

**The Influence of Social eWOM
Information on Attitude Formation for
Aesthetic Products: The Case of Fine Art**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mum and dad for always standing by my side; this is for you.

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to further our understanding about the influence of eWOM communication on consumers' decision-making process and its effects on the development of aesthetic product attitudes in an online social context. The growing number of studies that explore the influence of online WOM information on consumer decision-making still presents a lack of understanding in specific consumption contexts. This requires further theoretical development on the modality in which eWOM communication retrieved from social platforms alters the decision-processes in emotionally rich consumption contexts. Accordingly, given aesthetic product typology's recent market trends, and art in particular, which saw a shift from predominantly offline consumption towards online mediated channels, fine art has been chosen as the subject of the current study as the prototypical example of an aesthetic good.

A mixed-method approach within a pragmatic philosophical stance was deemed most suitable to explore the research problem. The lack of research within the area called for an initial qualitative method of data collection in the form of in-depth interviews. A total of 28 in-depth interviews were carried out with different groups of stakeholders, such as commercial galleries, consumers, artists etc. This phase of the study helped pare down the number of variables to be included in the model and offered an indication of the experimental design requirements. The primary phase of research consisted of a quantitative data collection in the form of an online administrated experiment. This stage sought to test the developed product attitude formation model, accounting for the influence of social eWOM information. A total of 426 responses were collected, and data were subjected to statistical analyses, specifically analyses of variance and SEM.

The findings of this research highlight several contributions to theory, which advances our understanding of how consumers form product attitudes in an online social context, particularly attitudes towards aesthetic products.

Firstly, this study found that the attitude a consumer develops about an aesthetic product in an information-rich context is not pre-determined by the product typology, but depends on consumer-specific factors. In this instance, eWOM information enters the process as cognitive input and induces a shift in product preferences that suppress the influence of affect that was previously considered of paramount importance. Secondly, the study highlights the importance of the purchase motivations of the consumer as, these act upon the extent of influence that eWOM information has on product attitude. Thirdly, the study identified the specific dimensions of eWOM that exhibit a differential impact upon product attitude development. Fourthly, a new theoretical model that accounts for the aesthetic product attitude formation process was developed and defined by the variables that exert an influence on the process in an online social context.

The results of this study provide several managerial recommendations that help inform marketing practice, given the pervasive adoption of social media for following and purchasing aesthetic products.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.0 Introduction

In the last decade, a growing number of studies have tried to explore the influence of online WOM information on consumer purchase behaviour; however the field is still fragmented and there is no clear understanding of its effects in specific consumption contexts. Particularly, there is a lack of insight about the modality in which eWOM communication influences consumers' decision-making process and its effects on product attitudes in an online social context.

A large part of the research, which has been undertaken in the field of consumer behaviour, has focused on rational consumption without much investigation on decision-processes in emotionally rich consumption contexts. Thus, the relationship between the availability of eWOM information and consumer attitude formation about aesthetic products is explored in comparison to affectively driven decision-making process for this product category. As a result, this research aims to identify the changes that occur in the attitude formation process for aesthetic products in an online social context. Given their affect-rich nature, aesthetic products are a type of goods with a distinctive ability to evoke affective responses in consumers, while their quality is established on discretionary standards. For these reasons, aesthetic decision-making does not correspond to a traditional, reason-based evaluation; rather feelings are used as an information source in the development of product and brand attitudes. With the diffusion of knowledge through online social channels, consumers have greater access to information, which influences the way they develop attitudes towards a product.

The internet has become a preferred information channel for collecting and sharing information about products and brands, with social media assuming ever-larger importance in the process of social knowledge exchange. Namely, eWOM that originates

on social media such as Facebook could be even more influential as users engage in repeated interactions on these platforms. Given that hedonic, and particularly aesthetic, product consumption is a vital part of consumers' lives, further exploration is necessary to understand how consumers carry out consumption decisions for this category of products in a social media context.

1.1 Research Background

Research to date has argued that the inherent traits of a product determine its character and thus mark the nature of consumption (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; López and Maya, 2012). Literature has thus consistently indicated that products can be classified into two broad categories: primarily hedonic and utilitarian (Neeley et al., 2010; Alba and Williams, 2013; Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012; Bigné et al., 2008). Although products may have a mixture of hedonic and utilitarian attributes, it is useful to conceptualise them into one of these product types because it reflects the overarching patterns that consumers employ during evaluative processes (Lee and Lee, 2009). Hedonic products are expected to drive pleasure, attainment and experiential consumption (Cheema and Papatla, 2010; Chen and Granitz, 2012), while utilitarian products offer functional benefits (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Park and Moon, 2003; Cheema and Papatla, 2010). A series of studies have employed this classification in the marketing literature (e.g., Batra and Ahtola, 1990; Chitturi et al., 2007; Chitturi et al., 2008; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Okada, 2005; Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998; Voss et al., 2003).

Consumers' decision-making process refers to how individuals evaluate and subsequently select products and brands (Reynolds and Olson, 2001); and is defined by the product category that is being considered for consumption. Specifically, this evaluative process includes the formation of product and brand attitudes, where an attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour' (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; 1). Product attitude thus guides

the decision-making process of consumers and defines product selection as its outcome (Keller, 1993).

Following this conceptualisation, literature suggests that hedonic products are considered to be affect rich, while utilitarian products are affect poor (Hsee and Rottenstreich, 2004; Voss et al., 2003; Botti and McGill, 2011). The central tenant about product attitude formation holds that ‘the affect-rich nature of hedonic outcomes causes their value to be established mostly on internal, subjective, and discretionary standards, whereas the value of utilitarian outcomes depends on external, objective and mandatory standards’ (Botti and McGill, 2011; 1067). Furthermore, as some hedonic items are more capable of eliciting affective responses due to their pronounced aesthetic properties (Hekkert, 2006) literature suggests that the aesthetic component of these hedonic typologies has an even larger influence on consumers’ decision-making process (Hoegg and Alba, 2008). Thus, Leder et al. (2004) classify aesthetic products as hedonic goods due to their ability to elicit emotions (Bigné et al., 2008); however the element of beauty is a distinguishing trait of aesthetic products that needs to be present.

In contrast to the cognitively driven process that characterises utilitarian consumption, hedonic consumption, and the consumption of aesthetic products, is largely associated with affective elements (Kronrod and Danzinger, 2013; Adaval, 2001; Alba and Williams, 2013; Babin et al., 1994; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Kivetz and Simonson, 2002; Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998; Chaudhuri, 2006). Given this, the product category type is assumed to exert substantial influence on consumers’ attitude formation process. When facing a utilitarian option, consumers adopt a cognitively driven process, resulting in rationally based attitudes towards the product. On the other hand, when evaluating a hedonic product option, affective considerations drive attitude formation. Given that the market for aesthetic products is increasingly shifting towards online spaces, it is important to understand how this change in context influences the consumer decision journey, with particular focus on the process stages and resulting attitude. One of the major changes brought about by the online channel, which

was not available in the offline space, is the wide pool of information at consumers' disposal, which presents itself as eWOM information retrievable from social platforms.

1.2 Research Rationale and Objectives

As previously mentioned, a large part of consumer behaviour research has focused on decision-making with regards to utilitarian products, while scarce attention has been given to emotionally driven consumption contexts. Hedonic consumption has been typified as affectively driven, internally rather than externally motivated, indiscriminately entailing a pleasure component and is often seen as indulgent consumption. As such, literature has established that when an individual assesses a product's hedonic pleasure rather than its functional value and correlated benefits, an evaluative process based on affective elements will be employed (Schwarz, 2000). Thus, in the process of attitude formation, the value assigned to the experienced affect does not lie in the affect per se but rather in the informational value this provides for evaluation (Clore and Storbeck, 2006). Specifically, hedonic products, especially those defined as aesthetic goods (i.e., fashion, wine, music, art) possess an ambiguous product quality. Given that the product quality is difficult to establish, consumers undertake a largely subjective assessment of product attributes or otherwise rely on external cues aiding product attitude formation (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014); however, a goal-oriented approach to consumption should also be considered when exploring the attitude formation process (Alba and Williams, 2013; Botti and McGill, 2011; Pham, 1998; Khan et al., 2005).

Specifically, 'because of the goal-oriented nature of consumption, behaviour should be more directly related to the predominant affective versus cognitive basis of the goal it is attached to' (Dubé et al., 2003; 266). It follows that hedonic products can also be consumed in the light of motivations that are not purely hedonic in character and thus, consumers may employ a different attitude process based on the specific goal that drives the consumption pursuit. Based on this, one stream of literature has suggested that aside from hedonic goals, aesthetic products can drive consumption goals of a different

character. Namely, that there is an important additional underlying aspect in the consumption of this product category. These additional aspects relate to the symbolic dimensions present in hedonic consumption instances and are tightly related to consumers' attempts for engagement in social approval and identity communication (Wolny and Mueller, 2013; Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012). As Ritterfeld (2002) explains, symbolic consumption occurs because product preferences can be considered as identity manifestations that help an individual express and situate himself in the social world. Namely, aesthetic products are consumed in accordance with social expectations and are not entirely directed towards the experience of personal pleasure (Bell et al., 1991; Charters, 2006). Here, symbolic consumption is not entirely driven by affective processes but also by more rational considerations (Chaudhuri, 2006). Although research affirms that a response to an aesthetic product is universally experienced, regardless of individual factors because 'without inference or learned response, a product can be aesthetically pleasing' (Townsend and Sood, 2012; 416). The evaluation of the product, and thus the product attitude that follows, could be shaped and influenced by different elements (Patrick and Hagtvedt, 2011).

Following these arguments, fine art has been chosen as the subject of the current study because it represents a prototypical example of an aesthetic good within extant literature, and thus offers a valuable context to explore the aesthetic consumption typology in an online setting. This study will contextualise the research within the primary rather than the secondary art market, as different parameters govern the marketing dynamics in the two markets (MacNeill and Wilson-Anastasios, 2014), and the primary market offers a more transparent and suitable context for the current investigation. Given recent market trends for art in particular, which saw a shift from predominantly offline consumption towards online mediated channels, it is important to examine the consumer decision journey and product attitudes in this context. Because users that can exchange product information in their conversations, the influence of eWOM is even more critical on social media platforms (You et al., 2015). However, recent literature contends that 'albeit the promising practice of social media in alluring consumers, topics related to consumer

mechanisms of processing brand-related information in social media posts and making attitudinal judgments remain understudied' (Chen, Kim and Lin, 2015; 208).

Thus, research needs to explore the contextual conditions in which consumers shift from an affectively driven attitude route to more reason-based processes (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009) as a result of social knowledge and eWOM information. It is important for this gap to be addressed, such that depending on the evaluation modality that a consumer employs; the formation of product attitude is shaped accordingly. That is, 'overall, instrumental as well as emotional evaluations contribute independently to the prediction of preferences' (Bohm and Pfister, 1996; 144). Specifically, extant research in consumer decision-making has confirmed that depending on one's decision-modality, product attitudes and preferences will change, thus distinguishing between affective and cognitive preferences (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). And importantly, individual-specific factors have been known to influence the process for aesthetically rich products (e.g., Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014; Hekkert et al., 2006; Hekkert and Van Wieringen, 1996).

Based on the assumptions that emerged in the literature, it is worthwhile noting that there are different views regarding aesthetic consumption and little understanding of how they translate to the online social context. Research exploring the influence and impact of eWOM as an information source on consumer product attitude development within affect-rich consumption contexts is underexplored. Therefore, this research will address this gap and analyse the interplay between affect and cognition framing on the development of aesthetic product attitudes in an online social context. It will also take into account person-specific and eWOM informational factors that may influence this process.

Accordingly, the specific objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1) Identify variables that influence consumers' decision-making process in the development of aesthetic product attitudes in an online social context.

- 2) Explore the role of purchase goals in determining the attitude formation process in an online social context.
- 3) Determine the role that eWOM information availability plays on the attitude formation process for an aesthetic product.
- 4) Determine the interplay between affective and cognitive elements on the attitude development process.
- 5) Develop a comprehensive consumer attitude formation model for aesthetic products that accounts for variables that influence the process and the impact of eWOM information.

1.3 Methodological Approach

The current study adopts the philosophical stance of the pragmatic school of thinking. The pragmatic philosophical stance to research maintains that direct experience guides the development of knowledge and understanding (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Accordingly, the underlying principles of the pragmatist school include: rejecting the existence of a universal truth, transcending dualist debates between objective and subjective ontologies thus embracing a pluralist perspective, adopting methods that best suit the requirements needed in order to address the research question and using both qualitative and quantitative methods in a complimentary fashion (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Following this school of thinking, the researcher believes the objectives of the current study call for the adoption of both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to obtain an exhaustive level of insight and acquire deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The pragmatic stance does not restrict the researcher in terms of methodological possibilities and encourages the deployment of methods considered to be most appropriate given the research's aims.

As outlined in the previous section, numerous studies have explored hedonic consumption. However, scarce attention has been given to the attitude formation process that consumers employ because most of the research has focused on decision-making in

contexts typified by rational drivers. Given the major changes occurring in the marketplace for affectively rich aesthetic products, consumers' decision journey needs to be contextualised in the online mediated social space. Particular attention also needs to consider attitude development as an antecedent that leads to product purchase. In accordance, both consumer and information-related factors will be investigated to determine how consumers form product attitudes in this consumption setting.

A mixed-method approach to the research has been deemed the most suitable to explore the consumer decision journey for aesthetic products and the influence of eWOM information on the process of attitude formation. Primary data collection consisted of 28 qualitative in-depth interviews with different groups of stakeholders, such as galleries, consumers, artists etc. The obtained findings helped refine an attitude formation model that was tested in the quantitative stage of this manuscript, providing an indication of the conceptual framework and the experimental design requirements.

Following the interviews, a quantitative online administrated experiment was conducted to test the developed product attitude formation model. A total of 426 responses were collected, and data was analysed using analyses of variance and SEM. This provided a direct test of the hypothesised attitude formation model and answered the research objectives.

1.4 Market Trends

1.4.1 The Art Market Online

The internet is disrupting a wide range of sectors by changing the way consumers look for information, interact with each other and undertake purchases (Broniarczyk and Griffin, 2014). 'The rich, new, and ever-expanding sources of information through the internet and related communities' (Simonson, 2016; 844) have catalysed a change in the way consumers define product quality as this channel lowered barriers to a large amount

of information and product options. Aesthetic products are also gaining momentum in online commerce, as consumers assert they regularly purchase wine (19%), jewellery (19%) and antiques (22%) online (Arttactic, 2016). Accordingly, the global online art market is experiencing exponential growth, increasing from £ 1.26 billion in 2013 to £ 2.62 billion in 2015. By 2019, the online art market is predicted to be worth over £ 5.1 billion (Arttactic, 2016). Following an institutional interpretation, the art market ‘can be viewed as a social–economic network involving artistic and business-based activities, organizations and individuals. Art and the art market can be positioned within a wider network involving social actors engaged in competitive exchanges’ (Fillis, 2014; 52). Additionally, art market development has been accompanied by growth in consumer interest for art and artistic content, such that 23% of the English online population consider themselves ‘passionate about arts and culture’, while 33% would like to be more involved (Arts Council, 2010).

Advances in internet technology and increased industry investment are also aiding the online art market in this rapidly maturing process (Arttactic, 2014). A range of new players, such as Amazon and eBay (Skate’s, 2014), Etsy and high-end websites like the Artnet, Saatchi and Art.sy, are entering this market and enabling artists to create brands via self-promotion (Belk, 2014; Kottasz and Bennett, 2014). Furthermore, more peer-to-peer platforms are expected to bypass traditional and online intermediaries within this product category (Arttactic, 2014).

Art buying motivations and patterns are changing, as evidenced by how half of all art buyers have already bought art online. Thus buying art solely based on an electronic image is becoming a widely accepted practice, such that 95% of buyers reported that the product they purchased corresponded to the digital image on the website. Additionally, novice buyers drive online purchases with 24% stating they have already bought art online. Thus, the internet represents an important access point for novice buyers as their first purchases are made online rather than in traditional offline outlets (Arttactic, 2015).

This finding is of particular importance because market research suggests age divisions are beginning to narrow with regards to internet use (Arts Council, 2009).

Here, the level of online engagement with art is growing exponentially as individuals use the internet primarily for research purposes. They look for more information in order to educate themselves about artists and artworks. This channel also offers the opportunity to further develop interests without any financial or time obligation, and this engagement is largely viewed as a pleasurable experience (Arts Council, 2004).

Although offline spaces are considered important for educating and building confidence in consumers, the online channel is also catering to these same needs. These recent figures illustrate an important trend that consumers are becoming indifferent to the type of channel they use in order to acquire and collect information about art; they are also becoming less dependent upon physical galleries (Arttactic, 2015).

1.4.2 Art Consumption Online

The perceptions that consumers hold about traditional offline art outlets are catalysing the shift towards online art spaces. Potential buyers experience high entry barriers set by traditional gatekeepers, such as dealers and galleries. A large majority of consumers perceive the art market as unfamiliar territory, and they remain intimidated by conventional gallery environments. Regardless of socio-economic background, consumers often report feeling excluded from these art practices; feelings of inferiority (e.g., lifestyle); feelings of financial and intellectual inadequacy. Because of these reasons, potential buyers look for guidance and information online (Arts Council, 2004).

Thus, the online channel is building an entirely new profile and generation of customers. The internet's main advantages are mainly in the opportunity to discover new art, the range of products available and the fact that consumers find this outlet less intimidating compared to the traditional offline setting. Fifty percent of surveyed respondents claim

they have discovered an online art platform through WOM coming from social media (Arttactic, 2015).

Social networks, in particular, are increasing in importance and becoming major platforms for finding and sharing information about art. Online interactions are seen as an important opportunity to share information, experiences and opinions. Individuals regularly share information about artistic content via social media, and as a result, these platforms are now considered a key marketing channel (Arts Council, 2010). Artists are exploiting the internet's opportunities to growing their fan bases by attracting large numbers of followers though social media (Kottasz and Bennett, 2014).

