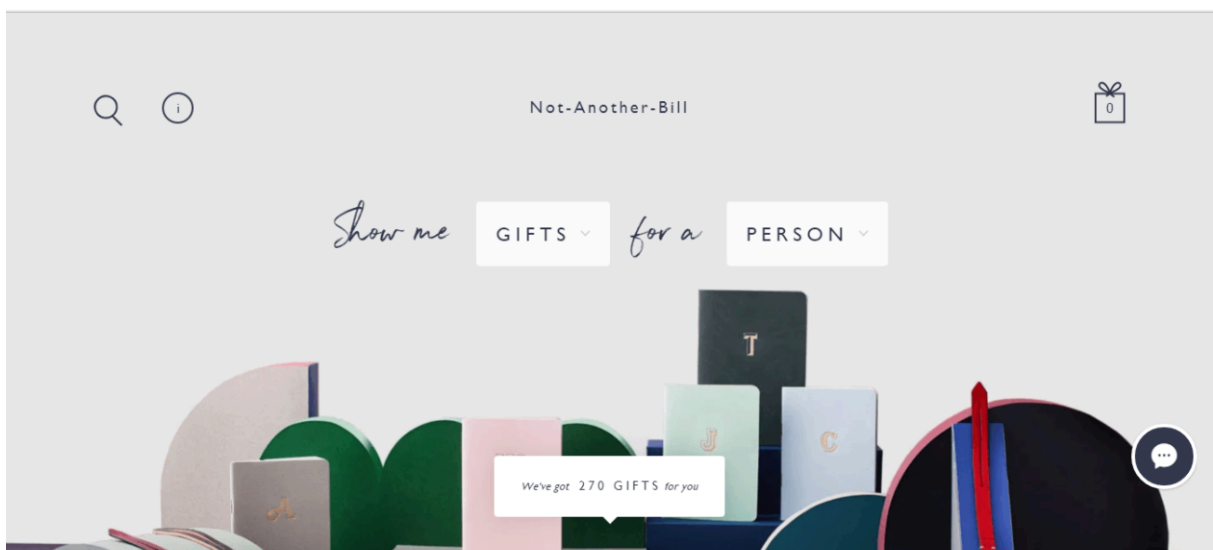


Figure 7: Homepage screenshot from "Not-another-bill", Source: <https://www.notanotherbill.com/>, April 2019

The online shop design stands out from the crowd. The products shown on the website are appealing and clean. The brand builds on a website that offers unique gifts. This is highlighted by the dropdown on the homepage, which leads you directly to the desired product. It almost seems like the brand is telling a story.

Beatific (see figure 8) uses a variety of digital content such as photos, animations and illustrations to successfully convey its message. The color scheme and fonts create a young and playful brand that is visible throughout the site. This young and friendly feeling is reinforced by the Facebook Messenger plugin attached to the page. If you're already connected to Facebook, you can ask someone for help immediately.

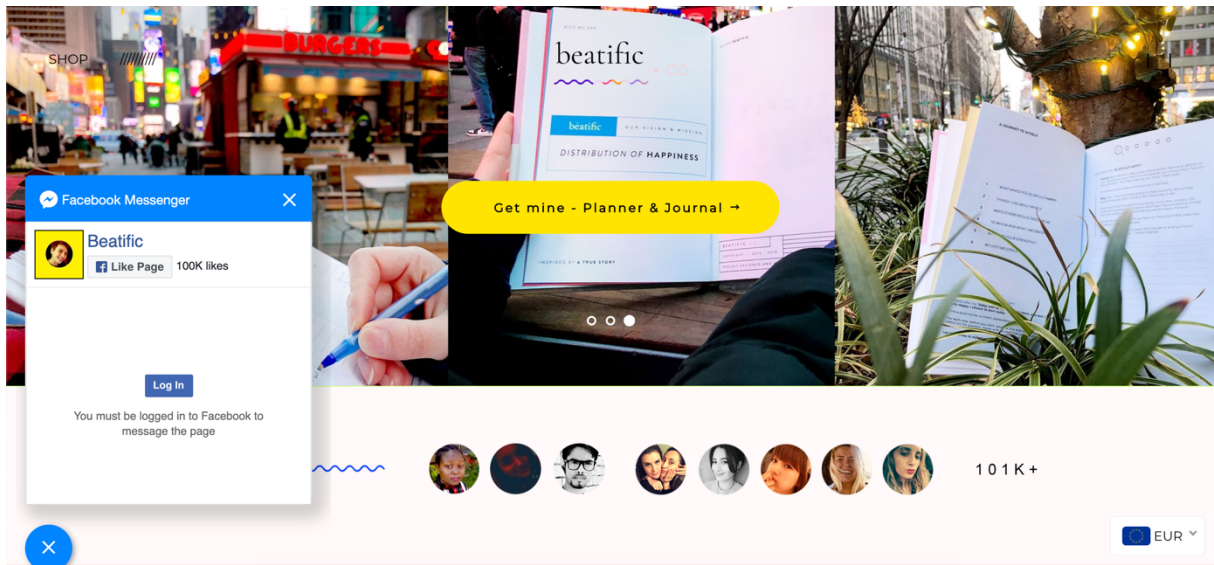


Figure 8: Homepage screenshot from "Beatific", Source: <https://www.beatific.co/>, April 2019

3.2 Website dimensions

According to Dr. Jill Novak, a professor at University of Phoenix and Texas A&M University, there are seven design elements of a website that should be considered when creating an e-commerce platform (Novak, 2019). The following elements illustrate Novak explanation of the 7C's on a website.

1. Context
2. Commerce
3. Connection
4. Communication
5. Content
6. Community
7. Customization

Firms need to integrate customer needs and preferences into the designs of their website and create an online buying environment that produces specific emotional affects. Especially due to multi-device compatibility, companies need to create a website that drives traffic from several devices and creates a lasting experience that will make customers to return. The 7C framework illustrates the interfaces a user sees.

"Aesthetic appeal is defined as the overall impressiveness and attraction of a website. Layout and functionality are defined as the design aspects of a website which create enjoyable

*interactions and experiences for users.”*⁴ Building an aesthetic online store environment is a way for a website to distinguish itself from its competitors and is extremely important for online retailers.

To highlight the importance of the 7C's online, one of the pioneer business strategists and opinion leaders in the luxury industry, Uché Okonkwo-Pézard, also adapts the 7C design framework in her book “Luxury online” to illustrate the e-experience of a luxury brand website. She explains the core concept of luxwebmopshere, adopts the 7Cs to luxury brands and applies them according to objectives and resources of an e-boutique (Okonkwo U. , 2010).

Context

The website context comprises the aesthetic elements, layout and overall visual design, which need to be proper, easy to read and navigate. The design concept should follow the store's or brand's personality which equates to a scheme that every aspect of the website needs to follow. The context of the website is the concept that drives the design elements, it is the store concept and notion behind the website.

Commerce

Applied into an e-commerce setting, the website's safety must be well communicated to the customer. Since an e-commerce website is intended for commercial transactions, it is important to create an environment where the customer is able to do so all while ensuring that the user's information is safe while using the website. The Commerce “C” could be strongly related to the trust elements described in this thesis.

Connection

Connection is referred to links that lead customers away from the website. Those links can take users to different websites or bring customers to the website itself through third-party linkages. Linking to or from other websites can help ranking higher in search engine results.

Communication

Communication is key and is what the content should communicate, which is one of the foundational elements of a good website. It is essential for a positive user experience. Ideally, the design content of the website should work together in order to create a clear, unified message to users.

⁴ Wann-Yih Wu et al., „*How e-servicescapes affect customer online shopping intention: the moderating effects of gender and online purchasing experience*”, Information systems e-business management, p.689-715, 2016

Content

The website's content is by many considered to be the most important element on a website. Text, graphics, sound, music and videos are content elements that must feature authentic, compelling and relevant information.

Community

The emerge of the social web and online communities such as message boards or live chats allow interaction between the customer and the website/ brand. Online consumers are creating their own online experience by creating and managing an online identity and communicating with and influencing others. It is therefore not only in the hands of the store or brand to diffuse a certain message but also consumers are actively involved in creating a message.

Customization

Customization allows the customer to tailor the website to his needs and wants. For instance, the use of "My Account" option or the possibility to personalize aspects such as different colors and graphics or country adaptation allow users to make the website "their own".

3.3 Hedonic and utilitarian features

Kim and colleagues highlight the importance of both functional and hedonic aspects of user experience design in relation with mobile user engagement (Kim, Kim, & Wachter, 2013). Furthermore, they highlight that user-friendly features nurture user value, satisfaction and engagement. Mobiles devices allow customers to complete a task and entertain themselves in an environment created by the brand online. It is therefore imperative to create a unified design online.

Utilitarian features such as the usefulness elements of a website are associated with utilitarian features on a website. Utilitarian shopping behaviour is rather goal-oriented, deliberate and based on rational view of consumer behaviour (Batra & Ahtola, 1991), (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995). According to Babin, consumers find utilitarian value when navigation is easy and goals can be successfully accomplished rather than focusing on the experience itself (Babin, 1994). The studies therefore show that in order to create a better experience, e-commerce websites should be easy to navigate. Later studies however show that such utilitarian attributes are no longer sufficient to drive online purchase intention. Today's online consumers seek experiential value in e-commerce which is rather aligned to hedonic features such as enjoyment and experiences (Bilgihan, Okumus, Nusair, & Bujisic, 2014).

The perceived enjoyment is regarded as the substantial value of e-commerce and mirrors users' feelings of excitement (Salehi, Salimi, & Haque, 2013). Therefore, to create a pleasing online shopping experience, websites should be fun to use composed by elements that make users return to the website or recommend it to a friend. This thesis hence proposes, that enjoyment is a vital element to be considered when improving customer experience in online environments.

3.4 Social interactions

The online shopping experience continues to evolve as consumers increasingly rely on their social interactions, opinion leaders and other ways to drive their purchase and decision making (Bilgihan, Kandampully, & Zhang, 2016). Consumer use word-of-mouth to talk about latest brands and trends each day and the rise of social media promotes the flow of word of mouth. Social media allows consumers to engage with their favorite brands on a deeper level than ever before. This paper characterizes word-of-mouth and referral intention as being dependent on a pleasing website experience. Consumers' positive thoughts about a website or brand can be explained as the degree to which they are willing to recommend and share the brand with their social community (Kim & Kim, 2010).

Leveraging on the power of social media and other online platforms, consumers can share their online shopping experience not only with their traditional social circles but also with friends from friends and their friends. Everybody knows that a recommendation from a friend is the holy grail of advertising and more reliable than any other form of marketing communication. Word-of-mouth in an e-commerce environment creates trust and brand awareness. Electronic word of mouth is also known as viral content as it spreads way faster than traditional word-of-mouth and enables brands to generate a product or brand buzz. Netflix is leading the brand buzz creation as it continuously launches full seasons just in time for winter holidays and creates content that people talk about. The creation of trust in relation to peer-members has been outlined several times in recent research. Xi Hu et. al state that the trusting perception of peer members is associated with positive evaluation of the entire platform (Hu, Huang, Zhong, Davison, & Zhao, 2016). Especially due to an increasing volume of content on commercial websites, an information overload threatens a lot of brands and companies. Negative word of mouth can therefore harm a website's credibility as consumers rely heavily on recommendations and suggestions within their social cycle.

Different life experiences cause generations to develop into different directions. Especially the Gen Y grew up in a world where everything is branded, which is why they feel more comfortable with brands than previous generations and show different responses. Consequently, Gen Y demonstrate a unique attitude towards brands (Lazarevic, 2012).

4. Influence of website elements on users' responses

4.1 Trust towards a website

Brands online need to build effective websites to enhance and maintain customer relationships. Trust, website attitude and brand attitude have been identified as critical factors that impact purchase intention in an online context. According to Liu and Arnett in 2000 (Liu & Arnett, 2000), a website that is trustworthy and reliable makes an e-commerce website successful and one that magnetizes customers. Another research done by (Sejin & Leslie, 2009) confirmed the crucial aspect of trust by indicating that trust and enjoyment are important in online shopping. It seems, that trust is a significant construct in creating a business relation especially in a virtual environment since the relationship is firstly built without any human interaction. The online shopping environment is often considered as uncertain and risky. It is therefore evident, that trust is needed in order to reduce these perceived risks and to create a safe environment.

With regard to the topics introduced in this master thesis, it is hence proposed that:

Hypothesis: Trust acts as relevant mediator between perceived website experience and post brand attitude.

Positive emotions such as enjoyment are predicted to arise from flow experience when interacting with a brand on a website. Especially in relation to experienced flow, website appeal is a significant predictor of trust which in turn influences the intention to recommend the website to another social group and to return to the website (Hampton-Sosa & Koufaris, 2005). Thus, it is expected that flow influences trust.

Hypothesis: Trust towards the website shows positive association towards the level of flow experienced on the website.

People who positively experienced flow have a tendency to replicate these emotions and seek to re-feel this experience (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993). Therefore, it is proposed that:

Hypothesis: The desire of revising the website or recommending it to a friend shows positive dependency on flow experience.

