

Creating memorable customer experience

– The case for E-tailers of vintage apparel and fashion pieces

Thesis – Bachelor
Business Administration

Linn Bank
Ludwig Skalare
Mathilda Widerberg

2020: 2020.1.14



HÖGSKOLAN I BORÅS

Title: Creating memorable customer experience - The case for vintage E-tailers of apparel and fashion pieces

Year of publication: 2020

Authors: Linn Bank, Ludwig Skalare & Mathilda Widerberg

Supervisor: Sandhiya Goolaup

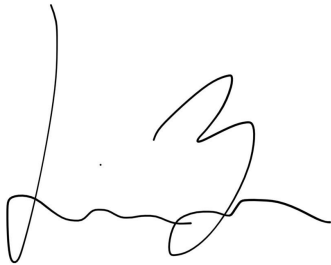
Abstract

Owing to technological development, companies want to transmit a memorable customer experience to their customer in order to enhance their competitive advantage. The purpose of this thesis is twofold - (1) to explore how E-tailers of vintage are working to create memorable online customer experiences and (2) to identify the challenges vintage E-tailers face whilst trying to create these experiences. Earlier research focusing on consumer experience within an online setting was used as a theoretical framework. Semi-structured interviews with eight successful companies, all working with selling vintage online was conducted, and conclusions using thematic analysis were drawn. The findings showed that the most important factors were unique and wide assortment, establishing trust, and adequate communication. The study also shows that the main challenges are related to the complex assortment and its growth, as well as the consumer attitudes. In contrast to the current literature, this study shows that the utilitarian feature is not important and it is something that the customers take for granted. The hedonic features are perceived as being of higher importance. A suggested framework of how to create memorable customer experiences in the context of vintage is also constructed.

Keywords: memorable experience, online customer experience, vintage, online, E-tailer, E-commerce

Preface

We want to give a special thank you to our supervisor, Sandhiya Goolaup, who has been a great support during this study. Additionally, a special thank you to all companies who contributed to our research. Thank you to Delicate Vintage, Haiendo, PlugMePlease, L'étoile Luxury Vintage, Vintage Threads, Ambroeus Milano, One Scoop Store, and The Vintage Studio. Furthermore, we appreciate the help of our opponents, and lastly, The University of Borås for our three years at the university.



Linn Bank



Ludwig Skalare



Mathilda Widerberg

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Problem discussion	6
1.3 Purpose and questions	8
2 Earlier Research	9
2.1 Customer Experience	9
2.1.1 Customer experience online	10
2.1.2 Memorable customer experience	10
2.2 Hedonic and utilitarian values in online experiences	11
2.3 Success factors for E-tailers	12
2.3.1 Virtual community	12
2.3.2 E-service quality	13
2.3.3 Assortment	13
2.3.4 Website design	14
2.3.5 Brand Identity	15
2.3.6 Summary	16
3 Methodology	17
3.1 Choice of method	17
3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews	17
3.1.2 Interview guide	18
3.1.3 Sampling	18
3.1.4 Selection of interviewees	19
3.1.5 Collection of data	20
3.1.6 Analysis	21
3.1.7 Ethical considerations	22
3.1.8 Validity and reliability in interpretative research	23
3.2 Reflection	23
4 Empirical findings	25
4.1 Factors for creating a memorable customer experience	26
4.1.1 Trust	26
4.1.2 Products	29
4.1.3 Multi-channel	31
4.2 Challenges	34
4.2.1 Product growth	34
4.2.2 Clear communication	35
4.2.3 Consumer attitudes towards pre-owned products	35
5 Discussion	37
6 Conclusion	39
6.1 Limitations and directions for future research	40
References	41

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent years, there has been a shift from traditional retail stores to online shopping. As a result of technological development, the accessibility to purchase goods online is now higher than ever. The Internet development has enhanced the online shopping experience and companies are now encountering new opportunities, as well as challenges. Along with this development, the vintage market has grown, and consumers are becoming more conscious. Owing to the expanding E-commerce, the competitiveness heightens the essential need for companies to create a successful and satisfying customer experience.

In addition to technological development, retailers online (E-tailers) can now easier connect, and more rapidly supply customers to meet their needs and demands (Saghiri, Bernon, Bourlakis & Wilding 2018). E-commerce is gaining in popularity and gets more market shares increasingly, compared to traditional physical stores. By operating online, several factors in different industries have improved and enhanced the way of everything from communicating with customers, logistics, and administrative tasks to creating more targeted customer offers (Srinivasan, Anderson & Ponnayolu 2002). Managing businesses online is becoming more popular, which enhances competition between companies. Companies continuously need to develop their businesses to stay competitive and to be ahead of the game. A way to improve competitiveness could be to generate a positive experience for customers (Santos 2003; Pine & Gilmore 1998). To sell a service or product primarily for its physical existence is not enough today (Boswijk, Thijssen & Peeleen 2007). A customer desires to purchase a product for the story behind it, and not particularly for the physical product (Jensen 1999). Several studies have shown to focus on how to generate customer experience online, with the prerequisites that an online platform in terms of a webshop includes (Blazquez 2014; Fernández & Boluda 2012; Evanschitzky, Iyer, Hesse & Ahlert 2004). Customers want an experience; in other words, a purchase that involves a memorable treat that stretches beyond expectations (Pine & Gilmore 1998). Customers are filled with satisfaction and enjoyment when perceiving a memorable customer experience. Pine and Gilmore (1998) defines the phenomenon of a memorable experience as when a customer develops a feeling of satisfaction during an experience, and the experience becomes memorable when something value-added is attached to the initial stage while purchasing a product and service.

Furthermore, another important area under development, due to the expanding E-commerce, is, as stated, fashion E-tailing. Different kinds of online fashion are rising in popularity, and the resale market is growing fast. Moreover, a clear trend reflecting an increasing awareness regarding textile consumption has been seen in the new 20s, which has paved the way for the vintage market. Beard (2008) highlights the growing interest of unique and price worthy products bought in second-hand stores. The desire to acquire vintage products is reflected in the trend of wanting to be perceived as authentic, combined with the mistrust in international brands (Tungate, 2008; DeLong, Heinemann & Reiley 2005). The definition of vintage apparel and fashion pieces is, according to numerous authors, something luxurious, priced higher than normal second-hand, and every piece consists of its history (Cornett 2010; Gerval 2008; DeLong, Heinemann & Reiley 2005;). Garments and accessories from different eras are

transmitting different stories and emotions, and the vintage market further enhances the possibility of being unique (DeLong, Heinmann & Reiley 2005). Vintage apparel is nowadays more convenient to locate because of the spread on several platforms, both because of the increasing interest and the technological development of E-commerce. According to ThreadUp (2019), the market for second-hand fashion will grow from (USD) \$24B to \$51B from 2018 to 2023. Technical innovations, constantly fluctuating demand and customer experiences, as well as expectations on second-hand digital sales, contribute to a market in major development.

As E-commerce and vintage are markets of both greater interest and growth, it is highly valuable for E-tailers in the vintage context to have common knowledge of how to create a customer experience online. Customer experience is the summary of the availability, quality, product value, and services the company provides for the customer (Cundari 2015). An understanding of customer experience is crucial, since the customers' experience and their involvement throughout their purchase journey become essential in determining whether they will return or not. With that said, a fruitful customer experience leads to customer retention (Cundari 2015). The relatively new context of E-tailing has created the phenomenon of online customer experience. Even though working online has enhanced companies' abilities to manage their businesses, it comes with new challenges and opportunities for companies to create a memorable customer experience. There are currently numerous actors worldwide operating in the online second-hand market. There are many different business models and functions for value creation because of challenges regarding supply chains, logistics, quality, quantities, and more. By reference to the growing second-hand market, one can see great opportunities for the companies that best meet customer needs (ThreadUp 2019). Therefore, it is of high importance for vintage E-tailers to create memorable customer experiences in order to stay competitive and successful.

1.2 Problem discussion

Due to the increasing E-commerce, fashion platforms face challenges and opportunities whilst trying to satisfy their customers. At the beginning of this era, fashion companies were facing greater difficulties with operating online than other industries, because the way of transmitting the in-store experience online was more challenging when it came to fashion and clothing (Blazquez 2014). The unique limitations and challenges that go along with online second-hand business models, such as a complex supply chain, and handling products in quantities of one, make the vintage context an interesting phenomenon to study. The resale phenomenon has been widely investigated by ThreadUp (2019), claiming it to be a market of rapid expansion in the upcoming years.

Whether a service or product is to be sold, online or in-store, customer experience is necessary (Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen 2007). The increasing number of digital platforms, webshops, and E-tailers has led to numerous studies on the topic. Stressing the expanding market of fashion E-tailers, the importance and challenge of delivering a customer experience out of the ordinary are crucial. The second-hand market is currently estimated at 24 \$B and growing 10% every year (ThreadUp 2019). It is an entirely new market with unique attributes, opportunities, and challenges, which is why further research is necessary. Considering the

increased awareness regarding consumption, and the emerging interest of second-hand sales, a gap in current studies regarding vintage and second-hand is highlighted (ThreadUp 2019).

A review of the literature pertaining to consumer experience with an online retailing setting reveals that customer experience can serve in favor of the company (e.g. Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016; Cundari 2015; Meyer & Schwager 2007; Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen 2007). The customer experience a company offers can be used as a competitive advantage to differentiate from competitors (Pine & Gilmore 1998). In order to stay competitive as an online retailer, the company ought to create something the customer will remember after the purchase. Therefore, E-tailers need to understand how to build experience throughout their channels. Customer retention and loyalty are described as one of the main challenges for companies, as they are directly related to profitability. The customer's experience functions as a key contributor to retention and loyalty, as well as establishing customer relationships (Cundari 2015). This portrays the importance of customer experience both from a business perspective in order to stay competitive, and from an analysis perspective as a research subject. In current studies on online customer experiences, there is an insufficient description of what makes an online shopping experience memorable, as well as detecting the challenges that go along with it. It is essential to establish an element that will transform into a critical factor for the customer's return, which creates success for the company (Röllecke, Huchzermeier & Schröder 2018).

Lou, Wang, Zhang, Niu and Tu (2020) conducted a study on an online second-hand platform, where the focus was to identify how community and E-commerce build trust within a consumer-to-consumer perspective. The study highlights that E-commerce service quality and virtual community have positive effects on customers' purchase intention. Their E-Commerce service quality theory consisted of the following factors; System Quality, Products Variety, Service Support, and Security Assurance. However, the context differs from business-to-consumer. An additional limitation is that the study only has been examined on one website in China and does not investigate on how the purchase can be memorable. Previous research on online customer experience found that website or app, ease-of-use, utilitarian and hedonic features, personalization, and social interactions are the foundations of online customer experiences (Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016). The study explains how customer experience generates brand engagement, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) for the company. The study has limitations, as it does not investigate how these factors contribute to a memorable experience in addition with the importance of the social element in creating a memorable online customer experience.

Previous studies have mainly been focusing on customer experience, success factors and satisfaction (e.g. Lou et al. 2020; Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016). In the vintage context, no studies on how to make the experience memorable are found, making this context a research gap. The memorable aspect is important due to the expanding and dynamic markets of vintage and E-commerce. Customers desire a unique shopping experience, and it is of high importance that companies offer a high level of satisfaction. Because of the expansion, the vintage E-tailers need more in-depth knowledge of how they can contribute to a memorable experience, in order to stay competitive. Additionally, it can be argued that the current state of knowledge is limited since online vintage is a relatively new and uninvestigated subject.

Hence, this study will have the purpose of finding the determinants of how vintage E-tailers can create a memorable customer experience, in addition to the challenges they are facing

1.3 Purpose and questions

This is an explorative study focusing on understanding the different factors that create a memorable customer experience in the context of vintage E-tailing. The purpose of the study is to investigate how vintage E-tailers develop experiences that are successful in the way of leading to a transaction as well as creating a memorable experience. Limitations are set to only select companies operating in the online vintage-context, that have their own online webshop, with a geographical base in Europe. The research questions of this study are as follows:

- What key factors are contributing to creating a memorable experience in the context of vintage online?
- What are the challenges vintage E-tailers face while creating a memorable experience?

2 Earlier Research

2.1 Customer Experience

Customer experience is a broad subject that has been widely studied by numerous authors (e.g. Cundari 2015; Walls, Okumus, Wang & Kwun 2011; Meyer & Schwager 2007; Schmitt 1999). Walls et al. (2011) did an epistemological review where they investigate different perspectives and definitions of experiences. According to the authors, consumer experiences can be studied using either a psychological, anthropological, ethnological, marketing, or economical perspective. These perspectives illustrate different ways the consumer perceive and processes the overall experience. Regardless of perspective, the authors explain how consumer experiences are multidimensional, individual, and unique for everyone. A customer seeks to perceive a purchase that delivers a memorable experience, something that delivers more than the actual product or service. Cundari (2015) states that the interest in customer experience, among companies, arose because of the positive impact it has on all different features in the business, and how it can make the company more successful. Companies are using experiences in order to create emotion and to make the customers feel, relate, or create a sense of satisfaction towards a product or service (Schmitt 1999).