Although art appreciation and collection can be a solitary exercise, it is starting to become an online social activity by individuals' sharing their knowledge and tastes. 'Only few industries are so rooted in personal relations and the opinions of others as the art market is' (Arts Council, 2009; 10). Accordingly, the internet serves as channel that connects art consumers and improves the communication between consumers and artists (Kerrigan et al., 2009). In addition, consumers who still engage with art offline are doing so primarily because of the social component involved (Arts Council, 2009). The art world traditionally centres market actors like curators, artists, collectors and enthusiasts, who jointly contribute to a product's market value (MacNeill and Wilson-Anastasios, 2014). It follows that this value system has found context in the online arena as 'social media naturally aligns with the core structure of the art eco-system' (10); thus power structures and traditional hierarchies can be challenged in this context (Arttactic, 2015) as amateur voices are sharing their opinions in digital spaces (Kolb, 2014; Preece and Wiggins Johnson, 2014). A similar market change has also been identified in the aesthetic field of fashion. The availability of online platforms for sharing and collecting social knowledge has given voice to a large number of fashion enthusiasts (Dolbec and Fischer, 2015). This confirms how consumers are widely sharing their aesthetic consumption choices online as a means of expressing their identities (Preece and Wiggins Johnson, 2014).

Research carried out by Arttactic (2016) about the online art trade suggests that, in today's online landscape, even private individual purchases can be shared with a vast number of people and can affect the purchasing patterns of peers. This is especially true for novice buyers who claimed they were influenced by peer art buyers at a 74% rate (Arttactic, 2016). Based on these figures, the market is becoming dependent upon the dialogue between all levels of stakeholders, from curators, galleries, artists, customers and peer art enthusiasts.

However, the extent of available online art content makes people uncertain about its relevance and worth. Individuals largely do not feel confident about their own judgment in evaluating art products when making purchasing decisions (Arts Council, 2004). As such, consumers state they find eWOM very useful as this type of content allows them to widen their level of understanding and heightens their level of enjoyment in art (Arts Council, 2009).

The internet and social platforms that allow for an exchange of opinions and personal preferences, are becoming important factors that influence sales, as they enables the sector to map out tastes and market art directly to buyers. In 2015, 41% respondents discovered art through social media (compared to 33% in 2014); and 24% of art buyers said they recognise the link between social media and their art purchases (Arttactic, 2015). As a consequence, social media is aiding validation and increasing buyers' confidence. More specifically, social media eWOM helps with: more information on known artists, discovery, popularity of artists and peer confirmation (e.g., opinions, tastes). An Arttactic (2015) survey reported that Facebook (52%) and Instagram (34%) are the two most important platforms for sharing and finding information about art.

The influence of social media is expected become stronger and more visible in the years to come because of the fading distinction between professional and personal use of the internet (Arttactic, 2015). Nevertheless, arts organizations seem hesitant to adopt these

platforms out of fear to engage in bidirectional communication with consumers that could potentially threaten their role as authoritative institutions (Hede, 2014).

1.4.3 The importance of eWOM Information in Art Consumption

Social networking sites can enable both active and passive discovery of art-related information. For example, Facebook users come across arts and cultural information in status updates, comments and messages, but also actively join groups in order to keep up-to-date (although there is a considerable resistance among Facebook users in being too heavily 'marketed to'). Specifically, people share information online about artistic content in a range of different ways. For example, of those that have publicised something related to art, 63% had used social networking sites, 49% had used email and 44% had done so through a website (e.g., a blog or forum) (Arts Council, 2010). Emotional benefits still seem to be important motivators for purchasing art, but 63% of respondents reported that they are also motivated by other, more functional, factors (Arttactic, 2016). In addition, the importance of information about the artist's brand or product emerged as a crucial factor, with 57% of respondents stating that they would like to have more information about the quality of the work, and 64% would like to have more information about the artist (Arttactic, 2015).

internet users state that they look for information about the background of the artist/artwork; the context and meaning of the artwork; as well as reviews, opinions and interpretations of artwork in order to form an opinion about it (Arts Council, 2010). It could thus be contended that consumers find difficulties in assigning meaning as well as forming personal opinions about this aesthetic product category. Namely, individuals do not exhibit confidence in their tastes and knowledge about art as 'they find the extent and variety of art that is available in the digital space overwhelming and intimidating'. For this reason, consumers are often unable to judge the quality of the content online, and they lack an expert judgment that would guide them in the experience. In other words, engaging in activities on the Internet requires consumers to take an active role in

determining the value and relevance of content as well as curating and catering their own experiences (Arts Council, 2004). In conclusion, the Internet, and particularly social media platforms, have catalysed a change both in the way consumers look for information as well as how they engage in fine-art consumption (Kolb, 2014).

1.5 Thesis Structure

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows:

Figure 1.1 Thesis Structure

Chapter 2
This chapter serves to explain hedonic and aesthetic product consumption, by contextualising them within the larger discourse about consumption typologies. The specific traits that characterise aesthetic products, and that consequently have an influence in determining decision-making for this product category are also outlined. The chapter also provides an overview of the additional motivating factors beyond hedonic aspects that intervene in individuals' consumption of this product typology.
Chapter 3
This chapter explores consumer decision-making with reference to process differences, depending on the product category. Here, a comparison is traced between decision modalities that rely on predominantly affective elements and those that rely on cognitive elements. The process differences are thereafter explained by referring to the implications of such distinctions for subsequent process steps, such as product attitude and preference formation.
Chapter 4
This chapter provides an overview of extant eWOM literature and its influence on the consumer decision process. Accordingly, context, person and information related elements are outlined with regards to their role in the eWOM adoption process.

Furthermore, the implications of eWOM adoption in the process of attitude formation are explained and compared to what literature has assumed to be the underlying components of aesthetic product consumption.

Chapter 5

This chapter examines the methodological choices considered and adopted in view of answering the research questions. Specifically, it describes the philosophical underpinning of the study and engages in a discussion of ontological and epistemological assumptions. The chapter also outlines the methodological approach adopted in the first phase of the study; in-depth interviews, sampling as well as data collection and analysis are described and justified.

Chapter 6

The findings of the qualitative study are documented and discussed in reference to the theoretical assumptions underlying the research problem under investigation. Based on data collected from the in-depth interviews, relevant variables are identified for inclusion in the later stages of the study, and a theoretical framework is established in accordance with the research hypotheses.

Chapter 7

This chapter provides a discussion of knowledge gaps in the literature that have been refined through the exploratory phase of the study. This chapter also offers an account of the process that helped establish the conceptual framework adopted in the study.

Chapter 8

This chapter introduces the methodology for the second stage of the study, a quantitative approach. A discussion of possible methods with according implications is provided, as is justification for an experimental approach in this particular context. This chapter also

contains a detailed overview of the experimental procedure, as well as the format of the accompanying questionnaire. Measurement scales, sample and limitations are explained.

Chapter 9

The findings and analysis from the quantitative stage of the study are presented in Chapter 9. The analyses that were undertaken to address the research questions included: repeated measures ANOVAs, MANOVAs, Reliability analysis, Normality analysis and CFA. In order to test the hypothesised model, which accounts for the attitude development process for aesthetic products, Structural Equation Modeling was adopted.

Chapter 10

In this chapter, the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative studies are discussed in relation to existent literature. Here, findings are examined in reference to the research objectives and used to offer insight about the attitude formation process for aesthetic products and the influence of eWOM information. The theoretical model is discussed and justified.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 offers a concluding discussion about the implications of the present research. As such, the theoretical contributions and managerial implications are articulated. This chapter also offers suggestions for future research that have grown out of the limitations in the current study.

1.6 Summary

This chapter served as an introduction and roadmap to the research. Relevant background information acknowledged the online changes that are occurring in customers' journey for purchasing aesthetic products. In particular, this section explained the traits that characterise the aesthetic product typology as well as the methodological approach and

the pragmatic underpinnings of this research's philosophical stance. Secondary market data was analysed in order to provide a practitioner perspective about the implications of these behavioural changes for market actors, and thus contextualise the research problem. In conclusion, this first chapter provides an overview of the process that was adopted in view of answering the research questions.

CHAPTER 2: DEFINING HEDONIC CONSUMPTION

2.0 Introduction to Consumption Instances

This section of the thesis will serve to identify the body of literature that deals with hedonic consumption. The discussion about hedonic consumption will be applied to the case of aesthetic products where fine art has been adopted as the context of study. It will also be situated in the larger discourse about dimensions of consumption in consumer research. With this objective, consumption of aesthetic products will be formalised by placing it within the domain of hedonic consumption.

Alba and Williams (2013; 2) characterise the research produced so far as ‘the result has been an impressively supported set of assertions about relatively restricted aspects of hedonic consumption, an outcome that has yet to produce a full understanding of when, how, and why consumers find pleasure in the products and events they experience’. To contextualise hedonic consumption, its distinctive traits are compared to utilitarian consumption in the following sections. This is done to identify the ways in which the nature of the product affects consumer decision-making and attitude formation. As such, the chapter will commence with a general analysis of the literature that deals with the dimensions of consumption. Then, peculiarities of hedonic consumption, as opposed to utilitarian consumption, will be explored. The related drivers and outcomes that distinguish the two will also be outlined so as to offer a better understanding of one peculiar type of hedonic consumption: aesthetic products and their application in an online context.

2.1 The Proposed Conceptualisations

Although consumption can be viewed from an instrumental/cognitive and emotional/affective dichotomy, different authors have proposed varied definitions that encapsulate the nature of consumption instances. Studies have distinguished between

definitions that aim to conceptualise the dichotomous perspective involved in the product character and the nature of consumption. The table below provides an outline of the conceptualisations that have been proposed in the extant literature with according definitions.

Table 2.1 Outline of the conceptualisations proposed in the literature

Conceptualisation	Source	Definition	Explanation
Hedonic / Utilitarian	Batra and Ahtola (1991); Chitturi et al. (2007); Lopez and Maya (2012); Palazon and Delgado-Ballaster (2013); Sela et al. (2009)	‘Consumers purchase goods and services and perform consumption behaviours for two basic reasons: (1) consummatory affective (hedonic) gratification (from sensory attributes), and (2) instrumental, utilitarian reasons concerned with "expectations of consequences" (of a means-ends variety, from functional and non-sensory attributes)’ (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; 159).	The hedonic and utilitarian consumption dimensions are not perceived as entailing some negative connotation, but both are expected to provide a type of benefit (Alba and Williams, 2013)
Wants / Shoulds	Bazerman et al. (1998); Ramanathan and Menon	‘Operationally, want refers to the emotional or affective preference of the decision maker,	The categorisation refers to the ‘impulsive wants’ on one hand, and the ‘reasoned shoulds’ on

	(2006)	<p>whereas should refers to the cognitive or reasoned preference of the decision maker' (Bazerman et al., 1998; 226).</p>	<p>the other (Bazerman et al., 1998; 226). Based on this proposition, hedonic goods correspond to the more affectively driven 'want' state, while utilitarian goods are comparable to the reasoned 'should' preferences that characterise consumption choices (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). However, the main difference between the two conceptualisations consists in the fact that the 'want' motives are said to entail an 'immediately gratifying payoff' as well as, on the other hand, an anticipable 'obvious harm' in the future as these are linked to risky behaviours entailing some predictably negative consequences (Okada, 2005).</p>
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Vices / Virtues	Wertenbroch (1998)	<p>‘Within matched pairs of products, we distinguish relative "virtue" and "vice" goods whose preference ordering changes with whether consumers evaluate immediate or delayed consumption consequences... These preference orders can lead to dynamically inconsistent consumption choices by consumers whose trade-offs between the immediate and delayed consequences of consumption depend on the time lag between purchase and consumption’ (Wertenbroch, 1998; 317).</p>	<p>Wertenbroch (1998) approached consumption in terms of ‘vices’ and ‘virtues’. However, Okada (2005) offers a different perspective as the author points out that ‘vices’ inherently entangle a negative type of outcome, whilst ‘virtues’ are associated with favourable ones (Wertenbroch, 1998). As such, if an individual decides to prioritise a ‘vice’ over a ‘virtue’, the outcomes ‘explicitly straddle the gain and loss domain’ (Okada, 2005; 43). Nevertheless, Sela et al. (2009) define the ‘vice/virtue’ dichotomy as being identical to the hedonic/utilitarian formularization. Namely, by looking at the choice mechanisms consumers employ in</p>
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			evaluating product options, a parallel between the two conceptualisations can be traced. Specifically, given that hedonic and accordingly ‘vice’ product categories are intended as indulgent activities, there is a defined need to provide internal and external justification when engaging in such consumption (Sela et al., 2009).
Necessities / Indulgencies	Kivetz and Simonson (2000a; 2000b)	‘Indulgency is defined as non-essential item or service that contributes to luxurious living; an indulgence or convenience beyond the indispensable minimum. Necessity items, in contrast, are defined as items that cannot be done without; things that must be had for the preservation and	The conceptualisation entails a distinction of choices between necessities and indulgencies. That is, acquiring ‘what is perceived as necessities, such as savings, ordinary food, and medical care; or items representing indulgences or nonessential luxuries, such as a cruise, fancy food, or an expensive

		reasonable enjoyment of life; essentials'.(Kivetz and Simonson, 2000a; 156).	watch' (Kivetz and Simonson, 2000b; 199).
Think / Feel	(Claeys et al., 1995)	'Think products are bought for "utilitarian needs", where the main focus lies on functional performance and which are cognitively processed and evaluated. The feel side was interpreted to represent products where the drive for purchase is ego gratification, social acceptance and sensory stimulation' (Claeys et al., 1995; 194).	In the same vein Claeys et al. (1995) put forward the distinction between think and alternatively feel products. Namely, the motivation behind the purchase of a think product lies in the 'functional consequences' of the same. On the other hand the motivations to buy a feel product reside in 'psychological consequences'.
Utilitarian/ Consummatory	Pham (1998)	Consummatory motives underlie consumption behaviours that are intrinsically rewarding (e.g., reading a novel for pleasure), whereas instrumental motives underlie consumption behaviours that are seldom rewarding in	In the same fashion, Pham (1998; 146) distinguished between the two typologies of consumption motivations into consummatory and instrumental. Namely, consummatory motives are 'intrinsically

		<p>themselves and are purchased to achieve some other goals (e.g., reading a tax manual to prepare a tax return). When consumers' motives are consummatory, affective considerations should be more important determinants of their behaviour than when their motives are instrumental (Pham, 1998; 146).</p>	<p>rewarding', while instrumental motives drive consumption undertaken for achieving 'some other goals'.</p>
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Due to the rather extensive series of different propositions that have been advanced to explain consumption, Alba and Williams (2013) argue that their empirical measurement remains unclear. Despite a lack of through analysis, one may still conclude that there is an overarching link associated with the various definitions and set of conceptualisations. Namely, 'these findings collectively point at a conceptual parallel between luxuries-wants-hedonic benefits and necessities-needs-utilitarian benefits' (Chitturi et al., 2008; 50).

The hedonic/utilitarian definition is the conceptualisation that has been predominantly applied and most widely accepted within the literature. As such, it will also be used in this study. Chaudhuri (2006) considers the hedonic and utilitarian product categories to be quintessential consumption typologies. The following sections will trace a parallel between the two product definitions and will specifically focus on hedonic products. The

subcategory of the hedonic typology, defined as the aesthetic product typology, is the subject of the current study, which will be explored in depth.

2.2 Product Character

Even though research acknowledges that some instances of consumption see the presence of both hedonic and utilitarian dimensions in varying degrees (Okada, 2005; Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012), literature acknowledges some goods are predictably perceived as primarily hedonic or utilitarian (Neeley et al., 2010; Alba and Williams, 2013; Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012; Bigné et al., 2008). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) argue that every hedonic object may serve a utilitarian purpose, and every utilitarian product entails a hedonic component, but some products are considered hedonic in nature. Given that products possess specific inherent traits that mark the nature of consumption, research adopted the proposition of product category character (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; López and Maya, 2012). According to Alba and Williams (2013), a stream of research has adopted a product-centred view that considers hedonic and utilitarian consumption. In other words, different modes of consumption are viewed as dependent upon a product's inherent traits (Wertenbroch, 1998; Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998).

Here, the distinction between hedonic and utilitarian can refer both to the product attributes as well as to product categories as a whole. For example, a product can possess a high hedonic attribute (e.g., appealing design) and a low utilitarian attribute (e.g., no functionalities) at the same time. Depending on the salience of these two dimensions, the product will be considered primarily hedonic or primarily utilitarian (Chernev, 2004). As Batra and Ahtola (1990) outline, a product marked by sensory traits will trigger the formation of a hedonic attitude. On the other hand, a product's functional attributes will induce the development of utilitarian attitudes in the consumer. By definition, the hedonic or utilitarian dimensions of products are regarded as independent constructs when it comes to consumers' attitude formation. Namely, 'these considerations map onto

independent components of product evaluations and attitudes and enable people to distinguish between goods according to their relative hedonic or utilitarian nature' (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; 60).

This categorisation helps to distinguish between product typologies and has been adopted in many studies (e.g., Batra and Ahtola, 1990; Mano and Oliver, 1993; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Lim and Ang, 2008; O'Curry and Strahilevitz, 2001; Venkatraman and MacInnis, 1985; Zhong and Mitchell, 2010; Chaudhuri, 2006). Although product categorisation is not a straightforward process because products often have a mixture of attributes, it represents an efficient approach to studying consumption. Specifically, taking into account Lee and Lee's (2009) argument, adopting these typological distinctions is a useful strategy, as it reflects general consumer assumptions and the evaluative criteria for products.

2.3 Defining Hedonic Products

2.3.1 Hedonic and Utilitarian Products

In line with the aforementioned product characteristics, a distinction between product categories has been put forward. Following this classification, literature defines hedonic products as capable of providing pleasure and experiential consumption (Cheema and Papatla, 2010; Chen and Granitz, 2012), while utilitarian products convey functional benefits (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Park and Moon, 2003; Cheema and Papatla, 2010). Similarly, O'Curry and Strahilevitz (2001) acknowledge that depending on the nature of the product, consumers will both consume and acquire the product differently. Hedonic products are considered affect rich, while utilitarian products are affect poor (Hsee and Rottenstreich, 2004; Voss et al., 2003; Botti and McGill, 2011).