In the research design of this master thesis, which will be explained in a more detailed way in chapter 8 (Methodology) trust acts as a mediator. Trust as a mediator was chosen as it has

been stressed out in several research papers dealing with flow experience, website appeal and behavioral consequences.

4.2 Emotional design model

One of the most well-known approaches to emotions and design is “Norman’s emotional design model” introduced in 2004. The framework that was developed by usability experts in their work “The role of affect and proto-affect in effective functioning” provides an explanation to how design features impact a user’s evaluation and responses (see figure 9).



Figure 9: Norman's three levels of design, Source: <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/the-reflective-level-of-emotional-design>, 2019

In the context of this master thesis, the framework provides an understanding of how design features influence the perspectives of a user. Norman proposes, that human emotions and behaviour result from three different levels of information processing (Pengnate, 2013). The first level, also called the visceral level relates to visual design features on a website and their characteristics (e.g. attractiveness). The second level is the behavioral level including the actually use of the website where the users becomes active and task driven. This level is characterized for instance by flow and navigation. The third level is the reflective level and shows the user’s evaluation of content presented. This last level serves as an overall evaluation of the website.

With regard to the results of this thesis, the model leads to a profound understanding of emotional responses users have towards a website and how likely it is that a positive experience will influence the behaviour towards a particular brand. Reflective design is the biggest challenge for a website’s design as customers have different opinions, attitudes and responses. The outcome of this research aims at contributing towards the explanation of

behavioral levels as it refers to the experience of the website in use. All three levels combined form an entire user experience.

4.3 S-O-R framework

In 1974, Mehrabian and Russel introduced the framework from an environmental psychology background stating that environmental stimuli (S) lead to emotional feedback from customers (O), which in turn leads to a specific customer response (R) (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974). A more recent interpretation of the framework is used to examine how online attributes may affect trustworthiness and attitude being considered as affective- and cognitive-based states (Wu, Quyen, & Rivas, 2016).

In e-commerce, the S-O-R framework can be understood as a chain of certain online stimuli and behaviors such as brand attitude and purchase intention. Retailers develop their website to stimulate sales. This thesis assumes that website appeal and dimensions will influence emotional feedback resulting in a positive brand attitude. As previously explained with regard to webatmospherics, recent investigations attempt to transpose this theoretical framework from store atmosphere to an e-commerce setting. By adopting again Kotler's definition of atmospherics, the online store atmospheric cues such as visuals and design elements are the "stimulus". In online retail, design features of the website the consumer interacts with are stimuli.

Organisms are a consumer's internal state so to say, which pertain cognitive and emotional responses including perceptions, experiences and evaluations. Such results can be either conscious or unconscious and can be either influenced internally or externally (Zhang, Lu, Gupta, & Zhao, 2014).

The "R" which stands for response and represents the outcome and hence the behaviour and attitudes of consumers. The online environment is immensely interactive and allows the consumer to be total involved within the experience. An appealing website (e.g. online shopping atmosphere) provides several "flow opportunities" in which consumers are entirely engaged during the shopping experience (Ettis, 2017). Emphasis on flow experience was already given in one of the previous chapters of this thesis.

Studies with regard to online retail have applied the S-O-R model to the online shopping context. This model is used to examine the influence of technological characteristics of e-commerce and helps understanding virtual experiences. It therefore serves as an overall understanding of other theories and models discussed in this thesis.

5. Brand attitude

Managing brands successfully in the 21st century is a combination of design and implementation of marketing activities. A brand is one of the most valuable intangible assets a firm can own. A strong brand is at the heart of every product or service and commands strong consumer experience. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them” intended to identify a product or service. A brand thus differentiates itself somehow from other brands and these differences can be symbolic, emotional or intangible (Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2012).

According to Philip Kotler and Kevin Keller in their book “Marketing Management”, beliefs and attitudes result through experience and learning. An attitude is *“a person’s enduring favorable or unfavorable evaluations, emotional feelings, and action tendencies toward some object or idea”*⁵. Attitudes therefore puts consumer into a certain frame of mind. Within the evaluation stage, consumers perform certain activities such as the decision or intention to purchase a product from that brand.

In an e-commerce environment, brands are seeking to understand customer experience online. Not only online, but also offline post-positive attitudes such as brand attitude and purchase intention are popular research topics. Especially when following trends in the e-commerce industry, it can be observed that due to a very complex market and in the face of products that are equal in terms of a lot of aspects, consumers mostly prefer products of brands they tried or that they trust. According to Alden et. al in 2013, the attitude customers gain towards a brand plays a crucial role in the value that they receive from this brand (Alden, Kelley, Riefler, Lee, & Soutar, 2013). Brand attitude and brand equity is vital for building relationships and awareness.

Brand attitude can be seen as an internal evaluation of the brand that integrates the direct attitude and evaluation of the brand itself (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). According to Spears and Singh in their work “Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions”, *“attitude is an enduring state that endures for at least a short period of time and presumably energizes and directs behaviour. Attitude towards the brand is a summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes behaviour.”*⁶. Both researchers argue in favor of a summary of evaluations such as beliefs, feelings, behaviors and other components that express attitude

⁵ Philip Kotler, Kevin Keller, “Marketing Management”, 15th edition, Pearson Education, p.167

⁶ Nancy Spears, Surendra N. Singh, “Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intention”, Journal of current issues and research in advertising, 2004, V. 26, p.53-66

as a unidimensional summary evaluation. Findings of the research indicated, that attitude and purchase intention exist as separate but correlated dimensions. Furthermore, they imply that advertisers and marketers should use brand attitude and purchase intention to assess customer perceptions of brands. In the figure below (figure 10), their study model is seen which summarizes the hypothesis and proposed correlations. This thesis uses the same framework in relation to website experience to express brand attitude and other post positive attitudes such as purchase intention and likeliness to return to the website or recommend it to a friend.

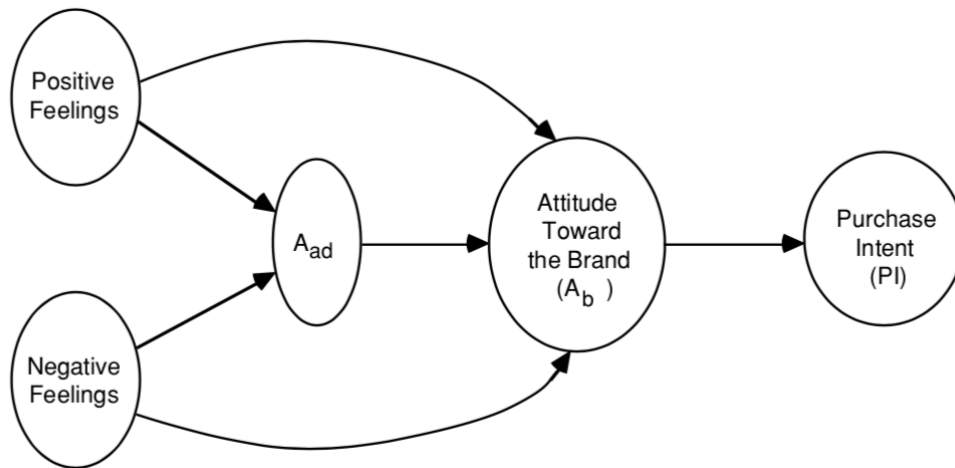


Figure 10: N. Spears, S.N. Singh, Framework of brand attitude & purchase intention, Source: "Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intention" Journal of CI & Ad, 2004

With reference to the model of Spears and Singh, this study defines attitude towards the brand as an overall evaluation of the brand seen on the website. The following hypotheses can be stated in combination to the topics discussed in the previous sections of this thesis:

Hypothesis: Positive feelings resulting from the website shows strong association to website experience.

Hypothesis: Purchase intention shows strong association to website experience.

Hypothesis: A high quality brand feeling is dependent on a pleasing website experience in terms of appeal, layout and design.

Hypothesis: Positive feelings resulting from the website shows strong association to perceived trust.

5.1 Online branding

As brand equity is defined as “added value” it contributes with its products or services towards brand value and brand love, which are considered as key metrics. Brand equity is considered as competitive advantage which requires constant evaluation and progress in order to create long-lasting relationships with the customer. Brands therefore need to invest in enhancing customer experience in virtual environments. Especially e-commerce environments are considered as great and new opportunities to create and maintain brand equity through engagement and enjoyment and creating a unified flow experience. According to Park et. al, the flow a customer experiences are positively correlated towards brand attitude (Park, Nah, DeWester, Eschenbrenner, & & Jeon, 2008). This thesis builds upon these findings and measures these items with regard to website experience. Furthermore, Park et. al concluded that in online environments, flow experience leads to positive post attitudes and behavioral outcomes.

Theory of brand equity proposes, that consumers associate themselves with a strong brand and that brand equity influences attitudes and behaviors (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007).

Founded on the above-mentioned arguments, it is therefore proposed that:

Hypothesis: Positive brand attitude is associated with flow experiences encountered when browsing on a website.

6. Leveraging digital channels and content

According to several studies, retailers have to improve their ability to build long lasting relationships with their customers as well as design and deliver branded customer experience while making use of and leveraging multiple channels.

Implementing social media in the purchase-decision process is essential for marketers as they need to discover the point at which people turn to social media as a tool for helping them in making a purchase decision (Lipiäinen, 2014). Digital environments are key for sustaining a competitive advantage and brands need to transform their business model into a full digital business one.

Responsible and transparent data handling will be even more decisive for online marketing success than it was already in 2018. Trends for 2019 within this context are topics such as artificial intelligence and data collaboration which continue to gain in importance. After a series of privacy incidents, major technology companies are increasingly focused on critical attention: they are closely monitoring how they share and protect their user data and how they operate globally. Therefore, in 2019, Facebook, Google and Amazon are expected to introduce new data sharing and privacy policies.

6.1 Multi-channel marketing

Searching for products on the Internet, comparing offers and prices, ordering via mobile phone and finally buying them at the next shop in the city: such consumer behavior has become a matter of course for many consumers. More than ever before, the Internet serves as an information medium that is influencing the conventional information behavior and has thus become a central component of the trading world, which is increasingly characterized by multi-channel strategies.

The customer of the 21st century does not decide whether he would rather shop online or offline. He opts for brands and products - the marketing and sales channel becomes a minor matter insofar as brands have to meet their customers on several channels in order to be successful in the long term. The term omnichannel marketing (also often used as a synonym for multichannel marketing or seamless shopping) describes the approach of the dialogue with potential customers on several closely interconnected channels. The customer becomes the focus of a holistic marketing channel strategy.

6.2 Omni-channel strategy

To reduce dependency on Amazon, Facebook and Google, brands and retailers must work together to find ways to keep the customer relationship in their own hands - and of course the data that comes with it. Therefore, many companies are looking to expand their omnichannel capabilities through cooperation and effective data usage. For example, retailers share their real-time POS and inventory data with brands. Both sides will have access to analytics and insights and will be able to better plan promotions and make campaigns more efficient (Susanne C, 2019).

The use of visual processing and speech recognition in digital marketing will increase significantly in 2019. Text and image searches are important when consumers search for products. Voice-driven search makes engagement even more convenient and important - for both advertisers and consumers at every stage of their customer journey. According to Gartner, brands, which are optimizing their websites to use image processing and speech recognition in order to create a more interactive and engaging user experience, will be able to increase their digital commerce revenues by as much as 30 percent by 2021 (Susanne C, 2019).

The beauty giant Sephora owned by luxury conglomerate LVMH as of 1997 is a France-based multinational chain of personal care and beauty stores. The beauty brand has long been a pioneer in creating and cultivating a strong relationship across different channels and its current marketing strategy is all about blending offline and online experiences.

The cosmetic retailer creates a holistic omni-channel experience that connects its shoppers' online purchases to their in-store visits. The beauty bag by Sephora (see figure 11) allows customers to look up product items in detail and virtually try on products using digital software. If they like it, they can add it to their personal beauty bag or wish list integrated into the Sephora app. By integrating the beauty bag feature, Sephora is able to track user and buying patterns which allows them to personalize and target different consumer segments.

