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CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS

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Thus far the existing literature regarding customer experience has not examined the concept considering the influence of different online environments. However, this research gap has been addressed from all quarters. Given the ongoing shift from online environments enabled by stationary desktop devices to mobile online environments, it is important to gain understanding about the dynamics between the customer experience and these aforementioned online environments, that are selected under examination in this study.

The aim of the study is to strengthen understanding of customer experience in the context of online environments. This study enhances extant knowledge from consumers viewpoint in an international setting by concerning the core components of online customer experience based on the conceptualization of Trevinal & Stenger (2014).

This Master’s thesis carries out a study particularly focusing on the target group of young women. Following the principles of exploratory qualitative research, the empirical data was collected in semi-structured interviews with seventeen Finnish and Russian citizens, who on a frequent basis utilise the environments under examination. Data analysis was conducted by means of template analysis.

This study makes a general remark that consumers continuously strive for optimising their experience online. The findings outline that the most optimal customer experience online develops in a situational manner, where the attributes of online environments and the components that form the experience, in addition to the cultural influences, have a significant effect on the ultimate customer experience online. As for culture influencing the experience, the results outline that values such as trust and privacy have a great impact on the experience when comparing different nationalities.

Managers responsible for designing the winning online customer experience should be aware of the influence of different online environments in addition to culture. The results of this study offer useful information about consumer behaviour and explain why consumers choose certain environments to accomplish their tasks online.

This study contributes the literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the key components of customer experience online along with outlining the influence of different online environments. For future research, there is a need for continuing the exploration as consumers adopt more and more recent technologies to enhance their experiences online.

Keywords
desktop, mobile, social media, consumer markets
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1 INTRODUCTION

This Master’s thesis addresses customer experience and examines how different online environments affect consumers’ experience online. The first section of this chapter presents the background of the study and identifies the existing research gap, outlines the objective of the study and presents the research questions. Next, this chapter outlines the key concepts that are relevant to this study and presents the research methodology. In the end of the first chapter, the overall structure of this study is described in brief.

1.1 Background of the Research Topic and Research Gap

The domain of customer experience is well developed in the face-to-face context, but little attention has been paid to exploring the concept in the online context (Rose, Hair & Clark, 2011, p. 24). However, already in the beginning of this century, Novak, Hoffman and Yun (2000) underlined the importance of determining how to create commercial online environments that engage consumers. Technological developments have widened the opportunities for customer-organisation interactions (Hair, Rose & Clark, 2009, p. 51), resulting in the development of online environments in which marketing professionals interact with customers across range of activities. Thus, these interactions online result in perceptions of the overall customer experience. Concurrently, Klaus and Nguyen (2013) explain a shift of marketing management paradigm triggered by the internet, firstly directing the discussion on the service-based relationship marketing, then moving the discussion forward to mutual and interactive, experience-driven relationships with customers. Hair et al. (2009) emphasise that with the emergence of the internet, there is a need to understand the key components that contribute towards an effective online customer experience. Even though Klaus and Nguyen (2013) argue that lately, the concept of online customer experience has received a significant interest from academic world and business life, McLean (2017, p. 658) clarify that so far empirical research concerning the concept remains limited.

Marketing Science Institute (MSI) selects the priorities that drive research initiatives going forward. One of the research priorities defined by MSI (Keller, 2015, p. 12) concerns understanding customers and customer experiences. This priority underlines
that strengthening the understanding of contemporary customers’ experiences requires considering varied perspectives that suggest new concepts, ideas and thinking. As for this study, it examines the customer experience derived from interactions with businesses in different online environments.

Technology-mediated interactions are critical to examine in terms of their impact on customer experience (Verhoef et al. 2009, p. 35), hence the context of online environments is of increasing importance to business and academia as well. Martin, Mortimer and Andrews (2015) state that research regarding online customer experience has focused in most cases on variables drawn from the existing literature, however, their relevance for present-day consumer online may be confusing. Therefore, this study aims at gaining new qualitative insights into what is relevant for consumers when using in online environments today. Concurrently, Rose et al. (2011) emphasize, that the development of online customer experience literature must be consistent with technological developments, as the concept will be more and more influenced by the social interactions enabled by the modern internet-based services that enable sharing information online in various platforms.

Great amount of online customer experience literature has focused to research the impressions derived from the activity of online shopping. Yet, Cho & Park (2004, p. 400) suggest, that online shoppers should be considered as having multiple roles - in addition to being purchasers of goods, they should be considered as users of information technology, who utilise the online environment as a medium for searching information. Concurrently, this study does not only consider online customer experience linked only to the activity of buying but aims at understanding the overall customer experience derived from all sorts of possible interactions between the company and consumer online.

When thinking about online environments, mobile and social have emerged as important new channels, wherein interactive and ongoing online experiences are part of our everyday life. (Kaplan, 2012; Lee, 2016; Mort & Drennan, 2002.) Even though majority of the research focuses solely on websites as the online environment, this study takes in account that the overall online customer experience takes place in different online environments. For example, Rose et al. (2011) emphasise that social
networking has had a great impact upon consumer attitudes, behaviours and acceptance of marketing messages. The authors state that “the future understanding of online customer experience must incorporate factors such as the role of virtual communities, the ability to incorporate user-generated content and the ease of one-to-many communication interfaces” (Rose et al. 2011, p. 33).

Moreover, this study considers the cultural aspects of online customer experience due to the online environments’ global nature. Chong (2004, p. 314) emphasises the internet having the ability to congregate the largest audiences in the world. The author states that the internet acts as a powerful channel for access to information, exchange of goods and social interaction, where the only way for a company to attract and retain a large international audience is to respect user choice and provide service that engages users. The customers have unlimited amount of options and hence, more control over their relationships with different brands. Therefore, it is important to consider how businesses can create consistent and pleasant experiences across different platforms.

As importantly from practical perspective, the web is a key channel for doing business today. Websites as well as other mediums where the whole presence of brand is presented online, are globally accessible (Rowley, 2004, p. 233). Moreover, when considering all the above discussion, online customer experience becomes an important concept for digital marketing professionals responsible for the online consumer markets i.e. businesses-to-customers (B2C) environments.

The conclusive justification for the research gap is presented by McLean & Wilson (2016), who emphasise that providing an effective online customer experience continues to be a challenge for service providers – while technology has enabled new online service delivery channels, little is known on what influences on the online customer experience (McLean & Wilson, 2016, p. 609). Similarly, Klaus (2013a, 449) states that future research should explore if, and how, use of devices such as smartphones and tablet computers influence the customer experience. Furthermore, the topic of this study is chosen based on the personal interest in customer experiences online by the author of this Master’s thesis. It is fascinating to find out what kind of aspects different online environments change regarding consumers’ experience.
Therefore, the possibility to understand better how the customer experience and the online environment relate with each other, acts as a motivational factor for the author.

1.2 The Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The aim of the study is to strengthen understanding of customer experience in the context of online environments. This study discusses the role of different online environments in formation of ideal online customer experience by examining the phenomenon from the standpoint of consumers in an international setting. This study relates extant knowledge concerning the key dimensions of online customer experience based on the research of Trevinal & Stenger (2014), by discussing the components and characteristics of these dimensions in the context of different online environments available. Based on aforementioned, the main research question is:

How customer experience emerges in use of online environments?

In addition, two supporting research questions are identified:

How are the components of customer experience affected by different online environments?

In what manner can culture affect the customer experience in online environments?

1.3 Key Concepts of the Study

In this section the essential terms and concepts that limit the scope of this study are explained. First, the concept of Online Customer Experience is discussed shortly and defined, following the clarification of what is meant by the Online Environments in this study.

As Rose et al. (2011) explain, the concept of Online Customer Experience is rather multidimensional – various definitions of the concept exist in the literature. Therefore, this study is conducted being aware of the view that customer experience is highly
context-specific depending of the setting studied (Klaus, 2013a), and submits that existing conceptualizations around the key concepts might vary between context.

Consequently, for its’ comprehensive viewpoint, this study applies primarily Hair et al. (2009, p. 52) definition of Online Customer Experience as “the customers’ cognitive and affective impressions that are developed derived from online customer-organization interactions.” Consumers perceive the overall online customer experience based on the formation of different impressions during activities such as search for product information, purchasing goods or using online services. (Hair et al. 2009.) Trevinal and Stenger (2014, p. 324) add, that as a holistic and subjective process, the consumer experience results also from interactions between fellow consumers in both, online and offline contexts and moreover, from the online environment. To recapitulate these definitions that are based on the literature, in this study, Online Customer Experience is seen as consumers’ personal, cognitive and affective impressions, that are developed online resulting from interactions between companies, fellow consumers and the online environment.

Next, the concept of online environments is discussed and the meaning defined. As mentioned, online environments are a vital part of formation of consumers’ experience online. Trevinal and Stenger (2014) mention websites and social media as an example of the online environments. This study recognises that consumers mainly use the online environments via two mediums, that are their stationary desktop computers and different mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets and so on. (Mohorovičić, 2013.) Consequently, online environments are understood as a range of digital platforms within the mobile and desktop hardware. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p. 59.) However, in order to limit the scope of this study, the Online Environments principally refer to the environments such as desktop and mobile websites, applications and social media networks, hence are selected under examination in this paper.

1.4 Research Methodology

The research approach in this study is fundamentally deductive, meaning that a theoretical position, as strong as possible, is developed prior to the collection of data. However, often happens that the research ends up combining also an inductive, theory
building approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 159.), therefore this study is considered mixing deductive and inductive approaches.

Exploratory qualitative research design is selected to examine how customer experience emerges through online environments. This research design is chosen mainly because exploratory research is flexible to change and gives space to comprehend the nature of the problem as it progresses. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 140).

The primary data will be collected by semi-structured interviews, with seventeen active online environment users, who on a frequent basis utilise the environments under examination when interacting with companies. This Master’s thesis will carry out a study particularly focusing on the target group of young women. The semi-structured interview contains list of themes and questions developed based on theory reviewed in this study. Data analysis will be conducted in terms of template analysis.

1.5 Structure of the Study

The first chapter offered an overall picture of the contents of the study. Second and third chapter together will present the theoretical background for this study. The second chapter discusses first the concept of online customer experience then presenting the conceptualization of customer experience online. The third chapter discusses firstly the main online environments under examination, then concluding the theoretical discussion with a summary of the theory by presenting a framework. The fourth chapter discusses the research methodology and data analysis process. In the fifth chapter, findings of the study are presented and summarized. The last, sixth chapter of this study covers the conclusions – firstly, the answers to the research questions are presented. Next, the chapter relates the findings to theory in the section of theoretical contribution and discusses the managerial implications. Lastly, limitations of this study are discussed, then outlining suggestions for future research. The list of references and appendices are placed at the very end of this study.
2 ONLINE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The following review will first examine the classifications of customer experience at a general level, later presenting the literature and the definition of the online customer experience adopted for this study. Next, the dimensions and their components of which online customer experience consists of, are discussed. In the end of this chapter, a conceptualization of online customer experience is introduced.

2.1 Overview of Customer Experience

Customer experience in the offline context is defined as the takeaway impression formed when consumers encounter with businesses’ products and services. (Hair et al. 2009.) Conceptualized in a broader manner, customer experience is examined as the customer’s subjective response to the holistic direct and indirect encounter with the firm (Lemke, Clark & Wilson, 2011, p. 846). Another way of comprehending customer experience is to describe it as the customer’s “personal interpretation of the service process and their interaction and involvement with it during their journey through a series of touchpoints, and how those things make the customers feel” (Johnston & Kong, 2011, p. 8). The experience design literature emphasizes that organization’s role is to create the prerequisites that enable customers to have the desired experiences (Zomerdijk & Voss 2010, p. 13). Tussyadiah (2014, p. 544) discusses that the focus of experience design research is to create quality experience for consumers, and therefore calls the need of service providers to work closely with consumers to validate different service scenarios created through an iterative process aiming at understanding better consumers’ experiences.

Rose et al. (2011, pp. 26–27) emphasize that clarifying the differences between offline and online customer experience aids understanding the concepts. According to Rose et al., the main differences are marked regarding the level of personal contact, information provision, time period for interactions and brand presentation. Firstly, the personal contact in offline context is higher, whilst in online context personal contact is low. Provision of information in offline customer experience context varies in terms of intensity over different traditional media, when in online context the amount of information is intensive. The length of interaction happening in offline context is
mainly led by the organization, when online context the customer experience can be created through interaction anytime and anywhere, hence dictated by the consumer. Last key distinction is, that in offline context the brand is presented through a range of tangible devices, meaning artefacts such as staff and their presentation, facilities, vehicle and other tangible elements, when in online context the brand is presented principally audio-Visually. This study focuses solely on the customer experience created in online context, therefore, next sections of this paper discuss online customer experience further.

2.2 Online Customer Experience

Internet as a medium is a powerful channel for access to information, exchange of goods and social interaction (Chong, 2004, p. 315). Exceptional online experience will positively influence a customer’s online behaviour in favour of the businesses. (Shobeiri, Mazaheri & Laroche, 2018.) Early on, the flow construct, introduced by Hoffman and Novak (1996), has been proposed as an important concept for understanding consumer behaviour on the internet as a way of defining the nature of compelling online experience, hence, widely discussed in the literature ever since. (Hoffman, Novak & Yiu-Fai 2001; Trevinal & Stenger 2014.) The flow experience is defined as the state occurring during network navigation, which is (1) characterized by a seamless sequence of responses facilitated by machine interactivity, (2) intrinsically enjoyable, (3) accompanied by a loss of self-consciousness, and (4) self-reinforcing (Hoffman & Novak, 1996, p. 57). On the contrary, based on the recent research of McLean and Wilson (2016), customers are time conscious during search with the perceived length of time spent on the web and this aspect has an influence on the customer experience online.

Hair et al. (2009) define Online Customer Experience as the customers’ cognitive and affective impressions that are developed derived from online customer-organization interactions. The interactions are explained as various activities, among others including searching for product information, subscribing to information services, purchasing goods or using online services. These activities create interactions that end up forming perceptions of the overall online customer experience. (Hair et al. 2009, p. 52.)
Rose, Clark, Samouel and Hair (2012) assume Online Customer Experience to be a psychological state manifested as a subjective response to the website. The authors contribute towards knowledge of how e-retailers can provide effective online experiences for customers by identifying the antecedents, consequences and the outcome of online customer experience. Moreover, Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2016, p. 356) define the quality of digital customer experience based on the combination of rational and emotional factors of using a company’s online services that influences customer’s perceptions of a brand online. Recently, Shobeiri et al. (2018) examine the influence of culture when creating the right customer experience online. A comprehensive review of the literature outlines numerous variables capable of influencing the customer experience including website aesthetics, ease of use, customisation, interactivity, enjoyment and flow. (McLean, 2017, p. 659).

In particular, three areas of literature have been identified that demonstrate how consumers interact on the internet across a diverse range of activities, leading to many different behaviours and, ultimately, experiences. Hair et al. (2011, p. 25) summarizes the previous literature discussion about the driving factors of online customer experience being website quality; identifying a range of factors or dimensions which result in effective website performance; online customer behaviour; particularly in relation to the linked activities of online search and online purchase; and online service experience; the internet enables the delivery of a range of online services, focusing on services such as the delivery of online banking, news and weather, travel bookings, education programmes and knowledge communities. Overall, customers operating in the online environment encounter numerous components capable of influencing their experience with the website (McLean, 2017, p. 658).

Distinction has been made within the online customer experience literature in terms of some research focusing on explaining the uncontrollable factors studied from the customers’ perspective (Klaus, 2013a; Klaus & Nguyen, 2013) and other research focusing on understanding the controllable factors of customer experience taking the companies perspective. (Klaus, 2013b; Voss et al., 2008; Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010.) Another remarkable distinction in the literature of online customer experience is the distinguish between business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2C) contexts. Examining the B2B setting and qualitative research on that, Hair et al. (2009)
form a repertory grid as a tool that encourages business managers to articulate emotional as well as rational customer experience. McLean (2017) explores the customer experience online within business-to-business (B2B) websites and outline that the credibility of the website and the quality of the information have a significant effect on the customer experience online in a B2B context. However, this study will concentrate particularly on the B2C i.e. consumer markets’ side of the literature and consider the concept from consumers point of view.