Schmitt (1999), identified numerous factors needed to create an experience; (1) sense, (2) feel, (3) think, (4) act, or (5) relate. By regulating these elements, different types of experiences can be created. A way to intensify the customer experience is achieved by combining the elements, and the most powerful experience is the one where all factors are combined. Customer experience is created by a connection between all parts of the purchase journey. The overall experience, created by the company, determines the extent of the long-lasting relationship with the customer.

Scholars have defined customer experience as the customer's perception, and reaction, towards all parts of the purchase journey in combination with the service, offers, customer support, and brand image (Pine & Gilmore 2020; Cundari 2015; Meyer & Schwager 2007). Meyer and Schwager (2007) explain, from a customer's perspective, that the customer experience can be perceived by direct or indirect contact. Direct contact usually occurs when the customer purchases any goods, use support services, or visit the website. Indirect contact is when the potential customer interacts with an unplanned advertisement. For example, an unplanned advertisement can be reviewed or word-of-mouth (WOM). Technological development is generating new ways of consumer contact with a company, thereby creating new experiences for this consumer. Cundari (2015) states the importance of interaction with the customer, in all essential touchpoints, throughout the purchase journey. The most important moments of interaction are to be found by breaking down and investigating the entire purchase journey. The author explains that when these crucial moments are found, the company can more easily determine which content and message that need to be delivered, at that specific time in order to create the most successful customer experience. Additionally, Pine & Gilmore (2020) clarifies how customer experiences are crucial to gain competitive advantages that are difficult to copy by other brands. Furthermore, customer experiences encompass customer experiences online, as well as memorable customer experiences, which will be elaborated in the following sections.

2.1.1 Customer experience online

When it comes to online experiences, it works in a similar way as physical experiences. A factor of high importance in order to create a positive customer experience is satisfaction. Indeed, this is also in line with Evanschitzky et al. (2004) who explain that overall customer satisfaction in traditional retail works similarly in E-commerce. The author highlights the accessibility and added value as critical factors for satisfied customers online (Evanschitzky et al. 2004). From a customer's perspective, personal interaction between a customer and company is stated to be more memorable than the actual web page, which is crucial for the company to keep in mind. The technological development shapes the online market, and customers can now engage with E-tailers using their computers, tablets, and smartphones (Bilgihan 2016). Purchasing is today more applicable across different devices, and E-tailers need to create a positive customer experience in order to meet the customer's expectations (Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016). Novak, Hoffman and Yung (2000) define online customer experience as the cognitive state experienced during navigation on a website. Prior research has illustrated that in contrast to the traditional physical store experience, the online retail environment is missing some elements, such as smell, taste, and touch, but obtains a higher level of flexibility concerning time and space (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis 2001). Berkhout (2019) agrees, stating that the online shopping experience is rather visual than multi-sensory. Customers now expect great service consistently, whenever and wherever they are, regardless of the platform they are using (Siwicki 2014). Neslin et al. (2006) have been influential regarding multi-channel retailing. Multi-channel retailing is defined as deployment, design, coordination, and evaluation of channels to enhance customer value through effective customer acquisition, retention, and development (Neslin et al. 2006). Mathwich, Malhotra and Rigdon (2001) indicate how a multi-channel environment is crucial in creating an experience filled with value. Through providing an excellent customer experience, a company can increase its competitive advantages. One way of increasing competitiveness is by increasing the *flow* (Novak, Hoffman & Yung 2000). Hoffman and Novak (1996) explain how the flow is created by the perceived balance of seamless interactivity, amusement, and a high degree of arousal, in addition to the use of talents in an online context. Additionally, it has been reported that customers' in the state of flow are completely absorbed in the interaction, and thoughts not linked to navigation on the website, are being neglected (Pine & Gilmore 2020; Novak, Hoffman & Yung 2000). In other words, the customer is totally involved and in command of the experience (Bilgihan, Okumus, Nusair & Bujisic 2014).

2.1.2 Memorable customer experience

Additionally, to previously mentioned factors, customers need to be filled with enjoyment and satisfaction to perceive a positive and memorable customer experience. One way of doing so is to stage a value-added perception in the customer's state of mind (Flagestad 2006). A memorable experience is established when companies intentionally create a service in relation to the purchasing stage, which is perceived with a higher value than the actual service or product, in other words, staging somewhat surprising (Pine & Gilmore 2002). According to the authors, memorable customer experience contains five key factors: theme, harmonizing impressions with positive cues, eliminating negative cues, mix in memorabilia, and, finally, engaging all five senses (Pine & Gilmore 1998). These factors are essential in creating a memorable online customer experience. All except for the last are as important to online as offline shopping. To begin with, a perfectly outlined theme simplifies the customer's thoughts

around what they might expect. It enhances the storytelling and captures the customer's attention (Pine & Gilmore 1998). According to Jensen (1999), stories play a bigger role in decision making. Companies use stories to communicate the brand's message, mission, and value in the hope that the customers feel a need for belonging (Kaufman 2003). Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang (2016) suggest that after satisfying basic needs, such as availability and support, the E-commerce companies should focus on creating a compelling experience that "hooks" the consumer through putting them in the state of flow, as this enhances competitiveness and encourages their return. In addition to a well-established theme, a fulfilled memorable experience consists of enduring impressions. The impressions are the outcome of the experience and fulfills the theme. The literature states that companies use cues that illustrate the desirable feeling they want to transmit to their customers'. Pine and Gilmore (1998) explains cues as features that enhances the feeling and supports the theme. A cue creates the experience and makes it smoother, as well as generating the impressions. A cue could be a special kind of website design in order to transmit a special experience and brand image. The authors also state that cues distracting or disorienting customers from the programmed experience needs to be eliminated (Pine & Gilmore 1998). In order to erase negative cues the companies turn each cue to positive, in order to make the theme more appealing and believable (Pine & Gilmore 2020). Moreover, Pine & Gilmore (2020) sums up that a memorable experience is created by gaining the customer's attention with the right kind of content.

2.2 Hedonic and utilitarian values in online experiences

Developing a successful customer experience requires a marketing strategy that meets the customer's expectation of the experience. In an online context, a customer seeks to find a balance between usefulness and entertainment, in other words, utilitarian and hedonic values (Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016). Schmitt (1999) highlights the mixture of rational and emotional drives for creating a customer experience. Different studies explain how a successful experience is established by combining hedonic and utilitarian motivations and features (Bilgihan 2016; Childers, Carr, Peck & Carson 2001; Babin & Attaway 2000). (Bilgihan et al. 2014) describe the importance of hedonic and utilitarian features in online customer experiences. Utilitarian features relate to the useful elements of the webshop, that are contributing to the ease of use (Bilgihan et al. 2014; Childers et al. 2001). Another study concerning infomercial shoppers by Donthu and Gilliland (1996), clarifies that the internet was identified as the optimal channel for consumers with utilitarian needs. Such needs can include well-functioning navigation (Babin, Darden & Griffin 1994), time-saving (Cotte & Ratneshwar 2003), comfort, and money saving (Huang 2005). Utilitarian values encompass the efficiency of the shopping experience where decisions are made upon logical evaluation of product information (Fiore, Jin & Kim 2005). To summarize, utilitarian values are described as an evaluation of the benefits and sacrifices associated with the function (Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016).

Kim and Lim (2001) highlight the importance of satisfaction and valuable information for satisfaction. The hedonic feature is associated with joy and entertainment during the experience (Bilgihan 2016; Babin, Darden & Griffin 1994). The mentioned factor can be experienced through sounds, visuals, taste, tactual, or with our sense of smell, all related to feelings and entertainment (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). In the context of E-commerce

sounds, graphics, visuals, entertainment such as games, and amusing product information are a few central factors for creating hedonic features (Childers et al. 2001). Additionally, the authors state that customers anticipate finding interactive experience more amusing than what is expected in a physical environment. Bilgihan et al. (2014) and Kim and Lim (2001) agree and clarify that, because of a developing online market, customers find satisfaction and convenient elements in the shopping experience more valuable than price and availability. Before, the prior feature was utilitarian benefits, but due to the increasing market, customers now desire to find the shopping experience amusing as well as satisfying (Fiore, Jin & Kim 2005; Szymanski & Hise 2000).

2.3 Success factors for E-tailers

A review of the literature reveals that there are several factors that are important in determining a positive customer experience (Lou et al. 2020; Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016; Szymanski & Hise 2000). There is consensus in the literature that virtual community, E-service quality, assortment, website design, and brand identity (Lou et al. 2020; Bilgihan et al. 2016; Park & Stoel 2005; Szymanski & Hise 2000) are all crucial factors in creating a positive customer experience online. The factors are treated one by one in the following sections.

2.3.1 Virtual Community

From a brand's perspective a virtual community provides a platform for co-creation of a consumption experience environment with consumers (Denegri-Knott, Detley & Schroeder, 2006). The potential of virtual communities is enhanced by the development of new technologies that facilitate multimedia and immersive exchanges (e.g. virtual worlds, content sharing, collective intelligence, and social networking platforms). These virtual communities support ongoing relationships between geographically dispersed consumers and brands that would otherwise be difficult to maintain (Rowley, Kupiec-Teahan & Leeming, 2007). This phenomenon is a unique way for brands to strengthen their brand-equity if they can use their customers' motivations (Hassan & Casaló 2016).

A virtual community is slightly different from a physical community (Lou et al. 2020). Factors that differentiate the virtual community from traditional is the more accessible scope where the requirement of distance is non-existing, the opportunity to be anonymous, as well as more ways of interaction with the group (Akar, Mardikyan & Dalgic 2019; Wirtz et al. 2013). Recent studies clarify that social interaction is highly valuable and shape the customer's experience (Lin & Chuang 2018; Bilghan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016). Customers engaging in online communities want to increase their knowledge and enhance their interaction among members (Wirtz et al. 2013). Woisetchläger, Hartleb and Blut (2008) clarify that when the expected expectations, within the community, are met, the level of satisfaction heightens. Previous studies have emphasized how communication through the internet strengthens the feeling of trust (Casaló, Flavián & Guinalíu 2016). Customers wish to illuminate risks, and by communicating with other members, the community can help reduce the uncertainty regarding questions where answers are nowhere to be found (Wirtz et al. 2013). As the number of online communities increase, customers' can effortlessly jump between communities with a few clicks.

Moreover, companies are able to use communities to obtain inside information about customer needs and their desires. This enhances and simplifies further development of the companies' upcoming products or services (Kim, Bae & Kang 2008). In according to this, previous studies have emphasized how virtual communities enhance the sales and affects the purchase intention as well as managing old customers to stay engaged in the business (Blazevic et al. 2013; Adjei, Noble C. & Noble S. 2010). The previous study shows that communities obtain valuable information that companies can use to create long-term relationships (Casaló, Flavián & Guinalú 2016).

2.3.2 E-service quality

E-service quality is defined as the customers' expectation and appraisal of both provided service and offers online (Santos 2003). E-commerce allows consumers to order goods from their homes to their homes every hour of the day (Lin & Chuang 2018). To purchase online, the customer needs to obtain a high level of trust. Bilgihan (2016), clarifies how trust is essential for a customer online in order to create loyalty and a long-term relationship. If a customer does not trust the website, the customer will not be loyal to the brand, even though the customer is satisfied with the purchased product. E-service provides help to customers, with the ambition of satisfying their needs (Santos 2003). Furthermore, the author states that a high level of E-service provides a higher amount of customer retention, satisfaction, and profitability (Santos 2003). Moreover, the author clarifies that e-service increases competitiveness, mainly by providing a high level of service that makes the customer experience and mission more efficient. Additionally, previous studies have shown that a well-functioning E-service is crucial for success and for creating a positive experience, since a comparison between sites and prices is considerably easier today, which increases competitiveness (Park & Stoel 2005; Srinivasan, Anderson & Kishore 2002; Santos 2003). This has also been explored in previous studies by Szymanski and Hise (2000), where the importance of product information and customer service is highlighted. Sites that easily communicate information about product or service in a way that fits the customer's preference will enhance the feeling of confidence and calm (Rose, Hair & Clark, 2011) and satisfy the customers purchasing criteria (Park & Stoel 2005). In addition, Mossberg (2007) explains the importance of providing a high level of service, since poor customer service results in an unpleasant experience. Compared to traditional face-to-face retail, E-tailing offers a more intense opportunity to provide information regarding the products or services, which needs to be carried through in a way that substitutes for the sensory experience in a physical store (Park & Stoel 2005).