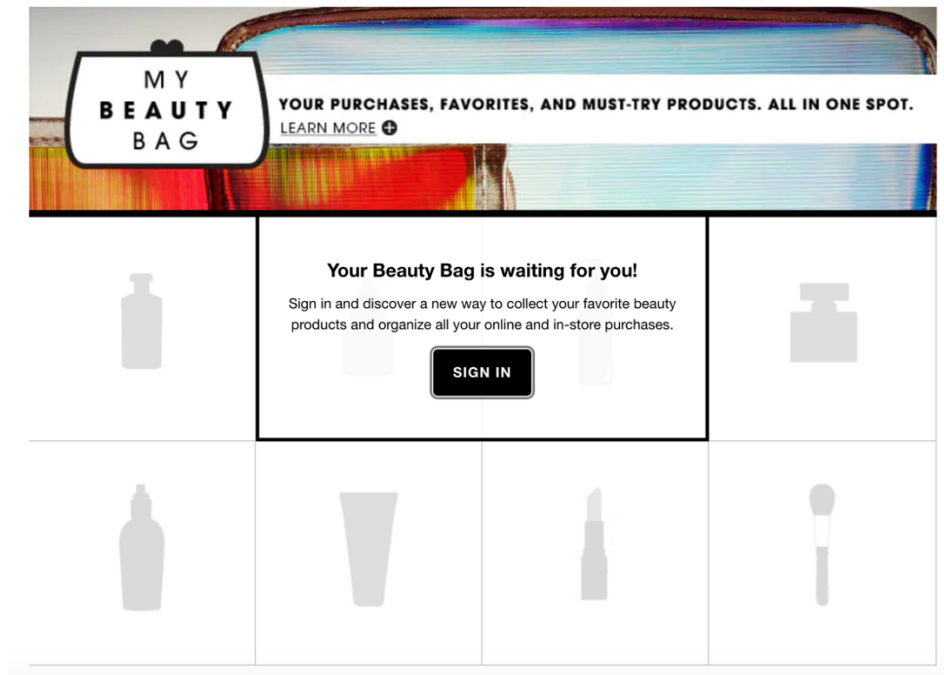


Figure 11: Screenshot My beauty bag Sephora, Source: <https://www.sephora.com/my-beauty-bag>, April 2019

One of Sephora's main goals is creating a unified shopping experience for each individual whether on the web, mobile or in-store. As the head of partner marketing for Google Home and Nest stated: *"We think adding a visual element of giving people a glance just adds so much more dimensionally to experience"*. At the end of 2018, Google partnered up with Sephora to integrate the Google Home Hub into the beauty company (see figure 12). For the in-store experience, the Google Home Hub is set up like a vanity and consumers can ask the smart home device questions like "Hey Google, show me everyday eyeshadow videos by Sephora" (Alcántara, 2018).



Figure 12: A.M. Alcántara, Google and Sephora Are Bringing Beauty Tutorials to the Newest Home Device, Source: <https://www.adweek.com/digital/google-and-sephora-are-bringing-beauty-tutorials-to-the-newest-home-device/>, April 2019

Furthermore, Sephora integrates retail and mobile experience. By tracking and noticing in-store and online needs, Sephora is able to tailor the mobile shopping experience in accordance with today's multi-channel shopper. A 360-degree data, which tracks the whole customer journey from online browsing through social media until purchasing in-store or online enables the beauty retailer to trace precisely customer behaviour. The Instagram account (see figure 13) uses location-based marketing and allows consumers to directly jump from the Instagram post into the integrated Sephora Instagram shop. Not only social media experience is heavily influenced by technology, also in-store experience is influenced by newest technology trends. Sephora's mobile app uses location-based marketing to recognize when a customer enters a store and proposes deals and products adapted to the consumer's needs (Perro, 2018).

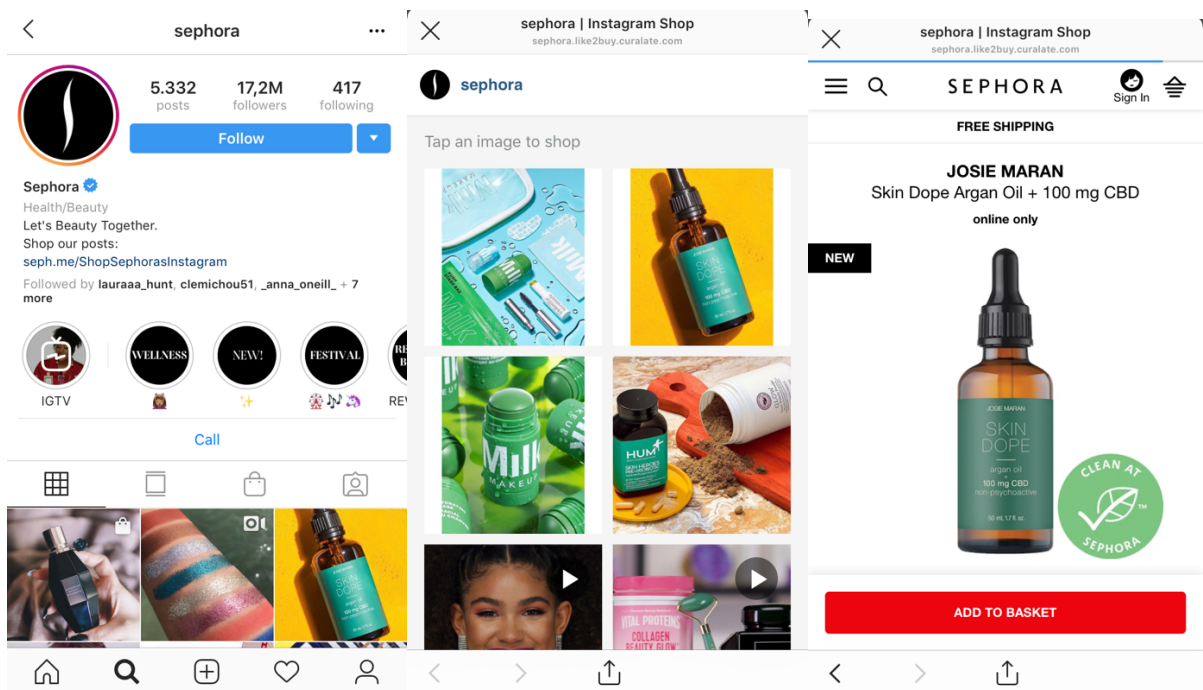


Figure 13: Instagram Shop Sephora, Source: Screenshot from author's Instagram account, April 2019

As seen in the Sephora example, creating a unified omni-channel experience provides an integrated customer experience and creates an environment where a customer can move between online shopping, getting inspiration through social media and creating different touchpoints across multiple channels. Social media campaigns, a great website as well as mobile marketing need to work as a whole and should deliver an integrated experience no matter on what device the customer uses. An omnichannel marketing strategy hence involves taking each platform and possible device the customer could use and creating an entire customer experience, while embracing personalization and a holistic experience (Harvey, 2018).

7. Research state and hypothesis development

To obtain an impartial perspective, a theoretical foundation was established through a critical literature review. The main findings summarized and resulting from the literature review are presented and summarized in the following table:

Title	Citation	Theory used	Main findings	Date
Towards a unified customer experience in online shopping environments	Anil Bilgihan, Jay Kandampully and Tingting Zhang	Functional and hedonic aspects of user experience design Flow theory SEO framework Technology acceptance model	Ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, social interaction are antecedents of a unified online customer experience.	2016
How e-servicescapes affect customer online shopping intention: the moderating effects of gender and online purchasing experience	Wann-Yih Wu, Phan Thi Phu Quyen, Adriana A. Amaya Rivas	Stimulus-organism-response (SOR) framework Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)	E-servicescape dimensions have significant impact on consumer attitudes and trust towards a website. Women are more likely to experience such effects.	2016
Examining the relationships between online store atmospheric color, flow experience and consumer behaviour	Saïd Aboubaker Ettis	Flow theory S-O-R Framework	Two dimensions of flow (perceived enjoyment and concentration) have direct and mediating effects on purchase intention and revisit intention.	2017
Gen Y consumer loyalty in online shopping: Integrated	Anil Bilgihan	Flow theory	Trust is the most important antecedent of e-loyalty in online	2016

model of trust, user experience and branding		Generational theory Utilitarian and hedonic characteristics	shopping for Gen Y customers. Brand equity is also a key precursor of e-loyalty	
Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intention	Nancy Spears, Surendra N. Singh	Brand attitude	Development of a framework with regard to brand attitude resulting of an ad.	2004

Table 1: Summary of current research on the subject area, Source: realized by the author

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. As the first main part of this master thesis reviewed the literature and the main constructs and theories, the following main section will present the methodology applied including the proposed research framework and hypothesis testing. After a detailed description of methodology along with the process of data collection, the structure of the questionnaire and measurement items used in this work, the final section of this thesis reports the results of the study. The thesis will end with academic and managerial implications resulting from the insights of statistical analysis.

A research model is developed based on an integration of the literature review. The framework shows that the different dimensions of online shopping experience will influence brand attitude with trust as a mediator. A detailed explanation of the research framework, narrowing down the main hypothesis into sub-hypothesis will be presented in the methodology chapter. On the basis of the established theoretical considerations and the presented results of previous empirical research, individual hypotheses can be derived. These are based on a summary of the critical literature review and relevant previous findings presented. As seen in table 1, elements such as website experience, trust and brand attitude have been analyzed in previous research, however none of the studies conducted so far merged the elements into one single framework. Therefore, the following main hypotheses formulate the possible relation between three variables that present expected relationship between each one another.

Hypothesis 1: **Website experience** in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow shows dependency on **trust perceived**.

Hypothesis 2: **Brand attitude** is positively associated with **perceived trust**.

Hypothesis 3: Positive **brand attitude** shows dependency on **website experience** in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow.

PART II – METHODOLOGY AND DATA GATHERING

8. Methodology

After conducting a literature review, integrating current findings from previous studies and consequentially establishing hypotheses, the following part of the research paper will present the methodology followed by a section of the quantitative study results. Quantitative research was used to quantify the problem by generating numerical data or data that could be transformed into useable statistics. This type of research is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviors and other defined variables. It simplifies generalizing results from a larger sample population and therefore uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in previous research (Wyse, 2011).

Preliminary study was used to refine the research idea and to turn the project into a research project. Research ideas were gathered which led to the overall research question and its sub-questions. This approach was used in order to break down the initial research question into layers until the heart of the research question can be expressed (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Furthermore, a deductive approach was used, which is characterized by first searching and finding possible relationships between variables which consequently lead to the development of a hypothesis that in return is being tested by the collection of quantitative data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

As explained further on in the research design, a self-administered questionnaire was developed based on an extensive literature review. All variables used in this study were adopted from previous studies and constructs in the proposed framework were evaluated using simple item measures. The sample size is expected to be around 100 respondents with a margin of error amounting to 10%. 120 responses were received leaving us 103 completed responses after removing the incomplete surveys and missing data. The survey was sent out only to women and the average sample age was 24. A detailed demographical analysis is adopted in the quantitative analysis part of this master thesis.

Due to time and personal resources constraints, no factor analysis was used to confirm how well the measured variables represented the constructs and will be added to the limitations of this research.

8.3 Research design

The research design aims at defining the research construct. It contains clear objectives derived from the research questions. This thesis uses the form of experiments which are frequently used in management research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Experimental research describes a series of research designs in which manipulations and controlled experiments are performed to understand causal processes. In general, one or more variables are manipulated to determine their impact on a dependent variable (Explorable, 2008).

The experimental method is a way to isolate and identify the cause of something. It uses manipulation and controlled testing to understand casual processes and demonstrates a cause-and-effect relationship of variables. A variable is anything that can vary or be changed and applies to experimental investigations. There are two types of variables: the independent variable and dependent variable. Applied to an experiment, a research aims at analyzing the possible effect on the dependent variable that might be caused by manipulating the independent variable (McLeod, 2018).

In addition to that, there are extraneous variables which might cause changes in a dependent variable and provide an alternative explanation to the independent variables (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to assess whether website experiences in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow positively impact trust towards the website and brand. Trust is then supposed to positively be correlated with brand attitude and hence act as a mediator. Furthermore, website experiences in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow are expected to also be positively correlated with brand attitude.

H1: **Website experience** in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow shows dependency on **trust perceived**.

H2: **Brand attitude** is positively associated with **perceived trust**.

H3: **Website experience** in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow shows dependency on post **brand attitude**.

The overall theoretical research framework is depicted in figure 14, modeling the hypotheses previously introduced.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

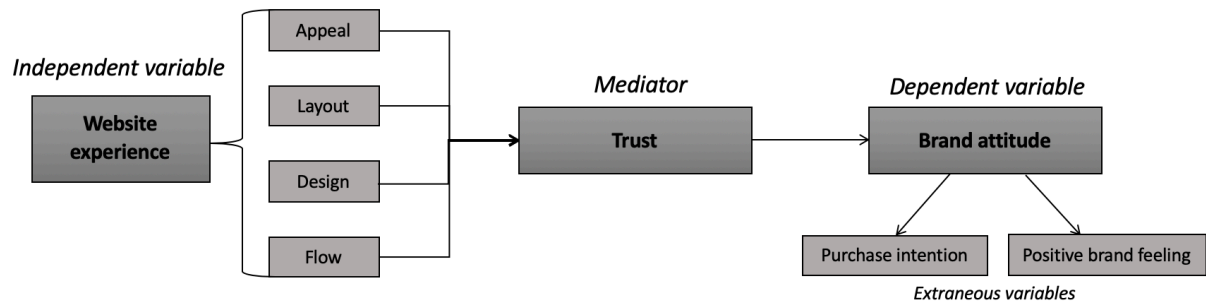


Figure 14: Research design framework; realized by the author

Website experience is defined here as the overall indicator subdivided into the degree of whether the website is perceived as appealing, layout and design show favorable impressions and that the overall flow experienced on the website was pleasing. It is then believed, that an enjoyable website experience has an impact on the level of trust that consumer perceive on the website with regard to the information stated on the website and the overall feeling of whether the website and brand is concerned with its customers. Perceived trust towards the brand and website are used to drive positive brand attitude and its consequences on purchase intention. Brand attitude will be measured as in whether respondents felt positively towards the brand as a result of the website presented. Overall brand feeling will include cues such as desirable, good, modern, attractive and high quality. Table 2 serves as an overview of the manifestations used in order to measure the independent variable, mediator and dependent variable.