Exceptionally forming a comprehensive framework of the online customer experience, Trevinal & Stenger’s (2014) research explores the content of consumers experience when they shop online and proposes conceptual model regarding the online shopping experience (OSE). OSE is defined as a “complex experience lived by the consumers when they shop online, in both online and offline contexts (in a specific place, time, with or without any companion’s presence…); it is a holistic and subjective process resulting from interactions between consumers, shopping practices (including tools and routines) and the online environment, (e.g. shopping websites, online consumer reviews, and social media) (Trevinal & Stenger 2014, p. 324).

Then again, Klaus (2013a) presents a conceptual framework of Online Customer Service Experience (OCSE), which incorporates individual dimensions of the online experience according to the stage of customer journey. Similarly, with Trevinal & Stenger’s (2014) study, the author examines the customer journey evolving around the purchase in online retail context. OCSE is defined as the customer’s overall mental perception of their interaction with the online service provider and other customers expressed in its dimensions functionality and psychological factors. Functionality dimension is associated with the technical performance of the web site, consisting of usability, communication, product presence and interactivity. This framework includes functionality factor of customers interactions with other customers as well. Psychological factors, such as context-familiarity, trust and value for money, are evaluated in a setting of online channel being compared to offline channel. (Klaus, 2013a, pp. 447–448.)

Overall, there exists various definitions of online customer experience in the literature. To some extent the distinction between these expressions are subtle, however
occasionally conflicting, including “internet experience”, “digital experience”, “online experience”, “website brand experience”, “online customer service experience” and “online shopping experience”. (Rose et al. 2011.) As the authors clarify, the difference in such concepts is predominantly in relation to the nature of the experience explained. An important remark that applies to this study as well, is that customer experience is considered as context-specific, and it needs to be explored in a context-specific setting. Therefore, following Klaus (2013a), this study submits that existing conceptualizations around the key concepts might vary between context. As mentioned earlier, the internet enables the delivery of a range of online services such as delivery of online banking, news and weather, travel bookings, education programmes and knowledge communities. At the same time, advances in technology have created new opportunities for online purchase, or online shopping, in terms of when and where customers are able to interact online with an organization (Rose et al. 2012).

However, the majority of literature with regard to the customer experience and the online customer experience, has focused on the hedonic activity of online shopping. However, as Cho and Park (2004, p. 400) advise, online shoppers should be considered as having multiple roles, in addition to being purchasers of goods, they should be considered as users of information technology, utilizing the online environment as a medium for searching information. Following Constantinides (2004) and McLean and Wilson (2016), this study considers that the online customer experience is more complex than the experience derived from solely the activity of online shopping. In reality often, these activities – online shopping and using online services such as online banking or using information search services – are combined in one session that creates the experience. For this reason, this study does not exclude either of the activities, rather examines them together happening simultaneously or as overlapping in different environments. Therefore, this study will focus to create understanding particularly in relation to the different linked activities of online search, services and purchases, that create impressions, eventually forming the customer experience online.
2.3 Online Customer Experience Dimensions

This study accommodates extant knowledge and further strengthens the notion of online customer experience, by examining how the experience’s dimensions constructs in different online environments during activities such as online shopping and using online services. Therefore, the dimensions of which online customer experience is constructed of, are discussed in greater detail next. The dimensions are recognized based on the fundamental conceptualization regarding experiences online by Trevinal and Stenger (2014) introduced in the previous section of this paper. The four core dimensions under examination are the physical, ideological, pragmatic and social dimensions. Although the division of the dimensions is based on Trevinal & Stenger’s (2014) conceptualization, also the online customer service experience attributes introduced by Klaus (2013a) are considered based on reasoning in the previous chapter, moreover since these attributes can act as both as barriers and enhances of online activities such as purchases. (Klaus 2013a, p. 448.) Furthermore, other views emphasised by various researchers within the literature are taken in account when formatting the scope of this paper. In conclusion, to be able to examine the online customer experience during the different activities thoroughly, customer experience online and its dimensions’ components and characteristics are discussed in detail next.

2.3.1 Physical Dimension

Physical dimension involves the aspects that are observed by *senses*; meaning consumer’s sensations and feelings created by the online context, such as the ergonomics and aesthetics, in other words, easiness-to-use and the visual design. (Trevinal & Stenger, 2014.) Physical attributes relate to the fact that customers evaluate the superiority of their experiences throughout the process of interacting with a provider’s resources (Lemke, Clark & Wilson, 2011). This dimension resonates with Chong’s (2004) definition of user experience which refers to matching users’ needs and expectations to key elements and features of product design - at a minimum the service must be useful, usable and desirable to offer a positive user experience.
Relating to the physical environment, Klaus’ (2013a, p. 447) conceptualizes functionality dimension as a part of online service experience. Here, the functionality is associated with the technical performance, which means that the service’s essential artefacts are those which enable users to have their requirements and wishes met. Klaus (2013a) defines these service fragments as the sub-dimensions of functionality, including usability, product presence, communication, social presence and interactivity. Usability enables online customers to feel comfortable using the website. Communication opportunities reduce the possible risks associated with e-commerce. Product presence offers consumer the opportunity to assess the products in virtual environments to stimulate the purchase intentions. Then again, interactivity describes the dialogue between the users and the company via the medium under examination. The last sub-dimension, social presence, reflects the customer’s virtual interaction with other shoppers. Similarly, in this study the social aspect is presented as one main dimension following Trevinal and Stenger’s framework (2014) and will be discussed later in greater detail.

*Time* is another defining component in online experiences context, discussing the consumer’s perception regarding duration of the experience. It includes the notion of time distortion, which refers to the uncontrolled feeling of loss of time when being online. Another characteristic is time management, meaning the determined intention to control the experience in terms of time. (Trevinal & Stenger, 2014.) As discussed earlier in this study, Novak et al. (2000, p. 24) defined the concept of flow on the web. The authors described the flow as a cognitive state experienced during online navigation that is determined by high levels of skill and control, high levels of challenge and focused attention, wherein time passing by is seen as somewhat positive to online experience. However, contemporary customers are considered behaving time-consciously with the perceived length of time spent influencing the online customer experience. (McLean & Wilson, 2016; Trevinal & Stenger, 2014.)

2.3.2 Ideological Dimension

Trevinal and Stenger (2014) posit that values and symbolic significations may also be part of the online experience. Therefore, as in the original framework, the ideological dimension consists of three components that are orientation, values and rituals.
Ideological dimension involves the consumers’ orientation meaning hedonic values in terms of pleasant sensations and on the other hand utilitarian principles. Pöyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara (2013) discuss the differences in consumer behaviour regarding hedonic a utilitarian purpose using social networking site Facebook. Utilitarian behaviour is defined as goal-oriented and rational, concerned with effectiveness and instrumental value, whereas hedonic behaviour implies seeking fun, play, enjoyment and experiences (Pöyry et al. 2013, p. 225). When it comes to using social media platforms, hedonic motivations show a tendency to participate in the community networking page without the intention to buy or refer the brand forward. On the other hand, users driven by utilitarian motivations are more connected to merely browsing in the community page, ultimately showing intentions to buy from hosting company. (Pöyry et al. 2013.)

Another component are the values, in this context meaning issues such as trust and privacy. Rose et al. (2011) posit that trust is accentuated in the context of the online environment due to low on personal contact. Authors clarify that in the online context, risk is related with the purchase decision regarding the commodities or services acquired, in addition to the exchange process, for example, using the website to purchase. With concurrent findings related to online experience, Klaus (2013a) identifies trust as psychological value and emphasises that lack of personal contact and anonymity of the internet are factors that discourage customers’ use of online channels. The author conclude that trust relates to the expectations that website will act proficiently, be open and fair to the consumer.

Last defined component are rituals. For example, using online environment at home for certain purposes or multitasking whilst being online. Rituals can occur daily or irregularly, be linked to consumer’s culture, or the perception what is socially acceptable. (Trevinal & Stenger, 2014.) By an exact definition, rituals are actions and interactions characterized by a sequential process that is regularly repeated (Trevinal & Stenger 2014, p. 315).
2.3.3 Pragmatic Dimension

Pragmatic, practice-based dimension, consists of two aspects linked to routines and online tools. First, it considers the use of *online tools* and all the shopping practices that structure the routines, for example different “tricks” that facilitate the shopping online. In a sum, practice involves customer’s online routines and tactics used to aid the activities of search and purchase. Important note is that these aforementioned practices are constitutive of the co-creation of the experience.

Second, the pragmatic dimension reflects the appropriation of the online environment through *patronage routines*, for example using many ways to browse websites, such as utilising bookmarks or searching information or other users’ comments about the object of intended purchase from multiple pages simultaneously. (Trevinal & Stenger, 2014.) Concurrently, Klaus (2013a) includes social presence as functional dimension of online service experience when indicating the customer’s virtual interaction with other shoppers through comments, product reviews and social media linkages. The author clarifies that the possibility to explore experiences of other customers helps to overcome the uncertainties and lack of physical presence and impacts to trust and usefulness of the experience.

2.3.4 Social Dimension

Social dimension encompasses components of socialization and decision aid related to the online experience. *Socialization* refers to social interaction online via social networks with friends. In addition, it involves socialization trough the companions’, such as friends or family presence during the experience offline. *Decision aid* refers to consumer relying online consumer reviews and ratings as well as offline decision aid, which means considering recommendations gathered in everyday life. (Trevinal & Stenger, 2014.) On contrary to Klaus’ (2013a) view of social presence is, that social dimension especially considers consumer’s nearest associates.

To conclude, Table 1 below conceptualizes four different dimensions that form the online customer experience trough the components and their characteristics. Table 1 adapts the original presentation of Trevinal & Stenger (2014) discussed above. This
conceptualization acts as an essential part of the framework that will be presented later in this study.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework of the Online Customer Experience (adapted from Trevinal & Stenger, 2014, p. 318).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical dimension</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time distortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senses</td>
<td>Ergonomics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Esthetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological dimension</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Hedonic/Utilitarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Trust and privacy issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rituals</td>
<td>Frame of the experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic dimension</td>
<td>Patronage routines</td>
<td>Ways to browse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online tools</td>
<td>Practices in use of tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social dimension</td>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>Interaction in networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Offline presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision aid</td>
<td>Online reviews &amp; ratings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Offline aid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be able to strengthen the understanding of customer experience online, it is important to consider this conceptualization also critically. Martin, Mortimer and Andrews (2015) state that online customer experience research has focused on existing variables outlined based on the extant literature, however, their relevance for nowadays consumer online may be misleading. Therefore, as authors suggest, this study aims at gaining fresh qualitative insights into what is relevant for consumers today when conducting activities in online platforms. As distinct from earlier literature, this study examines the online customer experience during different activities in online environments, not solely in the context of online shopping. Moreover, even though majority of the research focuses on websites as the core online environment, this study takes into account that the overall online customer experience takes place in different online environments such as desktop or mobile websites, applications and social media platforms, which will be discussed next.
3 ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS

Firstly, this chapter discusses the existing literature regarding online environments and communication online on a general level. Then, the contents of the chapter are organised according to the online environments selected under examination in this study, that are websites, applications and social media platforms enabled by desktop and mobile environments, discussing their different characteristics. As a conclusion, a simple figure that summarizes the online environments is presented in the end of this chapter.

3.1 Online Environments and Communication

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, pp. 59–60) discuss the digital marketing environment as the contexts in which firms operate, including how they relate to customers and other businesses participating in their markets. Furthermore, authors make a distinction between the micro- and macro-environments in the digital marketing environment. Micro-environment is defined as the operating environment, consisting of the companies, stakeholders, and their interactions which influence how an organisation responds in its marketplace. On the other hand, macro-environment is identified as the remote environment that includes the broad forces affecting all organisations in the marketplace, including social, technological, economic, political, legal and economic influences. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016)

Kiani (1998) discusses the marketing opportunities in the digital world, emphasizing that due to the internet and the fast progress of web technologies’ innovative components, they are posed as central to a paradigm shift in marketing. More recent developments in digitization, namely the social aspects of the web (e.g. Web2.0 and social media) have confirmed the positive relationship between utilization and outcomes in marketing (Taiminen & Karjaluoto 2014, p. 634). These contemporary digital environments act as the enablers of interaction via communication. Moreover, the appearance of the new marketing environments and the evolutionary progress of the marketing functions has led marketing from a mass-market model to one-to-many communications, including interactive individualisation of goods, services and interactions. (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Kiani, 1998.) Identifying four different ways
of communication made accurate by means of the new marketing environment, Kiani (1998) titles online communication situations that are company-to-consumer, consumer-to-company, consumer-to-consumer and company-to-company. Continuing the discussion of new communication patterns made possible by the online environment, Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2014) state that digital channels can be classified in several other ways. The authors discuss classifying channels by the means of presenting the channels based on the viewpoint of which party, the company or the target audience, controls the communications and whether communications are one-way or two-way as seen in Table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High company control</th>
<th>Low company control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-way communication</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>SEO (Search engine optimisation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E-mail newsletters</td>
<td>SEA (Search engine advertising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online directories &amp; Search engines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banner advertising, paid advertising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-way communication</td>
<td>Company generated blogs</td>
<td>Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company’s own communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-way communication channels that are in high company control are the website, e-mail newsletters, online directories and banner advertising. With low company control are search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine advertising (SEA). Two-way communication channels with high company control are blogs published by company, and the own communities, when under low control are social media channels. (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2014, pp. 635–636.) This study concentrates on the impressions that are derived from interactions during the communications between both as one-way and two-way contexts between the company and the consumer, moreover, considering also consumer-to-consumer communications in the online environments as the social aspect.

In order to firms to be able to answer the competition, they should conduct online marketplace analysis and evaluate and monitor the click ecosystem, which consists of a range of digital technology platforms within the mobile and desktop hardware and refers to the customer behaviour or flow of online visitors between search engines,
media sites and other intermediaries to an organisation and its competitors. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p. 59.) To limit the scope of the study, principally online environments such as desktop and mobile websites, applications and social media networks are selected under examination in this paper and will be discussed next.

### 3.2 Desktop Online Environments

As mentioned, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, p. 59) consider digital technology platforms within the desktop hardware as a part of click ecosystem, which in this study is referred as online environments. Hence, the stationary desktop setting is considered as a wider contextual concept behind the discussion of the two main virtual platforms, websites and social media, together forming the online environments on desktop.

#### 3.2.1 Websites

When evaluating website as the platform of creating customer experiences, various viewpoints and attributes can be examined. The objective of marketers in website design depends on organization, for example, the idea can be to make the audience aware of or interested in, their products or brands while some others might wish to sell and resell their product through the websites (Pitt, Berthon & Watson, 1996). In alignment with various authors, Kiani (1998) states that consumers can actively choose whether to approach firms through their websites, furthermore, motivation of consumers to response and interact is a key point of virtual marketing in interactive marketing environment as website.

In their research, Karayanni and Baltas (2003) examine the website effectiveness through determining the site properties for the internet sales performance by examining the characteristics such as navigability, interactivity, multimedia design and marketing communications content. *Navigability* refers to the ability of users to navigate the page and identify information quickly, enabled by e.g. linked pages throughout the site and hyperlinked related information. *Interactivity* of the site refers to customized solutions offered to customers who might otherwise require the assistance of staff, including firstly, memory storage, saving the data of interactions with customer and secondly, organizational response to individual needs and
preferences via demassification, individualizing messaging with each individual within large audience. To summarize, interactivity via website can be identifying the address of a customer, initiating the dialogue, maintaining the dialogue and storing data on customer behaviour, which can be used to customize marketing strategies. In multimedia design information is provided using multimedia, i.e. use of frames, animation, banners and audio-video elements. Website designers of commercial sites face a numerous of decisions about how best to organize and present product information. Marketing communication content includes allowance of involvement of customers in information processing through submitting feedback to the firm. According to authors view, content can be either company-related information provided on the website which aims at building the corporate image or customer-related information exchange available through the website. (Karayanni & Baltas, 2003, pp. 106–109.)