2.3.3 Assortment

Berkhout (2019) explains that a company with a wide assortment increases the ability to serve and provide customers with what they desire. The author additionally defines a larger variety among assortment, as one of the main reasons why a customer selects the store, aligned with the price. Moreover, the size is not the biggest factor, but the variety and the perception of a wide assortment through evenness are essential (Berkhout 2019; Kahn 2017). A study conducted by Kahn (2017) highlights the importance of a convenient online assortment that is easy to process. Besides, Bilgihan (2016) states that the success of any E-commerce depends

on how accessible the products are. However, customer experience decides whether there will be purchases and possible purchases in the future. Furthermore, Szymanski and Hise (2000) indicate that convenience and satisfaction are obtained by browsing through different sites or categories where a broad product assortment is found. As online stores can offer a larger amount of products than physical ones, it is easier to satisfy the customer. Online stores easily provide the customer with what they desire, even more, accessible, and with higher quality due to filter-functions (Berkhout 2019; Szymanski & Hise 2000).

Additionally, Berkhout (2019) highlights how a unique assortment increases the encouragement to shop for these specific products. A previous study clarifies how vintage retailers can position themselves by offering unique products in line with the owner's expertise, which is used as a competitive advantage (Channing et al. 2012). Furthermore, in comparison to physical retail stores, E-tailers lack the same cost structure. For instance, they have no rent, sales advisors and a much lower search-cost for both buyer and seller, which enables E-tailers to offer a more competitive price compared to their competitors with physical stores (Jones, 2001). Hence, a previous study indicates that the price is of high importance for the customer and needs to be positioned clearly on the website (Burke 2002). Customers want to purchase goods of high quality, conveniently, for a good price. Although vintage consumers are distinguished from normal fast-fashion consumers, the price factor is still in focus while purchasing (Channing et al. 2012).

2.3.4 Website design

Whereas price, assortment, community, and service are important, the website where everything happens is also a highly essential factor for success. Hasan (2016) examined the potential irritations in online shopping and highlighted the importance of website design. The visual, navigational, and informational design characteristics are factors that may lead to irritation and affect the online customer experience negatively (Hasan 2016). Furthermore, the result shows that it is crucial for clothing E-tailers to make visual attributes rich and attractive, as this affects the consumer's judgment and the overall experience (Hasan 2016). Another study made by Berkhout (2019) highlighted how space among products distributed on the website enhances the shopping experience and lowers the level of stress. Online customers want to perceive a feeling of control over the entire shopping experience, thus indicating that several factors related to the website need to simplify the experience (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis 2001). For instance, links need to be correct and easy to navigate. The navigation characteristic is one factor that has shown to influence perceived irritation (Hasan 2016). In order to avoid this, the website needs to have seamless and quick navigation, which enables the consumer to complete their task without too much effort and time consumption (Berkhout 2019; Hasan 2016). Additionally, the least influential factor in perceived irritation was the website's information design, such as product descriptions (Hasan 2016). However, the study showed that the informational design impacts the experience and will, if not designed favorably, lead to irritation and loss in sales (Kahn 2017; Hasan 2016). Another study by Lee and Kozar (2006) supports that information design is one crucial website design characteristic to attract consumers online. Furthermore, Kahn (2017) highlights the importance of images, since they are easy to process, and the importance of using symmetric shapes, since they are easier to perceive than irregular shapes. These factors are essential for implementing a

positive customer experience. In addition, the text next to the products needs to be well-conceived, since this can affect the overall satisfaction (Berkhout 2019).

Moreover, a study made by Eroglu, Machleit, and Davis (2001) highlights the atmosphere of online retailing. In contradiction to the previously mentioned study by Hasan (2016), this study does not solely focus on irritations that lead to a negative experience; instead, they highlight how the design of the website leads to approach or avoidance. Eroglu, Machleit and Davis (2001) created a model to explain how atmospherics affect customer response in an online retail environment. The online environmental clues were categorized into high task-relevant and low task-relevant (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis 2001). These were further defined as high task-relevant cues that help the customer directly with fulfilling their purchase task, for example, price and description of the specific product, returns, and delivery policies (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis 2001). A low task-relevant cue is the more unnecessary information, which is not important to complete the purchasing task and goal of the shopping. Online environmental cues can lead to a shift in the customer's state of mind and changed shopping outcomes (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis 2001). Additionally, a study conducted by Bilgihan (2016) clarifies how flow and positive customer experience attributes to loyalty against the company. To stand out from competitors selling similar products, the E-tailers need to pay attention to both loyalty and shopping experience towards the customer. Moreover, transmitting both hedonic and utilitarian features on the web design provides a positive customer experience (Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016).

2.3.5 Brand Identity

Bilgihan (2016) clarifies the importance of branding and how the brand itself can add value to the products. This added value is itself called *brand equity*, and brand equity can make companies highly competitive (Aaker 2009). Besides, Aaker defines brand identity as a set of brand assets and liabilities, and how these are linked to the brand. The name of the brand, in line with the logo, can add value to the products. Prior research suggests how companies transmitting their brand value, as unified customer experience, will have a positive return in profit and reputation (Cundari 2015). Aaker (2009) clarifies how companies have tried to differentiate and created their brand by product attributes, packaging, and different kinds of advertising throughout the years. Brand identity is presented slightly differently for E-tailers, namely to audio, visual, and other intangible devices, while traditional retailers use mostly tangible devices in-store.

Moreover, Cundari (2015) highlights that trust between customers and companies have decreased the last several years, mainly because of the differences between what a brand says and what a brand does. Customers demand transparency, and when dissimilarities between mission and action are visible, the level of trust decreases. Mossberg (2007) explains how brands can create a story to promote products and transmit a feeling, which, in the long run, make them more successful. Storytelling generates positive feelings in a customer's state of mind and is perceived as more convincing than facts. Additionally, a prior study highlights how stories increase the level of trust, raise brand awareness, and make the brand unique (Kelley & Littman 2006; Mossberg & Nissen Johanssen 2006; Kaufman, 2003). Consumers seek experiences appealing to their emotions and dreams, and stories help to create such experiences (Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu 2005; Silverstein & Fiske 2003). Brand stories need to

be credible and well-executed to be successful. The audience should be able to identify with its characters, and the message should put the brand in a positive light (Mossberg & Nissen Johansen 2006). Brands act as an important factor in purchase decisions (Park & Stoel 2005; Gordon 1993), and a sound brand image helps companies to compete in a competitive market (Ta-Lin & Shuang-Shii 2018). In line with this, Park and Stoel (2005) described that brands work as internal information for consumers, and their brand familiarity will affect the purchase. In the online environment, brand familiarity is deeply important as it decreases risks associated with shopping online (Park & Stoel 2005). It is, therefore, crucial that E-tailers communicate their brand thoroughly (Park & Stoel 2005). Keller (2008) highlights how brands with higher equity can put a higher price on their products and trade more efficiently, thus in the end, be more productive in communication. Research by Bilighan (2016) has shown a positive correlation between the hedonic features of an online experience with the level of communicated brand equity. It is stated that websites providing hedonic values also created positive brand equity (Bilighan 2016). In addition to that, successful brand equity leads to loyalty at E-commerce platforms (Bilighan 2016).

2.4 Summary

To present an overview of earlier research, a summary of the literature above is presented. Scholars have defined customer experience as the customer's perception, and reaction, towards all parts of the purchase journey in combination with the service, offers, customer support, and brand image (Pine & Gilmore 2020; Cundari 2015; Meyer & Schwager 2007). Online customer experience is very similar, however, it is highlighted that a well-coordinated multi-channel presence of a company is important, regardless of the device the customer is using (Siwicki 2014). A memorable customer experience is when the customer gets a feeling of both enjoyment and satisfaction (Flagestad 2006). To achieve this, E-tailers must satisfy both hedonic and utilitarian needs (Bilighan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016). As stated earlier in the literature, Virtual community, E-service Quality, Assortment, Website Design, and Brand Identity (Lou et al. 2020; Bilighan et al. 2016; Park & Stoel 2005; Szymanski & Hise 2000) are all crucial factors in creating a positive customer experience online.

3 Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of how the data was collected, the sampling approach and a tablet of the interviewees. Also, an examination of the analysis process is provided followed by ethical considerations, the validity and reliability of the study, and finally a reflective section.

3.1 Choice of method

In order to provide insights on how vintage E-tailers are working with creating a memorable customer experience, a qualitative research approach was considered the most applicable. A combination of empirical data and theory creates meaning and reliability within the subject (Bryman & Bell 2017), which is why it was chosen. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2017) suggests a qualitative approach when the existing research of the study topic is limited. Therefore, due to the nature of the research question and lack of research in the specific topic of memorable customer experiences in the context of vintage online, a qualitative study was considered most suitable. This study can be classified as being abductive in nature since the theoretical framework used in earlier research was added to our studies of inductive analysis. The method has an abductive approach as earlier research has influenced the interview guide and the development of the themes. An abductive method is, in this case, preferable to acknowledge connections and relations in the area of research and to create a theory about social reality, which is further examined by Bryman and Bell (2017).

3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

The research question of this study is focused on understanding the key factors that constitute a memorable customer experience. A more in-depth insight into the company's ideas and ulterior motives is needed to present the result. In order to collect our findings, the gathering of data and fieldwork has been conducted in forms of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of implicating pre-decided themes that are necessary to investigate the questions at hand (Bryman & Bell 2017), and were collected from the earlier review research. The semi-structured form leaves space for flexibility in adjusting the questions and picking up themes that could be useful for the research (Bryman & Bell 2017). The exploratory take on the subject will be nurtured by the flexibility to pay attention to valuable themes that may come up during the data collection. Additionally, the interviewees can answer the questions in their own, free way, which is suitable for getting to the interviewees' thoughts and ideas behind their creation of customer experience. A semi-structured interview contains a guide of subjects related research questions, which minimizes the risk of discussing irrelevant subjects non-related to the topic (Bryman & Bell 2017). In contrast to a structured interview approach, the semi-structured form gives the interviewee space to choose what is considered important and highlight it (Bryman & Bell 2017). This was highly valuable for our study as we wished to interpret their own beliefs. Furthermore, the topic of our issue was rather clear from the start, and we aimed to use the interviews to define more research questions along the process, which further supports our choice of semi-structured interview form as exemplified by Bryman and Bell (2017).

Our research is a study of multiple companies, where we wanted to identify recurring themes of how to work with creating memorable customer experiences. In order to be able to analyze

and compare the derived data of several cases, some structure was demanded (Bryman & Bell 2017) in the form of the constructed interview-guide.

3.1.2 Interview guide

Each interview was based on a constructed interview guide (Appendix 1). This was done in order to ensure similar content and maintain structure in each conversation. An interview guide enhanced the analysis process (Bryman & Bell 2017). A review of the existing literature and the most frequently mentioned factors of customer experience makes the basis of the questions. Factors that could be applicable in the context of online vintage were used. The topics included: E-service quality, assortment, website design, brand image, and community. The interview questions can be divided into categories related to the different subjects within the topic. To ensure that our interview guide was adequate for context and purpose, we conducted a physical pilot interview. After the interview, the order of the question-line was slightly changed, and the questions were directed more toward the subject of memorable customer experience. This was done to ensure that the collected data concerned the topic of research.

The interview guide (Appendix 1) was designed to allow the interviewer to probe further in what was discussed during the interviews (Bryman & Bell 2017). The guide aimed to include the topics of interest related to our issue, but with space given to the interviewee's perspective and the possibility to adapt supplementary questions.

As encouraged by Bryman and Bell (2017), it was crucial to prepare the interview by adjusting the guide if necessary, by doing background research of the company. By doing this, we could ask relevant supplement questions related to the themes and the specific company. It also enabled us to react to possible contradictions. In addition to that, the background research prevented missing out on valuable information that the interviewee might not address otherwise. An example of such could be functions of their website, and why these were chosen. Of course, in this scenario, the interviewer needed to avoid asking leading questions to maintain the quality of the study. Therefore, it was crucial to focus on *why* companies operated in a certain way and encourage the interviewee to elaborate on their answers.

3.1.3 Sampling

In the sampling process, a targeted selection, more specifically a criteria-driven selection of interviewees, was used. This is because the interviewees needed to fulfill a pre-decided criterium (Bryman & Bell 2017), namely, working or recently working in vintage E-tailing. A criteria-driven targeted selection was considered the most appropriate due to our question of issue. To answer our issue and understand how vintage E-tailers are working to create memorable experiences, they were a natural choice of analysis units. The interviewees were found by primarily researching for successful webshops that sell vintage online. As these companies aim to be found by potential customers, the easiest way was to google search "vintage online" and "vintage webshop" and then contact the companies via E-mail or a direct message to their official Instagram account. Since these companies had managed to market their business with a successful search engine optimization, they were considered successful. Furthermore, the companies had an established customer base, which also was evidence of success.