Website experience	Trust	Brand attitude
Appeal	This website will always be honest with me.	Positive feeling towards brand as a result of website.
Layout	I believe in the information that this website provides.	Purchase intention
Design	This website is genuinely concerned about its customers.	Brand is perceived as desirable.
Flow		Brand is perceived as good.
		Brand is perceived as modern.
		Brand is perceived as attractive.
		Brand is perceived as high quality.

Table 2: Manifestations tested with regard to variables, Source: realized by the author

All variables and most questions used in the research approach were adopted from previous studies highlighted in the summary of literature review. These elements used in the research framework lay the foundation for developing an instrument to further evaluate website experience and its influence on brand attitude.

The next section elaborates the stimulus material chosen, the research method employed in terms of scales and scaling, the sampling method for developing and testing the instrument, as well as a in depth explanation of how the data was analyzed and processed to meet the research objectives.

8.4 Stimulus material

In order to visualize the independent variables with regard to website experience, the website of the brand Aesop (<https://www.aesop.com/fr/en/>) was selected as stimulus material. Presenting stimuli in order to test new concepts is often required and serves as an intervening event designed to elicit and further measure potential consequences and impacts in behaviour (Cristofaro, 2016). The stimulus material was chosen based on personal choice and feedback from potential respondents. Due to time and cost constraints, only one website could be used as stimuli. As explained later on in the research's limitation, future research could include several website designs and manipulating designs by tools such as Optimizely.

One experimental group was created and each respondent prior to filling out the questionnaire was asked to browse a bit on the website. The website was used as a visual aid in the data collection process. Based on the literature discussed at the beginning of this thesis, it was assumed that the brand Aesop is the best fit in order to avoid as many biases as possible. The website's homepage and menu example (see figures 15 & 16) is very clear and minimalistic which served as the best interpretation of the intended flow and good example of an appealing website design in terms of layout and design. Furthermore, this brand was chosen because it was assumed that most respondents do not know the brand Aesop which will reduce the bias of knowing the brand upfront when evaluating the website experience. A beauty website's brand was chosen primarily because of personal interest but also due to numerous articles in several magazines, stating the growth of beauty in e-commerce. As discovering new brands is now much easier than ever before, technology is making it easier to discover new brands and brands can now reach out to their customers even across the globe.

An article in the Forbes magazine, points out the fact that rich online content offers a better online shopping experience. Furthermore, beauty e-commerce is expected to pace up the coming years and beauty giants such as L'Oréal reported a 36% increase in online sales in 2018

(Weinswig, 2018). As a consequence, beauty brands need to continue to fine tune their digital offerings in terms of website design, experience and overall providing the customer a pleasing online atmosphere.

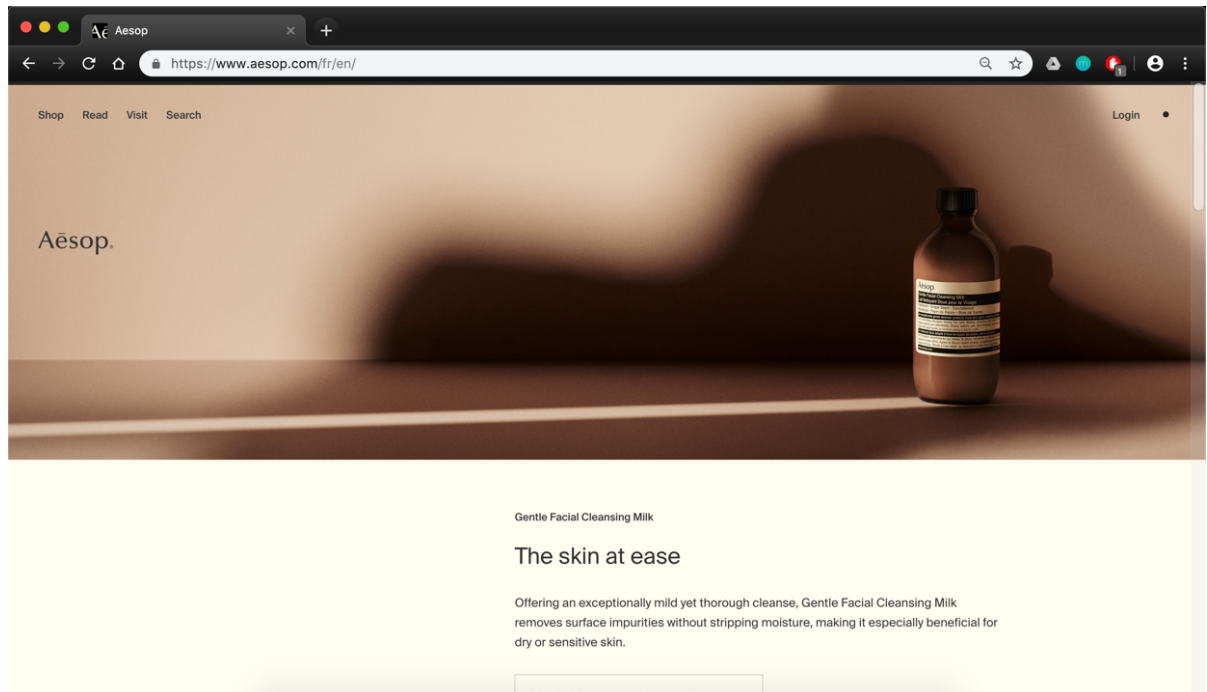


Figure 15: Aesop website, Example of homepage, Source: <https://www.aesop.com/fr/en/>

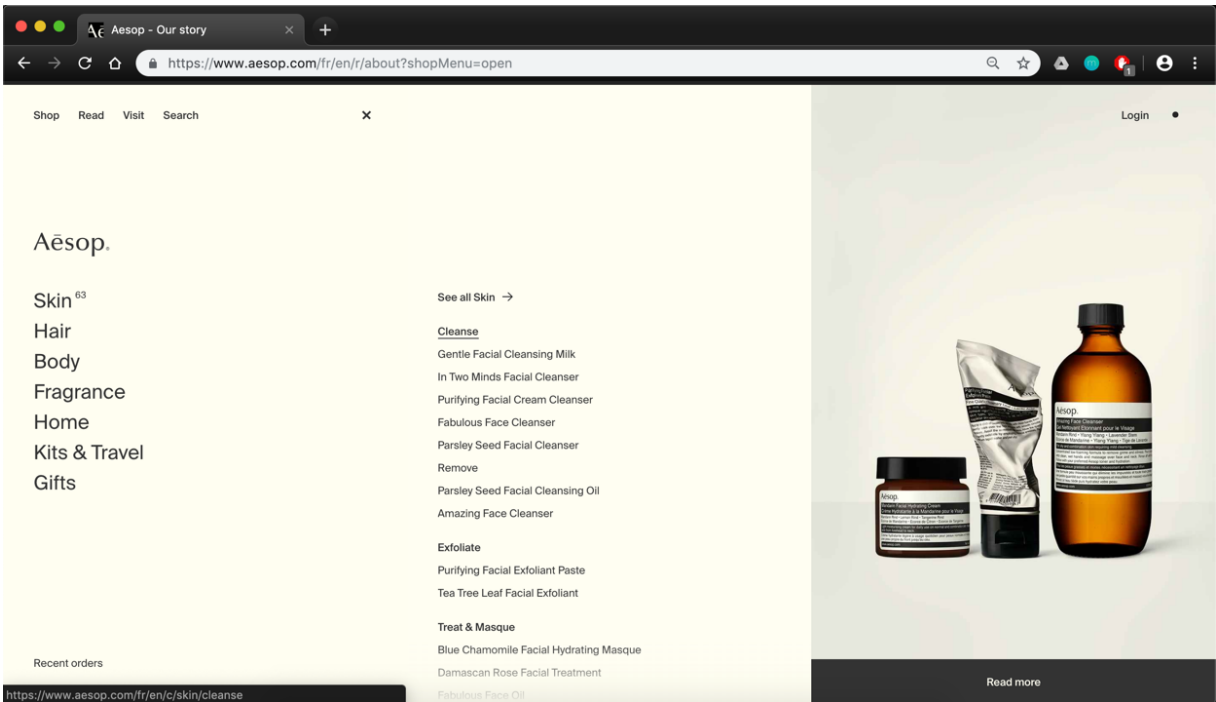


Figure 16: Aesop website, Example of Menu, Source: <https://www.aesop.com/fr/en/r/about?shopMenu=open>

On these grounds and in order to maximize and visualize the effect of website experience, a direct object of investigation with limited biases was sought-for. The website of Aesop as stimulus material was consequently chosen to help establish a contextual framework and to provoke the intended outcome of brand attitude which serves as dependent variable.

8.5 Data collection

Data collection took place in the form of an online survey carried out by the Online survey software SurveyMonkey where the survey was created. This form of collection was chosen due to simple handling, time flexibility and limited tools available. A questionnaire is generally defined as a form of data collection in which each participant is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order. The questionnaire used for this research was a self-administered questionnaire which has been completed by the respondents themselves and which are administered electronically by usage of the Internet (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The questions were precisely determined with regard to the independent and dependent variables and while reviewing the literature. Some of the questions used in the survey have been taken from prior research and adapted to the research question of this thesis. The questionnaire was hence designed in order to meet the requirements that are crucial for answering the research question (see figure 4).

Explanatory research, also called causal research was used to identify the extent and nature of cause-and-effect relationships. This type of research therefore focuses on the analysis of a situation or a specific problem to explain the patterns of a relationship between variables. As previously explained, experiments are the most popular primary data collection method in studies with causal research design (Dudovskiy, Research Methodology, 2019).

Explanatory research thus requires data to test a theory or several theories. In chapter 8.4, the research design was explained which resulted from reviewing the literature. Three types of data variables were used (Dillman, 2007):

- Opinion variables which record respondent's feelings about a statement or construct
- Behavioral variables containing data about respondent's attitude
- Attribute variables containing respondent's individual characteristics such as age, education, etc.

The introduction of the survey served as a welcome page containing the purpose of the survey and an explanation of the topic followed by the steps required (e.g. opening the Aesop website in a separate browser tab) in order to complete the questionnaire. The body of the

questionnaire contained questions related to the independent and dependent variables as well as extraneous variables previously explained in the research design. The end of the questionnaire contained a section thanking the respondents for completing the survey and the authors contact name and e-mail address was provided for any queries the respondents might have had. Figure 17 visualizes the construct of the questionnaire.

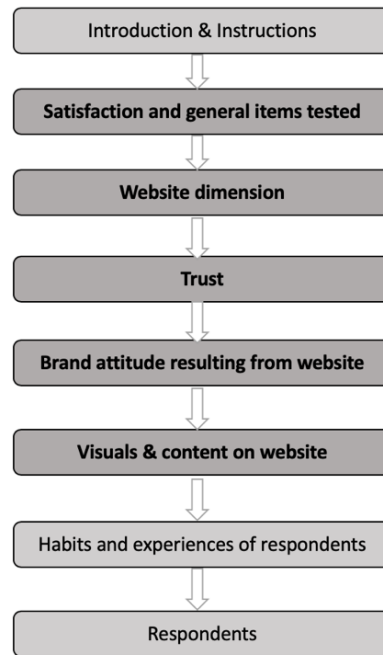


Figure 17: General structure of the questionnaire, Source: realized by the author

In order to ensure validity and assessing the survey's performance, pilot testing was used prior to collecting data. Friends and family tested the questionnaire in advanced to ensure that future respondents will not have problems in answering the questions and to avoid issues in recording the data. In total, the questionnaire included 21 questions and the processing time was estimated at 6 minutes.

To sum up, by using an online survey as a survey method, an objective survey situation could be created. The respondents could complete the questionnaire in an environment which was pleasant for them and were not subjected to any type of interviewing. The design of the study and the corresponding evaluation and interpretation of the results were carried out by the identical person. Thus, the objectivity of the study can be guaranteed.

8.6 Sampling method

A snowball sampling method was used to collect the data. The snowball sampling method is based on passing along information from referrals from initial subjects to additional subjects.

Therefore, when applying this sampling method members of the sample group are recruited via chain referral. Snowball sampling is commonly used when it is difficult to identify members of a desired population. Out of the three patterns of snowball sampling, the exponential non-discriminative pattern was used. The first subject recruited to the sample group provided multiple referrals. Each new referral generated new subjects until primary data from sufficient number of samples were collected (Dudovskiy, 2016).