The hedonic value of a product has been defined as 'the level of pleasure that the product or service is capable of giving to the average consumer' compared to the utilitarian value of a product that is, 'the level of usefulness of the product or service in solving the

everyday problems of the average customer' (Chaudhuri, 2006; 270). Based on this, Chitturi (2009) argues that the hedonic dimension of a product entails the capability to elicit pleasure in the consumer. Consumers perceive utilitarian and hedonic products as equivalently capable of satisfying basic needs, but only the latter are able to satisfy higher order needs (Yalch and Brunel, 1996). As such, the two typologies serve in fulfilling contrasting consumption requirements.

2.3.2 Categorising Hedonic and Aesthetic Products

Based on the hedonic conceptualisation, research has adopted various classifications to distinguish products that fall within this product class. Dhar and Wertenbroch (2000) classify 'sports cars, luxury watches, and designer clothes as hedonic products, while minivans, personal computers, and microwaves are classified as utilitarian goods' (Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012; 173). In a similar attempt to classify hedonic products, Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982; 95) propose, 'hedonic consumer research investigates performing arts (opera, ballet, modern dance, theater), the plastic arts (painting, photography, sculpture, crafts) and the corollaries of these high culture products within popular culture (movies, rock concerts, jazz music, fashion apparel)'. Following this line of thinking, Dolbec and Fisher (2015) classify items such as art, clothing and home furnishings as hedonic.

On the other hand, Charters (2006) defines hedonic products on a continuum depending on the level of aesthetics they possess, from high-to-low aesthetic products. Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer (2012) also place hedonic and utilitarian products on a continuum. As such, they differentiate products depending on the emotionally or cognitively driven process they elicit, suggesting 'broad categories that are placed on a continuum ranging from the heavy use of cognition to the heavy use of affect' (174).

Based on the above classification coupled with Petrosky's (1991) definition, the category of hedonic products includes a subcategory of aesthetic goods. In other words, hedonic

goods are consumed because these evoke pleasure in consumers, while aesthetic goods are consumed because they elicit the appreciation of beauty. Aesthetic goods can be viewed as a subcategory of hedonic goods because they are part of the broader category of products that fulfils hedonic needs, but their distinguishing element is the feature of aesthetic beauty. Arts and culture, like 'ballet, music, novels, motion pictures, and exhibitions' (Miniero et al., 2014; 628) have been typified as aesthetic products because they evoke pleasurable experiences. Literature suggests that art elicits deeper aesthetic experiences, as do fashion (Venkatesh et al., 2010) and design (Leder et al., 2004). For instance, Petrosky (1991; 627) defines aesthetic products as referring to 'works of art, music and fashion'. However, the same aesthetic mechanisms research has identified for purely artistic products can be applied also to objects other than art (Leder et al., 2004; McManus and Furnham, 2006).

Based on this premise, consumers are not only bound to art in order to encounter an aesthetically pleasing experience. Fashion, and the broader category of design goods, are recognised as capable of providing the same kind of experience, which was once believed to be exclusive to the art domain (Leder et al., 2004). As a result, Veryzer (1995) put forward that research in marketing should explore product evaluation for different aesthetic product typologies in order to research consumer behaviour with richer insight into the way aesthetics shape decision-making processes (Veryzer, 1993).

By adopting a product character approach, the category of hedonic products is assumed to possess distinctive traits that thereby influence consumption. Thus, consumers' decision-making process is largely dependent upon a product's natural traits. The subsequent section will explore the mechanism intervening in aesthetic consumption to offer a better understanding of how aesthetic products are consumed.

2.3.3 Aesthetic Products: The Case of Fine Art

By definition, aesthetics generally refer to the domain of philosophy, which is concerned with the theorising of beauty and a specific sensitiveness for the beautiful (Veryzer, 1993). Numerous studies have approached the topic of aesthetic/design product traits in consumer behaviour (e.g., Creusen and Schoormans, 2005; Holbrook, 1986; Page and Herr, 2002; Veryzer, 1993; 1995). However, contrary to ancillary aesthetics, the notion of aesthetics as a product's core dimension is plagued with different definitions and is vaguely formalised in the marketing literature (Charters, 2006). 'The distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic is problematic not only for marketing researchers, but for aestheticians as well', argues Petrosky, 1992 (20). In these instances, Belke et al. (2010; 157) contend that even though 'the meaning of the word aesthetics is multifold and has changed over time', the main element necessary for an aesthetic experience is sensory in nature. In philosophy and psychology, the main definition of aesthetics is comprised of the concept of 'beauty' (Belke, 2010). Even though some researchers contended the aesthetic worth of the 'ugly', 'beauty' is still the primary criterion applied in the definition of an aesthetic product (Townsend, 1997). Particularly, 'the aesthetic product has four fundamental components. First, it must have aesthetic considerations as a primary, rather than a secondary, purpose. That is, the aesthetic component (the pursuit of beauty, or of the sublime) is indispensable to the consumption purpose, rather than marginal, as it is with product styling. Second, the product must be designed to stimulate aesthetic consumption. Thus it must have dimensions that, in the widest sense, can be considered beautiful or moving by a number of consumers. The third criterion is that the product is capable of providing intrinsic value. That means that it can be appreciated essentially for its own sake, rather than merely as a means to an end. Fourth, aesthetic products exist in a highly fragmented market' (Charters, 2006; 250).

Research in marketing has been strictly linked to aesthetics that use particular design components as a marketing tool (Bloch, 1995; Veryzer, 1993; 1995; Kumar and Garg, 2010). But another series of studies within consumer culture theory have looked at

aesthetic experiences through a substantially broader consumption perspective (Joy and Sherry, 2003; Venkatesh and Meamber, 2008). As such, aesthetic research in the marketing field has traditionally approached and examined art and artistic objects as its archetypal field of investigation. In line with Colbert and St-James' exemplification (2014; 563), it is possible to trace the art product through a marketing lens. In this sense 'the discussion highlighted the hedonic nature of the cultural product...and the fact that, when it comes to high art, the marketing approach is more product oriented than market oriented'. Larsen (2014) points out that traditional consumer behaviour theories cannot be straightforwardly applied to the art consumption context. Compared to products that merely entail a design trait, more pronounced aesthetic responses are likely found in encounters with highly artistic objects, such as fine art (Bloch, 1995). Thus, Leder et al. (2004) classify these products within the wider category of hedonic goods due to their ability to elicit emotion in consumers (Bigné et al., 2008); however their distinguishing trait is the element of beauty.

Based on this premise (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Colbert and St-James, 2014), artistic products are objects of hedonic consumption when they naturally score higher on this consumption dimension. Given this, research assumes that the aesthetic worth of a product is determined by the extent to which the consumer is pleased exclusively by its appearance, regardless of any functional judgment (Creusen and Schoormans, 2005). As a consequence, the aesthetic consumption of art is not only intended by product purchase but also includes consumption through online or offline product access, which is consumption intended as the experience of viewing (MacNeill and Wilson-Anastasios, 2014). Although the consumption of art extends beyond purchasing and does not necessarily involve an engagement in a market-mediated exchange (Larsen, 2014), this study will focus on product attitude formation with respect to a possible artwork purchase.

Lacher and Mizerski (1994; 377), in their study of the transferability of constructs identified for the aesthetic product of music, 'the constructs in the music consumption

model may also be helpful in explaining consumption of other hedonic products, such as books, movies, plays, paintings'. As such, it is possible to assume that given these similarities in consumption for the wider category of aesthetic products, some significant common aspects could be present and exploited for the present study. Even though, this research will examine the decision-making process and the influence of eWOM in regards to fine art, the findings and implications could be applied to the wider range of aesthetic products given consumers' similarity for the evaluation of this product category.

2.4 Consumption

2.4.1 Utilitarian and Hedonic Consumption

Despite different conceptualisations in the literature (refer to section 2.1), the most widely adopted definition in consumer research refers to utilitarian and hedonic consumption behaviours. Firstly, one's need for gratification occurs through hedonic consumption; secondly, consumers also pursue goods in order to fulfil utilitarian goals (Batra and Ahtola, 1991).

Bohm and Pfister (1996) distinguish the concept of utility as two dimensional, which includes both a utilitarian and a hedonic dimension. They contend that the perceived utility of the product will provide the consumer with a particular kind of benefit. However, the type of benefit offered to the consumer will depend upon the nature of the product (Okada, 2005). More specifically, either an instrumental or emotional aspect of utility will prevail when evaluating a product option (Bohm and Pfister, 1996). Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982) first conceptualised consumption differing between utilitarian and hedonic elements. This distinction is particularly important for consumer behaviour research considering that, 'this two-dimensional approach is frequently typified as one of thinking versus feeling' (Mano and Oliver, 1993; 452), and thus has important implications for consumer decision-making and behaviour.

Despite the large number of conceptualisations that define products as having an inherent character, Alba and Williams (2013) as well as Botti and McGill (2011), Pham (1998) and Khan et al. (2005) highlight an additional aspect worthy of consideration. Aside from categorising consumption through the perspective of the product character, a consumption goal-oriented approach should also be considered because it provides a more comprehensive reflection of consumption pursuits that occur in natural settings. In other words, a perspective based on motivational drivers has been suggested as suitable in explaining how consumers engage in product choices. Although the authors acknowledge the existence of an inborn hedonic or utilitarian trait that characterises different types of products in driving specific consumption goals (Botti and McGill, 2011; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000), they also believe it is important to take into account an individual's motivation when assessing his or her decision journey. As such, the present study will view aesthetic products, under the hedonic consumption lens, but will also take into account the consumption goals that consumers employ when assessing the impact of eWOM on the consumer attitude formation process.

2.4.2 Consumption Perspectives within Extant Research

One stream of consumer psychology research has tackled the importance of affective phenomena on consumer decision-making, as has the conception of an 'experiencing' consumer proposed in a different stream of research. 'From an interpretivist point of view, actions like buying are not simply matters of rational calculation with consumers computing the pros and cons of objective facts, but rather are matters involving felt expectations as to how the consumption episode will be personally experienced' (O'Shaughnessy and Holbrook, 1988; 206). From Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) seminal study, and contrary to the information-processor understanding of the consumer, this stream of research embraced a broader and more inclusive understanding of consumption, which does not preclude the necessity of a market-mediated exchange. Under this perspective, a purchase decision is only a tiny portion in the series of consumption events and possibilities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Along these lines,

art has often been dissociated from a market exchange frame of reference and instead been considered a genuine effort of self-expression (MacNeill and Wilson-Anastasios, 2014). Literature in the field has explored aesthetic experiences through the lenses of constructed subjective meanings through consumption and embodiment processes of aesthetic appreciation (Joy and Sherry, 2003), revealing a blurred line between production and consumption (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2003).

Individual preferences towards aesthetic goods has been approached through a series of studies within this domain, especially through the perspective of the cultural capital intensive field of the high arts (Üstüner and Holt, 2010), where appropriate taste has been confined to the interpretation of expert judgment (Holbrook, 2005; Joy and Sherry, 2003a). Accordingly, starting from the seminal work by Bourdieu (1984), the conception of taste was defined as a mechanism that guides consumers in evaluating aesthetic products (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013) and thus represents a powerful marker that signals individual and group identities (Bourdieu, 1984). However, bridging this structuralist view, the postmodern perspective approached the consumer as cultural omnivore equipped with personal agency (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). From a semiological perspective, the relationship between the signifier (the referent) and the signified (the meaning) of an object has lost its direct logical link and is represented as the interpretation that the consumer assigns to an evaluated object (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Researchers in the field argued that the Internet and social media are eroding the role of traditional institutions, suggesting that the interpretation of objects needs to be situated in this context where new institutional logics emerge (Akaka et al., 2014). In a digitally connected society, the evaluation is defined at a consumers' level of discretion (Hirschman 1983; McCracken 1990 in Joy and Sherry, 2003), and thus the value of aesthetic objects shifts from top-down and institutionally determined to collectively negotiated (McQuarrie et al., 2015) and democratized (Arsel and Bean, 2013; Dolbec and Fischer, 2015).

As the opportunity to determine about what constitutes good or bad art is rapidly taken over by commentators and consumers, the outcome could eventually have a tangible impact on consumer attitudes. This change in evaluative logic impacts established processes of value definition. Because the consumer takes an active role in the creation and generation of cultural value (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2006), a market-mediated perspective will be adopted in this research, as it allows the researcher to pin down the particular dynamics of this study. The market-mediated perspective is one that focuses on the specific decision instances that consumers undertake when forming an attitudinal evaluation about an aesthetic object with the intent of understanding the changes occurring in this process. This study approaches the process of value definition through a market perspective and product attitudes. By acknowledging the existence of a broader consumption perspective, consumers' attitude formation process forms the unit of analysis that allows researchers to understand process changes and suggest managerial implications (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989).

2.4.3 Defining Hedonic Consumption

As discussed in the previous section, a large part of marketing research, particularly consumer psychology and decision-making, has until recently examined the rational and cognitive side of consumption without addressing emotional contexts, which are shaped by affective aspects (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999). However, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) shifted the focus from a purely functional approach to include a new more experiential conception in which scholars devote attention to investigating hedonic consumption and hedonic products (e.g., Babin et al., 1994; Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Okada, 2005; Voss et al., 2003).

Palazon and Delgado-Ballester (2013), point out that this conception recognises the complexity of consumption phenomena that entails both cognitive and emotional aspects. As such, when distinguishing between the hedonic and the utilitarian perspectives, scholars often employ the emotional versus rational context of consumption (Mano and

Oliver, 1993; Kronrod and Danzinger, 2013). These two separate consumption constructs are contingent on the functional or hedonic traits of a product, wherein consumers are driven by either intellectual or emotional goals (Babin et al., 1994). Aside from cognitive evaluative instances, feelings and emotions are relevant factors that intervene in consumers' decision-making processes (Pham, 1998). Based on these findings, not all consumer behaviour is merely directed towards the fulfilment of functional and utility needs. Instead, 'consumer choices are driven by both utilitarian and hedonic considerations' (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; 60).

Thus, marketing research has scarcely addressed the topic of hedonic consumption compared to studies that investigate utilitarian consumption and products. This field of research has started to gain prominence in recent years as scholars have moved beyond the conceptualisation of the consumer as solely a rational information processor (Babin et al., 1994). Previously, the consumer was perceived as an accurate processor of information who looks for the best choices to maximise utility gain. But the hedonic view defines the consumer as searching for multisensory experiences (Venkatraman and MacInnis, 1985). According to this understanding, consumer goods are not only viewed as merely products, but are complex consumption phenomena that require different dimensions.

2.4.4 Aesthetics in Hedonic Consumption

In reference to aesthetic products, literature suggests that an aesthetic experience is pursued as an end in itself rather than a utilitarian goal (Bloch, 1995). As such, Colbert and St-James (2014; 568) conceived it as, 'the interaction between the person's mind and art objects'. Extant literature implies that 'consumer research on aesthetic stimuli is based on the notion that the aesthetic experience is an appreciation of an object existing for its own sake' (Nuttavuthisit, 2014; 432). In support of this argument, pleasure is essential to aesthetic experiences (Charters, 2006). As such, in the marketing field, aesthetic experiences can be identified as corresponding to a wide range of leisure

activities that encompass different levels of emotional expression, and the ways in which these are conveyed in consumption activities (McManus and Furnham, 2006). A product's physical and sensory attributes trigger a consumer's aesthetic response (Veryzer, 1993), rather than its functional traits (Bloch, 1995).

However, as Alba and Williams (2013) point out, consumer literature has traditionally given little attention to product encounters that trigger these types of responses. This has resulted in hedonic and aesthetic consumption used interchangeably (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Venkatraman and MacInnis, 1985). Even though the key element of both consumptions is pleasure, the two concepts are not identical. Contrary to hedonic consumption, aesthetic consumption is contingent on the appreciation of beauty. In other words, hedonic consumption is directed towards pleasure, while aesthetic consumption is directed towards the appreciation of beauty. Aesthetic consumption is a sub-category of hedonic consumption as, 'an aesthetic experience is one type of hedonic consumption, but that other, non-aesthetic forms also exists' (Charter, 2006; 240). In comparison to the broader category of hedonic experiences, Reber et al. (2004) argued that aesthetic pleasure is not objectively directed but rather an objectified property of the object that is experienced. One illustrative example is 'the experience of having a cold drink on a hot day is both value positive and intrinsic, but this immediate pleasure lies exclusively in a positive sensation of the body and has little to do with aesthetic appreciation of an object. In contrast, perceivers look at a painting not to please their body, but to enjoy the painting's beauty' (Reber et al., 2004; 365).

Consumer research has also questioned the nature of the aesthetic experience. With specific regard to art, research contends that appreciation is largely subjective, and individuals differ substantially in terms of their preferences (Palmer et al., 2013; Preece, 2014). Contrary to utilitarian products, which are defined against objective quality criteria (Batra and Ahtola, 1991), even in an unvarying and stagnant environment, the evaluation of aesthetic products will change depending on specific individual and

situational conditions (Augustin et al., 2008; Jacobsen, 2010; Xenakis et al., 2012). The following sections will discuss the drivers behind product typology consumption.

2.5 The Drivers Involved in the Consumption of Aesthetic Products

2.5.1 The Pleasure-Attainment Perspective

As previously mentioned, hedonic consumption is distinguished from utilitarian by some peculiar traits. Specifically, utilitarian consumption is oriented towards a functional goal. As a consequence, individuals opting for utilitarian types of products have motives that drive their consumption (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). In other words, utilitarian consumption is usually directed towards products and services that are believed to be practical or necessary (O'Curry and Strahilevitz, 2001).