In addition, a snowball sampling was conducted, as we finished the interviews by asking who else they thought we should interview. Snowball selection is suitable in the frame of a qualitative study and is a method to undertake when the population of the research can be hard to get in contact with. With this said, the sampling process could, at times, be challenging and to get in contact with more companies via the interviewee's network was highly valuable. As we were partly researching how the companies work to make their customer experience competitive, the interview question about whether they know any other company that we should interview gave us an indication of how familiar they are with other players on the market. Getting to know a network and how people within a context are linked together is another advantage of using snowball selection (Bryman & Bell 2017). In our case, we used this sampling method to unveil the interviewees' knowledge of who their competitors are and to ease the work of finding more suitable companies to interview. Also, this method allowed us to be connected to other people at the company, which meant getting in touch with interviewees that we might not otherwise. In this case, the first interviewee that connected us was an important link to more data (Bryman & Bell 2017).

3.1.4 Selection of interviewees

After reaching out to companies that fulfilled the criteria, we got in contact with eight suitable companies that we conducted interviews with. The interviewees consisted of different managers from Gothenburg, Malmo, Stockholm, London, Amsterdam, and Milan. To ensure that the knowledge gathered was of the higher quality, we preferred to interview managers, which was possible with all companies chosen. The cities chosen were first decided upon the city's size in line with the vintage fashion interest the citizens of the city obtained. We aimed to generalize and see if companies around Europe use the same strategies to create the same successful result and memorable customer experiences. Therefore, a wide variety of cities around Europe was needed to find similarities in the chosen companies' strategies. The interviewees are presented in the table (Table 1) beneath, with further information about each company and the interviewee.

3.1.5 Collection of data

Practical information about the interviews, the interviewees and their companies are presented in the table below (Table 1).

Data Collection Strategies	No of Interviews	Brand	Type of products	Location	Time of operation	Interviewee and Position	Interviewer	Data Collection Tools & Strategies
Semi-structured Interview	1	Haiendo	High end-luxury vintage clothing	Malmo, Sweden	2017	Gustaf Kock Founder	Ludwig Skalare	53 min Zoom interview
Semi-structured Interview	1	PlugMePlease	Luxury vintage pieces and sneakers	Stockholm, Sweden	2017	Emilian Mintas Co-owner & Founder	Ludwig Skalare	41 min Zoom interview
Semi-structured Interview	1	VintageThreads	Affordable vintage/second-hand garments	London, UK	2016	Charlie Oxley Founder & Managing Director	Linn Bank	28 min Zoom interview
Semi-structured Interview	2	L'étoile Luxury Vintage	Luxury vintage high-end bags and accessories	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	2009	1. Sarah Berzel Store & Social Manager 2. Machteld van der Does Growth Manager	1. Linn Bank 2. Mathilda Widerberg	1. 37 min Zoom interview 2. 29 min Zoom Interview
Semi-structured Interview	1	Ambroeus Milano	Vintage clothing	Milano, Italy	2015	Giorgia Dell'Orto Co-founder	Mathilda Widerberg	27 min Zoom interview
Semi-structured Interview	1	Delicate Vintage	Luxury high-end vintage handbags	Gothenburg, Sweden	2014	Niklas Knoph Purchasing Manager	Ludwig Skalare	48 min Physical interview
Semi-structured Interview	1	Vintage Studio	Reworked vintage pieces	London, UK	2019	Lucy Win Founder	Linn Bank	38 min Zoom interview
Questions sent by email	1	One Scoop Store	Second-hand and vintage	London, UK	2017	Holly Watkins Founder	Mathilda (contact person)	Answers via E-mail

Table 1. Information of interviewees

The initial plan of the data collection was to conduct physical interviews with the interviewees. Due to the current situation of Covid-19, this was no longer an option further on in the study process. Instead, eight interviews via Zoom were conducted. One of the interviewees could not participate in a digital video interview as planned due to personal reasons. Instead, the interview questions were sent to her and answered via E-mail. Of course, the collected interview data from an E-mail conversation differs from a video-interview, as it is not of dialogue or conversation character—however, we still found the material usable as the manager fully answered the questions. When analyzing the material we kept this in mind, as written answers and spoken words differ, in that the interviewee might think more about how they express themselves in text. All Zoom-interviews lasted between 27-53 minutes.

There are numerous advantages with online interviews; for instance, it has been highly cost-saving. There was no need to visit the companies, or to use transportation to go there, making it more environmentally friendly and time-saving option. When interviews are conducted on distance, physical, and mental factors have less influence. Disadvantages of conducting interviews online have been related to internet difficulties and sometimes challenging to keep a natural flow in the conversation.

Additionally, the interviews were recorded with the approval of the interviewee and transcribed afterwards. The interviews were transcribed in order to be able to do a more accurate and detailed analysis and interpretation (Bryman & Bell 2017). Recording of the conversation was advantageous as it enabled the interviewer to fully focus on what was being said and to ask suitable supplementary questions. In addition to that, we eliminated possible disturbing factors such as taking notes with the risk of losing focus on valuable data. The transcription was a crucial part, enabling subsequent analysis of the collected material. As we analyzed after the transcription, the whole interviews were transcribed word-by-word.

3.1.6 Analysis

The analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis method. A thematic analysis was used to understand how our empirical data could be categorized and linked to earlier research. In order to establish the themes, the questions from our interview guide were made upon pre-decided categories. The categories were related to different subjects within the topic, such as customer service, products, physical environment (Website), brand and community. These categories were later adjusted and reshaped throughout the analysis process to develop the final themes in the suggested framework. Advantages of thematic analysis as reducing uncertainties related to data analysis are stated by Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016) as well as Bryman and Bell (2017). The model of the analysis process presented by Vaismoradi et al. (2016) was used to a large extent. Furthermore, a thematic analysis approach was considered suitable as it enabled flexibility and is easily adapted to different qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell 2017). Below the analysis process is stressed, followed by an example of how the sub-theme community and main theme trust was developed through the analysis model (Table 2).

- (1) The first step of the analysis process is the initialization step. This includes reading transcriptions of each interview and highlighting important parts and key takeaways. In this initial step the data was coded into the pre-decided categories. Finally, we summarized with reflective notes and the pre-decided themes that occurred the most were highlighted.
- (2) The second step is the construction phase of the analysis process. After reading all transcripts and summary of the key takeaways, we compared the material between the interviews. This enabled us to classify recurring data within and beyond the pre-decided categories. Furthermore, we labeled the data into sub-themes and described these.
- (3) The third step, rectification, meant relating the data and sub-themes to established knowledge and connecting these to the existing literature. Differences and similarities

between sub-themes and pre-decided categories were searched for, and through this the main themes were developed.

(4) The last step of the analysis process is the finalization step. The main theme with including sub-themes are connected to the context and illustrated in the framework of factors contributing to memorable customer experiences (Figure 1).

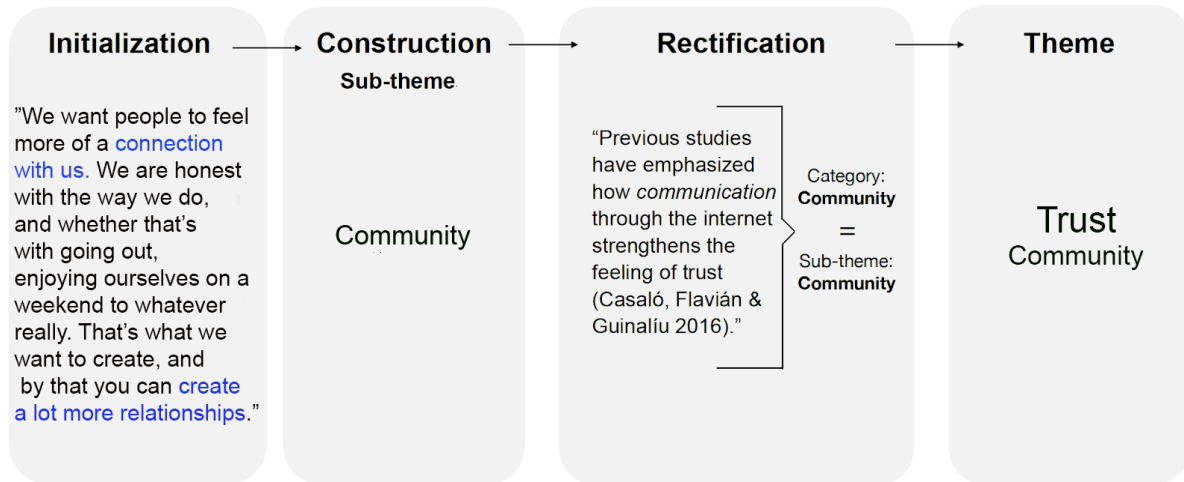


Table 2. Thematic analysis process - an example

Step-by-step:

- Initialization: Communities were highlighted as a crucial part of creating memorable customer experiences.
- Construction: Nine out of nine interviewees stressed communities in the context of building trust and relationships between the customer and the company. Community is, therefore, labeled and described to be recurrently mentioned when addressing trust.
- Rectification: The literature states that communities have a trust strengthening function. The main theme of trust is now set. Community was one of the pre-decided categories initially, and, as the findings state this as an important factor, it is kept.
- Finalization: The main theme trust with the including sub-theme of community is set into the suggested framework of how to create memorable customer experiences.

3.1.7 Ethical considerations

To ensure that this study did not cross any ethical boundaries, we reflected upon possible problem areas. The nature of the issue question does not comprise a sensitive research area. However, there were still some ethical considerations that needed to be treated. This was mostly related to the interviewee's integrity, and confidentiality as Bryman and Bell (2017) referred to as crucial considerations. Before conducting the interviews, we thoroughly explained how we aspired to use the collected data and the topic of the study. This was done in order to keep the transparency high of the study and enhance trustworthiness in the relation of the interviewer and the interviewee. Since we transcribed and recorded the interviews, we informed the interviewees about this, and it was only maintained upon their approval in order to minimize any ethical issues. Furthermore, we clarified that the interviewees could obtain

from answering questions that he or she did not want to. However, this was never a problem, and all questions were answered successfully. In addition, we asked for the interviewee's permission to use their name and the name of the company to provide anonymity if so was wished. All of the interviewees gave us their consent to include their name and name of the company they represented.

3.1.8 Validity and reliability in interpretative research

The reliability, validity, and level of generalization has been examined. Sandberg (2005) suggested appropriate justification criteria for interpretative knowledge production and claims. As our qualitative study is of interpretative character, Sandberg's constructed criteria of communicative, pragmatic, transgressive, validity, and reliability as interpretive awareness could be used.

The communicative validity is used to understand the interviewer and the interviewee, in order to justify that the objects of the study are what is being researched in practice (Sandberg 2005). To do so, we explained the study's content at the beginning of each interview. In addition, we continuously referred to the topic during the following interview questions to reconnect to the subject. We used follow-up questions and encouraged dialogue which enhanced the communicative validity (Sandberg 2005). During the analysis process, communicative validity was incorporated. This was done in a coherent way by following the thematic analysis (Table 2). The next criterion of validity is the pragmatic type, which strives to identify differences and discrepancies between collected material and what is being done in reality (Sandberg 2005). Doing background checks of the companies was crucial to identify such differences and search for coherence. Sandberg (2005) stated that these two forms of validity mainly aim to look for coherence between empirical findings and reality, and the transgressive validity is one important aspect to weigh up that weakness. The transgressive validity focuses more on contradictions, which was implied by, for instance, to look for differences in transcripts rather than similarities that lead to coherence.

The reliability is related to the process of how we conducted the method and interpreted the collected data (Sandberg 2005). Sandberg (2005) further referred to the reliability within interpretive research as interpretive awareness. This implies the need to show the interpretations we have made throughout the entire research process, as well as to be aware of how those have influenced the study. The criteria was derived by following the thematic analysis, and by all of the researchers to code the material individually before compiling the themes, in order to enhance reliability as interpretative awareness. In addition to that, we tried to discuss with each other and become aware of our subjective interpretations, instead of neglecting them.

3.2 Reflection

This section reflects the chosen method and faced difficulties, and issues are highlighted. The possibilities of how the problems may have influenced the results are reflected upon as well.