The research on user experience, whether the website serves the needs of users as a channel, Chong (2004, p. 283) states that user experience comprises many interrelated factors, such as usability, usefulness and desirability, indicating how closely the user identifies with the “personality” or the branding of that site (“design look” factors e.g. layout, colour palette, graphics and the overall look and feel of a site). These factors affect to the credibility, another factor that is intangible quality, termed as the perception among users whether the company can offer a given service in a manner that its competitive alternative. Branding and the websites brand image as another factor effects on overall user experience of the website. (Chong, 2004, p. 284.)

Based on their research, Shankar, Smith and Rangaswamy (2003) discuss how customer satisfaction and loyalty can be enhanced on websites and compare online environments to offline. Even though this research focuses solely on online environment, Shankar et al. (2003) make useful notions of how enhance the experience on online mediums, practically on websites. Authors recommend reinforce loyalty via the website by providing feeling of satisfaction and state the phenomenon being stronger online. Moreover, the information content of the website is important in terms of the depth of information, which increases service encounter satisfaction. Furthermore, the information should be access as easy as possible on the website. Lastly, greater value (in the form of promotions online and other incentives) to
frequent online users should be provided since frequent users seem to have greater overall satisfaction when they choose the service provider online. To sum up, websites offer more information, facilitating to access and exploit that information, increasing the satisfaction, loyalty and experience.

Mort and Drennan (2002) analyse key factors in terms of online marketing via websites accessed via non-mobile computer device, which makes it more restrictive, mainly visual trough large screen, being more content driven than spontaneous. However, nowadays the situation has changed and websites have become more mobile along the increasing popularity of usage of mobile devices stated by Mohorovičić (2013), which will be discussed in more detail later on.

3.2.2 Social Media Platforms

Digitization has become part of our daily routines, shaping the traditional ways in which consumers and businesses interact with each other (Karjaluoto & Taiminen, 2014). In particular, social media represents a ground-breaking trend that should be of interest to companies operating in online environments. Consumers increasingly spend their time online using social media. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010.) Due to the common statement derived from contemporary consumer behaviour, if a company cannot be found in Google, or from any search browsing tool as social media, it does not exist. Therefore, the of utilization of these digital channels is important for all sorts of brands including firms regardless the size, operating environment, this is, if they want to stay competitive and grow. (Karjaluoto & Taiminen, 2014.)

Social media is defined as a group of the internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). The authors clarify that in this definition, Web 2.0 represents the technological foundation and User Generated Content (UGC) can be seen as all the ways in which the individuals make use of social media. Continuing the discussion further, Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) add that regarding consumer-generated media, the content is also marketer-generated and that this social media content it’s not necessarily ‘paid’ media, even though the nature of the content is more advertorial.
Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) develop a classification scheme that considers the fact that the landscape of social media applications is ever-changing with new sites launching online frequently. The classification relies on theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure), being the two key elements of social media. The first classification can be made based on the richness of the medium and the degree of social presence that it enables. Social presence is influenced by the intimacy (interpersonal vs. mediated) and immediacy (asynchronous vs. synchronous) of the medium and can be expected to be lower for mediated (e.g., telephone conversation) than interpersonal (e.g., face-to-face discussion) and for asynchronous (e.g., e-mail) than synchronous (e.g., live chat) communications. The higher the social presence, the larger the social influence that the communication partners have on each other’s behaviour. Closely related to the idea of social presence is the concept of media richness. Media differ in the amount of information allow to be transmitted in a given time interval some media are more effective than others in resolving ambiguity and uncertainty, which supports the profound assumption within the research that it is the goal of any type of communication. The second classification social processes are based on the degree of self-disclosure it requires and the type of self-presentation it allows. Self-disclosure is the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information (e.g., thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes) that is consistent with the image one would like to give. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62.)

In alignment with Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) emphasis, Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) clarify the difference regarding the meaning of social media and Web 2.0. The authors continue that in general, Web 2.0 is comprised of computer network-based platforms upon which social media applications/tools (referred as social media) function. Many organizations create their own Web-based platforms which run on the internet. For instance, Facebook and Twitter offer their own Web 2.0 platforms, upon which social media e.g. mobile applications or games may function. (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011, p. 276.)

Moreover, Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011, p. 279) identify in their research dimensions that can be used to differentiate important types of social media in a social media mix. The types are associated with marketing objectives and purposes and recognized in
terms of two factors; the half-life of information and the depth of information. The half-life of information is a function of both the medium and the content and refers to the longevity of the information in terms of availability and appearance on the screen and interest in a topic. Depth of information refers to the richness of the content, and the number and diversity of perspectives. Blogs are social media that convey product knowledge and have long half-life of information, but the depth is shallower, comparing to communities in social media that establish and maintain relations and also have long half-life. Considering the platforms with short half-life of information, platforms defined as micro-blogs such as Twitter, which create awareness and recall bringing engagement and short conversation, are narrow in information depth. Then again, when comparing social networks such as Facebook, work as platforms that influence and track beliefs and attitudes and therefore are defined as having deeper information depth. (Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011, p. 279.)

When examining these different classifications of social media, this research aims at discussing social media platforms such as social networking channels and possibility of discussion related to communities, which were recognizable in both of the classifications presented. Nevertheless, this research considers the notion that social media landscape is continuously changing and developing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), as original platforms like Facebook are getting more unpopular or shifting as for demographics of its’ main audience, when at the same time, new platforms evolve and gain popularity such as Vero and Musicall.ly. Due to continuously developing landscape of social media channels, this study perceives that it is more meaningful to discuss social media in general than limiting the research to few particular social media channels e.g. Twitter or Facebook. Moreover, nowadays we see that social media applications have experienced a migration from desktop computers to mobile devices (Kaplan, 2012), therefore it is more meaningful to continue discussion regarding social media in that context in the next sections.

3.3 Mobile Online Environments

Discussion regarding mobile digital technology in marketing literature has been ongoing since two decades ago. Mort and Drennan (2002, p. 9) stated that “m-marketing should be considered within the context of m-business and m-commerce.”
The authors discussed mobile-business, *m*-business, referring to the change of communications and information delivery at the time due to the converge of the telecommunications and the internet. Key factors regarding technology in mobile marketing implications are the basis that technical interface is the mobile device, with possible different type of devices as access points with multiple interfaces. Key factors content-wise are that consumer behaviour can be more spontaneous and more integrated since users can interact with mobile device at any time anywhere, therefore interaction becomes more real and the possibilities in marketing are more tied to context. (Mort & Drennan, 2002, p. 16.) Mobile devices such as cellular phones and tablet computers have become necessary every-day essentials. (Kaplan, 2012, p. 129.)

3.3.1 Mobile Responsive Websites and Applications

In addition to applications and social media, websites are a remarkable part of the mobile channel too from customers viewpoint, and therefore it is another area what marketing literature needs to consider when examining customer experience. As stated above, *mobile marketing* is defined as “any marketing activity conducted through a ubiquitous network to which consumers are constantly connected using a personal mobile device.” (Kaplan 2012, p. 130). In alignment with the literature Mohorovičić (2013) states, that people are increasingly using smartphones and tablets for accessing the internet instead of not just desktop personal computers and notebooks. Therefore, websites need to be optimized for all these devices in order to provide the best user experience. Responsive web design is needed, in order to offer a website with a flexibility to adapt to any possible devices, i.e. their resolutions, eventually enhancing customer experience.

3.3.2 Mobile Social Media

At present, with the development and popularity of mobile devices, social media applications have gone mobile and new entrants are constantly appearing. (Kaplan, 2012.) Kaplan’s (2012) research on mobile marketing and mobile social media clarifies, that mobile social media belongs under the wider classification of mobile marketing applications. *Mobile marketing* is defined as “any marketing activity conducted through a ubiquitous network to which consumers are constantly connected
using a personal mobile device.” (Kaplan, 2012, p. 130). Comparing traditional social media applications with mobile social media reveals important differences. Companies engaging in mobile social media will often gather knowledge about consumers in terms of current geographical position in time or space. Moreover, it is mentioned that users will nearly always agree to receiving information from the company. Mobile social media is defined as “a group of mobile marketing applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan 2012, p. 130).

In their article discussing the emergence of hybrid online distribution channels, Thakran and Verma (2013, pp. 243–246) discuss that with most recent digital advancements, a new category of technology has emerged, known as customer engagement technology (CET), which includes a wide variety of “SoLoMo” applications, meaning social-, location-, and mobile-based applications.

Further examining determinants of effective SoLoMo advertising, Lee (2016) agrees that marketers seek to find successful practices in utilising mobile marketing. SoLoMo advertising refers to advertising information tailored for a user based on the location of that mobile user on social media (Lee, 2016, p. 334). These sorts of location-based mobile services are seen as more appealing to consumers due to the popularity of social media networks and being enabled more and more conveniently by the mobile internet connection. Authors explain that nowadays, mobile users value more “interpersonal connectivity, intimacy and sociability” and therefore, especially the social aspect is important for practical reasons in creating two-way communication with consumers. Another way of explaining the effectiveness of SoLoMo marketing is that it is agile in spreading word-of-mouth about products and services in the virtual communities of e.g. friends, colleagues and family, that users belong to. This refers to so-called social capital -aspect related of SoLoMo, meaning the resources derived from the networks that current and potential consumers have formed. Regardless the powerfulness and advantages of the social capital feature, the authors notify that often in evaluating mobile advertisement, it has been overlooked. (Lee, 2016, p. 328.)
Based on the literature, consumers mainly use online environments via two mediums, their stationary desktop computers and different mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets and so on (Mohorovičić, 2013), even though there is an ongoing significant shift from computers to tablets and smartphones. Figure 1 above indicates the online environments selected under examination in the scope of this study. Mobile and desktop hardware are presented as dividing physical enablers to the online environments under examination, which are websites and social media in case of stationary desktops and on the other hand, applications, responsive websites and social media in mobile devices.

3.4 Framework: Customer Experience in Online Environments

Above literature review in chapters 2 and 3 outlined the previous research and presented what is known to the marketing literature concerning the concept of customer experience online by discussing different approaches and viewpoints, hence presenting the main components and characteristics of the phenomenon (see Table 1). This review also recognized different online environments based on the literature that are selected under examination and outlined how they are understood in terms of this study (see Figure 1). These two entities form the theoretical framework that is guiding the empirical research of this study. Figure 2 that is presented in the end of this section and titled as “Integrative Framework of Customer Experience in Online Environments”, synthetises the discussion into one entity.

Existing literature recognised physical, ideological, pragmatic and social dimensions moreover, their components and characteristics typical to customer experience online.
These elements are examined in the context of two online environment entities. First entity that was selected to the scope of this study, refers to use of online environments such as websites and social media platforms via stationary desktop devices. Second entity refers to use of mobile online environments such as responsive websites and applications and social media platforms.

As written in the beginning of this thesis when defining the terminology, *Online Customer Experience* is seen as consumers’ personal, cognitive and affective impressions, that are developed online resulting from interactions between companies, fellow consumers and the online environment. This theoretical framework suggests that the defined components and their characteristics are a part of a whole that forms the impressions and eventually the online customer experience. Moreover, this framework suggests that those components are affected depending on the environment in question, therefore being fundamentally linked to whether the online environment is available in mobile or stationary manner.

In a sum, the theoretical framework suggests that different online environments might have an influence to the online customer experience. This is because literature has shown that online customer experience is formed from the impressions of accomplishing different activities (such as online shopping, search and using online services) online and moreover, the activities take place in different online environments provided by the businesses.
Figure 2. Integrative Framework: Customer Experience in Online Environments
4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To begin with, this chapter explains the research approach and methods utilized in this study. This section is followed by a description of the collection process of data and presentation of the empirical material. Next, the process of analysing data is explained. Lastly, the research quality is assessed by discussing validity and reliability.

4.1 Research Approach and Methods

Exploratory qualitative research design is selected to examine how online customer experience forms in different online environments. This research design is chosen mainly because it aids especially in assessing certain phenomena in a new light. Moreover, exploratory research is flexible to change, and it gives space to comprehend the nature of the problem as it progresses. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 140.)

The research approach is essentially deductive, meaning that a strong theoretical position is developed prior to the collection of data. However, often occurs that the research ends up combining also an inductive, theory building approach, which possibly will be the situation. Therefore, the research approach chosen considers both, and is a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. This hybrid strategy for the study is chosen due to its ability to be flexible in analysis process and therefore answer the research questions and empirically solve the research problem within the limitations of this study. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 159.)

4.2 Data Collection

The empirical data for this study is collected by carrying out semi-structured interviews. According to Saunders’s (2009, p. 320) classification, in semi-structured interviews the researcher will have a list of themes and questions to be covered, as in this case. Semi-structured interviews allow, depending on the counterparty in question, slight changes in the manuscript alongside the conversation during the interview. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 320.) The themes and questions for the semi-structured interview in this study were shaped based on the theoretical conceptualization
regarding online customer experience, examining how the attributes are manifested in different online environments (see Appendix 1).

In total, seventeen people were interviewed. The non-standardised interviews were conducted primarily in one-to-one occasions via online call interviews. In few cases, the interviews were conducted with two interviewees’ mini-focus groups, which also took place via online call interviews. The criteria of interviewee selection were based on the usage of different online environments and interviewees having had experiences online as a customer by activities such as shopping, using online services or searching information online. Moreover, as this study considers the global perspective of the internet and therefore online customer experience being influenced by culture, the interviewees were of two nationalities. Therefore, one more criterion for the interviewees was to be either Finnish or Russian citizen. This way, the data could have international point of view to consider, and by limiting the participants to two different nationalities, the examination could still be validated. The interviewees were 22-28 years old women, with different backgrounds regarding profession and the level of use regarding commercial sites and online services (see Table 3).

Table 3. Interviewees’ Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Order of the interviews and interview date</th>
<th>Age and profession</th>
<th>Use of commercial sites and online services (intensive, regular, limited)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>1st Interviewee, 14.3.2018</td>
<td>Student, 24</td>
<td>regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Interviewee, 14.3.2018</td>
<td>Account manager, 26</td>
<td>regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Interviewee, 14.3.2018</td>
<td>Project manager, 23</td>
<td>regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018</td>
<td>Purchasing manager, 24</td>
<td>regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th Interviewee, 18.3.2018</td>
<td>Marketing coordinator, 23</td>
<td>limited (commercial)/regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th Interviewee, 20.3.2018</td>
<td>Business processes consultant, 23</td>
<td>limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7th Interviewee, 21.3.2018</td>
<td>Data management specialist, 28</td>
<td>regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8th Interviewee, 22.3.2018</td>
<td>HR specialist, 23</td>
<td>regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9th Interviewee, 24.3.2018</td>
<td>Event manager, 26</td>
<td>intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10th Interviewee, 24.3.2018</td>
<td>Consulting analyst, 23</td>
<td>intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>11th Interviewee, 15.3.2018</td>
<td>Student, 24</td>
<td>regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12th Interviewee, 16.3.2018</td>
<td>Advisor, retail properties, 24</td>
<td>intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13th Interviewee, 17.3.2018</td>
<td>Sales clerk, 26</td>
<td>limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14th Interviewee, 19.3.2018</td>
<td>Accountant, 25</td>
<td>intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15th Interviewee, 19.3.2018</td>
<td>Assistant accountant/student, 25</td>
<td>intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16th Interviewee, 23.3.2018</td>
<td>Nursing student, 22</td>
<td>limited (commercial)/intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17th Interviewee, 24.3.2018</td>
<td>MSc. in Music, 26</td>
<td>limited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews were carried out between 14 of March and 24 of March 2018. Each interview took around 30 - 60 minutes. The interviews for Finnish consumers were
conducted in Finnish language and for the Russian consumers in English (see the interview frame Appendix 1). The interview sessions began with an introduction of the research question and clarifying the main concepts of online environments and online customer experience. After the introduction of the topic and collecting the background information, the semi-structured interview was carried out following main themes familiar from the theoretical framework; time, senses, orientation, values, rituals, patronage routines, online tools, socialization and decision aid. The interview contained detailed questions regarding aforementioned themes, relating them to earlier defined online environments (see Appendix 1). Each interview was recorded using the support of recoding software OBS Studio, and as soon as possible, maximum within one day since the interview, the material was transcribed, resulting in total of 30 pages of empirical data.