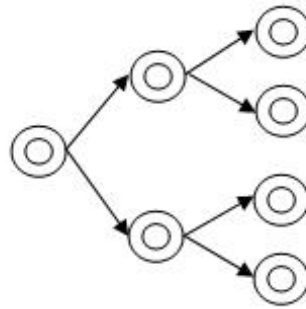


Figure 18: Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling, Source: <http://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/snowball-sampling/>

After creating the online survey, the link to the online survey was passed on to friends, family, fellow students and distributed on social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, to reach the highest possible number of subjects.

8.7 Measurement items

The seven-stage Likert scale is a suitable instrument for measuring the constructs. Firstly, this provides sufficient differentiation potential regarding the decisions of the subjects and secondly, there is the possibility of \wedge . Numerical and categorical scales were mixed, depending on which type was better for the attitude expression of the study population. As discussed earlier on, website experience was comprised of four sub-dimensions and trust as well as brand attitude was measured through three dimensions. Sub-dimensions and measurements in this research were employed based on previous literature.

Two types of unipolar scales were used which characterize a uniform direction of action, also called one-point category. The gradations in both types of scales ranged from 1-7, whereby 7 always represented the strongest agreement/ ranking. Figure 19 shows a categorical scale with a range from 1 to 7 with 7 representing the strongest agreement numbered by the numbers 1-7, whereby "1" does not agree at all and "7" is the strongest agreement.

* 6. To which degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This website will always be honest with me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe in the information that this website provides.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This website is genuinely concerned about its customers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 19: Example of a unipolar scale (categorical), Source: Questionnaire created by author

Figure 20 shows the same unipolar scale however expressed in numbers from 1-7 with 7 being the most positive as indicated in each question containing that type of scale.

* 9. Please describe your overall feelings of the Aesop brand as a result of the website on a scale from 1 to 7 with 7 being the most positive.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Desirable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Modern	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attractive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 20: Example of a unipolar scale (numerical), Source: Questionnaire created by author

8.8 Data examination

Statistical analysis will be used to process and analyze the outcome of the survey. Frequency of occurrence and using statistics enables comparisons through establishing statistical relationships between the dependent, independent variables and mediator. Before the main data analysis, the accuracy of data entry, missing values and fit were examined.

“Testing the probability of a pattern such as a relationship between variables occurring by change alone is known as significance testing”⁷. As part of this master thesis, sample data has been collected in order to examine the relationship between website experience, trust and brand attitude. The p-value measures the probability that one or more extreme occurred by chance alone. Usually in statistics, $p < 0.05$ or lower shows a statistically significant

⁷ Berman Brown, R. and Saunders, M. (2008) *“Dealing with statistics: What you need to know.”*, Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press

relationship where the probability that a result happened by coincidence is less than 5% ($p < 0.05$). With respect to our data analysis, if the p value is less than the chosen significance level, we reject the null hypothesis and accept that the same gives reasonable evidence to support the alternative hypothesis. The choice of significance level used in this thesis is overall 5%, however some results also show a 1% and even smaller significance. As most authors refer to statistically significant as $p < 0.05$ and statistically highly significant as $p < 0.001$ (less than one in a thousand chance of being wrong), we will adapt these interpretations for our data analysis. The theoretical underpinnings examined in the literature review as well as the research framework built the context of variables tested (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

8.8.1 Correlation analysis

For each variable and item, means were computed, and a correlation matrix of all manifestations was used for hypothesis testing. Means and variance are shown in the table below, whereas correlations are further on discussed and reported in Chapter 9.2, frequency analysis & Pearson correlation.

According to table 3, most of the respondents expressed a positive website experience with ease of use as the highest level (mean=5.8). A desirable brand feeling is the lowest item within brand feeling. Visuals and content also showed a high level of agreement. After having a first glance at the means, we may see already the relationship between website experience and positive brand feeling. For exploratory research, Pearson correlation is being reported for each of the items tested (please refer to chapter 9.2 and Appendices).

	Variable	Mean	Variance	Minimum	Maximum
Website experience	Appeal	5.20388	1.41670	1.00000	7.00000
	Flow	5.50485	1.42026	1.00000	7.00000
	Ease of navigation	5.80583	1.20504	2.00000	7.00000
	Ease of use	5.83495	1.22152	2.00000	7.00000
	Layout	5.50485	1.59579	1.00000	7.00000
	Design	5.68932	1.69213	1.00000	7.00000
Brand feeling	Desirable	5.31068	1.45541	1.00000	7.00000
	Good	5.50485	1.30515	1.00000	7.00000
	Modern	5.78641	1.49280	1.00000	7.00000
	Attractive	5.51456	1.55843	1.00000	7.00000
	High quality	5.91262	1.37275	1.00000	7.00000
Visuals	Clear	5.87379	1.20196	1.00000	7.00000
	Pleasing	5.39806	1.55513	1.00000	7.00000

	Appropriate	5.75728	1.27929	1.00000	7.00000
Content	Clear	5.59223	1.14135	1.00000	7.00000
	Interesting	5.06796	1.38806	1.00000	7.00000
	Appropriate	5.61165	1.17351	1.00000	7.00000
Age		25.60194	7.20068	17.00000	59.00000

Table 3: Simple statistics, SAS, Source: realized by the author, Note: N=103

8.8.2 Chi-square test

A cross table, also referred to as a contingency table, is an analytical instrument of descriptive statistics that is often used in market research. Crosstabulations contain the absolute and relative frequencies of combinations of two value characteristics of a statistical unit. They provide insight into how the two variables within the study are related. To create a classic contingency table, a two-dimensional record is required containing two nominal scaled variables.

The chi-square independence test (χ^2) was used to check the statistical significance of the contingency tables. Thus, the probability is determined whether the frequency distributions and correlations derived therefrom are not merely coincidental. In the case of the contingency table, this is the relationship of the two variables studied. It is important to find out to what extent they are dependent or independent and that the results of the statistical survey are therefore considered significant or not.

The chi-square test (χ^2) first predicts the calculation of a chi-square value for each individual cell, which is then aggregated into a total value for the table. The expected value is obtained by multiplying the marginal frequencies and dividing them by their total. The formula of the chi-square value is as follows:

$$\chi_c^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

In this master thesis, two-way tables (also called contingency tables) are used to summarize the relationship between variables. χ^2 -test is then conducted on the contingency table to test whether or not a statistically significant relationship exists between website experience, trust and brand attitude.

PART III – ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

9. Data analysis

In order to test the hypotheses within the proposed research framework, statistical technique was deployed. The data was analyzed using the statistical software SAS, the global leader in analytics. Customers worldwide use innovative software and services from SAS to turn data into knowledge and make smart business decisions.

At first stage within SAS, frequency analysis served as a measurement of central tendency. Furthermore, descriptive analysis was conducted in order to determine the demographic characteristics of the sample. In addition, person correlation has been adopted to test correlation between two single variables and therefore allows to prove or reject proposed variable correlations. Main effects and correlations were reported using the p-value and chi-square analysis in the section afterwards. To maintain the flexibility of this exploratory study, most constructs were considered as single constructs. Most variables remained as one factor, except website experience, a multiple construct consisting of four dimensions: appeal, layout, design and flow and brand attitude where three manifestations have been tested.

The data construct incorporated categorical and numerical data. As seen in chapter 8.7 several ranges have been adopted to collect responses. Categorical data (qualitative) such as agree/disagree, frequently/never represented characteristics without mathematical meaning. Numerical data (quantitative) was used to measure agreement/disagreement in ascending (1-7) order.

After a detailed presentation of results obtained, hypothesis testing will serve as a support regarding the linkage among the framework's variables. A discussion of results will finalize the quantitative analysis part and limitations of the research will lead to proposals of future research.

9.1 Demographic results – sample description

As previously mentioned, data was collected from April 4th, 2019 to April 19th, 2019 in a period of 15 days and in the form of an online survey conducted by SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>). A total of 103 respondents, mainly students and recent graduates, were asked to browse on the website of the Aesop brand and afterwards respond to questions with regard to their experiences and attitudes. The survey was only sent out to women to avoid discrepancies in the results in comparison to men and to ensure the

significance of results. Respondents were assigned to the same survey condition and questions.

Among 103 women in total, a large majority of respondents were in their 20s (see figure 21). In general, the age range is 17 to 59 years, with a vast majority (82%) being around 24 years old (see figure 22). As the average age of the sample is 24, the results comply with the assumption made in Chapter 1.3.1 “Digital natives”, that most of the respondents were born between 1980 and 2000.

Procédure MEANS										
Variable d'analyse : Q19 : Age										
Moyenne	Ecart-type	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Intervalle	N	10e centile	Quartile inférieur	Médiane	Quartile supérieur
25.6019417	7.2006805	17.0000000	59.0000000	24.0000000	42.0000000	103	22.0000000	23.0000000	24.0000000	25.0000000

Variable d'analyse : Q19 : Age	
Inférieur 95% IC pour la moyenne	Supérieur 95% IC pour la moyenne
24.1946437	27.0092398

Figure 21: Mean analysis Age, SAS, conducted by the author, May 2019

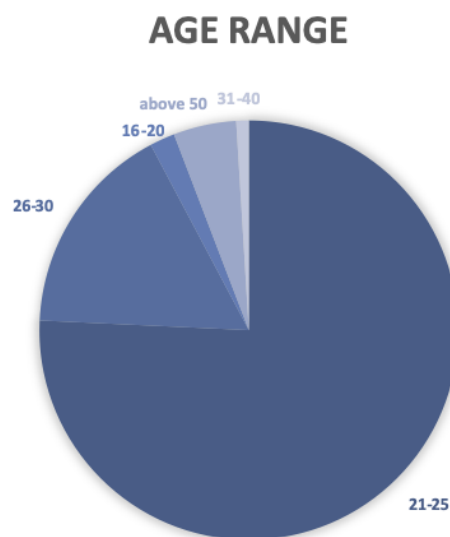


Figure 22: Age distribution, Source: realized by the author, May 2019

Most respondents came from Germany (50%) and Belgium (14%). Respondents from a total of 14 nationalities were collected, including different continents (North America and Europe). In terms of education, 77% had an academic degree and 13% had a college diploma. Overall, the sample had a very high status in education. In addition to the age distribution, the following figures (23 and 24) also provide an overview of the professional qualifications of the people tested.

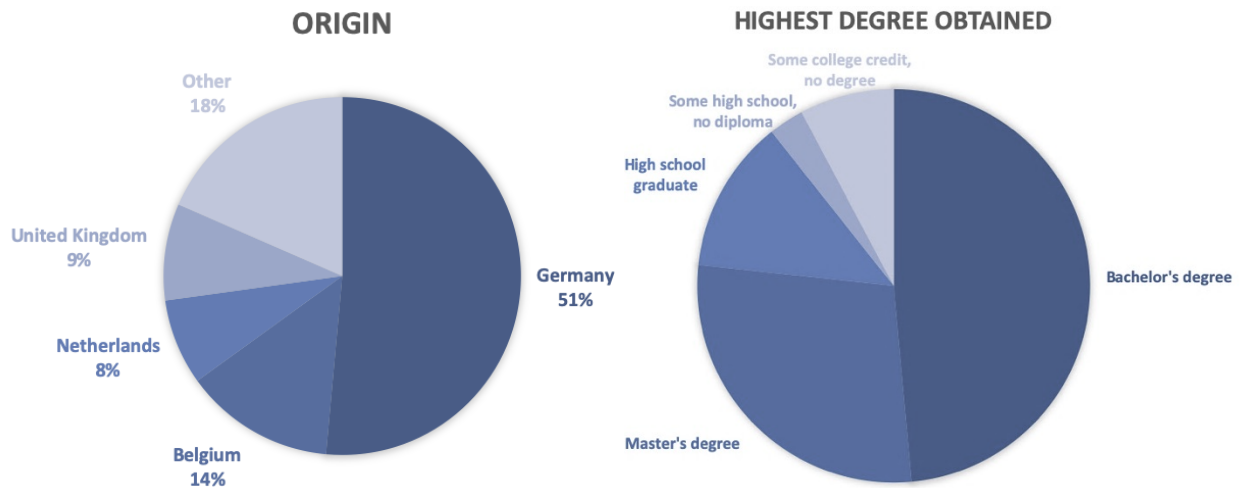


Figure 23: Nationalities of sample, Source: realized by the author, May 2019

Figure 24: Degree distribution, Source: realized by the author, May 2019

Concerning online shopping habits, frequency analysis revealed, that 35% of the sample frequently purchases online, 11% very frequently and 30% occasionally. Regarding the devices used for online shopping, laptops are used the most frequent (42%) followed by smartphones (20%) and tablets (8%).

	Laptop	Smartphone	Tablet
Frequently	41.75%	19.42%	7.77%
Very frequently	26.21%	16.50%	1.94%

Table 4: Frequency devices used, SAS, Source: realized by the author

Another interesting insight is the fact that 64% consider online shopping as needed. The majority of the sample (74%) did not know the brand Aesop before completion of the survey. Moreover, more than 75% of respondents stated that the brand is an important factor for them when buying, which shows the significant impact of this master thesis for successful e-commerce and brand management since customers highly value the brand when purchasing online.