One of the problematic parts of our research process regarded the coding of the collected data. At times it could be problematic to decide how to label and code into categories, which lead to confusion. On those occasions, it was important to have a dialogue and discussion within

the group of researchers and together reflect on how to divide the data. Also, the previous literature that we used for the thematic analysis was a big help (see Vaismoradi et al. 2016) as it contained coding examples. We learned the importance of discussing and reflecting within the research group, as well as considering methodological literature. To seek help from previous methodological studies could have been done at an earlier stage, as this would have eased our issues and facilitated the study process.

Another challenging part concerned the sampling process, as we found it challenging to find interviewees that fulfilled the criteria. The companies that sell vintage online are already quite few, and many of the companies that we contacted were not interested in conducting an interview. A bigger part of the contacted companies did not respond, and many of those who did reply declined to participate due to lack of time and resources. The snowball sampling was a great tool once we got to talk to the first interviewee who gladly helped us with further contacts and recommendations. Important to be noted is that snowball sampling affects the generalization, as it is not of random selection kind. In addition to that, the snowball sampling may have meant getting in contact with companies that were similar to those we asked to help. This could have influenced the result in a way only to highlight one segment of vintage E-tailers. However, due to the issue of finding interviewees, this was a helpful alternative that gave access to more data. Also, we have reflected over whether we would have gotten a higher response rate if we would have contacted the companies in a different way, such as more in advance or several times.

Since the method is based on semi-structured interviews with eight companies, it would be inadequate to draw any generalizations. Even though all companies are operating in vintage E-tailing, there are a lot of differences regarding different price-segments, niche-markets, and company sizes. This is one of the problems related to our research and method. However, it was considered the most appropriate approach, given the time and extent of the study.

4 Empirical findings

The findings of this study are based upon interviews with eight companies, all operating digitally on the vintage-market (Table 1). The findings aim to answer the two research questions, firstly regarding key factors in creating a memorable customer experience in the context of vintage online, and secondly, the main challenges the E-tailer of vintage faces while trying to create a memorable customer experience.

An analysis of the vintage E-tailers business model was conducted to investigate the two research questions. By having a clear view of how the company operates, the analysis process was easier. Our finding states that the most typical business model for the vintage E-tailers is a certain Buy, Sell, and Trade business-model, especially for those operating in the premium segments. This enables customers not just to buy, but to sell their current garments for cash or trade it in for online-store credit. Further on, several managers explained that they use different sale-channels for some specific items, such as handbags. These sales channels are both C2C-platforms, such as Grailed and Vestiaire Collective, where customers can find thousands of items from sellers all over the world. The reason seems to be a varying demand for some items. Additionally, it seems that the E-tailers make a trade with competitors and partners as well, if some item has remained unsold for some time, it is sometimes sold to another company. However, compared to C2C-platforms, the E-tailer provides a secure and smooth experience for sellers and buyers since it is an established firm with a reputation to maintain.

“When we buy items from consumers, we will obviously pay the price below the market price. In return, we close a secure deal smoothly for both parties.”

Delicate Vintage

“We are based on buy-sell-trade, so we’re buying, selling and trading. The customer can for example come in and change one T-shirt to another T-shirt. (...) We’re for example offering 500 kr for one T-shirt, money on the account, or else we’re offering for example 700 kr in store credit. You always get more in trading value (with store credit).”

PlugMePlease

4.1 Factors for creating a memorable customer experience

The findings of the first research question are presented through a set of themes, which emerged from the analysis. Although categories are inspired by established literature, more importantly, are the explicit manifestations and descriptive transcripts, the fundamental base for the development of the suggested framework including themes. The themes include (1) Trust, (2) Products, and (3) Multi-Channel, with sub-themes beneath each main theme.

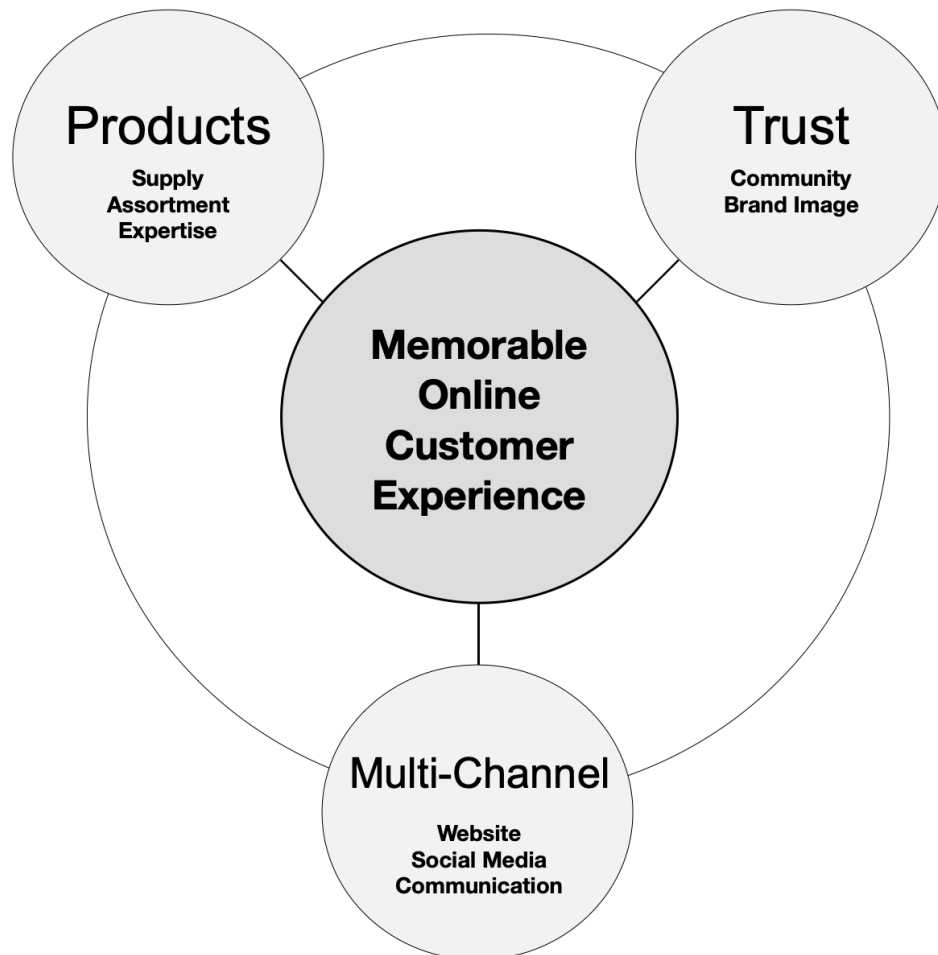


Figure 1. Factors contributing to a memorable customer experience in the vintage context online

4.1.1 Trust

The first established theme was trust. Trust is highly essential in creating a positive customer experience according to the vintage E-tailers. All interviewees mentioned the importance of trust and the importance of being honest. The theme consists of two identified sub-themes (1) community and (2) brand image, all affecting the level of trust. However, it is important to state that trust is linked to all identified themes since trust is the foundation of positive customer experience and purchase (Bilgihan 2016).

Community

Community is related to trust since online communities have the ability to strengthen the feeling of trust (Casaló, Flavián & Guinaliú 2016). Nearly all managers highlight the importance of a community. One Scoop Store, Haiendo, and PlugMePlease explained that the company even originated from a community. It seems that customer value is created from getting the customer to feel involved and a part of the community while purchasing. All companies use different types of tricks to grab the customer's attention with the hope that they will feel a sense of belonging. Moreover, social interaction shapes the customers' experience (Lin & Chuang 2018; Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016). Delicate Vintage, Vintage Threads, PlugMePlease, and L'étoile Luxury Vintage explained that they aim to establish personal contact with the customers' to make them more satisfied and enhance the experience. Additionally, Vintage Threads highlight the importance of keeping the old customers engaged in the company and continue to keep them tucked in in the community. The vintage E-tailers described how their communities are widely found on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. According to Haiendo, Delicate Vintage, and PlugMePlease, these communities tend to be an important channel for word-of-mouth between customers and potential customers. L'étoile Luxury Vintage indicates how customers interact in the comment section, discuss different products, and help each other out. The manager from Delicate Vintage explained how group members ask the community whether a specific seller is reliable and trustworthy.

"We follow what is written about our firm in these groups very frequently, most of it is really good."

Delicate Vintage

"I find information about what people want there [community]."

Haiendo

Supervision of the online community has another benefit for the companies, and it gives the managers new ideas of what the customers want. While monitoring ongoing discussions in communities, the companies can also use it as a tool to keep track of upcoming trends. Previous literature states that companies can use communities to determine customer preferences (Kim, Bae & Kang 2008).

"If I see people are looking to buy Palm Angels, I will get Palm Angels."

Haiendo

Brand Image

The second sub-theme, brand image, seems to be of high importance for the vintage E-tailers. Bilgihan (2016) highlights how the brand image can add value to the products and make the company more competitive (Ta-Lin & Shuang-Shii 2018; Aaker 2009). L'étoile de Saint Honoré, or L'étoile Luxury Vintage, as they prefer to call themselves, is aware of this. The manager explained how they changed their name on social media and website in order for more people to understand what they stand for and for who they are as a brand. Additionally, almost all interviewed companies have the name "vintage" in their brand name in order to spread who they are and what they offer easier. A previous study by Meyer and Schwager

(2007) explains that the customer experience is based on the brand and the message the company tries to convey. The Vintage Studio mentioned how they want to contribute to the circular fashion industry and tell the story about the garment's journey. Vintage Threads says their mission is to provide affordable and handpicked vintage clothing while sharing the story of doing so. The companies use social media, website elements, or additional features that add value in order to tell the story. The Vintage Studio explained that they try to tell the story through imaginary, whereas PlugMePlease tells their story by offering special types of products. Bilgihan (2016) additionally clarifies how companies have been using different ways of brand attributes, such as packaging and advertising, for creating their brand. This is clearly used in the vintage context. For instance, Vintage Threads states how they use both music, videos, and social media in order to communicate their story.

“Instagram is the brand and the voice of our webshop.”

Vintage Threads

“If you’d purchase a bag for €2000 and the packaging looks ugly, it would be a complete disaster.”

L’étoile Luxury Vintage

All companies try to tell a story through their mission, brand name, and what is actually done. The Vintage Studio explains how they spent a lot of time finding the right recyclable product to send the same message through delivery as they do in other sections. Further on, managers of the premium firms explained that appealing packaging and fast shipment contribute to positive customer experience. The managers explain that customers expect their packaging to be delivered in time, and in order to satisfy them, attractive packaging is essential. Using storytelling increases the trust and brand image, which increases success (Kelley & Littman 2006; Mossberg & Nissen Johansen 2006; Kaufman 2003). The vintage E-tailers are using different channels to spread their brand and the overall customer experience.

“...trying to connect with people on a basis, that isn’t just give me your money, something more than that.”

Vintage Threads

Previous studies explain how storytelling enhances the overall customer experience (Silverstein & Fiske 2003). For instance, the majority of the E-tailers have a blog on the website, where stories about the company and its products are told. This is mainly for providing additional value and sending out their brand image. Additionally, Park and Stoel (2005) state that brand familiarity decreases risk and enhances trust in the online environment. Haiendo, PlugMePlease, and L’étoile Luxury Vintage are all working with famous brands in order to position themselves on the market. Our findings indicate that vintage companies use brand image to create a competitive advantage. While most items are sold to contribute to the firm's profit, managers at Haiendo and L’étoile Luxury Vintage claimed that they could acquire and sell items that generated less profit. Instead, they function to position themselves by strengthening their brand image. It is some specific brands and items that will increase the customers' perceived brand-image towards the E-tailer. Haiendo clarifies how some products are purchased in order to increase the brand image and brand familiarity.

"Dior items are really difficult to acquire, and when we do, the prices are not too good, but we do it anyway."

Haiendo

The manager from Ambroeus Milano described that customers in the vintage industry are skeptical and tend not to trust product images and descriptions. Positioning your product-offer with certain brands and products seems to be a way for firms to position themselves and increase their legitimacy. However, several managers highlight the importance of support from the online community as an important factor for gaining customers' trust. The vintage E-tailers seem aware of the importance of the brand image because of their different ways of transmitting their brand and story. Successful brand equity leads to loyalty and a higher level of trust in the online context (Bilgihan 2016).

4.1.2 Products

During analyzation for findings, several sub-themes connected to the theme of products were found. The sub-themes regarding success factors and challenges for creating a memorable customer experience are (1) Supply, (2) Assortment, and (3) Expertise.

Supply

First of all, supply process has been proved to look differently from company to company. Buying from auction-houses, customers, other vintage-dealers, and wholesale is according to the gathered data common ways of supply. Regardless of how the E-tailers purchase their products, the process can take time, in order to be able to offer unique pieces. The managers also highlighted their purchasing function as a competitive advantage towards traditional brands and stores. Purchasing second-hand also has a direct impact on a more sustainable way of consuming, which, according to several managers, is one of many factors that contribute to their firm's success. As long as it is available on the supply market, the vintage E-tailer can acquire garments the day after they see the demand compared to traditional retailers, where purchasing and development take months of time in advance.