On the contrary, hedonic consumption relates to a different mechanism and perspective. Specifically, some specific types of consumption are able to trigger more pleasurable outcomes than others (O'Curry and Strahilevitz, 2001; Holbrook, 1986; Venkatraman and MacInnis, 1985; López and Maya, 2012). Alba and Williams (2013) posit that an indispensable feature is the pleasure that this kind of experience provides. More specifically, 'hedonic consumption designates those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of one's experience with products' (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; 92). This research has contended that consumers appreciate a hedonic product merely for its own sake, excluding any further utilitarian purpose that it may serve (Lacher and Mizerski, 1994). It can be concluded that the hedonic value individuals perceive relates to a more personal level of experience. Conversely, utilitarian consumption, which results from task related activities, derives pleasure encountered during the consumption of a certain product. Based on this premise, personal and situational factors shape the conception of value of aesthetic and hedonic products. However, given that utilitarian consumption refers to a task related activity, there are objective criteria in place upon which the objects of this consumption can be

referenced against. Even though both types of consumption can be situationally driven, hedonic consumption is more heterogeneous with respect to the consumption experience, as is the evaluation of the object (Alba and Williams, 2013). As Babin et al. (1994; 646) suggest, the character of hedonic consumption can be described as ‘festive, ludic, or epicurean’. O’Curry and Strahilevitz (2001) consider hedonic consumption to be consumers’ desires that can be defined as fun, sensually pleasurable and fantasy evoking.

2.5.2 Going Beyond the Pleasure-Attainment Perspective

As outlined in the previous sections, the utilitarian aspects of a product are traditionally perceived as instruments that permit achieving a utilitarian goal, while the hedonic dimensions are associated with less concrete attributes, such as aesthetics and style (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Venkatraman and MacInnis, 1985). Along these lines, hedonic consumption is not driven by utilitarian criteria; rather the item elicits pleasure, which is its only purpose. Nevertheless, Charters’ (2006; 246) definition of aesthetic consumption provides a different perspective. This author argues that ‘aesthetic consumption involves the use of a product where:

- (1) the utilitarian function of the product is not the primary consumption goal,
- (2) enjoyment of its beauty or sublimeness is the primary purpose of consumption, but
- (3) there may also be some extrinsic motivation in the form of symbolic consumption’.

Regardless of the pleasure-eliciting properties of aesthetic products, the consumption of these items cannot be exclusively reduced to this domain, as this approach neglects some important aspects intervening in the consumption of this product category. In support of this argument, a stream of literature within consumer research suggests that another aspect of aesthetic products influences consumption. As previously outlined with reference to the argument presented by Charters (2006), these additional aspects relate to the symbolic dimensions present in hedonic consumption instances. As Botti and McGill (2011; 1065) put forward, ‘consumers may consume the same products or services with

different goals, for example, for their own pleasure, a hedonic goal, or to achieve some higher level purpose'. In other words, besides the pleasure evoked by the consumption of aesthetic products, consumers may find a complementary motive.

In line with the symbolic meaning attached to this type of consumption, Alba and Williams (2013; 4) acknowledge that the hedonic product typology is, in some instances, consumed because of the symbolic aspect of consumption in which 'hedonic goods are purchased for the non-hedonic objectives of status-seeking or identity-signalling'. Here, a parallel can be traced with Keller's (1993) conceptualisation of a product's benefits that encompasses both product related and non-product related attributes. Perceived benefits include: functional (problem-solving), experiential (emotional) and symbolic benefits. Specifically, the latter refer to non-product related attributes that encompass more outward advantages of consumption. These are generally connected with more covert needs, such as social approval and identity expression. These benefits are particularly important for publicly consumed goods, or 'badge' products. Thus, consumers may attribute high importance to a product that allows them to express their identity and social position because of its 'prestige, fashionability or exclusivity' (Keller, 1993; 4). This conceptualisation is an expanded definition of Park et al. (1986)'s idea of how identifying needs influence brand selection, especially symbolic needs.

Along these lines, Dubé et al. (2003; 260) also include the symbolic dimension stating, 'utilitarian attributes can be associated with the immediate consumption experience (eg. convenience), or with more deliberative processes, like symbolic meaning (cultural attributes) or long-term outcomes'. Various social aspects are believed to shape the interpretation of an artistic work (Joy and Sherry, 2003).

Scholarship initially supported the proposition that aesthetic consumption is undertaken exclusively for 'intrinsic motivations' with 'no extrinsic' motivations (Holbrook, 1986). Nevertheless, more recent research acknowledged that extrinsic motivations also drive aesthetic consumption based on status and social approval (Bell et al., 1991). Contrary to

a wide range of hedonic consumption pursuits, aesthetic consumption is characterised by the importance assigned to the cognitive decision components given its strong symbolic elements; which can be either inner (directed to the self) or outer focused (directed to others) (Charters, 2006). Therefore, symbolic consumption an umbrella term that encompasses different modalities in which individuals pursue self-representative behaviours through consumption (Larsen et al., 2009).

Taking into account this perspective, consumption of aesthetic products is not entirely driven by pleasure attainment, but the symbolic dimensions intervening in the consumption need to be considered. Namely, literature has so far explained aesthetic consumption primarily through a hedonic lens, while considerably less attention has been given to the symbolic aspects that underlie it.

2.5.3 Aesthetic Products and Identity

The link between aesthetic consumption and identity communication requires further exploration to illustrate the relevance of symbolic consumption. Specifically, building on Belk's (1988) argument with regards to identity formation through possessions, aesthetic products can be approached through the consumption of art as well as other products within the aesthetic category (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2008). In support of this argument, Venkatesh et al. (2010) consider the aesthetic perception of fashion, arguing that body-adornments play an important role in how consumers view identity formation and enhancement. Larsen et al. (2009, 2010) also point out that music is another consumption domain full of symbolic attributes that are often used as a means for self-representation. These authors elaborate upon the socially situated self that is constructed and communicated through the consumption of music. In a similar vein, Harrison (2009) suggests that from a purely aesthetic product, art has undergone a process of commodification and is viewed in terms of the social benefits it provides in consumption.

Consumer research has commonly acknowledged that consumers often rely on products in order to communicate their identity to others (Hoyer and StockBurger-Sauer, 2012). This is evident when considering the category of badge products, which are usually rich in aesthetic (Townsend and Sood, 2012). Art thus falls into the badge product category, as these goods are considered identity markers given their pronounced visibility. Fashion, too, is an analogous aesthetic product that is viewed as a symbol of communicating individual and even group identities (Wolny and Mueller, 2013).

Furthermore, Bloch et al. (2003) advance that consumers may often confer the status of 'sacredness' on aesthetically pleasing objects. Specifically, this phenomenon occurs because these objects relate directly to consumer identity extensions as individuals recognise and appreciate them for their unique and quintessential properties (Bloch et al., 2003). Extending the implications of this phenomenon, Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) argue that aesthetics are particularly important when it comes to the typology of self-enhancing products such as jewellery and clothing. Townsend and Soods (2012) proposed the reverse mechanism of self-affirmation through the consumption of aesthetically pleasing products. This type of mechanism occurs when an individual strives to reach an idealised identity by consuming certain products, especially aesthetic ones. In other words, 'beauty premium applies to product choice such that associating oneself with a beautiful product similarly improves a consumer's sense of self' (Townsead and Soods, 2012; 415).

Ritterfeld (2002; 373) summarises this phenomenon by placing it within the social identity discourse drawn from social psychology, 'preferences can be considered as manifestations of values and attitude orientations, and in that, of identities. In expressing preferences through verbal evaluations, housing decoration, or the choice of couture, a person locates himself or herself in the social world, though these expressions are not only individually relevant, they can also be read by others'. Accordingly, individuals are able to shape and express their identities through the consumption of particular goods and relate to other consumers (Belk, 1988).

From this literature, aesthetic products, such as fine art, could be conceptually related to symbolic consumption, as the rich symbolic meaning of these products acts as vehicle in consumers' identity construction and communication (Colbert and St-James, 2014; Bloch et al., 2003; Creusen and Schoormans, 2005; Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012; Alba and Williams, 2013).

2.5.4 Symbolic Consumption and Aesthetic Products

Fine art has generally been associated with its capacity to evoke images of luxury (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2008). In the same fashion, Godey et al. (2009) also found a conceptual similarity between art and luxury. In their study, the authors transpose their 'aesthetic style' scale for the measurement of consumer perceptions from the category of art to the 'luxuries' product category. They concluded that hedonic, particularly aesthetic products, are often consumed for status because they are associated with images of luxury and conspicuous consumption due to their rich symbolic meaning.

Drawing a parallel to communication instances of a symbolic character, 'symbolic communication is socially shared, intentional, and propositional. It requires knowledge by description and is based upon learned symbols, which have a learned and arbitrary relationship with their referents' (Chaudhuri, 2006; 3). Here, it is useful to refer back to the consumption goal oriented approach that suggests hedonic and utilitarian consumption can be best understood by their motivational factors (Alba and Williams, 2013). Some typical hedonic goods can be pursued in order to fulfil symbolic goals, such as status enhancement and identity communication. Using the hedonic consumption lens, some times, products are viewed not as 'objective entities but rather as subjective symbols' (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; 93).

Based on the above characteristics, the factors that determine pleasure can be classified into two broad categories: the inherent traits of the product and the meaning assigned to the product (Alba and Williams, 2013). The hedonic inborn character of the product is

conceived as driving pleasure as an overarching aim, while it's socially acquired meaning will drive a different type of pursuit.

Rather than an exclusively hedonic approach, aesthetic products also possess a social meaning (Harrison, 2009), which necessitates further exploration in relation to consumers' decision-making processes.

Given these assumptions, it is possible to conclude that the consumption of a hedonic product is highly dependent upon one's personal subjective assessment. The outcomes of this subjectively often fall under the influence of social factors. Along these lines, individuals often consume hedonic products not only for pleasure, but also because of the symbolic dimensions, which are particularly relevant when addressing the influence of social knowledge acquired from eWOM information. Specifically, the symbolic aspects of hedonic consumption have never been suitably examined in view of their implications on consumer-decision making. The consumption of aesthetic products requires further exploration to address both the hedonic and symbolic dimensions, as each could influence the decision-making process differently, depending on a consumer's overarching consumption goals.

2.6 Conclusion

This review of the literature suggests that products can be classified based on their inherent traits into two paramount perspectives: hedonic and utilitarian. Depending on whether a product is predominantly hedonic or utilitarian in nature, scholars contend it will be perceived, consumed and purchased differently. More importantly, the motivating drivers of product consumption will vary according to the category type. Specifically, literature assumes that pleasure attainment goals will motivate the consumption of hedonic products. Within the hedonic products literature, aesthetic goods, like arts and culture exist as their own subcategory, which evoke pleasurable experiences.

Due to the affect-rich nature of aesthetic products, consumers will engage in the consumption of these goods exclusively because of emotionally based factors. Although consumption can be viewed with an instrumental/cognitive or an emotional/affective product dichotomy; Alba and Williams (2013) argue that a goal-oriented approach should be undertaken, as it better reflects consumption dynamics in real-life settings. However, an alternative motivational dimension involved in the consumption of aesthetic products emerged from the review of the literature. A series of authors pointed out that, in certain instances, consumers are driven not exclusively by pleasure but engage in the consumption of aesthetic products for symbolic motivations linked to status enhancement and identity communication. Accordingly, the symbolic dimensions that shape the consumption of these products are particularly relevant when addressing the influence of eWOM information and social knowledge.

The following chapter will provide an exhaustive overview of consumer decision-making instances and discuss how existing literature has approached the distinction of these processes, depending on product related and motivational factors. This overview will be used to trace out the major differences between the process steps within the two decision routes and the according outcomes, giving particular attention to the aesthetic product category.

CHAPTER 3: APPROACHES TO CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

3.0 Introduction

Building upon the consumption dimensions identified in the previous chapter, the following chapter provides an overview of extant research that addresses consumer-decision making process modalities that determine how consumers form product attitudes. It places particular emphasis on the way in which research has approached the consumer decision journey for the purchase of hedonic products and provides a detailed view on the specific elements that contribute to the consumer attitude formation process. As the objective of the current research addresses the decision journey, particularly as it relates to aesthetic product purchases and the influence of eWOM information, this chapter commences by providing an overview of the extant literature dealing with the topic of the broader consumer decision-making with reference to the product category factor. Then, differences between affective and cognitive attitude formation in the development journey are discussed. Lastly, the consumer specific and informational factors that influence the process are tackled. Discussion about consumer motivational factors thus far explored in the literature is also addressed.

3.1 Approaches to Decision-making

3.1.1 Affective and Cognitive Decision-Making

Consumer decision-making is defined as the process of evaluation and selection in relation to a range of consumption actions and behaviours. Thus, all decisions involve a choice between alternative options or behaviours. Specifically, a choice decision is always made from a selection of available choices, which needs to include at least two options (Reynolds and Olson, 2001). In order to identify the way in which individuals make decisions with regards to aesthetic products, both affect and cognition need to be addressed. Traditional behavioural decision-making theory research assumed that

individuals form judgments about a potential purchase based on rational grounds, dependent solely upon informational inputs. This assumption had its origins primarily in traditional economic theory that theorised behaviour through rational models (Khan et al., 2005). According to this view, consumers assess the product based on a cognitive process of weighting product attributes (Pham et al., 2015). Secondly, this conceptualisation was also adopted by research that assumed the consumer bases attitudinal judgments upon a logical evaluation of alternatives (Chaudhuri, 2001). However, the following research has acknowledged that feelings are involved in these decisions and are an important factor intervening in the attitude formation process (Greifeneder et al., 2011). In other words, research has agreed that in certain attitudinal instances, individuals assess the value of an object/product depending on the feelings they are experiencing at the time (Pham, 1998; Schwartz and Clore, 2007; Chang and Pham, 2013). Given this, the literature has begun to place more emphasis on affective decision-making and accordingly attitude formation, detaching itself from the exclusively cognitively grounded perspective of consumer reason-based judgments (Pham, 2001). More specifically, research has acknowledged that for a particular type of goods, decision-making is not based on a rational assessment of product options, but rather it is driven by emotional wants (Khan et al., 2005). Based on these propositions, Chang and Pham (2013) argue that feeling-driven attitudinal processes differ from cognitively driven instances, and as such, these two modes of evaluation exhibit different characteristics. It follows that reason and affect are viewed as two distinctive modalities of gaining knowledge about reality and of influencing behaviours (Chaudhuri, 2006).

3.1.2 Attitude Definition

The concept of attitude has been generally defined in the literature as representing ‘a summary evaluation of a psychological object captured in such attribute dimensions as good–bad, harmful–beneficial, pleasant–unpleasant, and likeable–dislikeable’ (Ajzen, 2001; 29). Along these lines, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) proposed the most widely adopted definition, where an ‘attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by

evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour' (1). The concept of attitude is largely inclusive as they are 'overall evaluations of objects, which can be physical objects, people, policies, behaviours, etc' (Wegener and Carlston, 2014; 493). As such, attitude theorists equate attitude to be an evaluative judgment (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Based on this, an attitude is defined as a predisposition that entails an evaluative character, which drives the consumer to engage in approach or avoidance behaviours (Krosnick et al., 2014). Thus, this definition of attitude as an evaluative judgment that defines following behavioural outcomes, like a product purchase, will be adopted in the remainder of this thesis.

There are two paramount perspectives about attitudes that have been developed within extant literature. In order to fully understand the underlying structure of an attitude, the attitude concept can be described as either a knowledge structure stored in memory, or as an evaluative judgment created within the evaluation context. While traditional attitude research confirms that some attitudes are stored in one's memory, more recent understandings assume a constructivist approach and argue that attitudes are mostly constructed within the evaluation context. Accordingly, attitudes are conceptualized as the outcome of evaluative processes that are shaped by the information available in memory or information available within the context of evaluation (Wegener and Carlston, 2014). The first perspective refers to the file-drawer approach, which suggests attitudes are stable entities stored in memory; the second believes attitudes as constructed 'on the spot' and thus suggests attitudes are representative of a judgment approach (Schwarz and Bohner, 2001).

The first conceptualization has been widely accepted within extant literature. But recent research argues that the latter perspective provides a more contemporary understanding because it conceives attitudes in terms of online evaluations and thus offers a more suitable interpretation of the consumer decision-making and choice process (Fabrigar et al., 2014). Accordingly, the context in which this process occurs defines the attitudinal outcomes as it 'contains cues that elicit the attitude, information that provides new inputs

to the attitude, and contextual stimuli that provide standards against which to judge the current instantiation of the attitude object' (Eagly and Chaiken, 2014; 747).

The theory of attitudes suggests that when consumers experience favourable attitudes, they are more likely to make a purchase. The attitude towards the brand or the product is associated with expected behaviours towards the object (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). However, it is important to highlight that attitudes are evaluations that can come in different forms and are based on different components (van den Berg et al., 2006). As an example, 'you are likely to base your evaluation of your bank on beliefs and other cognitive considerations, but you probably evaluate your pet in terms of feelings and other affective considerations' (Fabrigar et al., 2014; 373). It is thus important to examine the process during which an attitude is formed in order to understand the components that shape it in different decision-making contexts.

Based on the aims of this research and in line with literature findings that suggest the latter approach as more exemplary of real attitudinal instances and parsimonious (Fabrigar et al., 2014; Simonson, 2008), this study will look at attitude formation through this conceptual lens. This perspective is able to integrate contextual effects on attitude formation and is reflective of the individual differences that shape the attitude formation process (Schaller and Malhotra, 2015). Particularly, 'there is a growing consensus that preferences are inherently constructive and largely determined by the task characteristics, the choice context, and the description of options' (Simonson, 2008; 155).

3.1.3 Attitude Process Formation

As Chaudhuri (2006) suggests, attitudes are constructs of paramount importance within consumer behaviour because they are central to consumer decision-making. It is important to understand how attitudes are developed, as consumer behaviour does not correspond to a simple stimulus-reaction, and the process of attitude formation is important both for researchers and marketing practitioners. 'Attitude researchers focus on

the explication and development of models that can parsimoniously explain how people evaluate and respond to various stimuli' (Bodur et al., 2000; 17), as this offers insight about the way in which consumers form product preferences and the likelihood to undertake specific behaviours. 'Because attitudes, like all psychological constructs, are latent, we cannot observe them directly. So all attitude measurement depends on those attitudes being revealed in overt responses, either verbal or nonverbal' (Krosnick et al., 2014; 22). In other words, it is of paramount importance to understand the process that leads to the formation of attitude in order to understand the context bound outcomes of the same (Schwarz and Bohner, 2001).