9.2 Frequency analysis & Pearson correlation

First, frequency analysis was used to get an overview of the data analysis. Frequency analysis is a comprehensive tool used in order to extract first information and insights from the set of empirical data. The goal was to instantly capture features and trends in the data. In addition to that, possible errors in the data were spotted faster and hence were eliminated at an early stage of the analysis. Frequency analysis revealed, that question 3 asking about the likeliness to return to the website and recommend it to a friend did not show clear central tendency

and was hence eliminated. As prior assumed, we can reject the hypothesis specifying that the desire of revising the website or recommending it to a friend shows positive dependency on flow experience as it has been eliminated because it did not show central tendency while conducting the frequency analysis.

The same procedure was undertaken for question 12 asking about the perception of shopping online for a product in terms of excitement, meaning to the respondent and need. For question 12, frequency analysis did not show clear tendency in the results and was therefore taken out of the data set. Please refer to the Appendices for a detailed presentation of the frequency analysis undertaken in SAS.

The rest of the questions revealed tendency in frequency results for a single variable tested. As up until now, only descriptive statistics for a single variable have been considered, a correlation analysis has been conducted in order to test two variables and whether or not they are associated. This measure of association used to demonstrate how two variables are related is called the “correlation coefficient”, also known as the Pearson correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient r indicates how strong the empirically found relationship between the different observation values is. It can vary between +1.00 (a perfectly positive relationship) over 0.00 (no correlation at all) to -1.00 (negative relationship). With regard to the variables analyzed in this thesis and included in the research framework, a value as close as possible to +1 is aimed at, which shows a perfect correlation (Reinboth, 2016) (Keller, 2013).

This master thesis will use the subsequent directives for correlations:

- r value close to 0 do not show any correlation
- r value between 0 and 0.5 shows a weak correlation
- r value between 0.5 and 0.8 shows a medium strong correlation
- r value between 0.8 and 1 shows a strong correlation with 1.0 being the maximum achievable value

It needs to be noted that these reference points and limits are not strictly binding, however merely represent statistics proposals that will be used as guidelines for the interpretation of this thesis.

As previously mentioned in the discussion of the research framework, the variable “website experience” was sub-divided into 4 items tested: Appeal, layout, design and flow. The following table 5 shows the Pearson correlation value r for the variables analyzed within the independent variable website experience (please refer to Appendices for a more detailed representation of the correlation analysis).

	Appeal	Layout	Design	Flow
Appeal	1.00000	0.74762	0.74646	0.70856
Layout	0.74762	1.00000	0.76664	0.66074
Design	0.74646	0.76664	1.00000	0.60031
Flow	0.70856	0.66074	0.60031	1.00000

Table 5: Pearson correlation coefficient, Source: SAS, realized by the author

Based on the correlation analysis, the following findings can be consequently reported:

- ⇒ There was a medium strong positive correlation between respondents perceiving the website as appealing (M = 5.2) and the positive perception of layout (M = 5.5, $r = 0.74762$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a medium strong positive correlation between respondents perceiving the website as appealing (M = 5.2) and positive perception of design (M = 5.7, $r = 0.74646$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a medium strong positive correlation between respondents perceiving the website as appealing (M = 5.2) and positive perception of flow (M = 5.5, $r = 0.70856$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a medium strong positive correlation between the perception of layout (M = 5.5) and the perception of design (M = 5.7, $r = 0.76664$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a medium strong positive correlation between the perception of design (M = 5.7) and the perception of flow (M = 5.5, $r = 0.60031$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a medium strong positive correlation between the perception of layout (M = 5.5) and the perception of flow (M = 5.5, $r = 0.66074$, $p < .0001$).

Regarding the analysis of the dependent variable brand attitude, three items have been tested here:

- Overall positive feeling as a result of the website (Question 7)
- Purchase intention (Question 5)
- Description of brand feelings sub-divided into desirable, good, modern, attractive and high quality (Question 9)

Overall positive feeling resulting from the website and purchase intention will be further reported in the table crossings as both questions contain categorical data. Correlation analysis for the description of feeling towards the brand was done and the Pearson correlation values can be seen in the table 6 (please refer to Appendices for a more detailed representation of the correlation analysis).

	Desirable	Good	Modern	Attractive	High quality
Desirable	1.00000	0.83532	0.72125	0.82357	0.68599
Good	0.83532	1.00000	0.77043	0.84468	0.79642
Modern	0.72125	0.77043	1.00000	0.81468	0.76106
Attractive	0.82357	0.84468	0.81468	1.00000	0.72969
High quality	0.68599	0.79642	0.76106	0.72969	1.00000

Table 6: Pearson correlation coefficient, Source: SAS, realized by the author

Based on the correlation analysis, the following findings can be reported:

- ⇒ There was a strong positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as desirable (M = 5.3) and good (M = 5.5, $r = 0.83532$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as desirable (M = 5.3) and modern (M = 5.8, $r = 0.72125$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a strong positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as desirable (M = 5.3) and attractive (M = 5.5, $r = 0.82357$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as desirable (M = 5.3) and having a high quality (M = 5.9, $r = 0.68599$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a medium positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as good (M = 5.5) and modern (M = 5.8, $r = 0.77043$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a strong positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as good (M = 5.5) and attractive (M = 5.5, $r = 0.84468$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a strong positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as good (M = 5.5) and having a high quality (M = 5.9, $r = 0.79642$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a strong positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as modern (M = 5.8) and attractive (M = 5.5, $r = 0.81468$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as modern (M = 5.8) and having a high quality (M = 5.9, $r = 0.76106$, $p < .0001$).
- ⇒ There was a positive correlation between respondents describing the brand as attractive (M = 5.5) and having a high quality (M = 5.9, $r = 0.72969$, $p < .0001$).

As for other data collected from the survey with regard to measurement of extended website experience (ease of navigation and ease of use) as well as visuals and content, please refer to the Appendices of this master thesis as it shows correlation analysis for these variables.

9.3 Contingency table

9.3.1 Website experience and trust

In order to analyze the research framework, contingency table analysis was used in order to test the correlation between the independent variable website experience, composed of appeal, layout, design and flow and the mediator trust. Referring back to scales and scaling (Chapter 8.7), appeal, layout, design and flow was measured on a scale from 1-7 with 7 being the most positive. Positive outcomes of appeal, layout, design and flow comprise evaluations between 5-7. The same applies for the measurement of descriptive brand feeling, further on mentioned in the analysis. Moreover, as earlier explained in the research design, three items for trust have been tested:

- Perceived honesty of website visited
- Believe in the information the website provides
- Website's concern about its customers

To verify relationship and hence test dependency between the two variables trust and appeal, a chi-squared test (χ^2 test) was used.

	Frequency in %	χ^2 chi-square		
Trust	Appeal	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Perceived honesty	56.31%	29.2705	0.0036	0.5331
Believe in the information	68.93%	41.9231	<.0001	0.6380
Website's concern about customers	63.11%	32.2621	0.0013	0.5597

Table 7: Results χ^2 -test - trust and appeal, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported:

- ⇒ 56% of respondents considered the website as appealing and agreed on the fact that the website will be honest with them. A significant association (dependency) between appeal and perceived honesty was found, $p=0.0036$.
- ⇒ 69% of respondents considered the website as appealing and agreed on the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between appeal and believe in the website's information was found, $p<.0001$.

- ⇒ 63% of respondents considered the website as appealing and agreed on the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between appeal and perceived website's concern was found, $p=0.0013$.

To verify relationship and hence test dependency between the two variables trust and layout, a chi-squared test (χ^2 test) was used.

	Frequency in %	χ^2 chi-square		
Trust	Layout	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Perceived honesty	59.22%	37.1430	0.0002	0.6005
Believe in the information	69.90%	35.6961	0.0004	0.5887
Website's concern about customers	64.07%	53.7162	<.0001	0.7222

Table 8: Results χ^2 -test - trust and layout, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported:

- ⇒ 59% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing layout and the fact that the website will be honest with them. A significant association (dependency) between layout and perceived honesty was found, $p=0.0002$.
- ⇒ 70% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing layout and the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between layout and believe in the website's information was found, $p=0.0004$.
- ⇒ 64% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing layout and the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between layout and perceived website's concern was found, $p<.0001$.

To verify relationship and hence test dependency between the two variables trust and design, a chi-squared test (χ^2 test) was used.

	Frequency in %	χ^2 chi-square		
Trust	Design	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Perceived honesty	60.19%	26.7766	0.0083	0.5099

Believe in the information	72.82%	51.4701	<.0001	0.7069
Website's concern about customers	67.00%	45.4053	<.0001	0.6639

Table 9: Results χ^2 -test - trust and design, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported:

- ⇒ 60% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing design and the fact that the website will be honest with them. A significant association (dependency) between design and perceived honesty was found, $p=0.0083$.
- ⇒ 73% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing design and the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between design and believe in the website's information was found, $p<.0001$.
- ⇒ 67% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing design and the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between design and perceived website's concern was found, $p<.0001$.

To verify relationship and hence test dependency between the two variables flow and design, a chi-squared test (χ^2 test) was used.

	Frequency in %	χ^2 chi-square		
Trust	Flow	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Perceived honesty	57.28%	20.84444	0.0527	0.4499
Believe in the information	68.93%	32.6689	0.0011	0.5632
Website's concern about customers	63.10%	54.4246	<.0001	0.7269

Table 10: Results χ^2 -test - trust and flow, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported:

- ⇒ 57% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing flow and the fact that the website will be honest with them. However, no significant association (dependency) between flow and perceived honesty was found, $p=0.0527$.

- ⇒ 69% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing flow and the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. Positive correlation could be found between flow and believe in the website's information, $p=0.0011$.
- ⇒ 63% of respondents agreed that the website had a pleasing flow and the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between flow and perceived website's concern was found, $p<.0001$.

9.3.2 Trust and brand attitude

Following the research framework, consecutive results present the correlation between the mediator trust and the dependent variable brand attitude. As previously specified in the research design chapter, three manifestations of brand attitude have been used:

- Overall positive brand feeling resulting from the website
- Purchase intention
- Descriptive brand feeling: desirable, good, modern, attractive and high quality

The following results derived from the chi-square test analyzing the overall positive brand feeling resulting from the website visited, however only measuring two manifestations of trust.

To verify relationship and hence test dependency between the two variables trust and overall brand feeling, a chi-squared test (χ^2 test) was used.

	Frequency in %	χ^2 chi-square		
Trust	Overall positive brand feeling resulting from website	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Believe in the information	67.96%	34.9015	<.0001	0.5821
Website's concern about customers	63.11%	36.0643	<.0001	0.5917

Table 11: Results χ^2 -test - trust and overall brand feeling, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported:

- ⇒ 68% of respondents agreed on having an overall positive brand feeling resulting from the website and the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A

significant association (dependency) between positive brand feeling and believe in the website's information was found, $p < .0001$.

- ⇒ 63% of respondents agreed on having an overall positive brand feeling resulting from the website and the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between positive brand feeling and perceived website's concern was found, $p < .0001$.

To verify relationship and hence test dependency between the two variables trust and purchase intention, a chi-squared test (χ^2 test) was used.

	Frequency in %		χ^2 chi-square		
	Purchase intention		Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Trust	Yes	Maybe			
Believe in the information	45.63%	32.04%	29.8725	<.0001	0.5385
Website's concern about customers	46.60%	24.27%	37.5793	<.0001	0.6040

Table 12: Results χ^2 -test - trust and purchase intention, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported:

- ⇒ 46% of respondents would purchase on the website and agree on the that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between purchase intention and believe in the website's information was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 47% of respondents would purchase on the website and agree on the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between purchase intention and perceived website's concern was found, $p < .0001$.

To verify relationship and hence test dependency between the two variables trust and brand feelings experienced as a result of the website, a chi-squared test (χ^2 test) was used.

	Frequency in %	χ^2 chi-square		
	Trust	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Descriptive brand feeling	Believe in the information			
Desirable	67.97%	58.4751	<.0001	0.7535

Good	71,84%	63.5825	<.0001	0.7857
Modern	71.85%	59.1421	<.0001	0.7578
Attractive	69.90%	36.2709	0.0003	0.5934
High quality	73.79%	48.3250	<.0001	0.6850

Table 13: Results χ^2 -test - trust and descriptive brand feelings, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported as a result of the website:

- ⇒ 68% of respondents perceive the brand as desirable and agree on the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between a desirable brand feeling and believe in the website's information was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 72% of respondents perceive the brand as good and agree on the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between a good brand feeling and believe in the website's information was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 72% of respondents perceive the brand as modern and agree on the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between a modern brand feeling and believe in the website's information was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 70% of respondents perceive the brand as attractive and agree on the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between an attractive brand feeling and believe in the website's information was found, $p = 0.0003$.
- ⇒ 74% of respondents perceive the brand as high quality and agree on the fact that they believe in the information the website provides. A significant association (dependency) between a high-quality brand feeling and believe in the website's information was found, $p < .0001$.