"We can adapt a new trend and start looking for pieces the same day we see the trend come."

PlugMePlease

"Building these networks of contacts around the world has taken time, it's not something you want to give out."

Haiendo

Assortment

Regardless of the price range, firms offer unique and most often hand-picked items that serve as an option to established retailers. Additionally, several managers stated that a wide range of products is essential in order to be available to a larger market. Furthermore, findings show

that the customer finds value from items that are offered at an accessible price and in fine quality. All interviewees state how their assortment is unique either by emphasizing that it is hand-picked, rare, or that their shop is the only place where you can purchase these products. The fast process of purchasing and procurement enables the E-tailers to offer an updated assortment weekly and sometimes even every day. The upside is that consumers get a motive for visiting the websites daily to find new items before they are out of stock. The manager of PlugMePlease states that valuable and memorable experiences from the consumers' perspective arise from finding a garment and accessory, one they never thought they could find in a vintage shop. The essence of value creation for their customers is, therefore, to offer a variety of premium products at an accessible price. Apart from the importance of specific items and prices, several managers explained that they are frequently trying to broaden their potential customer base by expanding their assortment.

“You visit your normal retail store one time every season, but you can visit our store and find a whole another assortment every week.”

PlugMePlease

Expertise

The importance of providing the right kind of products is mentioned. Through experience, the E-tailers have gained knowledge about their specific products, and through this, they can offer a better service. Knowledge in regards to buying, assessing whether a product is authentic or not, and the customers' basic demands has been gained through experience. Additionally, the managers stress the essentiality in knowing the customers and their desires. Nearly all managers state that their expertise is important for their brand.

“At the end of the day that buying a product has to be perfect.”

The Vintage Studio

The Vintage Studio highlights that the delivered product has to be what the customer expects. The customer's expectation needs to be met, in combination with the honesty and service, to satisfy the customer. This is what the companies need to provide for each customer. According to all interviewees, the offering of unique products is of high importance. Several managers highlighted that the acquisition and purchasing of specific garments is the most important factor in creating memorable experiences. In combination with the E-tailer's expertise about their products, they can offer a more unique and personal experience towards its customers. Unique products seem to be one of the main factors that determine success. This simplifies the way of differentiating on the market and selling their own story. In other words, the one activity that provides the most value out of all activities. The company Haiendo claimed that they supply customers with steals. A steals indicate that a specific branded product is offered at a price so accessible that the customer more or less steals it.

“We put great resources in searching for the right products and we really want our knowledge to be seen through the store.”

PlugMePlease

“We have items you cannot get anywhere else.”

"Basically, the biggest differentiation is that we hand-pick all our clothes."

Vintage Threads

"Everything is selected by hand and we choose which items that we want sell."

Ambroeus Milano

"We don't want to source anything that isn't unique."

Haiendo

"Each of our garments has something special and we have put a lot of effort in finding these ones."

PlugMePlease

"We offer fine things at an accessible price."

Delicate Vintage

4.1.3 Multi-channel

The third theme that was developed during analyzing was multi-channel, in addition to a set of the sub-themes; website, social media, and communication. Our findings are equivalent to previous literature stating that multi-channel is essential in creating an experience filled with value (Mathwich, Malhotra & Rigdon 2001).

Website

Regarding the layout and aesthetics on the websites, several managers (PlugMePlease, Haiendo, L'étoile & The Vintage Studio) use the words clean, cool, easy, and simple to describe the desired looks on their website. The layouts of these websites are typically using minimalistic features of the menus, texts, and pictures. For instance, everything white with simple backgrounds. According to the managers, the motive behind the minimalist and simple layout is that it is perceived as luxurious. For the premium E-tailers, the website and products need to look well-curated and exclusive in order to retain the premium brand image. Further on, the importance of online user experience was highlighted. Other firms highlighted the importance of having a wide variety of products as well as user-friendly filters to easily let the customer navigate for whatever he or she might look for. Our findings indicate that all companies wanted their website to function as smoothly as possible, which also could lead to a transaction.

"The front page is very important, no more than two clicks to see a bag."

Delicate Vintage

“The homepage, I wanted it to be professional and easy.”

The Vintage Studio

“We really want to make it [website] as easy for the customer as possible.”

L'étoile Luxury Vintage

“Simplicity in terms of getting the items on the site, getting the customer journey through that as simple as possible, making sure the photos are as good as possible, aesthetically it looks good.”

Vintage Threads

Social Media

Apart from the website, where customers engage in one-way communication, online tools, and social media like Instagram, Facebook, and live chats are used for customer service and communication. These three were the most commonly used tools. Facebook is used by many Swedish companies to communicate new arrivals and monitor the community-members perceptions about the firm. Some of these Facebook groups focusing on premium second-hand have more than 20 000 active members (Haiendo), whilst the live chat had the purpose of enabling quick answers to customers. According to Haiendo, L'étoile Luxury Vintage, and PlugMePlease, customers' uncertainties and questions are mostly regarding size, fit, and condition. As the items are unique, the managers are witnessing a large number of daily questions from customers regarding measurements and fits, which seems to be the most frequently asked question. Since this is a question without a general answer, the firm must respond with a personal message. According to Haiendo, the manager believes that the live chat is one of the most value-adding functions the company offered. However, L'étoile Luxury Vintage removed their live chat function because they found that communication on Instagram was more convenient and effective. Regarding the platform for communication, all companies emphasize the importance of personal impressions and relations with their customers. Besides, the majority of the managers highlighted the importance of personal contact and their aspiration to be a personal, fun, and down-to-earth company. Conversations and communication frequently occur in the comments of Instagram posts and stories. Every firm that was interviewed is using both Instagram posts and stories to communicate the arrival of new items. However, very few firms conduct any business on Instagram; everything is directed to the website through product-tagging and informative ads. Only the largest and oldest company, L'étoile Luxury Vintage sell on Instagram. The manager at Delicate Vintage described that the number of website visitors increased drastically after uploading a post on Instagram. Finally, honest and effective customer service seems to be a key success factor, according to all managers.

“Instead of pushing a sale, be honest with them and they will remember you caring for them and not only selling, that's how you get returning customers.”

Haiendo

“By putting items that have not sold in a while on the front page before you upload an Instagram post, you give them some new attention.”

Delicate Vintage

Communication

Apart from communicating using Instagram and live chats, traditional tools as Email, newsletters, and ads are still used to promote campaigns and overall awareness about the brand. However, there are various ways that companies interact with their customers. Haiendo state that one of the most important factors for attaining a returning customer base is to respond quickly and in pure honesty honest when it comes to size and condition. Ambroeus, The Vintage Studio, and L'étoile Luxury Vintage state the importance of correct product descriptions. The manager from Ambroeus explained that customers tend not to trust vintage-dealers. Therefore, the importance of putting in time and being honest in product-descriptions and communication is vital. Customers tend to want to see, feel, and touch the item they are considering purchasing from the firms that operate in the premium segments. Since the physical meeting is eliminated with E-commerce, some firms have or would like to have a showroom. Vintage Threads exemplified spreading its presence through a quarantine-playlist on Spotify, and how they witnessed that customers started to interact after this. Other interactive activities that engage customers that were found are personalized discount codes for loyal customers and free giveaways in return for some interaction, usually on social media.

Another example of this is when L'étoile Luxury Vintage published a digital egg hunt, with discount codes hidden all over the website. Several companies explained that they offer discount codes to customers, hoping that they will return after their purchase. Managers from L'étoile Luxury Vintage, Vintage Threads, and The Vintage Studio explained that they do a post-sale follow-up to ask the customer about their experience, with a motive of reassuring that the experience was good and to get a review. The mentioned companies clarify the importance of keeping customers engaged. Vintage Threads highlight the importance of keeping old customers engaged, and by using these features, it is a way of keeping them tucked in the company.

“The touching points, the customer journey is crucial.”

Vintage Threads

“We have this amazing showroom where we more than welcome customers to have coffee and get to feel her bag before she buys it.”

Delicate Vintage

“I think it's very important now to offer that personal touch.”

One Scoop Store

4.2 Challenges

The second research question regards challenges the vintage E-tailers are up against, whilst trying to create a memorable customer experience. The detected challenges need to be taken care of in order to create a memorable customer experience. Found challenges are (1) *product growth*, (2) *clear communication*, and (3) *consumer attitude*.

4.2.1 Product growth

During the interviews, the managers explained different challenges regarding product growth. Several managers explained the difficulty in increasing their volume of products because of monetary difficulties and a time-consuming process regarding logistics and product descriptions. The reason for this is firstly, the variety of product quality other attributes as a brand, style, and color. The Vintage Studio, Ambroeus, and PlugMePlease state that the purchasing process is time-consuming and requires a lot of time and knowledge. The purchaser has to be agile and flexible when purchasing items. This is becoming more of an issue when firms aspire to grow their business and assortment, mainly because it is sometimes difficult to find the right prices, and it takes time to develop a new network.

Additionally, the younger firms are not financially mature enough to acquire product stock worth millions. Since time is money, and each item is unique with its profit, it is important that the handling of each item does not consume too much time. This affects the number of pictures of each product, the time spent on product descriptions, and measurements. However, it will be marketed on the various platforms used. Another common challenge for the premium dealers seems to be the individual product handling, which is often time-consuming and requires a solid authentication process, photography, editing, and publication.

“Since we are only a few who works at the company, it is difficult to increase the volume.”

PlugMePlease

“Since it is just me I can't produce as much.”

The Vintage Studio

“We do not have the time to do that [publish all products online] and the selection changes so much that it's hard to keep up.”

Ambroeus

According to the bigger firms, Vintage Threads and L'étoile Luxury Vintage, having a lot of products is very important to them.

“You need to have something for everyone, and you need to have a price for everyone. So yes, it's important to have a mixture.”

4.2.2 Clear communication

Since all items have their own history of marks and defects, it is stated as highly important to clearly show each product's condition clearly and honestly towards the customers. All managers emphasize the importance of being both clear and honest with all information regarding their products.

“You will reach the furthest by being honest.”

Haiendo

“(...) not a lot of people are used to buying vintage online and they don't trust it, because they, they're not sure about photos, they're not sure about the condition of the piece, so just writing that it's in good condition, is not enough, in my opinion.”

Ambroeus

There have been issues regarding customers using items and returning them, leaving it unclear whether defects arose during the time that the buyer held the item in its possession or not. Therefore, it is in both parties' interests to document and show the condition of every product clearly, not the least via the companies' product descriptions and photos. For this reason, returns are an issue. Several managers highlight similar issues regarding customer interactions and questions. Having a personal conversation about the products is time-consuming regarding the fact that each item will only sell once. However, the manager from L'étoile Luxury Vintage and The Vintage Studio described that it is worth to put in extra time for product description and photos, since it strengthens their customer relations and eventually will lead to more sales.

“Pleasant experience then it's more likely they would return (...) That is why we want to be as honest as possible! We show the flaws.”

L'étoile Luxury Vintage

4.2.3 Consumer attitudes towards pre-owned products

The last detected challenge is related to the overall attitude some consumers have against pre-owned items. This challenge is related to something bigger, where a shift in consumer opinions against pre-owned products, needs to change. PlugMePlease, The Vintage Studio, and Ambroeus all discuss the overall attitude people have towards second-hand. They explain that people tend to associate second-hand with words like nasty, smelly, and unwearable. The companies are battling this challenge in different ways. For instance, trying to create a website that is not related to negative prejudices about second-hand, creating similarities with retail stores and distribute the products professionally and more commercially.

“Some customers feel like it is a bit icky with vintage-clothing, you want to buy something new. That is for sure the toughest hinder with second-hand.”

PlugMePlease

“I feel like some people who don't know about it [vintage] are a bit intimidated by it. I want people to understand that our brand is very, very wearable (...) I just want people to think that reworked or vintage clothing can be completely wearable by anyone.”

The Vintage Studio

5 Discussion

As the findings showed, the elements stressed in the framework (figure 1): products, trust, and multi-channel are all crucial factors in creating a memorable customer experience within the context of vintage online. Additionally, the main challenges the E-tailers face while creating a memorable experience were, as stated: *product-growth*, *clear communication*, and *consumer attitudes* towards pre-owned products.