4.3 Data Analysis

Next section presents and justifies template analysis as the data analysis method chosen for this study and then describes the analysis process in detail.

4.3.1 Analysis Method

As mentioned above, the empirical data collected is qualitative in nature, meaning that it is based on meanings expressed through words. The non-standardised data requires classification into categories and analysis is conducted by using conceptualisation. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 482.) Content analysis was chosen as the analysis method since the study focuses on exploring online customer experience and what sort of views consumers have regarding online environments. Concurrently in previous research, content analysis method has been utilised as a support of research regarding online customer experience. (Klaus & Nguyen, 2013; Trevinal & Stenger, 2014.) Therefore, the content analysis was considered as a relevant method.

Content analysis is the study of the message itself by the means of interpretation and inference. Content analysis is a specific method that requires objective, systematic, and quantitative hold on the analysis process. Objectivity specifies that the categories of analysis need to be defined in a way that different analysts can apply them
repeatedly to the same content and receive same results. Systematization refers to the inclusion and exclusion of content to analysis categories and it is done according to consistently applied rules, with an assumption in mind that the findings must have theoretical relevance and be generalizable. Quantification means the measurement of the extent of emphasis and it can be conducted by examining quantitative words like more, always, increases, or often. (Kassarjian, 1977, pp. 9–10.)

In this study, structuring the data for analysis is done by utilising the template analysis. Template analysis refers to thematically organizing and analysing textual data, where the researcher produces a list of codes (template) that presents the themes identified in the data. (King, 2004, p. 257.) As mentioned before, qualitative data analysis can be done by following inductive or deductive approach or by mixing the two approaches. (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 159.) Template analysis combines deductive and inductive approach to qualitative analysis in a way that there are predetermined codes that are then developed or added as processing and interpreting the data progresses (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 505.)

4.3.2 Analysis Process

The analysis process took place in five phases: First, I created the template for the analysis by listing the categories according to the theoretical frameworks regarding online environments and components of Online Customer Experience, as well as being based on the interview questions (see Appendix 2). Secondly, I read the gathered data to get an overall picture and started to code it, in other words, labelled the data according to the characteristics of Online Customer Experience. Thirdly, I grouped the units of data under the template list. The textual analysis of the data was made manually without any support from software since the data was possible to comprehend and handle with simple procedures. Next, as a simple supplementary analysis and in order to confirm of the importance of certain themes for the study, I quantified the data by counting the frequency of particular aspects occurred. This was done by utilising the template and conducting minor statistical analysis by the support of Excel software. Lastly, I reported the findings that will be presented in the chapter 5.
Since developing the template is primarily done based on the research problem, I begun the first phase by creating the template by means of underscoring the important questions that derive from the purpose of the study. In this study, how online customer experience emerges via online environments is the main research question. Therefore, the highest-level themes were defined according to the environments, which are desktop and mobile environments.

In template analysis, a key feature is the hierarchical organization of codes, with groups of similar codes clustered together to produce more general higher-order codes (King, 2004, p. 258). Hierarchism in this study emerges from the division of the original framework to components and it more narrow, specific themes, characteristics of Online Customer Experience. I then created an initial template and started labelling units. Unit of data used in this study was a sentence, or a line of a transcript, depending on the suitability of case in question. After initial labelling, final template for analysis was created. The final template integrated the questionnaire more thoroughly in addition to the theoretical framework.

The actual markings to the textual material in coding process were done by utilising the numbering system derived from hierarchy division. When coding, I noticed that some issues raise up only in certain environment context and are not relevant regarding all the environments. Therefore, as it is usual for template analysis (King, 2004; Saunders et al. 2009, p. 505), the final template was formatted along the analysis process and developed to its final form (see Appendix 2). After being satisfied with the template, I listed the data under the template. I created own file for each language. Then I started the actual systematic analysis process. I analysed each component of the online customer experience in each environment one theme by one, both, with English and Finnish data in parallel. This way I was able to identify patterns in the data by comparing and identifying similarities and differences. To support the justifying of the observations, I did simple quantifying with support of Excel, listing the number of occurrences regarding each characteristic coming up in certain online environment.

The chapter 5 will present the results. As for the presentation of findings, this study aims to offer as authentic picture of the examined data as possible, therefore citations from the textual material are presented in order to depict and intensify reporting of the
results. However, before discussing the findings, the research quality is assessed and research context presented in the next section.

### 4.4 Research Quality: Validity and Reliability

This section evaluates the quality of this Master’s thesis by discussing the concepts of reliability and validity, in addition to four corresponding design tests of credibility, trustworthiness, confirmability and dependability. *Reliability* allows the study to be reproduced given that the data obtained should be independent of the researcher (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 13). As for attaining reliability, Kassarjian (1977) emphasises the importance of researcher’s subjectivity, which must be minimized to obtain a systematic and unbiased description of the textual content. This study is conducted according to the general conducts regarding content analysis, which facilitates the repeatability. Furthermore, reliability is attained through careful explanation of each step during the data collection and analysis processes in order to the study to remain repeatable. This is possible to do because the interviewees’ information is listed clearly in the study. Moreover, the template and questionnaire are available to see in the appendix so when repeated, the research is less likely to digress from the original agenda.

*Validity* is defined as the extent to which the study measures what it is initially meant to measure. For improved validity, content analysis should fulfil the conditions of objectivity, systematisation and quantification and therefore, the choice of categories and content units either enhances or diminished the likelihood of valid inferences. (Kassarjian, 1977.) In this study, the objectivity is achieved by creating clear categories in the template analysis. Systematisation is accomplished by coding the data according to the categories. Quantification is attained by the interpretation made regarding the extent of emphasis in the content in each category, for example in which context the words “usually”, “always”, “often” and “more” and their antonyms are arising in the data and in addition, examining the number of occurrences of these cases. Therefore, the requirements of valid content analysis defined by (Kassarjian, 1977, pp. 9–10) are accomplished.
To further support the evaluation of research quality and increase the degree of validity and reliability, the examination is supported by discussing the four design tests credibility, trustworthiness (transferability), confirmability and dependability, following Riege (2003) definitions of the concepts. Riege (2003) emphasises that several authors have also suggested that these corresponding tests would be used to evaluate the research quality in qualitative research design in general.

*Confirmability* is closely related with aforementioned validity, also described to correspond with the concepts of neutrality and objectivity. Confirmability test assesses whether the conclusions are the most reasonable ones considering the data, in other words, is the data interpreted in a logical and unbiased way. (Riege, 2003, p. 81.) Regarding this study, confirmability is strong when considering the fact that study’s general procedures are described in detail. However, confirmability suffers since the data is not freely available for reanalysis for others. In addition, when the research context is strongly related to technology, after a while confirmability suffers since these technologies used continue developing and consumers’ behaviour changes.

*Credibility* involves the approval of research findings by interviewees, as data and findings might be interpreted different ways. It can be also assessed by rationalising whether the concepts are systematically related, or findings internally coherent. (Riege, 2003, p. 81.) However, the evaluation is difficult since the findings will not be shared with the interviewees. In this study, the concepts have been systematically connected with each other and the findings were somewhat similar when comparing different interviewees’ answers.

*Trustworthiness*, or transferability is attained when the research achieves analytical generalisation, meaning that the findings are parallel with respondents regarding the phenomenon. (Riege, 2003, p. 81.) The findings have been described as clearly as possible by creating a summary that is connected with the topics presented in theory section, so the reader would get a comprehensive overall picture of the study.

*Dependability* is parallel notion to aforementioned reliability – dependability designates the stability and consistency regarding the techniques used during the process. Dependability suffers if the research is not conducted with reasonable care.
Dependability in this study is attained by presenting clear research questions which are qualitative in nature and therefore the matter is supported by utilising research design methods also qualitative in nature. Dependability of this Master’s thesis suffers from accomplishing the analysis process of data manually, without supporting software. Furthermore, the time limit has set boundaries regarding the level of carefulness when conducting this study. Then again, the research method used in this study was familiar to the researcher beforehand.

4.5 Description of the Research Context

The research focus of this study is to explore customer experience in different online environments, grouping the environments into two entities. One entity under observation consists of online environments such as websites and social media platforms enabled by stationary desktop hardware. Another entity focuses on examining the entity of online environments such as applications, responsive websites and social media platforms in the context of mobile devices.

The interviewees were all young people born between years 1990 and 1996. According to Kaplan (2012) this demographical group does not consume newspapers or watch regular TV. Author emphasizes that members of generation Z are commonly very attached to their personal mobile devices, therefore, information is received mostly through mobile channels such as social media. Therefore, the members of generation Z are perfect candidates for research context that includes mobile and social media applications, since social media platforms have always been involved in their lives – Facebook was founded in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. (Kaplan, 2012, p. 137.) Rose et al. (2011) states that the understanding of online customer experience must incorporate factors such as the role of virtual communities and therefore they are included in this study as important part of online environments.

As mentioned before, the interviewees were all women, therefore this is considered as one key context to the study. However, Hargittai and Shafer (2006) found that men and women do not differ in their online abilities. This study takes into account the generalization that Dennis, Morgan, Wright and Jayawardhena (2010) make about young adult women preferring social e-shopping sites and find online shopping
enjoyable and useful, even though this study examines online customer experience in a holistic manner and does not limit the actions the customers take in the online environment to only shopping. This is because searching and using services are actions amongst all others that influence the online experience in different online environments.

The research context included interviewees of two nationalities, Russian and Finnish online consumers. There are remarkable differences between the economies of these two countries, regarding for example history and culture, in addition to the size difference. This study observes whether the cultural background can make a difference regarding the online customer experience in different online environments. Yet, adoption of technologies is common, and the internet is a global medium, where the functions are the same disregard the geographical area. Chong (2004, p. 315) mentions, that “as a global medium, the internet transcends national borders and offers the possibility of a global user experience that includes all “net citizens” within the Web”. According to Chong (2004), often the international user requirements are taken into consideration already in the core design, rather than being optimized for a single market.

When considering social media networks and the decision to include two different nationalities in this study, a consultation by the Statista.com (2018) clarifies that the leading social networks are usually available in multiple languages and enable users to connect with friends or people across geographical, political or economic borders. As for 2018, three most popular social networks were Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. (Statista.com, 2018.) Arisen from the empirical material of this study, other popular social media platforms were, in addition to the popular triplet, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Skype. In addition to aforementioned platforms recognised from the data, Russian consumers mentioned especially VK and Telegram.
5 FINDINGS OF THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the findings derived from the empirical analysis are discussed. The structure of this chapter follows the conceptual framework of online customer experience, presented earlier in the Table 1, and the discussion about results is organised following the four dimensions of online customer experience: physical, ideological, pragmatic and social. Furthermore, the dimensions are discussed more in detail following the main components of what online customer experience consists of; time, senses, orientation, values, rituals, routines, online tools, socialization and decision aid, relating and comparing their characteristics emerging in desktop and mobile online environments. The comments are direct citations from the empirical data. Based on the findings, two summarizing sections about how the components of customer experience are produced in both desktop and mobile online environments, are presented. Lastly, the main observations regarding the cultural aspects emerged from the data are presented in the end of this chapter.

5.1 Physical Dimension of the Customer Experience in Online Environments

Physical dimensions’ findings are related to the core component of time, in a sense how it is controlled in online environments, moreover to the component regarding sensory aspects that effect the customer experience in different online environments during the interaction.

5.1.1 Time in Online Environments

Findings suggest that the environment helping the customers the most in their intentions to manage and save time is highly dependent on the situation that the environment is utilised in. The ability of the environment to foster time management was strongly dependent on situational factors such as intensiveness of the action and urgency of the matter in question and therefore reliance of the location.
Time management and distortion in desktop environment

Desktop environment was preferably utilised when being at home or at work to accomplish higher intensity level tasks. In a case where the level of intensiveness was high, meaning tasks that require more attention, were felt to be easier to accomplish in the home computer or laptop, such as purchases or work/education related tasks. Time management was seen to be easier in desktop environment due to the enhanced feeling of control involved when the environment is clearer to comprehend at once due to bigger screen. Desktop environments were often referred as more developed and easier to use.

The impression of losing time happened due to more intensive tasks occupying more time resources. On the other hand, majority of the respondents felt that they open the computer only for doing certain tasks and once they were accomplished, they stop using the online desktop environments. Interviewees described that the feeling of concretism when entering or exiting the online environment on desktop reduced the possibility of time distortion happening.

Time management and distortion in mobile environment

Mobile online environments were seen more useful and faster in terms of time management when being outside of home or work since the interviewees could use this environment anywhere and the device was always by their side. Mobile environment’s applications were considered easy to use and therefore helping time management. Mobile environment was favoured in tasks that were less intensive (easier to do) and in tasks that needed to be accomplished on the spot immediately.

Time distortion happened in mobile online environments more often than in desktop environments. The fact that smartphone is always with the interviewees also occupied their time because of easiness to access the phone. This leads to using mobile environment more often and the time distortion happening regularly in mobile environments, especially on free-time.
Especially when discussing about time distortion on online environments, the feeling of loss of time was exemplified by usage of social media networks, mostly on mobile environments. Considerations about efforts to limit or control the time when using these environments were noteworthy and one surprising factor arising from the data. Interviewees felt often “moral hangover” resulting from time distortion in social networks when using smartphone.

“On the phone I scroll all the time on social media and waste time, when first you think “I will only check it through fast” and then you notice you have been there half an hour.” (11th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

“Time distortion happens especially in social networks, for example, when you open Instagram you can spend there about one hour, but I don’t like to spend so much time, so I prefer to take about 15 minutes, then I decide to stop.” (9th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)

“I lose track of time using mobile phone for example in Instagram, that’s why I try not to use it.” (5th Interviewee, 18.3.2018)

5.1.2 Senses in Online Environments

Every respondent considered environments’ ergonomics and easiness to use very important. Great usability was described to enable the intuitive usage of services and perceive information without wasting time. Bad usability was described to cause strong feelings of frustration. Bad usability was forgiven easier if the needed info was found anyway. However, if the service was hard to use, respondents did not return to it and searched for another option. In addition to another service option, also another online environment was a choice – if service was not usable in mobile, it was switched to full version of desktop environment. Senses helped the respondents to evaluate reliability of the environment.

“If the page seems lightweight and therefore is suspicious-looking, I get an impression that the website is somehow wrong or false. Also, if the for example the payment system does not work properly as expected, I feel that I cannot trust the environment.” (14th Interviewee, 19.3.2018)
Aesthetics in online environments

Aesthetics were considered generally very important as well. Unpleasant design of a website made respondents feel suspicious about the service or even about the whole company and reluctant to use their service, or even make them immediately to search for another option. However, informative but clear designs with pleasing colour palettes were described even to encourage to purchase or to use the service and added more trust. The more unknown the brand, the more important was the enjoyable aesthetical design.

“It is extremely important, it defines whether I continue using the website. If the structure and design are not convenient for me, or it is hard to navigate, or visually inconvenient, I might easily drop it and look for other one that appears to be more usable both visually and structurally. If I can see the structure of the website quite well, if is visually attractive and understandable, the probability to continue using is higher.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

Findings suggest that aesthetics were usually perceived not so much depending on whether the online environment was on the desktop or on mobile. The aesthetics were perceived acceptable in both environments. Sometimes the mobile versions of websites or mobile apps were perceived to have maybe greater visual aesthetics, since there exists bigger icons and pictures. Then again in some cases respondents preferred laptop visually since desktop environment allows to perceive a bigger entity at once.