	Frequency in %	χ^2 chi-square		
	Trust	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Descriptive brand feeling	Website's concern about customers			
Desirable	63.10%	45.9365	<.0001	0.6678
Good	67.96%	74.6641	<.0001	0.8514
Modern	64.08%	66.6082	<.0001	0.8042
Attractive	64.08%	56.5279	<.0001	0.7408
High quality	67.96%	52.7939	<.0001	0.7159

Table 14: Results χ^2 -test - trust and descriptive brand feelings, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported as a result of the website:

- ⇒ 63% of respondents perceive the brand as desirable and agree on the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between a desirable brand feeling and perceived website's concern was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 68% of respondents perceive the brand as good and agree on the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between a good brand feeling and perceived website's concern was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 64% of respondents perceive the brand as good and agree on the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between a good brand feeling and perceived website's concern was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 64% of respondents perceive the brand as attractive and agree on the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between an attractive brand feeling and perceived website's concern was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 68% of respondents perceive the brand as high quality and agree on the fact that the website is genuinely concerned about its customers. A significant association (dependency) between a high-quality brand feeling and perceived website's concern was found, $p < .0001$.

9.3.3 Website experience and brand attitude

Table crossing was used in order to test interdependence between website experience and brand attitude. Chi-square analysis was used in order to measure dependency.

The first analysis shown in the table below, covers purchase intention as a manifestation of brand attitude.

Website experience	Frequency in %	χ^2 chi-square		
	Purchase intention	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Appeal	47.57%	99.2201	<.0001	0.9815
Layout	48.54%	114.9080	<.0001	1.0562
Design	48.55%	106.1959	<.0001	1.0154
Flow	48.55%	76.6700	<.0001	0.8628

Table 15: Results χ^2 -test - website experience and brand attitude, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported with regard to website experience and purchase intention:

- ⇒ 48% of respondents found the website appealing and would purchase on the website. A significant association (dependency) between appeal and purchase intention was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 49% of respondents agreed on the fact that the website had a pleasing layout and would purchase on the website. A significant association (dependency) between layout and purchase intention was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 49% of respondents agreed on the fact that the website had a pleasing design and would purchase on the website. A significant association (dependency) between design and purchase intention was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 49% of respondents agreed on the fact that the website had a pleasing flow and would purchase on the website. A significant association (dependency) between flow and purchase intention was found, $p < .0001$.

Secondly, overall positive brand feeling was used as a manifestation of brand attitude and results can be seen in the table below.

	<i>Frequency in %</i>	<i>χ^2 chi-square</i>		
Website experience	Overall positive brand feeling resulting from website	Value	p-value	Phi coefficient Φ
Appeal	66.99%	52.4599	<.0001	0.7137
Layout	66.99%	65.3939	<.0001	0.7968
Design	67.97%	81.2377	<.0001	0.8881
Flow	66.01%	43.3627	<.0001	0.6488

Table 16: Results χ^2 -test - website experience and brand attitude, SAS, Source: realized by the author

The following findings can be reported with regard to website experience and overall positive brand feeling resulting from the website:

- ⇒ 67% of respondents found the website appealing and felt positively towards the brand as a result of the website. A significant association (dependency) between appeal and brand feeling was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 67% of respondents agreed on the fact that the website had a pleasing layout and felt positively towards the brand as a result of the website. A significant association (dependency) between layout and brand feeling was found, $p < .0001$.

- ⇒ 68% of respondents agreed on the fact that the website had a pleasing design and felt positively towards the brand as a result of the website. A significant association (dependency) between design and brand feeling was found, $p < .0001$.
- ⇒ 66% of respondents agreed on the fact that the website had a pleasing flow and felt positively towards the brand as a result of the website. A significant association (dependency) between flow and brand feeling was found, $p < .0001$.

9.4 Hypothesis testing

The purpose of this study was to assess whether website experiences in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow positively impacts trust towards the website. Trust was then supposed to show dependency with brand attitude and hence acts as a mediator. Furthermore, website experiences in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow are expected to also demonstrate dependency with brand attitude.

The null hypothesis (H_0) was used to find out whether we can reject or accept alternative hypothesis. Going more into detailed, H_0 states whether a result happened just by coincidence or whether there is a statistical significance. As defined by Cohen in 1990, the null hypothesis is the hypothesis that tries to refute psychological experiments. It states that a particular independent variable has no influence on the results given and that investigations are ground of a random outcome (Stangl, 2019). Only when H_0 can be rejected as extremely unlikely, the alternative hypothesis is/are accepted.

Reflecting once again upon the hypothesis developed through extensive literature review and previous research done, the following hypothesis have been defined:

H1: **Website experience** in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow shows dependency on **trust perceived**.

H2: **Brand attitude** is positively associated with **perceived trust**.

H3: **Website experience** in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow shows dependency on post **brand attitude**.

As seen in the figure below (25), all dependencies show significant association apart from flow and perceived honesty of the website, since $p > 0.05$. All other variables seen in the framework were dependent on one another and showed statistical significance, $p < 0.05$. As appeal, layout, design and flow showed dependency on trust, H1 can be accepted and we reject H_0 . With regard to H2, stating that positive brand attitude depends on trust towards the website,

we can accept this hypothesis since $p < 0.05$ and as well reject H_0 . The last hypothesis defining dependency of website experience and positive brand attitude has also been accepted and findings were reported in the presentation of results above.

The following results have been obtained and will be interpreted based on the questions asked in the survey. Overall strongest dependency according to results of phi-coefficient could be found between respondents believing in the information the website provided and perceiving the brand seen on the website as desirable, good and modern. Furthermore, strong dependency was measured between respondents agreeing on the fact that the website is concerned about its customers and feeling the brand on the website as good and modern.

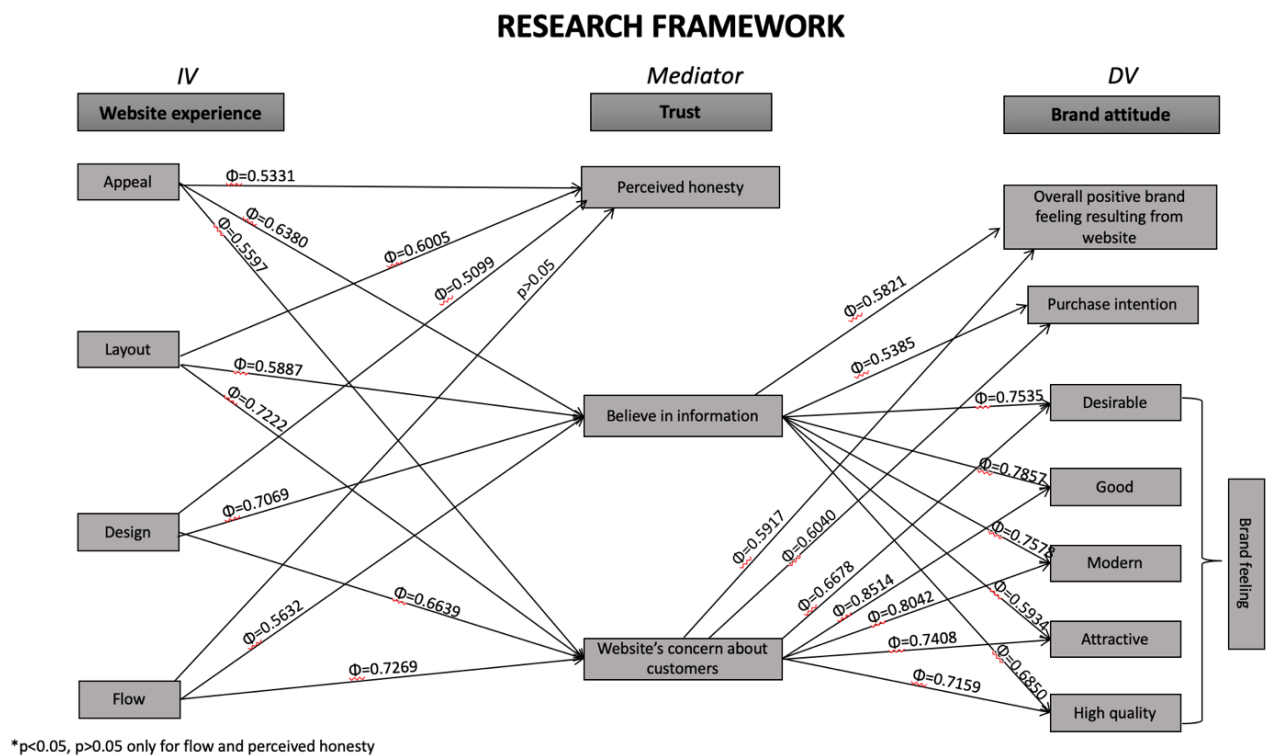


Figure 25: Research framework - chi-square test results, Source: realized by the author

9.5 Limitations

Of course, limitations exist with this study and in order to investigate the possible causes of the results, it is important and advised to review the study structure and identify possible weaknesses and defects.

Firstly, if we consider the results of the extent to which the respondents treated the survey questions, it is questioned whether all respondents have sufficiently taken time to answer the questions (average time spent: 5 min, 14 seconds). This limitation may occur because of the use of an online survey as a method of data collection. Another approach would be to verify if a different result could be obtained if, for example, the survey is conducted personally as part of an interview and the interviewee has possibly more control of the understanding of questions leading the respondent into a certain direction.

During the survey, respondents were first asked about the website and their experiences which may have affected their subsequent answers towards the brand and attitudes. Changing the order in which questions were posed might yield different results.

Furthermore, the sample represented more than 10 nationalities, which raises the question, whether a fully German or Belgian sample for example would have provided the same results as there might occur cultural differences. Additionally, the population of the experimental group (103 participants) seems small regarding the fact, that respondents had different origins. Moreover, it is questionable whether the website presentation responds equally to the subjects examined in the sample, or whether different age groups feel differently concerned. Though, it seems plausible to check the acceptance of the website or brand by a pre-test. The sample consisted of only female respondents. It might be interesting for further research, whether men respond and react identical to the same type of product presentation.

Regarding the stimulus material and website choice, no pre-tests were carried out for the selection of the website or brand but were selected because of personal feelings and opinion. The website of the brand Aesop was chosen freely. Therefore, it is unknown, whether another type of website or brand would have resulted in the same outcomes and implications. As described in previous chapters, a website essentially affects a post brand attitude. Another preliminary test to examine whether the stimulus choice of the Aesop brand and website represent appeal, positive flow, design and layout from the point of view of the general public as it was not inquired either in the study itself nor in a pre-test. Since the brand Aesop risks being slightly rejected and disliked due to personal experiences, the objective of the experiment is endangered by personal opinions about the brand itself in the first place. Finally, the fit between the website and brand should also be carried out by means of a pre-test. Consequently, the transfer of previous research results using brands websites must be called into question as the investigations of the current study is limited to a specific website.

This study has shortcomings in terms of research framework, which may limit the generalizability of findings. These shortcomings included the limited factors representing the independent variable website experience. Only four sub-variables have been examined: Appeal, layout, design and flow. For example, ease of navigation and ease of use were found

as critical to overall website experience resulting from critical literature review. The same shortcomings may be applied to brand attitude. Brand attitude was measured by overall brand feeling, descriptive feelings and purchase intention. For future research other post brand attitude consequences such as experiences and opinions could be analyzed and personal factors as well such as emotions and personality traits could be taken into account.

Taking the quantitative analysis undertaken into account, several limitations need to be noted. Firstly, no factor loading has been done to concentrate the effect of website experience, trust and brand attitude in order to meet reliability requirements and measurement of items tested. For a second analysis, factor loading could be conducted to test the three trust items, four website experience dimensions and manifestations of brand attitude. Secondly, regression and correlation analysis could help in confidently determining which website experience dimensions matter most in impacting trust and brand attitude, which factors can be ignored and how these factors influence each other. Thirdly, 76% of respondents indicated that they do not know the brand Aesop before completing the survey, however 26% were aware of the brand Aesop. Whether knowing the brand upfront influences test results has not been analyzed and have been not been further emphasized on concerning academic and managerial implications.

In further studies, these limitations and critics could be implemented in order to achieve further results which thus create more generalizable implications in business management with emphasis on e-commerce brands and websites.

PART IV – CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

10. Discussion of results

The final part of the thesis will again summarize the results obtained and will be interpreted based on the questions asked in the survey. Finally, academic and managerial implications will be outlined and an outlook on further research is provided.

The most important conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that trust towards a brand and website is dependent on appealing website experience, a pleasing layout and design as well as agreeable flow. This research demonstrates that an enjoyable website experience has the capacity to positively impact trust and brand attitude, which resulted in several main dependencies. As the findings of this study reveal, brand attitude was significantly dependent on enjoyable website experience.