Connecting the findings to earlier research of factors in creating a memorable customer experience online showed many similarities but also a few dissimilarities where our results differed to some extent. Overall, the elements stated in earlier research that create memorable online customer experience also seem to be applicable in the context of vintage online. However, the utilitarian aspects of the experience, such as ease of use and comfort, are not as remarkably important as the hedonic features. Because of the technological development and the increased E-commerce market, utilitarian values are not stated to have the same importance in order to create a memorable customer experience. The growth of E-commerce has made utilitarian features something customers expect, and features like functioning navigation, a smooth and simple purchase journey, and usability are not something out of the ordinary. The increased competitiveness among E-tailers has made these factors into something that the customer takes for granted. According to the findings, none of the companies stressed utilitarian features related to the website as a remarkable, important factor for making the experience memorable. Instead, it seems like hedonic features are of utmost importance, with value-added elements as an example. For establishing a purchase journey that is memorable, customers need to perceive the purchase journey as something amusing and satisfying, which is achieved with hedonic elements. A way of creating added value online, as stated by Childers et al. (2001), is through visuals and games. These services can be translated into cues, which illustrates the feeling the company wants to transmit (Pine & Gilmore 1998). These services, such as music, discount codes, or newsletters, create enduring impressions and strengthen the overall memorable customer experience. Earlier research clarifies that companies can enhance the memorable experience of creating a service that the customer does not expect (Pine & Gilmore 1998). Bilgihan, Kandampully, and Zhang (2016) clarifies that after satisfying utilitarian needs, the E-tailers need to create an experience that “hooks” the customer. Furthermore, Bilgihan (2016) explains that a hedonic element contains joy and entertainment and is needed for satisfaction. According to the literature, satisfaction and amusement are more valuable than price and availability online (Kim & Lim 2001; Childers et al. 2001), explaining that hedonic features are highly essential in order to be successful today. Communities create added value (Schau et al. 2009), and all investigated companies mentioned that they have different ways of creating additional value, such as newsletters, blogs, or events for raising awareness. Hence, the finding has shown hedonic features to be more important to create an impression and make the experience memorable.

Regarding the challenges, the E-tailers of vintage face challenges such as *product-growth* and *clear communication* that are mainly associated with time-consuming activities due to unique products of varying conditions. Partly in order to maintain trust, communicating conditions and size as honestly as possible, and partly to maintain an assortment via the purchasing function. As the interviewed companies are working with unique products, the questions they receive needs to be treated individually from case to case. Findings show that being as honest

and clear as possible regarding condition, authenticity, and sizing will enhance trust. Besides the context of vintage products with variations in quality, to shop online requires high levels of trust as it is an essential factor for the purchase, stated by Bilgihan (2016). As Santos (2003) suggests, the E-service quality and level of service that detailed product descriptions comprise are the main contributors in creating a memorable customer experience online. In addition to that, Berkhout (2019) also suggests a wide assortment as a value creator that contributes to customer experience. The result showed that especially smaller firms with few employees find the challenges to provide a wide assortment and clear communication difficult. On the other hand, this is also challenging for the bigger firms, indicating that this is a challenge regardless of company size. It was also stated by Szymanski and Hise (2000) that online retailers face many opportunities, as they do not have the limited storage that a store includes. However, as the findings showed, despite the advantage of not having the limitation of physical space in terms of storage, it is still hard to maintain a wide assortment as the purchasing activity is highly time-consuming due to the uniqueness of the products. Besides *product growth* and *clear communication*, the last detected challenge, *consumer attitude*, is more related to the consumer's opinion about pre-owned pieces. As a previous research state, this challenge may be less of a concern in the future due to the expanding market (ThreadUp 2019).

This study has focused on the vintage context in E-commerce, however, it is interesting to compare the result with physical vintage stores. Earlier research stated that several important factors in customer experiences are lacking in an online platform, such as smell and the ability to feel the garment (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis (2001). When it comes to the suggested framework and the stated factors contributing to a memorable customer experience online, the authors reflected upon how the factors could differ between digital and physical platforms. The most outstanding difference is the theme trust, which is believed to be extra crucial on online platforms, as stated by Lou et al. (2020). Trust is of higher importance because the company needs to incorporate trust in the entire customer experience in terms of having clear communication and a solid brand image. For instance, Vintage retailers do not need to worry about communicating conditions through product descriptions and photos. These types of trust issues are eliminated on a physical platform but are yet important in the creation of a memorable experience as a vintage E-tailer. In addition, the product handling that is included in the theme products is another difference. The handling of the products in a webshop is more time-consuming, due to photographing and product descriptions compared to a physical store where the products can be displayed directly. Furthermore, the need to be visible on multiple channels could also be extra crucial for the E-tailers, as they do not pursue marketing advantages that physical store has. Therefore, they must reach out to customers via other channels than the physical.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how E-tailers of vintage can provide a memorable customer experience online and to detect the challenges they face whilst doing so. The concept of customer experience has been widely investigated (Pine & Gilmore 2020; Walls, Wang & Kwun 2011; Meyer & Schwager 2007; Schmitt 1999). However, a limited amount of studies have focused on the context of vintage online. By conducting semi-structured interviews with nine vintage E-tailers, the authors investigated how these E-tailers are working with creating a memorable customer experience. The findings suggest that vintage E-tailers can compile a memorable customer experience by focusing on establishing trust, offering unique products that follow their customers' basic demands, and being visible on multiple channels. In order to reach a result, factors contributing to the perceived experience and what challenges companies face were analyzed. In order to create a memorable customer experience, firms must focus on creating value and dealing with challenges associated with operating as a vintage E-tailer.

To some extent, our findings are in line with Bilgihan (2016) and Childers et al. (2001), who state that hedonic features improve competitiveness and enhance the overall customer experience. Different ways of adding additional value related to the purchase is a trick that all interviewed companies use. Whether it is a blog post, newsletter, discount code, or entertainment, all E-tailers have implemented this in their business model in order to satisfy the customer and give them something more than the purchased product. Interestingly enough, our research has shown that ease-of-use and user-friendly websites are less important than current literature implied. Utilitarian features are essential in offering a smooth and pleasant experience. Still, our findings indicate that the website is mostly used as a secure and smooth platform for payment in this context. Also, the website is used to show the product's condition and more in-depth storytelling clearly. On the other hand, the vintage E-tailers spend more time on social media, mainly Instagram, to show new products, dealing with customer service, and sharing brand's story. Based on our judgment and analysis, this seems to be the main priority to communicate with customers and transmit the brand image.

Perceived challenges are mainly connected with lack-of-time because of selling unique products. The growth of products is difficult to attain due to the varying quality and limited quantity of demanded products. A wide assortment increases the chance that the customer finds what they are looking for. However, a wide assortment is challenging to acquire and maintain. Managers witness about the time it takes to build up the supply-network, which usually is global. Since vintage E-tailing is a relatively new phenomenon, many of the operating firms are young and do not have the financial strength to increase their stock as fast as they would have wanted. To acquire the right products, buyers must have knowledge, insight, and expertise on what the customers are looking for.

All managers stated the importance of honest, clear, and quick customer service. Since all of the products are unique, the customer needs to get very clear product information and pictures of the condition to be satisfied with the purchase. The importance of customer service online can also be seen in previous studies (Santos 2003). Therefore, this study found customer service to be a service that takes a lot of time due to the unique offering of products, but it is highly important to satisfy the customer.

Regarding the comparability to previous similar studies, previous studies have reached similar results regarding success factors for creating a memorable experience. Bilgihan (2016) expresses the importance of multi-device-compatibility to improve online customer experiences, which is completely in line with our results. According to Lou et al. (2020) who examined purchase intention for online second-hand shopping in China, similar results are identified. Their result verified that purchase intention is based on trust, and our study points out that trustworthiness is important in creating a memorable experience.

The result of this study contributes to current research on online customer experience in a new context, namely online vintage. Our conclusion indicates that current theories on creating a memorable experience apply to the vintage context as well. Companies need to deliver something more than a product or service, and they need to take several factors in mind in order to be successful. However, our findings show that the most important factors are (1) trust, (2) products, and (3) multi-channel. Our study is shedding light on the managerial challenges vintage E-tailers are facing while creating memorable experiences. The challenges presented in this study will help the E-tailers to be aware of the difficulties they might face. Hence, helping them to look for solutions to overcome these challenges. The result of this study will hopefully contribute with practical knowledge and guidance for the vintage companies who wish to improve their customers' online experience and make it memorable. The provided framework will guide and support the E-tailers with knowledge in which element of experience they need to focus on, and therefore, help them to design a memorable customer experience.

6.1 Limitations and directions for future research

The current marketplace for fashion and textiles is becoming more circular, which creates opportunities for future research. Since our study focused on how firms can create a memorable online customer experience, future research could focus on how vintage-companies create a memorable customer experience in traditional retail stores. Future research could also examine the customer experience, but from a consumer perspective and possibly look at differences across geographical groups or in the different segment of resale. A vast majority of the interviewed companies are operating in the luxury segment, where only two firms operated in a mid-price segment. The differences in factors contributing to a memorable experience might differ since the customer might have different expectations. Therefore it could be interesting to study. Additionally, studies related to the detected challenges may be a useful topic for future research. Lastly, the effects that online communities, such as the Swedish buy-sell-trade groups have on both consumers and online vintage businesses, are still rather unknown and interesting.

References

Aaker, D. A. (2009). *Managing brand equity: capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. New York: Simon and Schuster. ISBN: 0-02-900101-3

Adjei, M., Noble, S. & Noble, C. (2010). The influence of C2C communications in online brand communities on customer purchase behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(5), pp. 634–653. doi:10.1007/s11747-009-0178-5

Akar, E., Mardikyan, S., & Dalgic, T. (2019). User Roles in Online Communities and Their Moderating Effect on Online Community Usage Intention: An Integrated Approach. *International Journal of Human - Computer Interaction*, 35(6), 495–509. doi: 10.1080/10447318.2018.1465325

Babin, B. J. & Attaway J, S. (2000). Atmospheric affect as a tool for creating value and gaining share of customer. *Journal of Business Research*, 49(2), pp. 91–99. doi:10.1016/S0148-2963(99)00011-9

Babin, B.J., Darden, W.R. & Griffin, M. (1994). Work and/or fun: measuring hedonic and utilitarian shopping value. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20(4), pp. 644-656.

Beard, N, D. (2008). The branding of ethical fashion and the consumer: a luxury niche or mass-market reality?. *Fashion Theory*, 12(4), pp. 447-467. doi:10.2752/175174108X346931

Berkhout, C. (2019). *Assortment and Merchandising Strategy: Building a Retail Plan to Improve Shopper Experience* 1. ed. 2019. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Bilgihan, A., Kandampully, J. & Zhang, T, C. (2016). Towards a unified customer experience in online shopping environments. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, 8(1), pp. 102-119. doi:10.1108/IJQSS-07-2015-0054

Bilgihan, A. (2016). Gen Y customer loyalty in online shopping: An integrated model of trust, user experience and branding. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 16(1), pp. 103–113. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.014

Bilgihan, A., Okumus, F., Nusair , K. & Bujisic, M. (2014). Online experiences: Flow theory, measuring online customer experience in e-commerce and managerial implications for the lodging industry. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 14(1), pp. 49-71. doi:10.1007/s40558-013-0003-3

Blazevic, V., Hammedi, W., Garnefeld, I., Rust, R.T., Keiningham, T., Andreassen, T.W., Donthu, N. & Carl, W. (2013). Beyond traditional word-of-mouth: an expanded model of customer-driven influence. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), pp. 294-313. doi:10.1108/09564231311327003

- Blázquez, M. (2014). Fashion Shopping in Multichannel Retail: The Role of Technology in Enhancing the Customer Experience. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 18(4), pp. 97-116. doi:10.2753/JEC1086-4415180404
- Boswijk, A., Thijssen, T. & Peelen, E. (2007). *The experience economy: A new perspective*. Amsterdam: Pearson Education Benelux.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2017). *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder*. 3rd ed. Stockholm: Liber.
- Burke, R. R. (2002). Technology and the customer interface: what consumers want in the physical and virtual store. *Journal of the academy of Marketing Science*, 30(4), pp. 411-432. doi:10.1177/009207002236914
- Casaló, L., Flavian, C. & Guinalíu, M. (2007). The impact of participation in virtual brand communities on consumer trust and loyalty. *Online information review*, 31(6), pp. 775-792. doi:10.1108/14684520710841766
- Childers, T. L., Carr, C. L., Peck, J. & Carson, S. (2001). Hedonic and utilitarian motivations for online retail shopping behavior. *Journal of retailing*, 77(4), pp. 511-535. doi:10.1016/S0022-4359(01)00056-2
- Cornett, J, E. (2010). *What is considered vintage clothing?*. <https://www.leaf.tv/articles/what-is-considered-vintage-clothing/> [derived 2020-04-06].
- Cotte, J. & Ratneshwar, S. (2003). Choosing leisure services: the effects of consumer timestyle. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 17(6), pp. 558-572. doi:10.1108/08876040310495609
- Cundari, A. (2015). *Customer-centric marketing : build relationships, create advocates, and influence your customer*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley
- DeLong, M., Heinemann, B. & Reiley, K. (2005). Hooked on Vintage! *Fashion Theory*, 9(1), pp. 23-42. doi:0.2752/136270405778051491
- Denegri-Knott, J., Detley, Z., Schroeder, J. (2006) Mapping consumer power: An integrative framework for marketing and consumer research. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 950–971. doi:10.1108/03090560610680952
- Donthu, N. & Gilliland, D. (1996). Observations: the infomercial shopper. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36(2), pp. 69-77.
- Eroglu, S. A., Machleit, K. A. & Davis, L. M. (2001). Atmospheric qualities of online retailing: A conceptual model and implications. *Journal of Business research*, 54(2), pp. 177-184. doi:10.1016/S0148-2963(99)00087-9