Generally, the matter of consistency in visual design between companies’ environments and social media channels was not paid attention to. Occasionally, in social media networks, consistent visualisation with the actual websites and applications was considered important for the sake of recognizability of the company in different channels and helped respondents to evaluate the company faster whether it is trustable. The aspect of reliability was especially important factor in social media platforms. If the visualisation was professional and consistent, it helped to make first-impression judgements whether the company is considerable and trustable, especially if the company was unknown. In social media networks, the content was acceptable to be more entertaining. However, the content created by influencers such as bloggers and vloggers, who were almost considered as fellow consumers, were seen more positive than company-originated content.
“Subconsciously, if the different social media’s follow the same design, it is easier to the users to associate all possible channels with this one company itself.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

”Consistent design is important because it conjures the image especially if you don’t know the company too well. For example, if the company has great content on social media, and then you go to visit the website and notice that the website is not consistent with posts on social media, it can disturb a bit. However, the most important in the end is that you get the information you need out of the content.” (12th Interviewee, 16.3.2018)

**Ergonomics in desktop environment**

On the contrary, a big difference was between the ergonomics of desktop and mobile environments. Many respondents shared similar views that using websites on mobile was in most cases inconvenient and that many companies lack having responsive, mobile-scalable website, or an application with all the same functions as desktop website. Therefore, for important tasks, usually desktop environment of the service was chosen. Desktop environment helped respondents to perceive all the important information at a glance and having the feeling of more control over on the environment.

**Ergonomics in mobile environment**

Interviewees considered mobile applications the best in terms of usability especially when using often needed services. However, due to experiences of the lack of usability in mobile environment, respondents felt that the environment is more restricted and limited. Mobile environments with bad usability and heavy loading time were described to make respondents loose time, feel frustrated and make them to change to the desktop environment. Yet, many respondents had experiences using services also with convenient scalable websites and designed applications and described that the problems with ergonomics on mobile are much better than few years ago.

“…generally speaking, if the website has mobile apps and mobile versions of the website, they are quite good, useful and convenient to use.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)
“…even if some websites have applications or mobile-friendly versions, they are still less detailed than in desktop. Maybe it’s faster to search some initial data via your phone or tablet then you switch to desktop to finalise something. Just because you have more details, it’s more convenient when you see all the picture.” (10th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)

5.2 Ideological dimension of Customer Experience in Online Environments

The ideological dimension consists of three different components, which are orientation, values and rituals and were all important aspects in the findings.

5.2.1 Orientation in Online Environments

In the context of this study it was questioned in which environment, desktop or mobile, the respondents used for orientation in utilitarian way searching for benefits, and on the other hand, hedonic way searching for gratifying atmosphere.

Findings outline that the environment used varies according to whether the behaviour is hedonic on utilitarian oriented. The environment is migrated according to the benefits regarding convenience in particular situation and according to the accessibility of the environment.

“Sometimes I have strong desire to switch my brain off and I use my mobile phone just to use my social networking, to see some stupid news, or play some online games [---] I use desktop environment mainly for observing something really important, meaning preparing presentations, some reports and so on.” (6th Interviewee, 18.3.2018)

Utilitarian and hedonic orientation in desktop environments

Findings suggest that desktop environment is operated more for the utilitarian purposes due to perceived better functionality, given that the access was possible. Aforementioned sensory experience related to better usability and control affects the choosing of the desktop environment for important and more demanding tasks.
In most cases, desktop environment was chosen for hedonic purposes only when watching movies or series, simply due to the aesthetics being better when the screen is bigger.

“If the desktop is available, I would use it if I need it from pragmatic point of view. If it is available nearby, I would most likely use desktop rather than mobile phone.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

“… in most cases I have access to mobile rather than desktop because usually I don’t bring laptop with me.” (5th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

*Utilitarian and hedonic orientation in mobile environments*

Mobile online environment was seen as equally important environment for utilitarian purposes since it is in practice continuously accessible. Due to the occasional lack of usability, it was most used for purposes considered simpler to do or used in a daily basis.

“Yes, I accomplish tasks with mobile phone, but then they have been appointments, or something related to services...then I check email and minor info related to studies.” (16th Interviewee, 23.3.2018)

Generally, the findings suggest that mobile environments are more popular for hedonic purposes such as listening to music, scrolling in social media and playing games. Especially popular hedonic use was to use social networking environments, discussed in next section. Easy access and, on the other hand, the freedom regarding location or possibility to multitask were matters affecting the popularity of mobile environments for hedonic purposes. Interviewees were able to be entertained online and not to be tied to sit in front of device in physically in one spot. In other words, consumers were free to lay down, run, cook, do home chores at the same time.

“For entertainment and fun, I think it’s mostly phone, the mobile environment, because you are not always next to your desktop and you need some time to turn it on, to find it to bring it, and your phone is always near on your hand so if you need to search you can just type it in and use some applications installed.” (8th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)
“Mostly once I use my phone I browse Instagram...” (1st Interviewee, 14.3.2018)

“I think I browse it on the phone, so phone is like for entertainment. It’s because it is easier to get access to social media and all these entertainment apps” (7th Interviewee, 21.3.2018)

Even though less popular, social media was also used in a utilitarian way among both Finnish and Russian respondents for example when searching for information about companies and their free positions. Only the platforms favoured were different between nationalities.

“Like not very often, but sometimes. When I was searching for jobs, some companies had their career communities in Vkontakte, so I could write to them, but it’s not like on a daily basis” (10th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)

“…for example, in search for a job, I use LinkedIn. So, in a case where I want information, I search social media” (12th Interviewee, 16.3.2018)

5.2.2 Values regarding Online Environments

Values concerning online customer experience were defined as trust and privacy issues. Trust was related to the fact that the environment works as expected, moreover, operates fairly and openly to the consumer. In general level, trust to the environment working expectedly was strongly dependent on the usability of the environment and affected to the selection of environment for certain purposes, as discussed before as well. Trust for the environment derives from knowing the service provider and is evaluated by the ergonomics and the aesthetics.

However, concerns regarding privacy issues were not dependent on the desktop or mobile environment and the lack of trust regarding safety of privacy was at the same, generally low level. Interesting results were that the virtual or physical aspect affected to the answers regarding privacy in online environments.
Trust and privacy issues on desktop and mobile environments

Regarding trust to the environment, the Russian respondents trusted both environments, desktop and mobile equally, distinguishing that the feeling of trust of the environment functioning as expected derives from knowing the company and the brand. As discussed above, the structure of the website and aesthetics helped respondents to evaluate the trust towards the service, and the environment does not matter that much – in a sum, if company has received trust in one environment via well-established online service, the trust is equal in another environment.

“Trust builds towards the brand, not for the medium. It just the brand and the company.” (1st Interviewee, 14.3.2018)

“I think I trust both environments, but it depends on the website, when I’m searching for new information I don’t know how it will work.” (10th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)

“Actually, it doesn’t matter because in my opinion it doesn’t depend on environment, depends on companies, and their websites, and their offering.” (6th Interviewee, 20.3.2018)

Privacy-wise the environment did not matter either, in a sense that the feeling of safety was as low in both mobile and desktop environments regarding personal data being safe. The only difference was that mobile was felt safer for privacy, because the smartphone or tablet is carried physically with oneself at all times, and that mobile services in online environments such as Appstore being so official created safety, instead of search engines in desktop offering more variety to choose and the probability towards scam is therefore higher.

“…Because if we speak about mobile environment, I prefer to use mobile applications, since I download them from official store. I use iOS, so I will download applications from Appstore, so this kind of more official channel comparing when I just I will just use Google and desktop environment for my purposes. Probably if we can take this point in consideration, then mobile environment is safer than desktop.” (6th Interviewee, 20.3.2018)

Amongst Finnish respondents the desktop environment was clearly trusted more due to the usability being better, when mobile environment felt less trustable due to
experiences of worse internet connection and worse usability in general. The same applied to concerns of own private information being safe - Finnish respondents felt that mobile devices have the possibility collect more private information about them because the smartphone has more personal information and it is hard to control.

Trust and privacy issues regarding social media environments

Trust towards social media environments was very low amongst all respondents, and the fact that majority of the information that respondents shared in these channels was collected by the companies, was being aware of.

“When you use social media and you have some information there, like personal data, your photos and whatever, it’s you who decide you want to share it, and if you share it in social media it means that you want to share it with the world” (8th Interviewee, 22.3.2018)

“I think that is open information for whole world, so you should show only what you want, so if you don’t want some information for everybody to know, so don’t show it.” (9th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)

In social media networks, the opportunities of being scammed or losing your data was more diverse. Possible hacking of the account was a concern, also the hacking of your own networks’ members accounts concerned.

“Social media…you know, there can be some spam things for example bad links, so even just your friends can send you a message with such a link and I think that social sites they are very, I don’t know, very unsafe regarding this question.” (7th Interviewee, 21.3.2018)

“…you never can tell what could happen to your privacy in social media, in different email accounts, there is always the risk that it can be violated.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

In general, Russian respondents expressed their lack of trust towards different social media network services more strongly and emphasised the social media despite the possibility to protect the account, at the end being open for anyone. Both nationalities were concerned of the amount and detail of data that was collected of them and
displayed as ads in social media, to the point that they limit their use of social media and strive to control the privacy settings.

“Well sometimes I just stop using social media because my data is stored, like everyone can see it actually and find it if they want. There is an issue, I don’t know maybe it is only in Russian network Vkontakte issue, that I see some advertising which I believe that they couldn’t know this information on my page and it seems to me they have read my messages, or something like that because sometimes I see advertisements that are really strange, I don’t know how they did know about it, so it gives me trouble sometimes.” (10th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)

“I feel like my phone is being listened, I don’t remember about what we discussed with X and suddenly I get advertisements about it on Facebook.” (13th Interviewee, 17.3.2018)

Distinguished from the data, Finnish respondents trusted that once they go through their privacy settings, their choices towards collecting data were respected by the companies, however, taking control over own settings was felt is made difficult.

“It’s up to your own activity if you see effort to go through the privacy settings. The only thing where I might not trust is that whether the settings are per se unfavourable towards the users, that you need come to think of adjusting the settings. But once I know I defined my settings, I trust my privacy is safe.” (12th Interviewee, 16.3.2018)

“Principally, I trust Facebook, that they keep my information with themselves what they claim and don’t give it forward. But then again, they use the data for their own business and analyse users for different purposes. […] I feel like, as an example Google, who knows for what we have given rights for them to do, that they are surely used somewhere.” (17th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)
5.2.3 Rituals in Use of Online Environments

Rituals are formed by getting accustomed to certain online environment, again, depending on the situation, chosen according to the most efficient and pleasant environment for the orientation judged by the attributes related to ergonomics and senses.

*Online shopping rituals in desktop and mobile environments*

For shopping in general, both environments were utilised, depending on the intensity of the purchase and familiarity of the service. Desktop was utilised for online shopping for doing more intensive level purchases and for using more unknown websites. For more familiar services and buying lower engagement level products, such as buying food or using taxi services, mobile environment was utilised more. In a general level, social media was not utilised for online shopping. Respondents stated that they prefer official channels and social media was not perceived as reliable environment especially for shopping. All the rare cases of shopping in social media were related to second hand purchases in a way that the purchase decision was made in social media environment and receiving the goods and paying for them were done face-to-face.

*Rituals regarding search of information in desktop and mobile environments*

For search of information, in general both environments were utilised, depending on the phase of search and the urgency of the need for information and therefore, depending on the accessibility.

Desktop online environments were favoured at home whenever it was accessible. If desktop was not available, mobile environment was chosen for use of search. If the search was initial and for some minor information, mobile environment was utilised. Then again, if the information was more intensive, respondents preferred to use desktop. Mobile environment for search was favoured because it was so easy to use and easily accessible. If the need of information was urgent, mobile phone was used more often. Social media was not popular environment to search information. At times,
Social media was used to search information about of certain topic depending on the “genre” of information. For example, LinkedIn and job communities was used for search regarding places of employment, social networks for search of information about people and communities. Then again, channels such as Instagram and Pinterest were used to find inspiration e.g. for home decor and fashion. Respondents in few cases also favoured asking advice in social media communities if they needed information that they could not find from anywhere else first.

**Rituals related to using online services in desktop and mobile environments**

Similarly, as with online shopping, desktop was favoured concerning using online services when being at home and for more intensive level tasks that were described as official tasks that needed to be completed correctly, certainly. Frequency-wise, mobile environment was clearly more favoured in use of online services, given that online services were familiar and convenient for daily use, such as online banking applications.

“If I need just to check some information for better knowledge or to make later my final choice, I usually use mobile phone. I can use Airbnb to look for different options, but very often when I need to do the final choice and buy something, I usually do it by desktop… But as for the banking, we have very convenient service by the leading Russian bank, Spear bank, as for paying for my different expenses, heating electricity, phone, I usually use the app of this bank on my smartphone. Bank services are more convenient to use with the help of the smartphone.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

“Well, I think I use both but again, if I have some service that I use constantly, for example booking.com or fundamentally service, I have application on my mobile and I use it on mobile.” (10th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)

“I do reservations for services on phone. Why would I go to laptop when phone is much more faster and easier […] It is not dependent on physical location and I use services when I have a moment, for example on a train, phone is always with you in situations where you need to do something” (15th Interviewee, 19.3.2018)

Social media was not popular medium utilised for getting customer service online. Respondents considered using social media channels as last option to contact the
company but preferred to contact by official channels. Contacting companies in social media was acceptable for smaller companies.

“I could contact small craft shops via Facebook, but I haven’t needed.” (12th Interviewee, 16.3.2018)

“Must be quite special product or service that I would contact company via Social Media and only if I had to get that product [...] “If I can’t get service needed on website, I prefer to call since I consider contacting social media very slow way.” (14th Interviewee, 19.3.2018)

“It’s hard to say why, but usually I prefer the official website of the company. I feel not 100% sure about information in some community or in some social media.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

5.3 Pragmatic Dimension of Customer Experience in Online Environments

Practicalities in the context of online customer experience are related to browsing routines and utilisation of different online tools. By browsing is meant exploration of the internet by following one interesting link to another, with (searching) or without (surfing) a definite objective. Practicalities regarding online tools were related to utilisation of tools that help the respondents in online shopping or using online services.

5.3.1 Browsing Habits in Online Environments

Browsing routines vary dependent on the environment. Online tools are utilised in different environments the same manner. Findings suggest that practicalities do not vary according to the respondents’ background but are more individual habits developed as a result of different needs and experiences. Next, the findings related these topics in the contexts of different online environments are discussed in detail.

*Browsing routines in desktop environments*

The fact that desktop environment is more convenient in terms of usability, and therefore operated in more utilitarian way shows in browsing habits also. Browsing is more searching with a certain goal. Routines on desktop are usually developed in a
way that allows the consumers to be more efficient, for example searching multiple things at the same time using different tabs and writing notes with different tools. Routines related to browsing are also using continuously the same page or search engine that consumers are used to.

“I have routines on desktop that when I search information I open always new tab and don’t close earlier ones.” (12th Interviewee, 16.3.2018)

“If I get involved and interested, I can open thousands of links and continue browsing, that’s it. In laptop I keep them saved maybe for month and then I think maybe I don’t need so many pages open at one time […] I have some, I like the search engines that I use when I search. Then again the favourite websites are quite same than in the mobile because I’m used in the kind of website that I use.” (8th Interviewee, 22.3.2018)

**Browsing routines in mobile environments**

Mobile environment is utilised more for “surfing”, browsing the internet without defined goal. Browsing in the mobile is related to entertainment and used as a method to relax. Browsing in the mobile was connected to different times of the day such as breaks during the day and evening, as well as whilst doing house chores or waiting situations.