Nevertheless, different perspectives about attitudes are available within the marketing literature and point to a fragmented understanding of the formation of these in specific contexts (Schwarz, 2006), mainly because 'processes are essentially latent constructs that are understood principally from the broader theories in which they are embedded' (Wegener and Carlston, 2014; 495). Based on these conceptualisations, different models explaining attitude formation have been proposed and have changed over the years (Schwarz and Bohner, 2001).

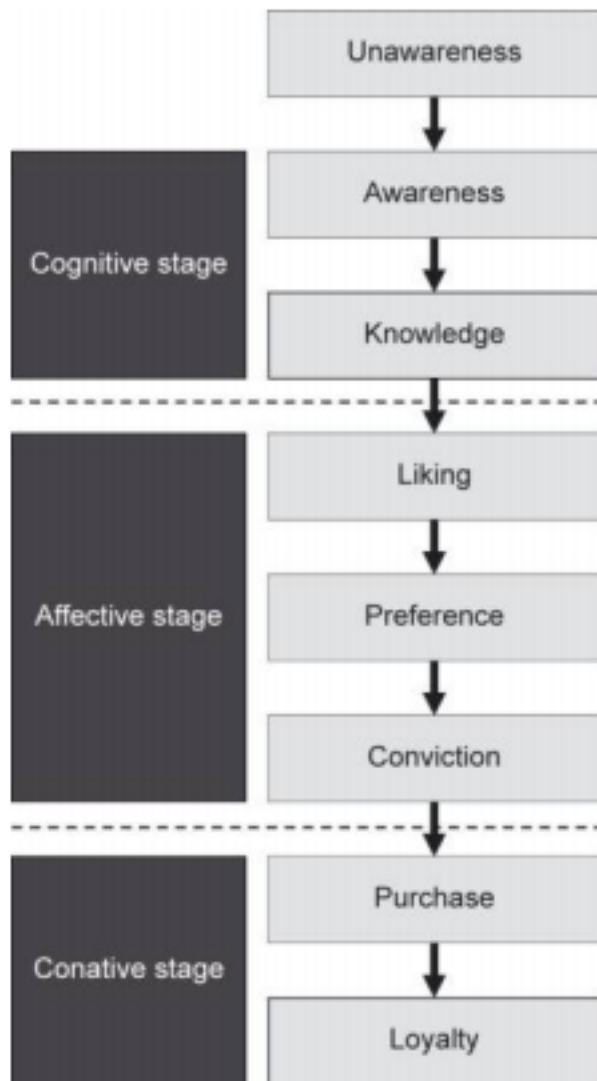
3.1.4 Modeling the Attitude Formation Process

Similar to the conceptualization of the consumer decision-making process, an analogous framework exists in the field of communications and advertising research. When communication and advertising messages affect consumer decision-making, it is known as the 'hierarchy of effects' model. Rather than looking at the broader consumer experience, this model focuses on the relationship between the psychological stages of the process that are formed when the consumer evaluates a product or brand (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). Hierarchy stands for the order in which the consumer uses the available marketing information to inform a purchase decision. The consumer first perceives information cognitively, then affectively and lastly conatively. This indicates that first awareness is achieved, then feelings are developed and ultimately a purchase or

product adoption decision is reached (Barry and Howard, 1990). Based on this process definition, a series of models have been proposed, and one of the most widely recognized is Lavidge and Steiner's model (1961). All theorised models in extant literature assume that the consumer acts in a sequential manner that follows a thinking-feeling-doing modality.

However, some scholars contend that the major issue in the theorizing of these models stems from the assumption that the affective and cognitive components are causally related. The interaction between affective and cognitive components is not taken into account, and thus poses a problem in the conceptualization of the hierarchical models (Barry, 1987). As posited by Peterson et al. (1986), even though affect has been traditionally conceived as preceding cognition, it is more accurate to conceptualise it occurring simultaneously. Particularly, 'when respondents are asked specific questions that rely on relevant information accessible in memory, order of effects will be small or may vanish completely' (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz; 1996; 160). Thus, although theoretical hierarchies of information exist, the human brain processes information in a synchronous manner. Furthermore, the research tools available within the social sciences are not able to accurately grasp the fine sequential precedence of one or the other (Barry, 1987). The social context in which attitude formation occurs has been widely neglected within extant literature, as most of the theory has adopted a narrow psychological perspective. The social context thus needs to be taken into account in order to understand attitude formation as it occurs in natural environments (Eagly and Chaiken, 2014).

Figure 3.1 The stages of the decision-making process



Building on this literature, different factors will have an influence on the way in which a consumer forms an attitude towards a product. Specifically, the product features, the consumer traits and the situational conditions in which evaluation occurs define the formation process and the outcomes of an attitude (Shavitt, 1989). Literature contends that both cognitive and affective elements define attitudinal outcomes (Malhotra, 2005). As a result, the underlying definition needs to accommodate these different perspectives in order to understand the relationship between affective and cognitive elements and consumer attitudes (Bodur et al., 2000).

3.1.5 Attitude Structure

Scholars first conceptualised an attitude as a single entity that corresponded to a like or dislike disposition. But later, they acknowledged that the attitude construct assumes a tripartite classification and is thus composed of different elements that include affect, cognition and conation (Hajjat, 1990). Researchers within the field have consistently acknowledged the need to understand attitude structure (Fabrigar et al., 2014). More specifically, ‘the definition that has been most attractive to social psychologists, perhaps because of both its breadth and its ancient philosophical roots, conceives attitude as having three components: affective, cognitive, and conative (or behavioural)’ (Greenwald et al., 1989; 6). Here, the affective component refers to consumers’ affective experiences with respect to a particular attitudinal object; the cognitive component refers to the knowledge and information possessed about the stimulus; and the conative component captures the intention and the likelihood of the consumer to take action with regards to the attitudinal object (Eagly and Chaiken, 2014).

Moreover, the relationship between attitude and behaviour is not straightforward, as attitude does not directly determine behaviour, and this relationship is difficult to observe. This study will attempt to examine the affective and cognitive elements that frame the development of attitudes rather than including also the conative component in its definition (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975; Fazio 2007). ‘Attitudes formed toward novel objects when one is a passive spectator obviously do not depend on pressures to act. Their formation suggests that the value of being ready with appraisals of objects is sufficient that we form attitudes even when their usefulness is not directly apparent’ (Greenwald et al., 1989; 435).

Because of the methodological problems associated with identifying observable behaviours, researchers have used the conative component of attitudes as proxy for overt behaviour (Hajjat, 1990). Along these lines, the attitude construct is composed of affective and cognitive elements; and conation is represented as the evaluative attitudinal

outcome, defined by the saliency of the two formative components. In other words, conation is the evaluative outcome produced by the affective and cognitive components taking part in the process (Millar and Tesser, 1986).

Following this line of argument, a bi-dimensional approach to attitudes is thus employed in order to represent both affective and cognitive components, which includes the operationalisation of these components through attitude scales (Fiore and Kim, 2005; Lee et al., 2011). Based on these considerations, previous literature has adopted the definition of attitude structure as being composed by cognitive responses and affective responses intended as the elements forming the attitudinal outcome towards a product or brand (Schaller and Malhotra, 2015). Attitudes are based on both cognitive and affective components, which are independent one from the other (van den Berg et al., 2006; Crites et al., 1994). As the two components are separate elements driving the formation of an attitude, they can assume varying salience in the attitude formation process. Based on the salience of the cognitive or affective component, a different attitude will be formed, which will reflect the importance assigned to either one or the other component (van den Berg, 2006).

Research concerned with understanding attitudes has distinguished attitudes that are primarily based on either affective or cognitive attitudinal components. Depending on the attitudinal context, the attitude a consumer forms towards a product or brand will be based either more on affect or cognition (Edwards, 1990), such that an attitude (or overall evaluation) is formed and developed based on a mixture of affective and cognitive components with differing levels of salience (Shiv and Nowlis, 2004). Specifically, traditional views specify two major dimensions, namely affect and cognition, as evaluative bases for attitude formation (MacKenzie, et al., 1986). Such elicited affect and cognition are thus conceived as affective and cognitive elaborations, which serve as the in-process outputs in determining attitudes (Petty et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2012).

3.1.6 Product Category and Decision-Making

As outlined in Chapter 2, literature assumes that product stimuli affect consumers' decision-making process (Suh, 2009; Khan et al., 2005). By addressing the distinction between utilitarian and hedonic products, research has pointed out that the decision-making processes that consumers employ differs depending on the nature of the product (O'Curry and Strahilevitz, 2001; Palazon and Delgado-Ballester, 2011). In other words, consumers categorise the same product both on its utilitarian and hedonic dimensions. The consumer considers the product in terms of the type of benefit that the consumption of the product will provide, thus determining the two different types of consumer attitudes. And, based on the utility of the product, the consumer will assume either a hedonic or a utilitarian attitude (Batra and Ahtola, 1991).

Different factors of choice intervene when consumers are facing utilitarian or hedonic alternatives (Palazon and Delgado-Balatter, 2011). Namely, depending on the available options, the attitudinal determinant could be an affective or a cognitive response. As such, the affect-rich nature of a hedonic product (Botti and McGill, 2011) is expected to trigger an intuitive behavioural response according to the fact that the consumer's attitude is based primarily on feelings (Rottenstreich and Shu, 2004; Suh, 2009). More specifically, literature contends that in deciding on the purchase of a hedonic product, consumers are driven by the emotional elements of the attitude (Suh, 2009). Accordingly, research in consumer behaviour has acknowledged a strong link between hedonics and emotions (Kronrod and Danzinger, 2013; Adaval, 2001; Alba and Williams, 2013; Babin et al., 1994; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Kivetz and Simonson, 2002; Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998; Chaudhuri, 2006).

In connection with the message elaboration literature, utilitarian choices are prone to elicit higher-order processes that result in cognitive responses (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999). On the other hand, in situations when the consumer faces a hedonic option, consumers attribute higher significance to experiential benefits, thus engendering a

lower-order process that results in an affective response (Palazon and Delgado-Balatter, 2011). Thus, research thus far indicates, ‘there is a robust process difference in how consumers make decisions under instrumental versus consummatory (hedonic) motives’ (Pham, 1998; 152).

Building on Hirshman and Holbrook’s (1982) seminal study, which proposed that some product categories are seen as inherently hedonic or utilitarian, Pham (1998) argues that we should also consider consumers’ affective states. He posits that the importance attributed to feelings on behalf of consumers could depend upon the product category that is being evaluated. In a traditional decision setting, consumers will more likely rely on their experienced feelings when forming an attitude towards a hedonic product rather than cognitive processing of its attributes. Similarly to what Mano and Oliver (1993) contend, the initial response to the product that consumers will exhibit scores higher on the affective dimension in instances of hedonic compared to utilitarian product options. It could therefore be suggested that research traditionally ascribes consumers’ product attitudes as influenced by affective response components in hedonic choices, assuming that the main objective is pleasure. But with utilitarian products, cognitive components determine individuals’ attitudes because products are evaluated on the basis of their functional benefits (Batra and Ahtola, 1991). As such, Voss et al. (2003) state that product attitude in utilitarian choices can be accurately predicted by logical assessment. This process is thus tightly related to logical and rational reasoning, in contrast to the hedonic alternative.

Based on this premise, art as the most prominent aesthetic product archetype, an interest in the interplay between affect and cognition. Specifically the discussion centers around the affect-eliciting properties of the stimulus that is assumed to guide the decision-making process of consumers and accordingly attitude formation (Scherer, 2003; Chaudhuri, 2006). As such, extant research has consistently approached the decision process associated with hedonic consumption through the lens of the affective perspective (López and Maya, 2012). In particular, hedonic products, given their affect-

rich properties, have been explored as targets of affective attitudinal instances (Schwarz and Clore, 1983; Reber et al., 2004; Adaval, 2001) as well as in relation to mood regulation strategies (Adaval, 2001). It therefore emerges that the product category variable exerts substantial influence on the type of attitude formation process that consumers employ. It is important to elucidate upon the affective components involved in the decision process in order to define the steps by which consumers form attitudes towards hedonic products.

3.1.7 Affect in Relation to Attitude Development

The importance of understanding affective elements in consumption has been championed by research from different fields of inquiry. They contend that affective reactions, referring to both moods and emotions, are capable of influencing attitudinal judgments (Clore and Huntsinger, 2007). As such the term ‘affect’ will be used as an umbrella term for the subordinate category of feeling states ‘that covers different affective phenomena’ (Juslin, 2013; 236), encompassing both mood and emotions (Forgas, 1995). To provide a definition, Cohen et al. (2006; 3) argued affect is an ‘internal feeling state’ and is defined as ‘the positively or negatively valenced subjective reactions that a person experiences at a given point in time’ (Wyer et al., 1999; 3). More specifically, ‘these reactions are experienced as either pleasant or unpleasant feelings’ (Forgas, 1995; 3), where the term feeling ‘is used to refer to the subjective experience of emotions or moods...typically measured via verbal-self report’ (Juslin, 2013; 236). To be even more specific, an emotion is ‘a quite brief but intense affective reaction that usually involves a number of sub-components’ where ‘emotions focus on specific objects and last minutes to a few hours’ (Juslin, 2013; 236). Here, an emotion is considered to be a subcategory of affect, which is a short-duration arousal, elicited by a stimulus (Lacher and Mizerski, 1994), and individuals are not able to provide a description of their emotions (Chaudhuri, 2006).

Mood is another sub-category of affect. ‘Moods are usually thought of as a low intensity and diffuse affective state that generally lacks source identification’ (Cohen et al., 2006; 5). Along these lines, the difference between emotions and moods lies in the fact that emotions have an identifiable referent to which they are directed and last for shorter periods of time compared to moods, which do not possess a clear referent and are longer lasting (Schwarz, 2010; Bigné et al., 2008). In other words, a person experiences a type of good or bad feeling but does not always know the reason behind it (Cohen et al., 2006).

In marketing literature specifically, there has been a consistent lack of attention towards this subject. As Bagozzi et al. (1999; 202) argued, ‘emotions are ubiquitous throughout marketing. They influence information processing, mediate responses to persuasive appeals, measure the effects of marketing stimuli, initiate goal setting, enact goal-directed behaviours, and serve as ends and measures of consumer welfare. Yet, we are only beginning to understand the role of emotions in marketing’.

Most research concerned with cognitive theories of decision-making has largely ignored the influence of affect, and has generally approached evaluative processes and accordingly attitudes as reasoned assessments (Pham et al., 2001). Along these lines, Bagozzi (1999) argues that affect plays a very important role in consumer decision-making, and specifically attitude formation. ‘One’s explicit or implicit liking for some object, person, or position is viewed as an evaluative judgment rather than an internal feeling state’ (Cohen et al., 2006; 3). This means that consumers’ information processing modalities as well as product evaluations and attitudes can be highly influenced by affect. As such, the present study aims to further tackle these aspects by understanding the way in which consumers form attitudes towards aesthetic products, including the influence of eWOM.

3.2 The Stages of the Attitude Formation Process

3.2.1 Affective and Cognitive Response

As a first step in defining the decision process, we can identify the responses consumers experience when faced with a product option. By response, we mean the reaction a consumer has when he encounters a product, which could lead to a specific behavioural response (Chaudhuri 2006). Accordingly, affective responses consist of spontaneous reactions (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999) that the product evokes, which coincide with the emergence of emotions (Voss et al., 2003; Mano and Oliver, 1993). This type of response is insensitive to a stimuli's magnitude (i.e., quantity or size of the stimulus) (Hsee and Rottenstreich, 2004). These responses are typically encountered in situations with affect-rich products and may directly determine attitudes (Suh, 2009). In order to provide a definition, Schwarz and Clore (1983) and later Kahn et al. (2005; 5) argue 'affect-rich items are those whose choice is likely to be made intuitively. These products may be spontaneously evaluated on the basis of the liking or disliking that they evoke'.

However, consumers may also exhibit cognitive responses to the product. In these cases, the individual scrutinizes the quality of the product and rationally assesses the benefits it offers (Pham et al., 2001). This type of calculation-based valuation is typical for affect-poor products (Rottenstreich and Shu, 2004; Suh, 2009). Furthermore, it is sensitive to stimulus magnitude (Hsee and Rottenstreich, 2004), mainly because 'affect-rich alternatives evoke valuation by feeling while affect-poor alternatives lead to valuation by calculation. When relying on feelings, people are sensitive to the presence or absence of a stimulus but are less sensitive to variations in range. In contrast, when people rely on calculation, they are generally sensitive to changes in range' (Khan et al., 2005; 8). When the experienced affective response directly determines attitude, the consumer develops an affect-based attitude towards the product (Wyer et al., 1999). On the other hand, descriptively based attitudes are determined by the knowledge and information about the stimulus. This suggests that an affect-based attitude is implemented in hedonic product choices, while a cognitively based attitude develops when evaluation concerns

utilitarian product options (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009). As Chaudhuri (2006; 270) stated, emotions correspond to 'knowledge about the hedonic or other emotional values of a product or service, just as information about a product's tangible attributes is knowledge about the functional or utilitarian values of the product or service'. Based on the above findings, extant literature concludes that the product typology will determine a consumer's response, thus differentiating between affectively and cognitively based product attitudes.

Overall most research within the topic undertaken so far has contended that the salience of the affective or the cognitive element of an attitude is pre-determined by the product category. As such, research has neglected how cognitive and affective elements in the attitude formation process compete in certain instances (Wienkielmann et al, 2003). Accordingly, Chaudhuri (2006) argue that both affect and reason influence consumer choices of products and services, as individuals assign both types of value to products, making the exploration of these dimensions extremely important for research in consumer behaviour. The following sections will help understand the factors that influence the cognitive and affective sides of attitude formation in the context of aesthetic products.