- Evanschitzky, H., Iyer, G. R., Hesse, J. & Ahlert, D. (2004). E-satisfaction: a re-examination. *Journal of retailing*, 80(3), pp. 239-247. doi:10.1016/j.jretai.2004.08.002
- Fernández, A. H. & Boluda, I. B. (2012). Brand impact on purchasing intention. An approach in virtual social networks channels. *Economics and Business Letters*, 1(2), pp. 1-9.
- Fiore, A. M., Jin, H. J. & Kim, J. (2005). For fun and profit: Hedonic value from image interactivity and responses toward an online store. *Psychology & Marketing*, 22(8), pp. 669-694. doi:10.1002/mar.20079
- Flagestad, A. (2006). Opplevelsesøkonomien på vei [The experience economy on the way]. *Magma*, 9(3), 81–90.
- Fog, K., Budtz, C. & Yakaboylu, B. (2005). *Storytelling Branding in Practice*. 1. ed., Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Gerval, O. (2008). *Fashion: Concept to Catwalk*. Bloomsbury, London
- Gilmore, J. H. & Pine, B. J. (2002). Differentiating hospitality operations via experiences: Why selling services is not enough. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 43(3), pp. 87-96. doi:10.1016/S0010-8804(02)80022-2
- Gordon, G. L., Calantone J. R. & Benedetto, C. A. (1993). Brand Equity in the business-to-business sector: An exploratory study. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 2(3), pp. 4-16. doi:10.1108/10610429310046689
- Hasan, B. (2016). Perceived irritation in online shopping: The impact of website design characteristics. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 54, pp. 224–230. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.07.056
- Hassan, M. & Casaló Ariño, L. V. (2016). Consumer devotion to a different height: How consumers are defending the brand within Facebook brand communities. *Internet Research*, 26(4), pp. 963-981. doi:10.1108/IntR-03-2015-0090
- Holbrook, M. B. & Hirschman, E. C. (1982). The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun. *Journal of consumer research*, 9(2), pp. 132-140. doi:10.1086/208906
- Hoffman, D., & Novak, T. (1996). Marketing in Hypermedia Computer-Mediated Environments: Conceptual Foundations. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(3), 50-68. doi:10.2307/1251841

- Huang, E.Y., Lin, S.W. & Fan, Y.C. (2015). MS-QUAL: mobile service quality measurement. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 14(2), pp. 126-142. doi:10.1016/j.elerap.2015.01.003
- Jensen, R. (1999). *The Dream Society. How the Coming Shift from Information to Imagination will Transform Your Business*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Jones, A. (2001). The Economics of the Internet Retail Industry and Its Impact on the Business-to-Consumer Retailing Environment. <https://sites.duke.edu/djepapers/files/2016/08/jones.pdf>
- Kahn, B. E. (2017). Using visual design to improve customer perceptions of online assortments. *Journal of Retailing*, 93(1), pp. 29-42. doi:10.1016/j.jretai.2016.11.004
- Kaufman, B. (2003). Stories that sell, stories that tell: effective storytelling can strengthen an organization's bonds with all of its stakeholders. (Communication). *Journal of Business Strategy*, 24(2), pp. 11-16.
- Keller, K. L., Apéria, T. & Georgson, M. (2008). *Strategic brand management: A European perspective*. 1. ed. England: Pearson Education.
- Kelley, T., Littman, J. (2006). *The Ten Faces of Innovation: Strategies for Heightening Creativity*. London: Profile Books.
- Kim, J.H., Bae, Z.T. & Kang, S.H. (2008). The role of online brand community in new product development: case studies on digital product manufacturers in Korea. *International Journal of Innovation Management*, 12(3), pp. 357-376.
- Kim, S. Y. & Lim, Y. J. (2001). Consumers' perceived importance of and satisfaction with Internet shopping. *Electronic Markets*, 11, pp. 148–154. doi:10.1080/101967801681007988
- Lee, Y., Kozar, K. (2006). Investigating the effect of website quality on e-business success: An analytic hierarchy process (AHP) approach. *Decision Support Systems*, 42(3), 1383-1401. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2005.11.005>
- Lin, C. T. L. & Chuang, S. S. (2018). The importance of brand image on consumer purchase attitude: a case study of e-commerce in Taiwan. *Studies in Business and Economics*, 13(3), pp. 91-104. doi:10.2478/sbe-2018-0037
- Luo, N., Wang, Y., Zhang, M., Niu, T. & Tu, J. (2020). Integrating community and e-commerce to build a trusted online second-hand platform: Based on the perspective of social capital. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 153, pp. 1-7. doi:10.1016/j.techfore.2020.119913

- Mathwick, C., Malhotra, N. & Rigdon, E. (2001). Experiential value: conceptualization, measurement and application in the catalog and Internet shopping environment. *Journal of retailing*, 77(1), pp. 39-56. doi:10.1016/S0022-4359(00)00045-2
- Meyer, C., Schwager, A. (2007). *Understanding customer experience*. Harvard Business Review, 85(6)
- Muniz, A. M. & O'guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of consumer research*, 27(4), pp. 412-432. doi:10.1086/319618z
- Mossberg, L. & Johansen, E. N. (2006). *Storytelling-Marknadsföring i upplevelseindustrin*. 1. ed. Göteborg, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Mossberg, L. (2007). A marketing approach to the tourist experience. *Scandinavian journal of hospitality and tourism*, 7(1), pp. 59-74. doi:10.1080/15022250701231915
- Neslin, A. S., Grewal, D., Leghorn, R., Shankar, V., Teerling, M. L., Thomas, J. S. & Verhoef C. P. (2006). Challenges and opportunities in multichannel customer management. *Journal of Service Research*, 9(2), pp. 95-112. doi:10.1177/1094670506293559
- Novak, T. P., Hoffman, D. L. & Yung, Y. F. (2000). Measuring the customer experience in online environments: A structural modelling approach. *Marketing Science*, 19, pp. 22-42. doi:10.1287/mksc.19.1.22.15184
- Park, J. & Stoel, L. (2005). Effect of brand familiarity, experience and information on online apparel purchase. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 33(2), pp. 148-160. doi:10.1108/09590550510581476
- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1998). Welcome to the experience economy. *MA: Harvard business review*, 76, 97-105. <https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy>
- Pine, B. & Gilmore, J. (2020). *The experience economy : competing for customer time, attention, and money*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Rose, S., Hair, N. & Clark, M. (2011). Online customer experience: A review of the business-to-consumer online purchase context. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(1), pp. 24-39. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2370.2010.00280.x
- Rowley, J., Kupiec-Teahan, B., Leeming, E. (2007). Customer community and co-creation: A case study. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 25(2), 136-146
- Röllecke, F. J., Huchzermeier, A. & Schröder, D. (2018). Returning customers: The hidden strategic opportunity of returns management. *California Management Review*, 60(2), pp. 176-203. doi:10.1177/0008125617741125

- Saghiri, S., Bernon, M., Bourlakis, M. & Wilding, R. (2018). Omni-channel logistics special issue. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 48(4), pp. 362-364. doi:10.1108/IJPDLM-05-2018-361
- Sandberg, J. (2005). How Do We Justify Knowledge Produced Within Interpretive Approaches?. *Organizational Research Methods*, 8(1), pp. 41–68. doi:10.1177/1094428104272000
- Santos, J. (2003). E-service quality: a model of virtual service quality dimensions. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 13(3), pp. 233–246. doi:10.1108/09604520310476490
- Schau, H. J., Muñoz Jr, A. M. & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of marketing*, 73(5), pp. 30-51. doi:10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30
- Schmitt, B. (1999). Experiential marketing. *Journal of marketing management*, 15(1-3), pp. 53-67. doi:10.1362/026725799784870496
- Srinivasan, S. S., Anderson, R. & Ponnnavolu, K. (2002). Customer loyalty in e-commerce: an exploration of its antecedents and consequences. *Journal of retailing*, 78(1), pp. 41-50. doi:10.1016/S0022-4359(01)00065-3
- Srinivasan, S., Anderson, R., & Ponnnavolu, K. (2002). Customer loyalty in e-commerce: an exploration of its antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Retailing*, 78(1), 41–50. doi:10.1016/S0022-4359(01)00065-3.
- Silverstein, M. J. & Fiske, N. (2003). Luxury for the masses. *Harvard business review*, 81(4), pp. 48-59. <https://hbr.org/2003/04/luxury-for-the-masses>
- Siwicki, B. (2014), *E-commerce and m-commerce: the next five years*. <https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/2014/04/28/e-commerce-and-m-commerce-next-five-years/> [2020-04-20].
- Szymanski, D, M. & Hise, R, T. (2000). E-satisfaction: an initial examination. *Journal of retailing*, 76(3), pp. 309-322. doi:10.1016/S0022-4359(00)00035-X
- Lin, C. T. L., & Chuang, S. S. (2018). The importance of brand image on consumer purchase attitude: a case study of e-commerce in Taiwan. *Studies in Business and Economics*, 13(3), 91-104. doi:10.2478/sbe-2018-0037
- ThreadUp. (2019) *ThreadUp 2019 Resale Report*. https://www.thredup.com/resale?tswc_redir=true [2020-05-13]
- Tungate, M. (2008). *Fashion brands: branding style from Armani to Zara*. 2 ed. London: Kogan Page Publishers.

Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H. & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, 6(5), pp. 100-110. doi:10.5430/jnep.v6n5p100

Wirtz, J., den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horvath, C., Ramaseshan, B., van de Klundert, J., Canli, Z. G. & Kandampully, J. (2013). Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities. *Journal of service Management*, 24(3), pp. 223-244. doi:10.1108/09564231311326978

Walls, A. R., Okumus, F., Wang, Y. R. & Kwun, D. J. W. (2011). An epistemological view of consumer experiences. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(1), pp. 10-21. doi:10.1080/1936862

Appendix

Interview Guide

Before starting the interview the following needs to be stated.

- Explain the aim of the study and how we aspire to use the data:
 - *“the purpose of the study is to explore how vintage E-tailers develop experiences that are successful in the way of leading to a transaction as well as creating a memorable experience”*;
 - *“we will analyse the collected interview material to answer our question of research related to the mentioned purpose”*.
- Highlight the option to obtain from answering questions and encourage the interviewee to ask if any question is unclear.
- Confirm if we can include the name of the company, the name of the interviewee or if they prefer to be anonymous.
- Confirm the interviewee’s approval on letting us recording the interview, as well as transcribing the recording afterwards.

Topics to address

Tell us about the company (Mission/objective);
How long have they been operating;
How does the business model look;
What are the value creators in the business model;
Which success factors/values (related to the business model) is central for the webshop; - Why these values;
Regarding customer experience, how do they think vintage shopping differs from (traditional) fast fashion shopping;
What do they want their customers to think when they hear of the company;
How are they creating value for the customer;
How are they working in order to create a positive experience online for their customer;
What do they think is most important with their company that makes the customer satisfied;
What do they consider as crucial factors for the customer to return and fulfill a transaction;

<p>How are they working with their assortment; - Do they have any product strategies;</p>
<p>How does a customer experience at their webshop distinguish from their competitors;</p>
<p>In which way are they communicating with their customer;</p>
<p>Is there any platform from where their customers are communicating; - In which way do they advertise/tell their customers about this;</p>
<p>Is there any other company that they think we should interview?</p>

Additional questions, if the topics have not already been discussed

<p>How are they working with the following in order to create a memorable customer experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● service/customer service; ● products; ● physical environment (the website); ● brand; ● community/other customers.



HÖGSKOLAN I BORÅS

Besöksadress: Allégatan 1 · Postadress: 501 90 Borås · Tfn: 033-435 40 00 · E-post: registrator@hb.se · Webb: www.hb.se