“I have habits, when I search for some information about anything, entertainment, restaurants, place to visit etc. I google it and then I’ll open many links and after that, only after I will observe that links.” (6th Interviewee, 20.3.2018)

“In mobile if I want to have some rest and go away from everyday situations, I can just take mobile phone and I can forget about the time and spend a lot of it searching different things that are not so important for me but just entertainment, notes, information, minor news, short YouTube videos just like that.” (7th Interviewee, 21.3.2018)

“So, first of all is the search engines, I like the one I use and its usually this one. Then I have some special websites that I use, when I have time I just sit with my phone and browse in the internet I usually check news and this website. Then when I’m in the transport and I have time and I’m moving somewhere I can browse the internet whether it’s for the use or not, just to waste the time.” (8th Interviewee, 22.3.2018)
Social media browsing is related to the mobile phone browsing, rarely browsing in social media was described in the situation of using laptop, mainly when settings needed to be controlled. As mentioned in the findings regarding time management, avoidance in using social media for trivial browsing without goal is tried also to avoid when it is noticed it causes more harm and time waste.

“Mostly I browse in the evenings and along the day. Always my smartphone on my hand. It’s quite horrible. At times I feel that the phone disgust me and then I close it. You just get hooked on it. Once you post in social media, you need to check it every second.” (16th Interviewee, 23.3.2018)

“From my point of view, there are different options available in desktop layout on social media and mobile, it also depends on what do I want to do. Look some photos or do some setting changes on my accounts. I usually use desktop when I want to do some changes in my account settings, not for browsing it” (1st Interviewee, 14.3.2018)

5.3.2 Tools in Online Environments

Findings suggest that that online tools used to help in actions in the online environments are many and used creatively. However, tools are chosen and used according to individual’s personal liking. Using tools was not described often in the context of certain environment, desktop or mobile, but more in a universal way. Of course, in mobile environment the means were different, but the purposes were the same than in desktop environment. Online tools favoured were incognito-tab, saving bookmarks, using comparing tools and filtering options, saving items in shopping cart for later evaluation, subscribing to newsletters and searching discounts, saving forms to browser, using different note tools. Especially in desktop environment VPN was mentioned among respondents in order to “change” the location country of the device and to be allowed to use other countries services.

In mobile environment special tools mentioned were using voice recognition for search. Also taking screenshots and saving them for examination for later on. Also subscribing to email marketing letters and following discounts was popular described on mobile, since email was used mostly as an application on mobile. Social media was utilised for watching tutorials on YouTube or searching reviews about the products or searching reviews or discounts from blogs.
“I receive offers on my email, if I’m interested I would check what are offers and check if I need something at the moment and then buy it to save some money. Then I would use some websites that compare the price of the good, just to see what the options are and where I can buy the cheapest one. And the if im in some online shop and I want to buy something, but I am hesitating between some few brands, I could use the comparison tool where you can clearly see what the differences are. And then also I read some reviews about the goods, just to check if people are happy with what they bought. And not only reviews but also if I can find some real pictures from the customers.” (8th Interviewee, 22.3.2018)

5.4 Social Dimension of Customer Experience in Online Environments

Social dimension relates to the socialisation and decision aid in online environments. Socialisation happens in crosswise different environments depending on the usage situation, not related to specifically desktop or mobile environment. As the name indicates, when accomplishing tasks online, simultaneous socialization happens in online in social media networks, but also in purely offline communicating with people who the users are close to. Generalizing the findings, respondents highlighted the communication happening only occasionally when necessary.

5.4.1 Socialization in Online Environments

Interaction in online environment with family or friends simultaneously when shopping online or using online services was quite typical, but not favoured. In the context of different environments. Respondents described situations in which they were on the desktop and used instant messaging in smartphone. However, between the respondents it was clear that simultaneous communicating was normal thing to do.

“Very often I can just receive a call from my sister and at the same time I can just watch news in the internet, watch cheap flights or online shopping […] usually it happens since the social networks are open at the same time when I do something online.” (7th Interviewee, 21.3.2018)

However, respondents tried to avoid communicating simultaneously when using online environments and felt it to be disturbing in some cases. Talking via online networks were done only if needed. However, if the respondent received a message,
answering to it in all described cases was not restricted by the fact that the respondent was using online environments.

“Sometimes I can do it but not on purpose because two things coincide. Just occasionally. Usually I try to do these things separately, because otherwise I would feel distracted from one thing to another.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

Findings suggest that the attitude towards simultaneous online and offline presence, where the respondents use online services and do online shopping when they discuss with a person near to them in the same physical space, is rather normal but again, the attention shifts from online services to the offline discussion, even though only occasionally.

“Yes, it can happen, well just that it happens that I don’t do it on purpose. I might do some shopping and start conversation with my family members, it happens too.” (4th Interviewee, 15.3.2018)

“I think I don’t do this because its rather difficult to keep your mind concentrated when someone near you or in the same room and at the same time you should concentrate on online service. Its more convenient when you don’t see your friend to talk in Skype, and you search something in the internet so you don’t see his reaction, its normal when we look at the people when we talk with them so it’s rather difficult to have not online but have live talk with something and search at the same time with someone.” (7th Interviewee, 21.3.2018)

5.4.2 Decision Aid in Online Environments

As described in the section of routines in the task of search, findings suggest that it is common to search advices online to make decisions related to online shopping or using online services. Advices online were searched to reinforce the feeling of trust especially in a case of unknown online service or because encountering some difficulties. Reading reviews in desktop and mobile was common. Whilst using desktop environment for the more official and attention requiring, utilitarian tasks, consultancy via chats were often described as the method of decision aid and help. Common channels for going through reviews were different social media platforms, such as TripAdvisor, blogs, Instagram and YouTube. Mainly the channels were the same.
Yet again, the findings emphasise that asking for advice to help make decisions related to online shopping or using online services is common. However, asking for advice offline was limited to the cases where the respondent knew a certain person who had expertise in the field in question. If this sort of expert did not belong to a person’s closest associates, respondents preferred to search online by themselves the needed help.

“If someone I know has knowledge, I trust this person more, but the internet is the primary source. I rarely ask if I don’t know beforehand that someone knows this issue, it’s easier to search online, there is ratings for sure.” (8th Interviewee, 22.3.2018)

“It depends. When I need advice, when I’m not sure what I’m buying, I would need advice from friend or my mom. It is not that usual thing because sometimes I think it is more disturbing when you chat, and you need to focus on deciding something.” (1st Interviewee, 14.3.2018)

Additionally, respondents asked advice in offline only related to the issues of reliability and quality of the online service. Especially Russian respondents mentioned asking decision aid regarding trustworthiness of the online environment in question.

“Yes, if my friends already use this website and service, why not. I ask if this website is ok and can I trust it. And just definitely when my friends already use this particular online service, I will ask mainly not how to use, but if I can trust it.” (6th Interviewee, 20.3.2018)

“You cannot really check whether the advice online is real or made by the company to increase their sales, so sometimes you just feel a bit paranoid whether you are sure to buy it or not. So, if you have someone who have tried what you want to buy or to use some companies service, and if your friend says yes, they are okay, I would trust this person more than someone on the internet.” (10th Interviewee, 24.3.2018)

5.5 Summary of the Empirical Findings

This section recapitulates the findings presented above. First, online customer experience is discussed in the context of desktop online environments, concluding the discussion with Figure 3 that summarises the entities visually in order to provide a clear picture of the content. Correspondingly, the topic is discussed in the context of
mobile online environments concluding with summarising entity in Figure 4. Lastly, observations regarding culture are to be discussed.

5.5.1 Customer Experience in Desktop Online Environments

The time aspect within physical dimension of the online customer experience in desktop online environments became evident as the desktop online setting was utilised for more efficient time management when it comes to accomplishing more intensive-level tasks at home or at work. This was due to the convenience and easiness-to-use regarding websites that are often designed primarily as desktop versions, but also due to the physical attributes of the desktop devices such as screen size and convenient keyboard that enable comfortableness. Impressions regarding website’s ergonomics were positive. On the other hand, time distortion in desktop environment was caused due to more versatile environment that enables being led astray. Naturally, accomplishing tasks that require more concentration caused the impressions of losing time as well. Then again, the concretise nature of access and exit the environment hindered time distortion from happening. It appeared that aesthetics helped customers to evaluate reliability of the website. Aesthetics were another vital factor regarding the online experience, however visual attributes were not considered notably changed between different environments even though aesthetics in desktop online environments were felt to be more comprehensive in nature.

When discussing ideological dimension in desktop environments, the orientation of the experience was more commonly favoured for utilitarian purposes due to aforementioned factors. Hedonic use in desktop was based on the better physical attributes (larger screen) and usually was limited to watching entertaining content. Regarding values, in line with earlier findings, desktop online environments were seen reliable to accomplish tasks due to better usability. Safety of own privacy was felt to be low in all online environments and the feeling was dependent on the company responsible for the online environment. In desktop environments privacy was considered lower due to the physical attributes since it is not under supervision at all times. On the other hand, feeling of safety when using online environments on desktop was higher due to separately installed anti-malware programmes even though maintaining them was seen in some cases adding riskiness. The findings indicate that
rituals are part of online customer experience that are formed individually when getting accustomed to certain online environment for use of particular purpose. Desktop was preferred for online shopping when acquiring higher involvement products, for searching when more extensive information was needed or for using more demanding online services. Findings suggest that social media platforms are not commonly used in the context of desktop environments.

Pragmatic dimension of online customer experience was related to the practicalities in ways to browse. In desktop online environments, browsing happens with a purpose, in other words, browsing in desktop used for searching purposes. The desktop environment was considered as more laborious environment to access and that was another reason why it was accessed only for particular purpose. Popular tools to enhance the experience in desktop online environments were tools originated from service providers such as utilisation of comparison tools, shopping cart in online shops, email newsletters, discount generators, as well as Virtual Private Network (VPN) and other browser extensions such as utilising autofill, multiple tabs, incognito mode and bookmarks.

When it comes to the social dimension of the experience in desktop environments, socialization was quite common, but not always preferred. Whilst accomplishing a particular task, respondents were communicating in social networks using multiple desktop online environments at once, or in mobile environments in parallel. However, as discussed above, desktop environment was mainly used for utilitarian purpose that required more attention, therefore socialization whilst using the environment was not favourable. Also, simultaneous socialization in real life, offline, when using desktop online environments was common, given that co-workers/friends/family members were in the same space. However, it was neither preferable nor purposeful, therefore social interaction in these cases happened only occasionally and when necessary. Concentration to the task, and on the other hand politeness and attentiveness towards other human beings was valued higher. Searching for decision aid online on desktop online environments was common in different websites and up to some level from social media. Decision aid was searched for evaluating reliability of the online environments. Reviews, comparison sites, ratings and tutorials were assessed to support and help in different purposes dependent on situation.
Figure 3 below summarises the discussion above into a visually comprehensible entity regarding customer experience in desktop online environments. The figure indicates with purple arrows that different components of the experience are linked with each other and with red arrows that different dimensions have likeness and linkages between them. These linkages will be clarified later on this thesis in the discussion chapter in Figure 5. Moreover, as the arrow between the components and the online environment is marked as two-way, the figure designates the general finding that consumers continuously strive for optimising their experience by choosing the desktop online environment as most convenient option regarding the nature of each component or vice versa, trying to optimise the experience according to the enabling attributes regarding environments’ characteristics.
Figure 3. Summary: Customer Experience in Desktop Online Environments

**Customer Experience in Desktop Environments**

**Ergonomics** > often positive because websites designed for desktop environment. **Aesthetics** > important, screen size enhances the experience.

**Time management** > for intensive tasks and due to concrete entrance and exit. **Time distortion** > versatile environment and time consuming tasks.

**Utilitarian** > for intensive tasks requiring more attention, used commonly for utilitarian purpose. **Hedonic** > mainly for watching entertaining content.

**Privacy** > for accomplishing demanding tasks due to better usability. **Privacy** > depends on service provider in online environments, also on devices’ physical attributes (large screen impedes privacy, device not under supervision at all times).

**Rituals** > when buying high-involvement products/searching extensive information/using demanding services. Social media not the environment of rituals as for these activities.

**Browsing** > occasional, for searching purposes or accomplishing certain task at home/place of work. Browsing social media not popular.

**Tools** > service provider tools: utilisation of comparison tools, shopping cart in online shops, email newsletters, discount generators - Virtual Private Network (VPN) - Browser extensions: utilising autofill, multiple tabs, incorporate mode and bookmarks.

**Socialisation** > not favourable due to more intensive tasks, anyway common, online environments used simultaneously, also using desktop and mobile environments in parallel. **Offline presence** > common as momentary but avoided and not purposeful, concentration on the task and politeness towards others people valued higher.

**Online** > reviews, comparison sites, ratings, tutorials from different websites and social media platforms. **Offline** > only if not found online and there is known expertise amongst consumer’s closest associates.

**Components of Online Customer Experience**

**Physical dimension**

**Sensory:** Ergonomics and Aesthetics

**Time Management and Distortion**

**Ideological dimension**

**Orientation:** Utilitarian and Hedonic

**Values:** Trust and Privacy

**Rituals:** Framed of the Experience

**Pragmatic dimension**

**Patronage Routines:** Browsing habits

**Online Tools:** Practices in use of tools

**Social dimension**

**Socialization:** Interaction in Networks and Offline presence

**Decision aid:** Online reviews & ratings and Offline aid

**Desktop Online Environments**

USE VIA STATIONARY DESKTOP DEVICES

Desktop environments:

Websites and social media platforms

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**Physical dimension**

**Sensory:** Ergonomics and Aesthetics

**Time Management and Distortion**

**Ideological dimension**

**Orientation:** Utilitarian and Hedonic

**Values:** Trust and Privacy

**Rituals:** Framed of the Experience

**Pragmatic dimension**

**Patronage Routines:** Browsing habits

**Online Tools:** Practices in use of tools

**Social dimension**

**Socialization:** Interaction in Networks and Offline presence

**Decision aid:** Online reviews & ratings and Offline aid
5.5.2 Customer Experience in Mobile Online Environments

Concerning the physical dimension and the component of time, mobile online environments were used for managing time in terms of accomplishing tasks that were less intensive, routine-like or urgent. Due to the physical attributes of mobile devices and accessibility of mobile online environments, time management was experienced to be especially convenient on the move. Then again, time distortion took place on mobile online environments regularly due to constant and easy access to the environment services, which were more entertaining and ended up fostering time distortion. Consumers’ considerations about efforts to limit or control the time when using these environments were noteworthy. Interviewees felt often “moral hangover” resulting from wasting time in social networks when using smartphone. Aesthetics and ergonomics on mobile environment were as vital as in desktop environment. Applications offered the best usability and aesthetics. Regarding websites on mobile, impressions of poor usability were common due to services not investing in creating responsive websites. Considering the ergonomics during the experience, mobile online environments lack often features that exists in the desktop online environments, which creates confusing impressions. All in all, aesthetics was considered very important and helped to evaluate reliability of the applications and websites.

Findings related to the ideological dimension in terms of the orientation were in line with the observations regarding physical dimension. Regarding orientation, mobile online environments were most useful in utilitarian manner for more simple tasks that required less concentration, especially in urgent matters or daily tasks when services were familiar to the user. Hedonic usage of mobile online environments was more common due to convenient access and took place especially in the social media platforms. Regarding values, trust that the tasks would be accomplished as expected, was lower when using mobile websites due to the impressions of websites on mobile being not designed as responsive. However, the lack of trust didn’t apply when consumers spoke about familiar applications. As mentioned earlier, the safety of own privacy was low in all environments but for different reasons. In mobile online environments the impression of privacy was lower due to the higher amount of personal data stored to respondents’ personal smartphones. Then again, positive
impressions about privacy were related to mobile device being an item that is, in most cases, being carried with oneself and under supervision. In mobile environments respondents’ rituals regarding online spending were related to buying lower involvement products such as ordering meals or buying train tickets. Information search in smartphone was done for instantly needed and less important information. Online services were used for more everyday purposes such as booking appointments. Social media platforms were used mainly on smartphone commonly for searching information, not for buying purposes.

Findings regarding pragmatic dimension indicates that practicalities on browsing the mobile environments were commonly for browsing without object, i.e. surfing or for searching in a case that the need was instantaneous. Both browsing routines were developed due to online environments being available to access continuously. Respondents described their individual rituals of having a look to the social media on smartphone during breakfast or in the evening before going to sleep. In line with the avoidance of time distortion that browsing social media was found to cause, especially on mobile environments, unnecessary habit-forming browsing in certain situations was being avoided too. In mobile, common online tools practices were using tools from service providers such as comparison tools, shopping carts in online shops, email newsletters and discount generators, as well as using browser extensions for instance utilising autofill, multiple tabs and voice search. Typical to mobile online environments was to use multiple applications simultaneously, taking screenshots and using note tools.