3.2.2 Affective Responses to Aesthetic Products

As previously mentioned, literature assumes that the aesthetic product typology is tightly intertwined with the domain of affect, as their consumption is notably shaped by affective states (Colbert and St-James, 2014; Miniero et al., 2014; Bohm and Pfister, 1996; Hirschmann and Holbrook, 1982; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). As Hsee and Rottenstreich (2004) argue, the nature of the product is believed to be the factor that is responsible for inducing consumer feelings. Therefore, some items are more capable of eliciting affective responses due to their pronounced aesthetic properties (Hekkert, 2006). As such, in the marketing literature, responses to aesthetic products have been conceptualised not as reasoned cognitive responses but rather as affective in nature

(Venkatesh and Meamber, 2008). For instance, fashion products are often based on the affective differentiation rather than performance attributes (Wolny and Mueller, 2013). Upon evaluating an aesthetic product, consumers will present affective heterogeneity, as different people will develop different product attitudes towards the same product stimuli (Juslin, 2013; Holbrook, 1986). A central tenant of the experiential conception of marketing is the assumption that feelings can serve as a source of information (Schwartz and Clore, 2006). More specifically, this mechanism takes place in hedonic evaluative instances but is not triggered when the consumer faces utilitarian products (Pham, 1998; Wyer, 2004).

As such, Winkelman et al. (2003) differentiate between attitudes and evaluative judgments that rely on feature information about the target attributes, and judgments based on the feeling experienced with regards to the target. Hoegg and Alba (2008) further outline this distinction, where they consider the ‘holistic’ view of processing, which argues that individuals do not perceive the parts of an object but rather its configuration patterns as a whole. On the other hand, a ‘featural’ view involves an analytical processing of the stimulus based on its individual components. In order to illustrate this distinction: ‘whereas a cognitive evaluation of different colleges will generally focus on their specific attributes (e.g., location, student housing, financial aid), an affective evaluation is more likely to be based on a feeling towards colleges as a whole’ (Pham et al., 2015; 6).

3.2.3 Product Attitude Formation for Aesthetic Products

As mentioned in the previous sections, consumer experiences inform product and brand attitude formation. Thus, affect based attitudes are based on the hedonic potential of the product, while reason-based attitudes take into consideration the rational benefits of the product (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Kim et al., 2012). Depending on the evaluation modality, attitude formation will be shaped correspondingly.

In order to define the process resulting in product attitude, some peculiar traits need to be outlined in order to understand how consumers evaluate aesthetic products. Specifically, the attributes of hedonic products are more difficult to evaluate compared to attributes of utilitarian products (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). This difficulty is closely related to uncertainty because hedonic attributes are more prone to a subjective conception of value (Roy and Ng, 2012). Based on this premise, Verhagen et al. (2010; 142) argue, ‘the distinction between utilitarian and hedonic products is also characterized by their objective versus subjective nature’. As Petrosky (1991) suggests, the modality of evaluation depends on its predominant hedonic or utilitarian component. Specifically, individuals are able to engage more easily in attitude development for predominantly utilitarian, rather than hedonic goods. Voss et al. (2003) argue that the broader category of hedonic goods awakens consumers’ emotions. Based on this premise, literature has agreed that ‘the affect- rich nature of hedonic outcomes causes their value to be established mostly on internal, subjective, and discretionary standards, whereas the value of utilitarian outcomes depends on external, objective and mandatory standards’ (Botti and McGill, 2011; 1067). Thus, consumers adopt affective responses as informational inputs to develop an overall product attitude towards a product (Cohen et al., 2006; Schwartz, 1990; Schwartz and Clore; 1996).

In Althuizen and Sgourev’s study (2014), they argue that hedonic products — especially aesthetic products (i.e., fashion, music, film) — possess an ambiguous product quality. Namely, these products induce an evaluation that is based on subjective criteria given that the product quality is difficult to establish. Similarly, Charters and Pettigrew (2003) explore the question of hedonic product quality in relation to the different ways that consumers conceptualise and evaluate products. Even though the product under investigation in their study was wine, they argue this logic can be applied to a broader class of aesthetic goods such as music, fashion and art. These include products that are constantly subjected to expert judgment, but at the same time regularly encounter the response that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ (Charters and Pettigrew, 2006b). In a similar conceptualisation, Lee and Lee (2009) put forward the argument that when

developing an attitude towards a product, there is a difference in the modality of evaluation depending on the standard on which it's based. There are ranking-based standards of evaluation established on objective and measurable criteria. But there are also, attributes that are consonant to subjective criteria, such that different consumers will have different assessments and preferences of the same product. To be more specific, taste is perceived as an important element that shapes attitudes for aesthetic products and is conceived as an emotional component. In particular, Charters (2006; 247) posits, 'taste is a personal judgment and that aesthetic experience relies on an individual emotional response'. Hence, its nature is largely subjective rather than objective (Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012). Based on this definition, the present study will take into account an individual's taste as part of the overall affective response.

In this domain, good taste is traditionally understood from and ascribed to the opinion of the experts (Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012) who play an important role in shaping attitudes (Bloch, 1995). Furthermore Petrosky (1991) argues that taste significantly shapes the process of innovation adoption. It is therefore possible to derive that taste, even though it is considered affective and does not always determine product attitudes. In some instances, outcomes are determined by taste, and in others, by product meaning, which is assigned through expert opinions in the field of the specific product category.

Along similar lines, Cho and Schwarz (2008) demonstrated that evaluative judgments of aesthetic goods are malleable. In their study, consumers were exposed to different naïve theories with regards to time and effort required for producing art. Based on these manipulations, they found that consumers, although presented with the same information, develop different value judgments and overall product attitudes depending on the naïve theory with which they were primed. As such, the framing and product information to which consumers are exposed influences their product attitudes, without an objective measure available to guide the process. Given the availability of external cues, the affective response as the most salient element needs to be reconsidered in view of these new inputs.

The following section will focus on how literature has defined affect's direct influence on attitude formation in order to situate the research problem in the discourse.

3.3 Affect as Information Theory

3.3.1 Affect as Basis for Product Attitude Development

Chaudhuri (2000; 2006) contends that an individual is able to gain knowledge of the world through two functionally different approaches: through affect and through reason. To illustrate this distinction, 'if you are an average music listener you probably do not think of B flats and C minors when you hear a piece of music. That would be a rational reaction to music or knowledge of music by description (i.e., you could describe the piece to someone else in terms of the musical notations, and if they spoke the same language they would be able to understand your meaning). But, if you are like me, you probably just react spontaneously or emotionally to music and you know quite well whether you like the piece or not, but you cannot really describe it to someone else' (Chaudhuri, 2006; 3).

In relation to this definition, *affect as information* is a commonly adopted approach used to reference the way in which individuals gain knowledge about reality. It with the modality in which at a certain point in time affect directly influences attitude formation. Specifically, affect as information research investigates the way in which attitudinal judgments are directed by affective elements (Pham et al., 2001). In other words, as Clore and Huntsinger (2007; 393) report, the affect as information hypothesis states that: 'affect assigns value to whatever seems to be causing it'. The individual adopts the affective response about a product stimulus as an informational input when forming an attitude (Cohen et al., 2006; Schwartz, 1990; Schwartz and Clore; 1996). Based on this premise, affective responses are perceived as a sign of liking or disliking a product (Cohen et al., 2006). Accordingly, an affectively determined attitude occurs when a consumer engages in evaluative instances by relying on the experienced affective response as a source of

information. As such, when an individual relies on affect as an information source, the same rules that follow any other type of informational input will be adopted in the decision-making process (Schwarz, 2010). More specifically, this hypothesis suggests that in this particular instance, individuals are not relying on feelings automatically but they think about what their feelings mean for the judgment they have at hand (Cohen et al., 2006). Contrary to what has been conceptualised in the initial stages of research dealing with affect as information, Pham et al. (2013) suggest that reliance on feelings in judgment is a rather flexible and spontaneous process. Consequently, ‘studies from different disciplines have shown that value is often assessed affectively by monitoring how one feels toward the object to be evaluated’ (Pham et al., 2015; 5).

In reference to this, Pham et al. (2001) argued, ‘one cannot fully appreciate the psychology of evaluation without understanding the principles underlying feeling-based judgment’. The following sections will explain the influence of affect in the evaluative process by investigating the interplay of affective and cognitive components during attitude development.

3.3.2 Defining Affect as Information

In line with the view of affectively driven decision-making instances, *affect as information* theory has been adopted as a framework that conceptualises the role of moods and emotions in attitude development, that is the interplay between thinking and feeling components that occur in these judgments (Schwarz, 2010). This perspective will be employed, as research assumes that in a traditional setting, *affect as information* is significantly more likely in situations when an individual assesses the hedonic pleasure of an affect-rich product (Xia, 2002), rather than its utilitarian benefits (Schwarz, 2010). Here, the value assigned to one’s feeling does not lie in the feeling per se, but rather in the informational value that provides the evaluation (Clore and Storbeck, 2006).

Schwarz and Clore (1983) provide the cornerstone for this line of research. Even in its origins, research has assumed that this hypothesis is applicable merely in the case of

incidental feelings instances (i.e., moods), but more recent findings have confirmed that the same is valid for integral feelings and their effects, or emotions (Cohen et al, 2006; Pham, 2004; Pham et al, 2001). Nevertheless, the interplay between affective and cognitive component is still subject of debate in literature (Bigné et al., 2008; 27). As Cohen et al., (2006; 27) suggest, ‘the relationship between integral affective responses and object evaluation is so strong that, for a long time, affect and attitude were considered to be synonymous’. However, recent research is achieving consensus that the two are different constructs, where affect is conceived just as one of the possible antecedent elements that shapes product attitudes. Affective responses and attitudes were previously considered synonymous, however, research has shifted this definition towards one where affective and cognitive components determine attitudes (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Thus, it is important to explore the elements that shape the evaluation of affectively rich products and understand how affective responses determine overall attitude and to what extent the decision-making process is not an exclusively affective response.

3.3.3 How Consumers adopt Affect as Information

This section will illustrate the conditions in which individuals adopt affect as information to inform product attitude development. First, affect as information strategy is adopted primarily in heuristic conditions and is distinguished by the direct influence that feelings have on evaluative judgments (Forgas, 1995; Hong and Chang, 2015; Pham and Avnet, 2004). It is important to highlight that this aspect is particularly relevant when an attitudinal judgment by its nature entails an affective response (Clore et al., 1994). For instance, affective responses are used to inform judgment most commonly when individuals are asked to express one’s liking or dislike of a certain stimulus (Schwartz and Clore, 2006). Based on this premise, the above findings suggest that product category plays a crucial role in determining the influence of affect. Affect as information is significantly more likely to be used in instances when evaluation concerns a hedonic, rather than a utilitarian, product (Pham et al., 2013). In other words, it is assumed

individuals will base their judgments on feelings about a product being evaluated when they apply hedonic, rather than utilitarian, evaluative criteria (Adaval, 2001).

In many instances, people rely on their affective reactions because they perceive them as informatively valuable for their evaluative judgments. As such, affect-based evaluations signal that these processes are deliberate in character (Pham et al., 2001). More specifically, the affect as information process is not associative, but rather it is inferential in nature (Pham et al., 2013). It is possible that feelings, as an information source, are particularly influential in hedonic consumption because they are perceived as more relevant for assessing this typology. Thus, the typology of a product determines the relevance of one's feelings (Avnet et al., 2012).

Regulatory focus theory supports this view. This theoretical framework argues that consumers' motivations are centred around the pursuit of pleasurable outcomes and the avoidance of potential losses. A distinction between a promotion focus that centres around consumption motives directed towards achievement is differentiated from a prevention focus that drives consumer goals towards the avoidance of harmful outcomes (Florack et al., 2013). Hence, feelings will be more likely to be used as information input in instances when the goals are promotional rather than preventive, which are commonly directed towards hedonic alternatives (Greifeneder et al., 2010). Namely, literature argues that hedonic product attributes help obtain promotion goals, which are conceptually tightly related to hedonic consumption (Chitturi et al., 2007; Chitturi et al., 2008; Chitturi, 2009; Chernev, 2004).

Along these lines, feelings, and thus the affective components, are more likely to be used as an information source when the individual perceives a certain degree of relevance. By this definition, the perception an individual has about a feeling is relevant in defining and informing the attitude about a target stimulus (Greifeneder et al., 2010). Pham (1998) argues that individuals engage in feelings monitoring when they are driven by consummatory (hedonic) goals rather than when dealing with instrumental consumption motives. Nevertheless, a later study Pham (2001) suggests that this process occurs during

both consummatory (hedonic) as well as instrumentally driven goals, the only difference results in the prominence given to affective or reason based elements, as the affective side is more prominent in hedonic options. Based on this premise, individuals rely more extensively on affect to inform their product evaluation in instances that see the following conditions (Cohen et al, 2006):

- a) the individual is driven by hedonic/consumatory rather than instrumental/utilitarian motivations (Pham, 1998; Pham, 2001; Pham, 2004)
- b) when the purchase decision is driven by promotion rather than prevention goals (Pham and Avnet, 2004)
- c) when the decision at hand is affectively rich in nature (Clore et al., 1994; Wyer et al., 1999)
- d) when the decision is self-referential rather than when it concerns another person (Schwartz and Clore, 2006)
- e) when the individual has a high level of trust in his feelings (Avnet et al., 2012)

These conditions reflect the definition of hedonically driven consumption. Furthermore, affect as information is not only employed when individuals consider a low involvement product. Rather, this kind of heuristic is often relied upon even in situations that see high involvement decisions (Pham, 1998; Cohen et al., 2006; Schaller and Malhotra, 2015). Based on this premise, literature concludes emotional information is used to inform attitudes, and feelings present a source of information in particular settings. As such, this hypothesis holds:

- a) that judgments can be genuinely feeling based
- b) that feelings influence judgment directly
- c) that the reliance on feelings in judgment is inferential rather than purely automatic (Greifeneder et al., 2010).

Based on these conditions, it is important to explore how the effects of affect as information shape instances when the individual is presented with competing informational inputs derived from eWOM sources, and thus affect is not the only informational element.

3.3.4 Conditions for the employment of Affect as Information

As previously discussed, the *affect as information* theory argues that the effect of a feeling depends mainly on its perceived informational value (Schwarz, 2010). Along the lines of Pham (2004), individuals rely on feelings as a heuristic in instances when they are facing hedonic goals. In the same token, feelings are more consonant to the purpose of evaluating personal options compared to those of others (Schwarz and Clore, 2006). Supporting this proposition, Gorn et al. (2001) concluded that affect is more frequently used when judging a self-referential alternative rather than when making objective judgments. To be more specific, this judgment would correspond to the ‘I like it’ rather than the ‘It is good’ attitudinal judgment.

Another important factor that increases the likelihood of feelings being used to inform judgment refers to the malleability of the target. This conceptualisation involves the extent to which there is ambiguity towards the evaluation of the product target, or the amount of available information about it. As such, the higher is the level of ambiguity or the lesser information is present, the higher is the chance that feelings will inform individuals’ attitudes (Greifeneder et al., 2010). Similarly, Andrade (2005) confirms that the influence of affect in the decision process takes place when people are judging ambiguous stimuli. Affect as information is more likely to be adopted in instances when the attitudinal target requires more thinking, given its ambiguity (Forgas, 1995; Gasper, 2004). Thus, this assumption is directly relevant to the evaluation of aesthetic products, as product quality is difficult to establish (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014), consumers may undertake a largely subjective assessment of product attributes.

Lastly, for feelings to influence attitudes, they need to be perceived as representative of the target stimulus (Greifeneder et al., 2010; Schwarz, 2010). Clore et al. (1994) also confirmed this suspicion, wherein they suggested that this strategy is employed in instances where there is a lack of information about the target being evaluated.

Attitudinal outcomes that are based on these feelings call for fewer required resources compared to attitudes informed by descriptive inputs. Research has concluded that in situations that see any type of limitations — in terms of time, attention or availability of information — affect as information is more likely to be adopted (Cohen et al., 2006). To illustrate this assumption, when processing resources are constrained, individuals will be more likely to opt for an affectively superior alternative (e.g., cake) rather than a cognitively superior one (e.g., salad) (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999). As such, both attitudinal judgments (Pham et al., 2001) as well as individual choices (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999) will depend on the experienced feeling. As summarised by Cohen et al. (2006), affect as information is likely to be adopted by individuals in certain situational conditions, such as:

- a) Time pressure
- b) Other informational inputs are missing
- c) Little expertise about the stimulus being evaluated

As mentioned in the last point, affect is reduced in cases when there is expertise in the product class available, as individuals with a higher level of expertise will employ their knowledge about the target domain in order to reduce ambiguity (Greifeneder et al., 2010).

This section has provided a comprehensive understanding of the conditions that lead to the adoption of affect as information in the process of attitude formation. Some peculiar conditions are in shaping the affective or cognitive side of the attitude process. As previously suggested, affective processes are subject to a variety of stimulus, object,

person and situation specific variables that influence their degree and valence (Augustin et al., 2008; Jacobsen, 2010; Xenakis et al., 2012) and thus determine the adoption of affect as an informational input rather than relying on cognitive components in a product's assessment. The following section will further elaborate upon these conditions and provide an overview of the instances in which individuals adopt affective components in the product attitude formation and the influence of competing informational inputs.

3.4 Factors Influencing the Reliance on Affect or Cognition in the Attitude Formation Process

3.4.1 Context

Attitudes are highly sensitive to the context in which evaluation occurs (Schwarz, 2006). The situational *context* in which an aesthetic object is encountered exerts an influence on an individual's product attitude formation. In support of what has been proposed in Leder et al.'s (2004) model of aesthetic experience, Cupchik et al. (2009) suggested that context plays a vital role in how the aesthetic object is viewed, serving as a socially established scheme of processing. In other words, the context serves as a heuristic system that helps consumers organize new information based on preconceived ideas. By relying on these socially acquired mental concepts that inform consumers how to perceive new situations, an object is assessed following relatively different modes of processing. The right situation (such as a museum or gallery context) will therefore induce the individual to aesthetically process the object accordingly to the appropriate schema (Augustin et al., 2008). Juslin (2013) also supports this view, arguing that the context or 'framing' where the aesthetic stimuli is encountered can serve as a cue that suggests to the individual that the stimulus has some aesthetic potential. Along the same lines, Gerger et al. (2014) argued that the type of context changes the way in which individuals respond to art and also influences the attitudes they develop about a product. Namely, an art context increases positive evaluations by positively increasing the levels of liking. The framing

that a particular context creates changes consumers perceptions with regards to the product as ‘the simple cue ‘This is art’ changes peoples' experience of emotional stimuli’ (Gerger et al., 2014; 182). Leder et al. (2014) and Scherer (2005) report that the same product stimulus will be evaluated differently depending on the context where it is found, namely if the context defines it as ‘art’ or not.