Therefore, creating website requires more than just setting up a usual e-commerce platform and waiting for consumers to purchase on it. Companies and especially brands have to be tactical and think through their website design strategies. Society these days is heavily influenced by social media reactions, brand responses and consumer reviews. Social media enables a much faster and more widely flow of information and consumers are increasingly influenced by word of mouth on social networks. Creating a pleasing website experience online is hence key in constructing a unified omni-channel strategy. Yet, still several outcomes of online experience are unknown and limited research exists on how website experience, trust and brand attitude function, which is why the topic of this research is very recent and original. This research provides deeper understanding of online shopping experience on a website. Despite its limitations, the study offers valuable theoretical and managerial insights.

10.1 Academic implications

Web design and its effects on experiences and attitudes in literature is fast-growing and largely focuses on phenomena that are practically and theoretically interesting. Generally, this study enriches and builds upon existing literature in e-commerce in several ways. The study validates, that trust is dependent on a pleasing overall website experience with reference to appeal, layout, design and flow.

Few studies have examined the role of brand attitude in website experience and perceived trust. In my study, phi-coefficient was highest for trust and a desirable, good and modern feeling of the brand seen on the website which shows the effect of feelings and sensations.

The results of this study provide thus important guidelines for researchers to further analyze and measure brand attitude on websites. Some findings are consistent with previous studies related to website attitude, brand attitude and purchase intention, e.g. (Wu, Quyen, & Rivas, 2016). To sum up, this study contributes to the literature by finding that trust shows strong dependency on website experience in terms of appeal, layout, trust and flow which in return impacts brand attitude. These four dimensions need to be strategically managed and maintained in order to build up trust and positive brand attitude.

According to Babin, consumers find utilitarian value when navigation is easy and goals can be successfully accomplished rather than focusing on the experience itself (Babin, 1994). The results of this study confirm correlation between flow and ease of navigation ($r = 0.58485$, $p < .0001$) and ease of use ($r = 0.91047$, $p < .0001$) and reinforce the argument that in order to create a better experience, e-commerce websites should be easy to navigate.

As key elements of Hassenzahl's model of user experience suggest, emotional responses of users are evoked by appeal and satisfaction that result through the product. With regarding to findings from this research, his framework can be applied since brand attitude and feelings were strongly dependent on a website's appeal and design (refer to Figure 26). Based on this, we can endorse Hassenzahl's proposition of appeal and emotional and behavioral consequences.

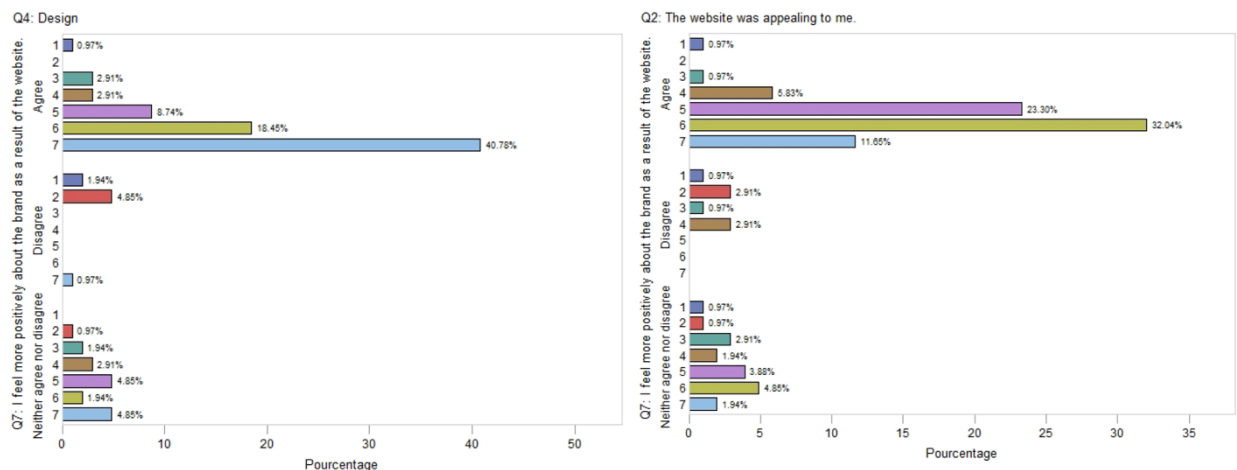


Figure 26: Visualization of results χ^2 -test, SAS, Source: realized by the author

Lastly, in a purely educational context, e-commerce and online marketing gains importance. The active management of e-commerce strategies is an integral part of many course modules for business schools all around the world. Personal experiences confirm, that digital marketing, the new era of consumption and buying and several other related topics are common themes in marketing and online business strategy at universities.

10.2 Managerial implications

This study shows that website experience along with trust lead to a positive brand outcome for the e-retailers. Website experience linked to trust lead to greater purchase intention and positive feelings towards the brand. A key finding of this study is that e-commerce managers should be cautious about creating a compelling online experience since they create the website to generate traffic. Specifically, when considering web design, managers should evaluate website elements based on the message they want to convey as this will have an effect on their firm's brand. Trust findings are another interesting outcome with regard to brand attitude as it underlies the positive perception of a brand and feelings related to it. As purchase intention showed positive dependency on trust, trusted brands are supposed to be purchased more often. Higher brand trust working through website experience in terms of appeal, layout, design and flow.

As increased internet traffic and the complexity of organization in tracking the traffic have made privacy a vital issue in e-commerce, maintaining trust in the minds of consumers is key in establishing a positive brand frame. Trust is of high importance, especially as customers have often little knowledge of sellers and must deal with uncertainty and risks. My findings suggest, that e-commerce websites bear business responsibility, especially when inducing trust on the website.

In light of the above, the ultimate goal in creating a brand-relationship development is a customer who trusts the website and hence the brand. Aiming at promoting customer purchase intention through website design, notable findings of this work suggest that a more appealing appearance will evoke trust and help consumers develop positive brand feelings and purchase intention. Web designers and e-commerce managers need to emphasize the design and layout appeal as well as flow elements to optimize the website experience. Aesthetic appeal may be enhanced by the use of high-quality images, enjoyable flow, sounds etc. to ensure that the website elicits positive emotions and preferences towards the brand and possibly to the firm as a whole. Bad website experiences may then mean that consumers do not trust the website and do not want to spend money on it. An improved online trust-attitudes relationship with websites is proposes positive brand attitudes. E-retailers should design aesthetic websites to position and influence brand images. As such, an appealing website is considered more reliable and trustworthy and thus positively impacts purchase intention and brand feelings.

Approximately 85% of my study sample were in their mid 20s (average ag: 24) and hence are part of the Gen Y. According to (Lester, Forman, & & Loyd, 2006) investigating digital natives in the context of e-commerce is critical. Given the importance of positive website experience in e-commerce, the significance of digital natives in the success of e-commerce and the fact

that virtual environments offer unique ways for brands to engage with their customers, the results of this study can be overall applied to this generation previously examined in Chapter 1.3.1 of the literature review. According to my findings it is evident, that a compelling website experience is successful in creating trust and positive feelings towards the brand and website.

Another interesting insight of this study is the fact that most people (45%) frequently purchase online and predominantly laptops are used, followed by smartphones. Tablets are rarely to never used. As stated by the American marketing association in 2018, mobile devices are the first and most important touchpoint as users engage with their phones on average 76 times a day, totaling up to 145 minutes online and 2.617 times of touching the phone (Haan, Kannan, Verhoef, & Wiesel, 2018). Even though brands are shifting to a mobile-first sales strategy, it should be bear in mind that most sales still occur on a desktop or laptop which is confirmed by the findings of this study. As 55% of people making a purchase after discovering the product on social media, marketers should continue and enhance their multiple device strategy ensuring brand identity across different devices and channels.

10.3 Future research

In this study, only one type of website and brand was used as stimulus material. Moreover, this stimulus was personally selected as having a positive website experience and items measured. Future research might analyze several degrees of positive website experience, to research whether a minimal or certain degree of website experience is sufficient to induce trust and post brand attitudes such as positive feelings and purchase intention. In addition to that, it would be interesting to explicitly compare different brands and consumer responses to e-commerce websites. It might be, that for a certain product or brand, consumer react negatively. As in this thesis a beauty brand's website has been used, it might be that the same analysis leads to different outcomes when another product site is tested.

Additional research might also examine how widespread the effects of website experience are. Are effects limited to certain age groups studied or are they more general? Do people overall prefer a certain website look and does appeal depend on personal preferences with regard to color, structure and visuals. Under what mood condition might website experience imply positive or negative brand attitude? It might be interesting to further analyze whether consumers in a good mood are more likely to positively react to brands on a website in contradiction to people being in a bad mood.

Further research is also needed to assess the duration of post positive brand attitude resulting from website experience. Is the effect of trust only temporary, over the course of even a few hours or one day? Especially due to the fact that consumers are presented with several brands

on diverse channels, they get in touch with several brands in a short period of time. In 2011, Sahin, Zehir and Kitapci studied the effect of brand experiences, trust and satisfaction on building brand loyalty and concluded that the main output of brand experience is brand loyalty. According to their findings, brand experience creates and develops trust-based relationships between brand and customer and results show that brand trust has a significant effect on brand loyalty (Azize, Cemal, & Hakan, 2011). In addition to that, brand experience is related to sensations, feelings and cognitions evoke by brand-related stimuli such as the website. However, the present study did not examine brand loyalty neither brand experience in detail, which could be therefore implemented as an extension of the current framework.

In relation to hedonic and utilitarian characteristics of website experience, future analysis could provide additional insights by investigating whether items such as layout, design, appeal, flow, ease of use and navigation show hedonic or utilitarian orientations and whether they have a different impact on positive brand attitude resulting from a website. Findings by (Bilgihan A. , 2016) covering Gen Y consumer loyalty in online shopping revealed that hedonic features such as aesthetic appeal motivates Gen Y in online contexts. Besides, utility of a website favor purchase intention and Bilgihan et. al findings showed that utilitarian features have a direct effect on e-loyalty.

According to the AIDA model, marketers must achieve these four communication goals in order to get potential customers moving from product awareness to the actual purchase. The AIDA approach thus assumes a linear-sequential process of the purchasing decision process, in which consumers go through a series of cognitive and affective stages, culminating in a (purchase) action. Further research could build upon all four stages within the AIDA model, as this thesis mainly focused on the “desire” stage.

In general, the research provides a sound basis for future work on website experience, trust and brand attitude.

GLOSSARY

Brand attitude

Brand attitude can be seen as an internal evaluation of the brand that integrates the direct attitude and evaluation of the brand itself (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007).

Correlation analysis

Correlation is a statistical technique that can show whether and how strongly pairs of variables are related (Franzese & Iuliano, 2019). The main result of a correlation is called the *correlation coefficient* (or "r").

Chi-square test

The Chi Square statistic is commonly used for testing relationships between categorical variables (Solutions, 2019). The Chi-Square statistic is most commonly used to evaluate tests of independence when using a crosstabulation (contingency table).

Digital natives

Most researchers define the generation Y, also known as "digital natives", the "Millennial generation", or the "Next generation" (Bilgihan A. , 2016) as a generation born between 1980 and 2000 (Bolton, et al., 2013).

Experience

An experience is an episode, a chunk of time that one went through [...] sights and sounds, feelings and thoughts, motives and actions [...] closely knitted together, stored in memory, labelled, relived and communicated to others (Hassenzahl, 2011).

Flow

Flow is a "crucial component of enjoyment" and is "the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988)

Frequency analysis

Frequency Analysis is an important area of statistics that deals with the number of occurrences (frequency) and analyzes measures of central tendency (Unknown, Researchoptimus, 2019).

Hedonic features

Hedonic attributes deal with the emotional or sensory experiences of online shopping (Batra & Ahtola, 1991) and include visual attraction, self-expression, enduring involvement and joy (Chiu, Wang, Fang, & Huang, 2014), (F.J. Martínez-López, 2016).

Omni-channel

Omni-channel retailing — or, *omnichannel* (meaning, all channels) — is a fully-integrated approach to commerce that provides shoppers a unified experience across online and offline channels (e.g., touchpoints) (Walker, 2018).

Trust

Consumer's willingness to accept vulnerability in an online transaction based on positive expectations of the future behaviour of an e-retailer (Kimery & McCord, 2002).

Utilitarian feature

Utilitarian attributes deal with the utility or functional value of an object (Batra & Ahtola, 1991) and include desire for control, efficiency, product information, ease of payment, convenience, and perceived ease of use (F.J. Martínez-López, 2014).

Webmospherics

In the virtual Internet context, the strategy of developing a specific atmosphere, i.e. the webmosphere, is known as webmospherics. Webmospherics is directly linked to the five human senses through elements that are adapted to stimulating positive sensations directly linked to these senses and subsequently leading to positive experiences (Okonkwo U. , 2010).

Word-of-mouth

Oral or written recommendation by a satisfied customer to the prospective customers of a good or service (BusinessDictionary, 2019).

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