In mobile online environments, socialization was considered continuous and common. Interactions took place in networks that were used cross-wise on desktop and mobile dependent on the situation. Simultaneous socialization offline in real life whilst using mobile environments was common if associates were present. Politeness and attentiveness were found to be more important in socialising whilst using mobile online environments. Finding decision aid in mobile websites and applications happened by means of searching for reviews and ratings to support and help in different purposes dependent on situation. Decision aid was typically searched from social media.
Next, Figure 4 presented below summarizes the discussion above into a visual entity regarding customer experience in mobile online environments. The figure indicates with purple arrows that different components of the experience are linked with each other and with red arrows that different dimensions have likeness and relations. These relations will be clarified later on this thesis in the discussion part, visualised in Figure 5. Moreover, as the arrow between the components and the online environment is two-way, figure indicates the finding that consumers, on a continuous basis, strive for optimising their experience. This happens in a form of favouring the mobile online environment as the most convenient option regarding the nature of each component or vice versa, by trying to optimise the experience according the means of mobile online environment’s attributes.
Figure 4. Summary: Customer Experience in Mobile Online Environments

- **Ergonomics**: Often inconvenient because of websites not optimized for mobile environment; applications convenient; Aesthetics > important.

- **Time Management**: For daily, urgent or easier tasks. Time distortion > especially social media related; due to constant and easy access, happens since used commonly for hedonic purpose.

- **Utilitarian**: For non-intensive/urgent daily/familiar tasks; Hedonic > common, especially in social media platforms.

- **Trust**: Applications trusted; websites rarely since often not responsive.

- **Privacy**: Depends on service provider in online environments; low due to high amount personal data available to store, but privacy better due to devices’ physical attributes (device typically under supervision).

- **Rituals**: When buying low-involvement products/searching slow/lower information using daily or urgently needed services; Social media preferred environment for rituals in terms of activities.

- **Browsing**: For searching or surfing, used on a continuous basis due to convenient accessibility; Surfing in social media popular, often forming individual browsing habits, but commonly and consciously avoided.

- **Tools**: Service provider tools; utilisation of comparison tools; shopping cart in online shops; email newsletters; discount generators; simultaneous applications usage; screenshots; note tools; Browser extensions; utilising autofill, multiple tabs; voice search.

- **Socialization**: Common; multiple online environments used simultaneously; also using mobile and desktop environments in parallel. Offline presence > common as momentary, not purposeful, attentive behaviour and politeness towards other people preferred.

- **Online**: Reviews; comparison sites; ratings, tutorials from different websites/applications, especially on social media platforms. Offline > only if not found online and there is known expertise amongst consumer’s closest associates.
5.5.3 Cultural Observations about Customer Experience in Online Environments

Customer experience in different online environments appears as global phenomenon since no major differences between Finnish or Russian respondents were noticed in this context. This finding is supported by Chong (2004, p. 315), who remarks, that internet is a global medium that transcends limitations arising from different nationalities, creating the possibility to offer global user experience. Regarding culture and the components of online customer experience, the only major difference was found regarding the impressions of trust about own privacy being safe. As discussed earlier, the trust in terms of privacy was low amongst both respondent groups and it was targeted towards the company behind the service rather than to the online environment itself. However, Finnish respondents trusted more their privacy being kept safe after they took care of the privacy settings by themselves, in other words, Finnish trusted that the company keeps their information safe. Russian respondents had greater distrust towards the services and the companies behind the services and generally did not trust their privacy being kept. Galkina and Kock (2014) confirms the cultural difference of perceptions of trust between Finnish and Russian people. In general, for Finnish, the concept of trust is the same towards person, company and government, unlike for Russians, the concept of trust does not apply for companies or government. Establishing the feeling of trust is easier in Finland due to culture’s general presumption of trustworthiness. However, in Russia for businesses establishing trust takes more time and effort due to general presumption of distrust; for creating trust, one must prove its reliability first. (Galkina & Kock, 2014, pp. 27–40.)
6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins with presenting answers to the research questions. The next section of theoretical contribution will focus on relating the findings to theory. This is followed by discussing implications for managers. To conclude, the limitations of this study are evaluated and lastly, suggestions for future research are presented.

6.1 Discussion of Findings and Answers to the Research Questions

The aim of the study was to strengthen understanding of customer experience in the context of online environments. The study added understanding of what is the role of online environments in the formation process of an ideal online customer experience. Moreover, this study clarified how the experience and the environment correlate with each other from the consumer’s point of view. This Master’s thesis adapted extant knowledge of the components of online customer experience and further differentiated the notion by studying how the experience is manifested in different online environments in an international setting.

The main research question was: “How customer experience emerges in use of online environments?” Based on the analysis of empirical data, all the main components and characteristics of online customer experience, in the context of all online environments considered, were identifiable. However, it was found that the profound purpose in using different online environments is always the optimization of the customer experience. The online environment is mainly chosen according to different aspects related to the components of online customer experience. Therefore, this study validates the supposition that the customer experience is context specific. (Klaus, 2013a.) Answer to the main research question is, that in use of different online environments, consumers continuously strive for achieving the most optimal experience online. The most optimal customer experience is affected by the components that the online customer experience consists of, as well as by attributes enabled by the online environments, in addition to the cultural influences.

To support the justification of this answer, the conclusions related to optimising the customer experience in online environments are presented in Figure 5 below. When
Considering the context of online environments, the components of online customer experience are more strongly linked to each other than the original framework of Trevinal and Stenger (2014) implies. Moreover, original grouping of the components according to the four dimensions is no longer such importance when it comes to the research context of different online environments. This is illustrated in a form of stacked Venn diagram in Figure 5 below. The figure clarifies the connected linkages in how consumers optimise their experience in the context of different online environments as for the components of customer experience.

![Stacked Venn Diagram]

**Figure 5. Optimising the Customer Experience in Online Environments**

Figure indicates that the customer experience is optimised by utilising different environments considering the components depending on the situation. **Firstly**, the components of values including trust and privacy act as fundamental features that are evaluated based on senses by ergonomics and aesthetics. These two dimensions, values and sense-based components are evaluated throughout the experience and majority of the optimisation happens based on these fundamental components. **Secondly**, aiming for the optimum experience, consumers utilise the desktop and mobile online environments for different purposes, for fun or to gain benefits, for example to improve...
the experience for saving their resources, mainly time. Moreover, there exists different situational factors that define the selection the environment, which comes always down to consumers’ momentary location, which then again defines the experience according to the urgency and intensity level of the task. Also, frequency of use and therefore familiarity are situational factors that affect the optimisation of the experience in different environments. Time management was associated with utilitarian orientation and hedonic use with time distortion by the consumers. Notable is that time distortion was seen as unpleasant experience. Thirdly, based on aforementioned components and the choices to optimise the experience based on them, individual rituals, routines and use of online tools are developed. Fourth circle visualises the finding that the experience is optimised by means of socialization and help of decision aid, too. Social interaction takes place in both, online environments and in offline in real life. However, when the online experience takes place simultaneously along the offline life, attentive, polite and respectful behaviour towards other people is a priority, as well as concentration on the activity online depending on its intensity. In finding decision aid, social media platforms are the least trusted option. Offline aid is only preferred in a case when there exists known expertise among consumer’s closest associates.

After answering the main research question, which concentrated on the topic more on a generalised level, the second research question “How are the components of customer experience affected by different online environments?” is discussed next, examining the components of online customer experience in the case of two main online environment entities under examination. Findings regarding the second research question were discussed in greater detail in the previous sections of 5.5.1 and 5.5.2. Therefore, the answer to the second question is now presented as condensed manner as possible, discussing how customers consider the components of the experience in different online environments (when ultimately striving for optimising their experience).

Customer experience in desktop online environments, meaning the impressions derived for using stationary desktop devices to complete activities in online environments such as websites and social media platforms, has its own special conclusions to be drawn related to the components of the experience within this particular environment. Concerning online customer experience’s fundamental
component of senses, impressions related to ergonomics and aesthetics are often very positive since companies’ websites are designed primarily for desktop environment. Another factor that creates positive impressions of convenience and feeling of control are derived from the physical attributes of the devices such as large screen and keyboard, which enable enhanced experience. Aesthetics and ergonomics are characteristics that help consumers to evaluate reliability of the environment. Due to positive impressions regarding these two characteristics in desktop online environments, naturally trust for the environment working fairly and as expected is also higher. However, feeling of privacy being safe is low independent on the online environment. Desktop online environment is chosen often for tasks that require time management, commonly for utilitarian use. Consumers develop their individual rituals and they prefer to complete certain activities in desktop environment, such as buying high-involvement products, searching more extensive information or using demanding services. Subsequently, consumers develop certain searching habits, and learn to favour particular online tools. As for socialisation, interaction in networks whilst completing actions online is common but not favourable since the actions completed are more intensive. That goes for simultaneous offline-online presence as well. Concentration and on the other hand, politeness towards other people are prioritised. Decision aid is commonly searched from desktop online environments especially with complex issues.

Customer experience in mobile online environments such as responsive websites, applications and social media platforms have also special, context-related implications. Impressions related to ergonomics and aesthetics are positive in case of responsive websites or applications. Components of values in terms of trust for the environment working as expected, are positive in environments that are designed for mobile, such as applications and responsive websites. Privacy as mentioned before, is dependent on service provider, however it is considered even lower in mobile environments due to high amount of personal data available for companies to store. Time management is efficient for daily, urgent or easy tasks. Yet, time distortion on mobile online environments is common when used for hedonic use. Especially in social media platforms time distortion happens due to constant and easy access, leading to habit-forming routine-like behaviour. Browsing in social media developed individual habits related for example to browsing it in certain situations. However, in
mobile online environments losing time can create strongly negative impressions. Rituals are developed in mobile online environments for answering instant needs; to buy low-involvement products, to search urgent information or to use everyday services. Online tools are used for enhancing the experience of completing rituals. As for the socialization, mobile online environments are the most common for this purpose on social media platforms. Simultaneous offline-online presence when using mobile environments is common but not purposeful in this context either, since attentive and polite behaviour is preferred. Search for decision aid in mobile enabled online environments is similar as in desktop environments, however, especially in this context searching for tutorials and reviews on social media platforms is more common.

As the aim of this study was to strengthen knowledge of customer experience in online environments by considering the global aspect of the internet as well, the last research question was related to culture. The question was: "In what manner can culture affect the customer experience in online environments?". The conclusion is that culture can affect the customer experience especially when it comes to consumers’ impressions derived from the fundamental components of customer experience that are related to values, such as privacy and trust.

### 6.2 Theoretical Contribution

This study creates value for scientific research by further revising online customer experience in a new way in the context of different online environments, as well as providing understanding from an international viewpoint. Next, the main theoretical contributions will be discussed more in detail by relating findings of this study to the key literature discussed earlier in the theoretical part of this study.

To begin with, majority of the existing literature has discussed online customer experience solely in the context of shopping activity (Klaus, 2013a; Rose et al, 2011; Trevinal & Stenger, 2014.) However, this study discusses the customer experience more extensively, considering consumers not only as online shoppers, but also as users of online services and searchers of information, following the suggestion of several researchers. (Cho & Park, 2004; Constantinides, 2004; McLean & Wilson, 2016.)
The components and characteristics within physical, ideological, pragmatic and social dimensions of online customer experience by Trevinal & Stenger (2014) were all recognised and supported in this study. However, when considering customer experience especially in the context of selected online environments, it occurs that the original categorisation of online experience components is not as relevant. Most importantly, this study makes a realisation of customers’ way of behaviour to optimise the experience continuously by using and cross-using different online environments according to the aspects of different components.

Continuous optimisation of the experience online emerges in the manner of behaviour in which consumers constantly draw conclusions of the online environments based on senses; ergonomics and aesthetics and on values; such as trust and privacy, moreover, choose the best online environment on the ground of these impressions. Next, the optimisation continues as for the orientation of the activity, as well as for controlling the component of time by choosing the most suitable environment for time management. Consistently, adjustment to certain online environments happens based on previously-mentioned components that end up generating individual rituals, routines and usage of favoured online tools. Lastly, the components of socialization and decision aid that take place continuously in interaction in online environments as well as offline in real life, also aims at optimisation of the experience as needed, in terms of searching for recommendations in order to be more efficient, to use the best service/buy from the best shop/find the best information. Socialization happens continuously, but again in a way that is either respectful for the counterpart or does not disturb the activities online. This description validates the implication that the original dimensions are irrelevant in this study context. Moreover, this study has confirmed the context-specificity of online customer experience and supports the parallel views of Rose et al. (2011) and Klaus (2013a). However, this study adds the universal notion of all customers’ aim at continuous optimisation of the experience in the given setting of any online context.

Next sections discuss more in detail the contributions made regarding the components of the experience. *Ergonomics and aesthetics* are a vital part of online customer experience as the most apparent part of online environments to the consumers, which also aids them in evaluating reliability of the service. Likewise, Rose et al. (2011)
discuss the consumers perception of ease-of-use and usefulness as enablers of positive experience. Pleasant and simply navigable environments are important to the consumers. Usability has been recognised as enabler of positive experience also by Klaus (2013a). Moreover, as Chong (2004, p. 284) mentions, aesthetic factors such as colour, style, editorial voice, advertising message, and reputation all impact how users perceive the brand image of an online service. Whether the experience is in this sense succeeded or failed, consumers will remember it and either keep continuing the service or disqualify it. Consumers migrate from one environment to another, whether it is for example desktop websites or mobile applications, according to the pursuit of the best experience related to ergonomics and aesthetics. Users have endless amount of options, therefore the power and autonomy, to change the environments as they want. This makes the services usefulness, usability and aesthetics that match the services nature, vital. (Chong, 2004.) This study showed that consistency in visualisation and messages from the same service provider is important between all the online environments whether it is websites, applications, social media, in desktop or mobile versions, which Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2016, p. 59) refer as managing the online presence. Also, the more unknown the brand, the more important was the enjoyable aesthetical design. This finding is supported by Rose et al. (2011), who confirm that prior knowledge of the offering provides the basis for customer’s evaluation of new information and this happens by processing information through senses. 

Values, such as trust and privacy are evaluated in online environments with the help of senses – evaluating based on the aesthetics and ergonomics. Rose et al. (2011) refer to research that confirms information processing being based on internal senses. Yet, the trust and safety for own privacy’s sake is felt to be more dependent on the company behind the service rather than depending on the attributes of desktop or mobile websites or applications. Safety of own privacy is felt to be guaranteed weakly in all environments. However, certain tasks are accomplished in certain environment because of individual beliefs, prior knowledge and preferences due to the feeling what is the safest environment. Concurrently, McLean (2017) recognises website credibility having direct effect on the customer experience. However, social media platforms in any environment are not considered as reliable or safe for privacy. All in all, these components are classified in this study as fundamental since the importance of feeling of control related to the customer experience, in terms of consumers’ privacy,
subsequently being able to trust the environment is important, and it is enabled by
ergonomics and evaluated by aesthetics. Similarly, Rose et al. (2011) discusses the
perceived control as a priority for successful customer experience online. Authors
emphasise the feelings of control are related to own access, search, evaluation of the
content, as well as security and privacy factors of the website.

Regarding the component of time, this study finds similarities with the statement based
on research of McLean and Wilson (2016), that customers are time conscious with the
perceived length of time spent on the web and this influences the impressions derived
from the experience. The importance of time management as a characteristic of
optimal online customer experience is emphasized also when related to exploration
how online environments can influence the experience. Consumers think continuously
how to optimise the time used in the environment and choose the desktop websites or
mobile applications prioritising time usage depending to their needs. Therefore, one
environment cannot be described as more efficient or inefficient since both are optimal
in certain situations. Even though time distortion takes place occasionally, the
endeavour of consumers to limit using their time online is strong and “time flying by”
causes mostly negative feelings after the online experience. Therefore, this study finds
differences with Novak et al. (2001) study, which examined the construct of flow as
positive experience online, derived from to the ease of navigation becoming apparent
as time distortion.