In a similar fashion, Brieber et al. (2014) propose that context plays an influential role when it comes to art appreciation, as art is framed by the context where it is experienced. These authors examine the experience of art first in a museum context and then in a computer-mediated laboratory setting. Their results suggest that the museum experience engenders higher levels of consumers’ artwork liking. And, in the computer-mediated environment, consumers are in need of knowledge to form attitudes towards products available on the internet. Thus, the context in which attitude is formed could have an influence on the way in which the attitude is developed (Schlosser, 2003).

Based on these findings, contextual factors influence one’s evaluation of an aesthetic product, especially in settings where consumption occurs and highlights the need to explore the perception of aesthetic stimuli in an online mediated context.

3.4.2 Product Class Involvement

The relationship between product involvement and hedonics still remains rather unclear in the literature and requires further attention in relation to a product’s object of aesthetic consumption (Styvén, 2010). In the marketing field, involvement is seen as the extent of one’s engagement with regards to different aspects of consumption (Mueller, 1999; Kinley et al., 2010). Consumer involvement with a product implies that an individual is deeply moved by the product category (Goldsmith and Emmert, 1991; Kim, 2005). Highlighting the relevance of this factor in exploring the decision process for hedonic products, consumers may find a utilitarian product as important, but will be able to develop enduring product class involvement most commonly with a hedonic or self-

expressive product (Mittal, 1989; Zaichkowsky, 1986). Aesthetics score naturally higher on this dimension because product involvement is generally defined in terms of the personal relevance to the consumer and the extent to which the product helps achieve self-expressive or hedonic goals (Richins and Bloch, 1986; Wolny and Mueller, 2013).

Product involvement has important consequences on the way in which consumers form attitudes towards aesthetic products. For instance, Giese et al. (1996) investigated the relationship between traditional offline WOM and product category involvement and suggest that consumers who possess a high level of involvement have strong beliefs about product attributes. On the other hand, less involved consumers who do not possess this characteristic will be more easily influenced by low-quality arguments in order to change their product attitude. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Caccioppo, 1986), one's level of involvement will influence the route of information processing. Specifically, the higher one's level of involvement experience, the higher the likelihood that the individual will employ central route processing, given his motivation to invest effort in the processing. Aside from differences in the attitude formation process, consumers scoring high on this scale will look more extensively for information, compare product alternatives, be better able to distinguish between product attributes and place more importance on the product compared to low-scoring consumers (Zaichowsky, 1985). Based on these arguments, the effects of involvement on product attitude development require further exploration in reference to the affective and cognitive elements shaping the process.

3.4.3 Product Class Expertise

Although a number of studies have attempted to explore personality, contextual and social variables, research has consistently identified one's level of the expertise as an important determinant in aesthetic product evaluation and attitudes (e.g., Althuizen and Sgourey, 2014; Hekkert et al., 2003; Hekkert and Van Wieringen, 1996; Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012; Belke et al., 2010b; Jacobsen, 2010; Gerger et al., 2014). Here,

expertise is defined as ‘the ability to perform product related tasks successfully’ (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; 411).

Hekkert and Van Wieringen (1996) exposed a group of experts and non-experts to artworks; non-expert respondents placed less value on originality than the experts. Experts’ perceptions of originality were correlated to overall quality, while non-experts valued craftsmanship. Based on these findings, one’s level of expertise will determine the criteria that are used to judge an aesthetic product, which can lead to diverging attitudinal outcomes. Althuizen and Sgourev (2014) argue that, compared to novices, expert consumers are more apt to suppress their intuitive responses in order to assign more importance to cognitive deliberations about the quality of the product.

Schwarz (2010) suggests that individuals are less likely to rely on affective informational inputs when they possess a high level of expertise in the domain being judged. Belke et al. (2010) also believe that there are two modes of aesthetic appreciation. Namely, individuals who do not possess a certain degree of expertise in the subject matter, exhibit a more affective response. On the other hand, individuals who present more extensive knowledge and expertise will be more likely to display a cognitive reception modality. In other words, it is worthwhile to note that individual consumers differ in terms of their capabilities to evaluate the product. More specifically, the segment of consumers who possesses a high level of expertise will use this knowledge to make evaluative judgments (Belke et al., 2010b; Juslin, 2013). Thus, the pre-existence of information or specific domain knowledge drives attitude formation, and more knowledgeable consumers are prone to be influenced by content and cognitive beliefs (Peracchio and Tybout, 1996).

Consistent with the affect as information theory, consumers with a low level of expertise will evaluate the artwork based on a ‘gut feeling’, wherein, they will base their attitude on their affective response towards the product (Augustin and Leder, 2006). Consumers with more expertise in the product domain are less dependent on affective responses of the product (Leder et al., 2004; 2014). As such, Leder et al.’s (2014) study confirmed that the higher one’s level of expertise, the weaker the impact of affect on product attitude, as

attention is drawn to other quality aspects of the work. In other words, ‘in aesthetic domains, expertise enables specific changes to the experiences of emotional stimuli’ (Leder et al., 2014; 10). Given that expertise entails a specific structured knowledge about the area, ‘cognitive systems can lead to different aesthetic processing’ (Jacobsen, 2010; 186). At the same time, consumers who lack this competence will rely on more affectively driven responses and accordingly product attitudes (Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012). Based on this premise, affect as a heuristic is less important when one’s level of expertise in the relevant subject is higher (Hoegg and Alba, 2008). In these instances, knowledge will be used as a heuristic cue (Neeley, 2010). Greifeneder et al. (2010) also confirmed these findings. In support of this argument, Bagozzi et al. (2002; 61) said, ‘novices by definition are unfamiliar with the product category, and are more likely to engage in online evaluations, which are more susceptible to mood (affect) influences’.

Given the availability of cues, expert consumers will rely on ‘intrinsic’ cues to characterise a product’s properties, while less expert consumers will use ‘extrinsic’ cues (Neely et al., 2010). Expert consumers compared will be less likely to rely on external cues, such as the brand of the artist, in order to form an attitude about the product (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014). The body of knowledge that expert consumers possess allows them to disregard external cues and are more prone to base their attitudes on cognitive, rather than merely affective, components when assessing aesthetic products (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014). In a similar study dealing with music, Juslin (2013) reports that expert consumers exhibit a more advanced appreciation of the product. This occurs as these consumers employ a different route in the process of attitude formation and do not rely directly on their immediate response to the product.

3.4.4 Product Class Experience

Following these arguments, involvement and expertise also need to be carefully considered in terms of objective and subjective product class knowledge. Because

hedonic option choices are carried out on emotion rather than problem solving, the level of subjective product knowledge is often deemed higher than its actual level (Park and Moon, 2003). In other words, one's level of involvement influences the perception of subjective knowledge that consumers think they have. This, consequently, might impact product attitudes and information sharing behaviours (O'Cass, 2004). In this sense, the more a consumer is involved with a product class, one's perception of expertise increases as well as his confidence in purchasing decisions (O'Cass, 2004; Harari and Hornik, 2010; Cowan and Dai, 2014).

The difference between actual and subjective knowledge lies in the fact that the first includes accurate information that is stored in memory, while the latter defines beliefs about one's knowledge (Carlson et al., 2009). Objective product knowledge refers to the effective expertise of the consumer, while the subjective knowledge is strongly tied to motivational factors. The more an individual perceives a high level of knowledge, the higher their likelihood to adopt attribute-based processing during the attitude process (Ritterfeld, 2002). Specifically, this is more likely to be encountered with hedonic products than utilitarian ones. Literature suggests that perceived knowledge figures much higher than a consumer's objective abilities in suitably evaluating the product (Park and Moon, 2003). Nevertheless, some authors argue that low-involvement consumers hold a predominantly subjective stance towards quality. On the other hand, highly involved consumers adopt an objectivist view, considering quality to be inherited in the product itself. These highly involved consumers take a cognitive approach toward quality, while low-involved consumers utilise an approach marked by affective information criteria (i.e., affective in nature) (Charters and Pettigrew, 2006b).

The level of product class involvement and the consumer's expertise are important factors shaping the attitude formation process with regards to hedonic, and particularly aesthetic products. These dimensions could play a significant role in influencing the way consumers will develop product attitudes as well as the attention that is given to the information different sources provide, such as eWOM. Nevertheless, it is possible to

conclude that for hedonic products, consumers' knowledge is more likely to be linked with product experience with no signs of objective expertise (Palmer et al., 2013). Experience with the product class, rather than expertise, could be a more suitable dimension to explore in order to understand how consumer traits affect attitudes. As previous research does not present a consistent explanation of the influence of the product class experience trait in defining the process and the following behavioural outcomes, it is important to further consider these elements in the development of the current research.

3.4.5 Social Meaning

As mentioned in the previous chapter (refer to section 2.5.2), the social meaning of the product is an additional factor that influences the way in which aesthetic objects are experienced. Many objects that individuals process aesthetically undergo social and cultural changes, which shape their character and the way in which they are experienced (Belke, 2010). The attribution of social meaning refers to a cognitive processing of the product stimuli and includes the meaning a consumer ascribes to a particular product. Here, the meaning assigned to a product is often culturally and socially determined (Juslin, 2013).

Thus, the hedonic view of deriving disinterested pleasure from aesthetic products (Hoegg and Alba, 2008) can be overshadowed by the social meaning attached to it. As introduced in Chapter 2, one stream of research approaches this phenomenon through the lens of symbolic consumption phenomena. Petrosky (1991; 628) addresses the uncertainty in predicting the acceptance of product innovations among aesthetic goods, pointing out that 'by their nature, aesthetic products contain an element of mystery driven by the elusiveness of a generally acceptable criterion of beauty'. Along these lines, 'when the informational value of their feelings is called into question, people turn to other sources of information to arrive at a judgment' (Schwarz, 2010; 10).

A large part of the literature that deals with attitude development about aesthetic products has overlooked the cognitive components that take place in the process. Reber et al. (2004) argue that this omission is because aesthetic experiences are not sought as a result of goal accomplishment, influenced by some other intermediary reason; rather they are a subjective experience of pleasure. In opposition to this view, considering the goal-oriented view of consumption (Charters, 2006), both affective and cognitive elements will be considered in the decision process, depending on an individual's consumption goals. Attitudes are also directed towards strategies for maintaining public self rather than being purely referential to a self-exhaustive function. Accordingly, 'when the public facet is emphasized, the person should display attitudes that are agreeable to significant others; these attitudes can be instrumental in earning the approval of significant others and, via this public-self strategy, self-regard' (Grenwald, 1989; 436).

As such, the symbolic aspect of hedonic consumption has been overlooked in the conceptualisations that support the exclusive 'pleasure attainment' view. Symbolic motivations that guide consumption need to be further explored, as they present important implications for the attitude process. The following section will serve to outline the cognitive components considered in the attitude formation process and will focus on symbolic consumption and the influence of external informational inputs.

3.5. The Influence of Cognition

3.5.1 Shifting From the Affective Towards the Cognitive Components

Based on a product's inherent affective and cognitive responses, some authors suggest that these elements are not entirely independent. Kaplan (1987) explained the relationship between affect and cognition, arguing that aesthetics and cognition are closely and complexly interrelated. In support of this assumption, Leder et al. (2004) argue that aesthetic experiences entail both cognitive and affective processing instances that are reciprocally linked. Contrary to Hoegg and Alba's (2008) arguments, which purport that

a product's aesthetics may trigger cognitive or non-cognitive responses, Leder et al. (2004) propose a dual approach to aesthetic appreciation, where emotional and cognitive factors jointly shape the outcome. They argue that both the emotional and the cognitive components intervene in the process. Furthermore, the context of viewing, viewers' experience and background knowledge about the stimulus moderate the outcomes of the process (Palmer et al., 2013).

In contrast to researchers who argue that the complete separation of affect and cognition in specific evaluative instances, Forgas (1995) also suggests a dual approach that sees the two entities as tightly related. Individuals will react affectively to art, as it evokes an affective response but will also engage in understanding the work by cognitively assessing the product under scrutiny. Both the individual's thoughts about the piece as well as his feelings shape the process (Leder et al., 2014). In the same tone, Kumar and Garg (2010) suggest that the evaluation of an aesthetic product comes in the form of an arrangement between affective and cognitive elements. Specifically, the first level of response is affective while eventually it can develop into a more cognitive, evaluative judgment. If the affective response calls for a deeper cognitive engagement, the consumer will be driven to incorporate product information and elaborate upon it, which will consequently result in a more stable evaluative judgment (Kumar and Garg, 2010).

Similarly, Wyer (1999) presents a decision model, where even though they occur concurrently, either affect or cognition win in the process of attitude and preference formation. Supporting this view, 'the pleasure of beauty depends on a subtle relationship between emotion and cognition' because the more the individual is able to understand the aesthetics of a product the higher is the perceived pleasure (Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, 2008; 312). Pham et al. (2001) theoretically contend that in judgment instances, affective reactions are more likely to occur faster; however, these could be altered by cognitive appraisals in order to develop a product preference. Kaplan (1987) also concluded that in order to arrive at a preference choice, there is substantial cognitive effort in information processing activity. And there may be a whole spectrum of

relationships that vary in their degree of affective or cognitive influences in shaping attitudinal outcomes. Accordingly, there is an elaborate process that entails both elements in instances of aesthetic evaluation (Millis, 2001).

3.5.2 The Cognitive Determinants in the Decision Process

Referring to the aspect of product design, Page and Herr (2002) suggested that the design features of a product elicit an affective reaction, which results in a like or dislike outcome. On the other hand, cognitive appraisal determines one's judgment about a product's quality that takes into account a variety of informational features. In line with this argument, Hagetvedt et al. (2008) argue that lower order processing occurs as an initial and rather automatic reaction when an individual appraises the stimulus in a holistic manner. On the other hand, higher order processing occurs when there is an availability of information that permits an intentional analytical scrutiny of the stimulus attributes. When people focus on the affective elements of their response, their behavioural outcomes will be based on a lower order process (Shiv and Fedorkhin, 2002); whilst when individuals look for reasons to justify their product preferences they will rely on cognitive evaluative elements (Scarabis et al., 2006).

Similarly, in a study exploring the consumption of music, Juslin (2013) contends that when knowledge is available, cognitive inputs that come in the form of information, will intervene in the attitude formation process. Aside from pre-existing knowledge, the provision of information about the product at the point of evaluation will also be included in the same way under these cognitive inputs that influence judgment. In support of this, Leder et al. (2011)'s SEM modelling study found that compared to non-experts, more knowledgeable individuals exhibited generally higher artwork liking and an increased capability for understanding, thus highlighting the importance of cognitive components for this category of consumers.

In the same token, Althuizen and Sgourev's (2014) research has attested that when consumers encounter difficulty establishing the quality of a product, which is often the case for aesthetic goods, they turn to external cues in order to aid evaluation. External cues, like information about the status of a brand of artists, can help consumers in forming an attitude and thus identify a preferred option from the consideration set. As such, Page and Herr (2002) argue that these cues will be even more relevant when consumers are trying to establish their objective judgment through a cognitive evaluative mode, rather than expressing their affective response (liking/not liking). These objective, evaluative judgments are conceptually related to consumption goals that possess a symbolic, rather than hedonic, character. However, Althuizen and Sgourev (2014) contend that information about status cues could also have an impact on attitudes based on affective components, which require further exploration in relation to hedonic consumption motivations.

This research suggests that the existence of cognitive elements assumes a higher saliency in the process of aesthetic product attitude formation. This view contrasts with the established conception of aesthetic consumption being driven by exclusively affective aspects. As such, both affective and cognitive dimensions can intervene in the decision-process for the aesthetic product category, and the importance assigned to these will shape the attitudinal outcomes of the consumer.

The major implications of these distinctions for consumer psychology relates to the fact that a shift in affective or cognitive processing could influence the way an object is evaluated and thus influence product attitudes and preferences. For example, Lowenstein et al. (2001) address the interplay between affective and cognitive components in the process, arguing that affect is able to drive decisional outcomes that differ from the cognitive route. Depending on the evaluation modality, the formation of a product attitude will be shaped accordingly (Lee and Lee, 2009; Kim et al., 2012). That is, 'overall, instrumental as well as emotional evaluations contribute independently to the prediction of preferences' (Bohm and Pfister, 1996; 144). Because there is yet no clear

answer to this issue (Hoegg and Alba, 2008), this study aims to explore these assumptions in further depth by in order to achieve a deeper understanding of this process, particularly as it relates to aesthetic goods. Given recent market trends of widespread eWOM information across product and service categories, this research aims to understand how this new informational source affects an individual's affectively charged attitude formation process.

3.5.3 The Role of Information

Given that in affective decision instances, individuals adopt affect in their judgments and follow the rules that apply for any other type of informational input, their impact on attitudes could decrease with the consideration of alternative informational inputs (Schwarz and Clore, 2007; Schwarz, 2010). In relation to the cognitive aspects that can intervene in the evaluative process, particularly those that address the modalities of product attitude formation, enhanced understanding of an object causes a shift in consumers' evaluative modes. More specifically, this can be observed in instances 'such as when an artwork that initially evokes a visceral reaction is appreciated upon learning upon its symbolic significance' (Hoegg and Alba, 2008; 744).

Given this, more cognitively based attitudes are based on the interpretation and ascribed meaning of the object (Hoegg and Alba, 2008). They are consequently conceptually related to the social meaning in symbolic driven consumption motivations. However, information could be of crucial importance in hedonic decision processes. Referring back to previous findings, Kaplan (1987) conceived that there is a premium placed on the role of information in relation to individuals' preference formation. Particularly, individuals exhibit a more positive attitude when informational material is available to accompany the product stimulus being evaluated (Russell, 2003; Silvia, 2005). In one of the few studies to tackle the decision process for aesthetic products, Juslin (2013) contends that when an individual is provided with information about the aesthetic item, this type of input will significantly influence his attitude about it.

In reference to these assumptions, López and Maya (2012) propose that even though in recent years greater emphasis has been placed on the affective elements of decision-making, the impact of affect on decisions can be significantly superseded by alternative sources of information. On the internet, consumers look for information about brands when developing brand attitudes (de Vries et al., 2012). As such, information retrieved from social platforms could shape product attitude formation and influence purchase intention both in symbolic, as well as in hedonic, consumption goals.