Orientation of the online customer experience, whether it is utilitarian or hedonic,
embodies in the usage of different online environments. The environment is, again,
optimised according to the purpose. Suitable environment is chosen according to the
situational factors, in utilitarian case such as intensiveness of the task and urgency of
the matter and in hedonic case, according to the attributes that provide the most
enjoyable experience. As McLean and Wilson (2016) summarise, this study agrees,
that customers are time conscious regarding customer experience especially in a goal
directed utilitarian activity. Then again, this study confirmed that in an opposite case
of hedonic behaviour it is common to be more unaware of the time passing.

Rituals as a part of online customer experience form as getting accustomed to the
purpose of the usage regarding certain online environment, and therefore, again
optimised depending on the situation. As an example of ritual related to use on online environments, social media was not popular in use of shopping purposes, which is reasoned by the study of Pöyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara (2013), explaining that in case of social media, there exists the challenge is that in most cases users cannot buy products directly through the company’s social media page, making the buying process complicate, even so if there is no convenient transition to the point of purchase enabling e-selling.

The routines related to browsing that consumers have developed during using different online environments as websites, applications or social media, in desktop or mobile versions, depends of the aspect whether the browsing more searching with object in mind or surfing without a goal, as well as and the accessibility of the environment in different situations. Online tools are utilised in compliance with what kind of attributes the websites, applications or social media, in desktop or mobile versions can offer. Whether the environment is on desktop or on mobile, the tools used to help the experience are similar with few exceptions. Again, optimising the experience is the eventual goal. Online tools are used naturally in line with the nature of the task, some tools for shopping, some tools for searching and some tools for service their accounts. In addition to the most common tools, some online tools are chosen to use according to individual liking. As a conclusion about contribution, these two components of routines and online tools were recognised in this context as well as in the original study from Trevinal and Stenger in 2014, in a consistent way that confirms that online routines and online tools are linked to each other.

Socialization is found in this study as a generally important component in optimising the experience. As logical, interaction online happens via different mobile or desktop social media networks with the family and friends of the consumer, depending on the momentary usage situation of certain environment. Therefore, this study agrees with Verhoef et al. (2009), who summarized that virtual communities formed by customers where social interaction is fostered, and information is changed, can lead to enhanced customer experience. For socialization, environments are often used cross-wise in a way that whilst completing task on computer online environment, socialization takes place simultaneously on mobile in instant messaging applications. Therefore, this
study agrees with Kaplan (2012) that today it is obvious that social media usage is migrated from desktop computers to mobile devices.

In this study, decision aid as a part of online customer experience emerges in a sense that online reviews are a primary source for decision aid and their importance is highlighted in the diverse sources and usage of different online environments where the decision aid is searched from. Decision aid is especially utilised when evaluating trustworthiness of the services. Also, the research of Klaus (2013a) confirms communication being a remarkable factor that reduces the impressions of risks online. The author also highlights the importance of social aspect regarding online customer experience as interactions between customers. Besides, socialization takes place on a common basis as part of the experience, simultaneously in parallel with “offline life”, too. Therefore, this study aligns with Trevinal and Stenger (2014) findings that interaction with consumers’ associates in real life and finding decision aid are important part of customer experience.

When enhancing the knowledge regarding decision aid, in this study it was found that social media platforms are often the last option to search for support, because consumers are not willing to take the trouble of contacting companies there, besides, social media is not felt to be reliable source. This feeling from the consumer side correlates with the statements of Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2014) who underline the fact that in social media channels the companies have less control over their brand. Furthermore, McLean and Wilson (2016) shed light on this finding in a sense that the need to even seek online customer support causes already negative impressions such as frustration and doubt.

To conclude, this study confirmed that culture indeed affects the customer experience in online environments. Regarding the components of values, major culture-related difference found in this study concerns the aspects of trust and privacy, supported by research of Galkina and Kock (2014), confirming the cultural difference in perceptions of trust between Finnish and Russian people. Because this finding concerned only one component out of nine, this study also supports the statement of Chong (2004) that customer experience online is rather global phenomenon.
Then again, in this study, values were grouped as fundamental component of the experience alongside the component of senses since these were the most essential aspects in optimising the experience. Even though not proved in this study, senses component of ergonomics and aesthetics can be mirrored to the existing literature highlighting ergonomics and aesthetics as culturally important components (Chong, 2004), which then links the finding of values being fundamental part of customer experience online to another culturally important, fundamental component, senses.

To justifiably evaluate the theoretical contribution, the originality and utility of the research are discussed shortly. Originality relates whether the study is more incremental or revelatory in nature when the utility can be scientific or practical. (Corley & Gioia, 2011.) Originality derives from incremental point of view since this study demonstrates how the addition of considering online environments alters the understanding of online customer experience, demonstrating that online experience is more linked with the attributes that the environment offers than the literature has indicated earlier. Revelatory insight stems from this study’s realization of customers way of behaviour to optimise the experience continuously by using and cross-using different online environments. The utility of this study is scientific considering the specificity of the idea but lacks in the analysis of scientific rigour. Therefore, the study has maybe more practical utility in a way that the findings could be applied to solve some of the problems of marketing managers responsible for the area of online customer experience. (Corley & Gioia, 2011.) These possibilities will be discussed in the next section.

6.3 Managerial Implications

This study offers the management ideas and new viewpoints regarding what kind of possibilities companies have when it comes to designing the winning customer experience online by enhancing the understanding regarding in which kind of situations consumers use which sort of online environment and why.

Primarily, it is important for the management responsible for user experience to be aware of what are the most used online environments (websites/applications/social media in desktop or mobile versions) by their audience. After that, the management
should evaluate and test whether the environment benefits their audience and continue developing those environments that enable relevant and interactive online customer experiences. Since the only way to attract and retain a large audience is to respect consumers’ choice and provide online service that is useful, usable and necessary to the consumes (Chong, 2004, p. 316), organizations should first and foremost learn to understand their target audiences’ routines by investigating the situations in which the consumers use their services: is it for utilitarian or for hedonic purpose e.g. in a hurry on the move or calmly at home, or how intensive and involving is the service from the customers viewpoint. Understanding the customers viewpoint to continuously search for the most optimal experience benefits the companies’ planning of the online environments. Moreover, as Mort and Drennan (2002, p. 13) state, creation of positive online experience requires that organisations anticipate and meet the needs of customers not only based on psychographics, demographics and behaviours, but also based on consumers accurate physical location. The authors note that providing personalised messages and timely information adds value to the customer’s experience.

This study argues that customers use and cross-use different online environments to optimise the experience. Regarding environments, user wants to have the feel of control and consistency, and if environment does not enable this, it is most likely abandoned. Therefore, creating pleasant and simple customer experience online, that is not dependent on the environment is extremely important. In other words, the usability should be priority that is considered not only in desktop environment but above all in mobile websites and applications. The more daily-basis needed the service is for the customer, the more important is to have a mobile application. As an example, if customers need companies’ services on the move, and the service is not usable in mobile version, customer either chooses another one or delays the interaction with the company until user can use the desktop version. The success stories are created by the companies that offer services that become a part of the customers’ routines in all decisive online environments.

This study argues that in interaction with businesses, social media environments are the least trusted environment by the customers. For interaction, social media platforms are often the last opportunity for the customer to reach out to the company. This finding
indicates that organizations should focus on their social media environment to create more feeling of trust. Social media channels reliability can be enhanced by acquiring verifications, which indicate to the users that the channel is not fake, but the actual company.

Moreover, if the company is planning and creating digital marketing strategy to new international markets, considering the target audiences’ culture in order to create successful online customer experience is vital. For instance, managers should pay further attention on how to create reliable feeling for the customer in interaction with the company’s online ecosystem, since in different cultures and markets the concept of trust can vary and it reflects in the online customer experience. This suggestion is in alignment with the findings of Reinecke and Bernstein (2011), who state the fact that interfaces that adapt to culture, can vastly increase the user experience.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study should be interpreted with prudence as for the limitations that are identified regarding overview of literature and moreover research methodology, in terms of the empirical data collection and analysis. The first factor that may restrict the quality of the study regards the concept of online customer experience. As Rose et al. (2011) states, numerous close but to some extent different definitions of online customer experience exists in the literature, which challenges defining the scope of the literature reviewed. In addition, concerning the defining scope of the online environments, there is no exact suggestions to follow in the literature.

Secondly, when it comes to research methods the limitations regard the most data collection and analysis processes. The data analysis process was conducted manually with simple level of research practice, which makes compressing different individuals’ personal expressions into one set of relevant findings rather challenging. Regarding the sample, the data collection was restricted to two geographical areas only. Then again, interviewing otherwise very homogenous group of young women may seem controversial. Moreover, the data collection process was completed in a online setting where one group of interviewees could express themselves in their native langue, but
the other group needed to express themselves in foreign language, which can create inconsistencies especially when the interviews were not conducted in face-to-face situation.

However, this study has limitations that offer opportunities for future research. As an example, the data acquired was collected from homogenous target group in a sense that interviewees presented the same generation Z and therefore the interviewees utilised technologies in a very similar manner, although in future research this sort of approach could be challenged as discussed in the next section.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This Master’s thesis considered the viewpoint of customers; however, the domain of customer experience management expressly online offers another angle for future research. With the different devices and channels available consumers are exposed to more interactions with brands and complexity from the marketers’ perspective increases. (Wolny, 2014.)

As Rose et al. (2011) state, the level of understanding online customer experience must be consistent with technological development. As an annotation, development of the concept should also be consistent with the pace of how consumers adopt new technologies. It can already be said that the concretise nature of the online environment continues to blur. As an example, in some countries, virtual voice assistants are already very common technology to have at home such as “Alexa”, the Google Assistant – these voice assistants are aimed at being involved with consumers on twenty-four hours, seven days a week -basis, plugging in to numerous of smart home devices such as smart glasses, smart earbuds and even smart toilets. (Cnet.com, 2018.)

This study examines online environments and online customer experience in a very general way discussing all dimensions of the experience that were defined in the framework. In future, also certain one dimension could be investigated to enhance understanding about online interactions between consumers and companies. For example, studies focusing solely on the social dimension of online customer experience in different online environments would give interesting results of consumer
behaviour. This perspective would offer interesting insights, especially if combined with aforementioned more inclusive notion of online environment, even referring to it as online ecosystems.

Furthermore, as referenced in the limitations section, another interesting proposition for future research is to study how the customer experience differs in online environments when the consumers under observation belong to different demographic groups.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

OUTLINE OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The aim of the research is to understand how online customer experience emerges via different online environments.

*Online customer experience:* Personal experience what you have as a consumer online, that results from interactions between consumers, companies and the online environment.

*Online environments:* Desktop websites and social media and mobile devices; applications, websites and social media.

**Interviewees’ Background Information:**

- Age and profession?
- Use of online services and commercial sites? (*intensive/regular/limited*)

**Interview Questions:**

**Theme 1: Physical dimension**

**Time – Time management and time distortion**

*When you think about using desktop websites and social media vs. using mobile social media and applications...*

- Which environment helps you to manage your time better, even to save time? Do you feel sometimes you “get lost in the time flow” in desktop or mobile channels?

**Senses – Ergonomics (functional design) and aesthetics**

- How important is the website design (layout, colour palette, graphics and the overall look and feel of a site) to you? What do they tell you?
- How important is the functional design (usability, easy-to-use)?
• Do you find differences in desktop channel usability and aesthetics versus mobile channel usability?
  • How important is that companies’ websites and social media channels are similar in design?

**Theme 2: Ideological dimension**

**Orientation – Hedonic (searching for fun)/Utilitarian (searching for benefits)**

*When you think about using desktop websites and social media vs. using mobile social media and applications...*

• Which environment you use for more effective way, for example to achieve certain goal that you have?
• Which environment you use for entertainment, fun, play, enjoyment and experiences?

**Values – Trust and privacy issues**

*Trust relates to the expectations that website will act proficiently, be open and fair to the consumer.*

• Which environment (using desktop vs. using mobile) you trust most for your purposes e.g. using online service or for shopping?
• In which environment (using desktop vs. using mobile) you feel that your privacy is more secured or does the environment matter in this sense?
  o What do you think of trust and privacy issues concerning social media?

**Rituals – Frame of the experience**

*Let’s discuss about whether you feel that you have certain habits (e.g. daily or irregular habits) when using online environments? For example, do you do certain things at laptop/computer at home, certain things in mobile? Do you use social media for certain purposes?*

• Which environment you use usually for online shopping?
  o Would you use social media for shopping (e.g. Facebook marketplace)?
• Which environment you use usually for search of information?
  o Do you use social media for search of information?
• Which environment you use usually for using online services? (e.g. email, booking tickets or banking, etc.)
Do you use social media channels for contacting companies or for getting service?

**Theme 3: Pragmatic dimension**

**Patronage routines – Browsing habits**

*Browsing = Exploration of the Internet by following one interesting link to another, with (searching) or without (surfing) definite objective.*

- Which environment, desktop or mobile, you use more to browse, which less?
- Do you have some habits regarding browsing in online environments on laptop? *(e.g browsing multiple things at the same time using multiple pages, saving bookmarks)*
- Do you have certain habits browsing in mobile phone? *(e.g browsing in certain situations, recurrence, time, place etc.)*
  - Is there difference between your habits when browsing in social media on desktop and browsing in social media via mobile device?

**Using online tools**

- What kind of online tools you use to *help you* in online shopping or using online services? *(e.g. watching tutorials/saving items to shopping cart/utilising search engines/subscribing to email marketing letters/searching discounts etc.)*

**Theme 4: Social dimension**

**Socialization**

- Do you communicate online with your friends or family when online shopping or using online services?
- Do you talk offline with your friends or family simultaneously when shopping online or using online services?

**Decision aid**

- Do you search advices online to make decisions related to online shopping or using online services?
- Do you ask advice offline to help you make decisions related to online shopping or using online services?
Appendix 2

ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

1 Time
   1 Time management
      1 Time management on desktop
      2 Time management on mobile
      3 Time management on social media networks
   2 Time distortion
      1 Time distortion on desktop
      2 Time distortion on mobile
      3 Time distortion on social media networks

2 Senses
   1 Ergonomics
      1 Ergonomics on desktop
      2 Ergonomics on mobile
   2 Aesthetics
      1 Aesthetics on desktop
      2 Aesthetics on mobile
   3 Senses on social media networks

3 Orientation
   1 Hedonic
      1 Hedonic behaviour on desktop
      2 Hedonic behaviour on mobile
      3 Hedonic behaviour on social media
   2 Utilitarian
      1 Utilitarian behaviour on desktop
      2 Utilitarian behaviour on mobile
      3 Utilitarian behaviour on social media

4 Values
   1 Trust
      1 Trust concerns regarding desktop environment
      2 Trust concerns regarding mobile environment
2 Privacy issues
   1 Privacy concerns regarding desktop environment
   2 Privacy concerns regarding mobile environment
   3 Trust and privacy concerns regarding social media

5 Rituals - Frame of the experience
   1 Online shopping
      1 Desktop as online shopping environment
      2 Mobile as online shopping environments
      3 Social Media as online shopping environment
   2 Search of information
      1 Desktop as search environment
      2 Mobile as search environment
      3 Social Media as search environment
   3 Usage of online services
      1 Desktop environment for using online services
      2 Mobile environments for using online services
      3 Social Media environments as an online service environment

6 Patronage routines
   1 Ways to browse
      1 On desktop
      2 On mobile
      3 Social Media browsing habits

7 Online tools
   1 Practices in use of online tools
      1 Practices on desktop
      2 Practices on mobile
      3 Online tools practices on Social Media networks

8 Socialization
   1 Interaction in online environments’ networks
   2 Simultaneous online and offline presence

9 Decision aid
   1 Online reviews and ratings in online environments
   2 Offline aid in using online environments