Relying on previous studies that attested the importance of titles for assigning meaning to works of art, Russell (2003) hypothesised that the hedonic value of an aesthetic object to a certain extent, derives from the capability to understand its meaning. Based on this premise, Russell explored the influence of additional information on the meaningfulness assigned to art. He concluded that the availability of additional information increases the perceived meaningfulness of a work of art. Furthermore, he suggests that the higher the perceived product meaningfulness achieved with the help of additional information, the more hedonic value the consumer experiences (Russell, 2003; Palmer et al., 2013).

In the same token, Millis (2001) suggests that the existence of additional information aids the individual in achieving comprehensibility and directing his attention to attributes. In comparison with this observation, Leder et al. (2010) identified that with understanding and meaning identification, a product's hedonic value increases equally, possibly due to a reduction in uncertainty (Leder et al., 2004). This indicates that the hedonic, as well as the symbolic, value of an aesthetic product is determined by mechanisms that occur during high-order processing, which are cognitively defined process elements.

If we want to address hedonic consumption instances in an online context, significant changes in the affective mechanisms typical for these instances could be encountered (López and Maya, 2012). Specifically, a product's affect will no longer be the only source of information available to the consumer. Instead, the presence of alternative

information cues about the product, such as online reviews, could influence an individual's attitude formation process.

By supporting Hirschmann and Holbrook's (1982) prominent tenant about the importance of emotions in specific consumer behaviour realms, Neelamegham and Jain (1999) confirm the cardinal role that affect plays in consumers' decision-making process with regards to experience goods, such as movies. However, the authors also acknowledge the importance of informational inputs in determining attitudes in this product category, such as information coming from word of mouth.

Yamada (2009) advances this argument further. Specifically, this scholar suggested that providing reasons about a product choice changes an individual's preferences, as it directs focus on information that is easy to retrieve. On the contrary, aesthetical preferences are difficult to access verbally, as a non-verbal and implicit processes shape them. As such, the liking or disliking of an item will go in the direction for which the choice is most easily justifiable, thus biasing one's attitude towards the most readily available information. This phenomenon could be conceptually related to the need for justification, which consumers experience in hedonic choices, such that it induces individuals to rationalize choices in order to diminish one's sense of guilt. As such, when there is a perceived need to provide justification, consumers' attitudinal preferences might shift from emotionally to rationally determined. Accordingly, Millar and Tesser (1986, 1992) argued that in instances when individuals look to justify their preferences, the cognitive component of the attitude toward the object becomes more salient than the affective counterpart.

3.6 Conclusion

A large body of literature has suggested that utilitarian consumption is driven by rational considerations, while hedonic consumption is driven by affective elements (Kronrod and Danzinger, 2013; Alba and Williams, 2013; Babin et al., 1994; Dhar and Wertenbroch,

2000; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Kivetz and Simonson, 2002; Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998; Chaudhuri, 2000). Specifically, consumer decision-making research has distinguished between attitudes contingent to their affective and cognitive character (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). Affect is able to drive attitudinal outcomes that differ from those obtained via the cognitive route, and depending on which evaluation modality was employed, the formation of product attitude would be shaped accordingly. Considering the significant changes that occur in the modalities of consumption, the purchase of aesthetic products offered via online platforms and the extensive amount of social information easily retrievable on behalf of consumers, this affectively driven process has undergone a series of changes that research needs to highlight. Hagtvedt and Patrick (2009) posit that research needs to explore the conditions under which consumers shift from an affect-based attitude formation route to more reason-based routes.

Here, the encounter of an ambiguous product stimulus, such as an aesthetic product, motivates increased information search from both internal and external information sources in order to reach a solution. As such, given the availability of information in the current marketplace, especially eWOM information, consumers could engage in more extensive information gathering to make evaluations about the product. The availability of additional online information could influence the way in which consumers form attitudes about these products, as affect is no longer the only information source available. In an online setting, affect toward a product is not exclusively the only influence on attitude formation, as the availability of additional information, such as consumer eWOMm could also play an important role in shaping one's attitude formation. Furthermore, it appears that the interplay between affective and cognitive elements in shaping the attitude formation processes for the aesthetic product category is dependent upon person-specific factors, such as involvement and expertise with the product class as well as the individual's consumption goals.

Based on these arguments, the following section will provide an overview of extant research concerned with eWOM information and its influence on the consumer decision

journey. Specifically, it will look at the importance that this informational factor has on shaping consumer attitudes and the factors that influence its adoption by contextualising these dynamics in affect-rich consumption settings

CHAPTER 4: eWOM INFORMATION AND PRODUCT ATTITUDE FORMATION

4.0 Introduction

Based on the insights provided in the literature presented in the previous chapters, this chapter will review how information is gleaned from external sources, specifically word of mouth in an electronic format (eWOM). Consumer decision-making for aesthetic products could be undergoing a shift due to the availability of information in online social spaces, as the internet. This channel transforms in the way consumers look for information, interact with each other and undertake a purchase. The way in which eWOM information influences consumer-decision-making, particularly attitude formation, after accounting for the product category, is still rather unexplored. The relationship between retrieval of eWOM information and consumer decision-making will be thus applied to the case of aesthetic products.

4.1 Defining Electronic WOM

4.1.1 Information and Decision-Making

One of the elements that can influence the consumers' decision-making process is known as information search behaviour (Nicosia, 1966). With this particular behaviour, individuals aim to gather relevant information about the product from a variety of information sources available, which will consequently help them make a decision (Gu et al., 2012). Studies have explored different forms of information retrieval because they reflect an important mechanism for explaining consumer purchase behaviour and product choice (Beatty and Smith, 1987; Maity et al., 2014). Klein and Ford (2003, 31) define these behaviours as instances wherein consumers actively collect and integrate information from numerous sources, both internal and external, prior to making a choice. Internal sources are the knowledge consumers have already acquired through experience

and that resides in memory, while external search are the external sources that are consulted (D’Rozario, 2016). If information about a product is available to consumers, they may decide to consult it or otherwise not to do so. If they opt for the latter, they rely merely on their previously acquired knowledge to inform the product attitude, thus focusing solely on their internal experience. If, however, they decide to consult an external recommendation, it is usually because they don’t possess a formed opinion about the product being evaluated (Senecal and Nantel, 2004). Based on this premise, a key element of consumer decision-making that influences product attitude development is the typology and amount of information that comes from external sources (Maute and Forrester, 1991).

As such, this phenomenon known as information seeking has been defined as a consciously driven behaviour where individuals seek information from intentionally selected information sources (Guo, 2011). The process culminates in what is called information adoption, which is ‘a process in which people purposefully engage in using information’ (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In relation to Beatty and Smith’s (1987) arguments, Kostyra et al. (2016) conclude that the higher a consumer’s need for information, the more the consumer will look for WOM information and rely on it when making a purchase decision. As such, word of mouth in marketing literature has been defined as ‘the dissemination of information (e.g., opinions and recommendations) through communication among people’ (Chen et al., 2011; 239).

This mechanism mainly occurs because consumers are often influenced by their peer’s opinions and purchases when forming an attitude about a product (Chen et al., 2011). Traditional WOM research has acknowledged that individuals’ preferences are influenced by others’ choices (Chen et al., 2011). This phenomenon has been defined as personal influence, and it is observed when individuals undergo a shift in their attitudes or behaviours due to the interaction with other consumers. As such, one of the most significant manifestations of this phenomenon is known as word of mouth (Kiecker and Cowles, 2002).

Specifically, with regards to this information seeking process, WOM communication has been traditionally found to play a vital role. Its effect in influencing consumers' choice has been extensively explored in the marketing literature (e.g., Cheung et al., 2008). Traditional WOM theory states that this communication format plays a significant role in shaping different aspects, such as aiding product evaluation (Doh and Hwang, 2009; Dhar and Chang, 2009; Hu et al., 2008; Park et al., 2006; Park and Lee, 2008; Koh et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2007; Clemons et al., 2006). In other words, consumers have been found to make extensive use of WOM information in order to aid their decision-making with regards to consumption choices (Steffes and Burgee, 2009).

4.1.2 Online Information

With the rise of the internet, one major source of online information is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Under this umbrella term we find *customer opinions, user experience and product or service reviews* (Gu et al., 2012). The internet has brought to consumers the ability to share, exchange and express their opinions in a large number of different online spaces. Some of these community-based venues are social networking sites, where users can develop a network of friends to socially interact with (Trusov et al., 2009). These platforms are defined as the 'group of 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 and Haenlein, 2010; 60). Specifically, these platforms foster the creation of relationships among users and facilitate repeated interactions (You et al., 2015). Furthermore, the advent of social media 'has loosened the constraints of information acquisition and distribution, both psychologically and physically' (Zhang et al., 2014; 2). Consequently, the internet's benefits facilitate a growing tendency for individuals to use these platforms to search for information (Alves et al., 2016; Bei et al., 2004). Particularly, the interactive nature of the channel allows consumers to exchange opinions about products and services with other consumers as well as making available to them an unparalleled extent of information (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006). Given the large number of product choices that consumers face due to

the rise of e-commerce, user-generated product information from other customers is an increasingly important aid for purchase decisions (Kostyra et al., 2016). Accordingly, customers will engage in the search of eWOM in order to find high-quality information to make informed purchase decisions (Zhu and Zhang, 2010). Steffes and Burgee (2009) argue that because the internet became a ubiquitous phenomenon, an ever larger portion of consumers relies on the information gathered from this source in order to aid their decision-making processes and fulfil their consumption goals (Zhang et al., 2010). As such, the availability of information has helped overcome informational asymmetry phenomena (Yang and Mai, 2010) and reduces consumers search costs (Kulviwat et al., 2004; Gu et al., 2012). With online WOM thus, a more transparent overview of the market can be achieved (Park and Kim, 2008).

Thus, that the advancement of technology has spurred a power shift from producers to consumers (Steffes and Burgee, 2009). As such, consumers are able to make deeper and entirely consumer-driven information searches (Kulviwat et al., 2004). The advent of this channel has allowed consumers to be empowered, which enables them to influence and be influenced by peers by means of information sharing (Zhang et al., 2011) and by leveraging their interconnectedness (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008). For instance, they can take part in the process of value making by stating individual preferences and altering product pricing and evaluation (Park and Kim, 2008). Furthermore, by reducing search costs, this medium has made the search for information even more accessible to consumers and further promoted the information search behaviour (Kulviwat et al., 2004). Based on these considerations, Kim and Gupta (2012; 985) define eWOM as a 'crucial product information source', as consumers largely rely on eWOM prior to making a purchase (Moldovan et al., 2011). Gu et al. (2012) reported that more than 60% of consumers will consult some kind of online WOM during their decision-making instances prior to purchase. As such, even if consumers seek often information from both online and offline WOM sources (Zhu and Zhang, 2010), online search is increasingly replacing search in the traditional setting (Klein and Ford, 2003). Compared to traditional offline search, the internet has reduced search costs and lowered access barriers, which

have improved the benefits and increased the likelihood of pre-purchase and on-going information search (Kulviwat et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, despite the growing importance of the internet, there is little research that addresses how information that consumers retrieve influences the attitude formation process (Cheema and Papatla, 2010). Based on this premise, the aim of this study is to explore how electronic WOM information influences consumer attitude formation processes, as it presents a valuable avenue for deeper explorations. Particularly, the product category factor is examined because it offers a valuable route to identify the peculiarities associated with how available information shifts decision processing. Specifically, the case of aesthetic products is used because research traditionally focused on the decision-making process of consumers for this category has been exclusively studied as a result of affect, with little consideration given to the role of information availability.

4.2 eWOM

4.2.1 Introduction to WOM

‘In commercial situations, WOM involves consumers sharing attitudes, opinions, or reactions about businesses, products, or services with other people’ (Jansen et al., 2009; 2169). It is an informal exchange of information with regards to the features of a brand, a product or service, a company or the selling actor, between a consumer and another individual without commercial aims (Ladhari, 2007). In this vein, WOM is defined as consumer-dominated communication where the sender is independent from any market force, and is thus perceived as more trustworthy, compared to other forms of marketing communication (Brown et al., 2007; Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006).

The large impact that WOM communication has on consumer behaviour lies in the fact that, contrary to traditional marketing strategies to reach consumers, this phenomenon

sees no profit (Steffes and Burgee, 2009). WOM is viewed as the most salient communication channel that consumers use to retrieve information (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). In a traditional WOM context, information is capable of influencing product judgment, purchase decision behaviour, and also playing an important role in the evaluation of the consumption experience itself (Fitzgerald Bone, 1995).

Research so far has approached WOM phenomena through three main thematic lenses., The first stream has explored the antecedents of WOM, the second has identified the drivers for consumers' reliance on WOM, and the third stream is concerned with the traits of the source that makes it influential for consumer decision-making (Bruyn and Lilien, 2008). However, Martin and Lueg (2013) argue that research investigating how WOM communication influences the decision-making process of consumers is limited. As such, there is a lack in understanding about the modality in which this type of communication impacts actual behaviour, as there is little knowledge about what occurs when this information is received and how it is processed by the receivers (Martin and Lueg, 2013). As such, the present study aims to shed light on this phenomenon in the online context, by considering at the same time the product category factor. In doing, study aims to explore the changes in the attitude formation process that occurred due to the emergence of online WOM communication, and the following sections will serve to outline the main points that distinguish online WOM from the traditional offline version of the phenomena.

4.2.2 WOM Offline and Online

As mentioned in the previous section, word of mouth is an established construct that was first explored in the offline setting, and only recently has research begun to explore how technology facilitated its transposition in the online context (Steffes and Burgee, 2009). Although this type of social interaction is typically encountered in the offline context, technological progress has assigned it more importance as a 'market force' (Chen et al., 2011; 238). As such, eWOM is found in a more complex technologically mediated

context, and thus different factors impact the way in which eWOM is consumed (King et al., 2014). Based on this premise, eWOM is believed to generate different patterns compared to traditional WOM (Shin et al., 2014).

Regardless of the setting where it is examined, the main characteristic of WOM is the distribution of consumer information about their experiences regarding either products or services (Steffes and Burgee, 2009). Seeing how research has adopted the assumption that the logic behind traditional WOM and eWOM is the same, traditional WOM literature has been predominantly used to contextualise eWOM phenomena (Wolny and Mueller, 2013). However, some authors argue that the electronic WOM is not suitably explained by the mechanisms intervening in the traditional offline context (Brown et al., 2007; Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) propose that online word of mouth needs to be approached as an extension of traditional word of mouth (Cheung et al., 2008; Chan and Ngai, 2011), but with some different peculiarities, due to its contextual shift (Floyd et al., 2014).

Based on this premise and, though acknowledging the substantial similarities between traditional WOM and its online version, research has identified some significant differences that have emerged from the digital context (Gupta and Harris, 2010; Cheung et al., 2009; Steffes and Burgee, 2009). ‘While WOM is an immediate intimate conversation, eWOM, much like e-mail communication, is most frequently an asynchronous process whereby the sender and receiver of information are separated by both space and time’ (Steffes and Burgee, 2009; 43).

The first and most apparent difference between the two types of WOM lies in electronic attributes of, ‘speed with which information travels in the cyberspace, the extent of access to a large volume of information, the lack of geographical limitations, and the many-to-many nature of online communications’ (Wolny and Mueller, 2013; 565). Second, while traditional WOM typically occurred between small groups of consumers, electronic WOM is able to reach a much larger portion of consumers under the form of a bi-directional communication (Steffes and Burgee, 2009). As such, this kind of WOM

becomes much more visible and easily observable (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Martin and Lueg, 2013). A third difference consists of the fact that while previously, source information was directly available to consumers, this kind of information does not exist in the electronic channel, making any appraisal of sender/message credibility difficult (Steffes and Burgee, 2009; Kim and Gupta, 2012; Gupta and Harris, 2010).

The difference between traditional offline and online WOM may be summarised with the preposition that the latter is: 'directed to multiple individuals, available to other consumers for an indefinite period of time, and anonymous' (Henning-Thurau, 2004; 39). In support of this conceptualisation, De Bruyn and Lilien's (2008) viral marketing study has been suggests that the direction and nature of moderating factors will remain the same in both contexts; however, their magnitude will be affected by the shift, leveraging on the properties of the different contexts. In order to build on these assumptions, the following sections will focus on eWOM and its implications for consumer decision-making, and particularly attitude formation.

4.2.3 Electronic WOM and Attitude Formation

The existence of online WOM has spurred a change in the modalities of consumer behaviour and decision-making (Chan and Ngai, 2011). The internet has made available a large amount of information to individuals prior to consumption (Broniarczyk and Griffin, 2014), which was not possible before. As such, the modality of information exchange and transmission has undergone a significant transformation (Chan and Ngai, 2011), as the influence of online WOM communication becomes increasingly more important with the growth of online platforms and the base of consumers using them (Doh and Hwang, 2009). More specifically, 'platform refers to an eWOM channel, which is the location of the eWOM' (Chan and Ngai, 2011; 495). Given this, 'electronic word of mouth communication refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customer about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet' (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; 39).

This form of communication has therefore become, in some instances, the preferred modality of information exchange between consumers (King et al., 2014).

The retrieval of online information via eWOM is available for consumers through a large range of different sources such as: online discussion forums, electronic bulletin board systems, newsgroups, blogs, review sites, and social networking sites (Cheung, et al. 2008). Electronic word of mouth has seen a steady rise, especially on social networking sites (Brown et al., 2007). Findings from Jansen et al. (2009) suggest that even micro blogging sites, such as Twitter, are used as a source of eWOM communication. These platforms leverage the possibility for consumers to gather and share consumption opinions and experiences spanning across a large area of consumption fields (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). As such, the emergence of social media platforms has enabled consumers to create a large amount of user generated content that helps other users make product choices. In other words, consumers have now the possibility to participate in the creation and exchange of information through increased interaction in the marketplace (Broniarczyk and Griffin, 2014). However, in the context of social media, consumers do not express their preferences just verbally, but they can make them easily apparent through other available means such as likes, photos, feeds etc. (Blazevic et al., 2013). As such, the definition of eWOM has been enriched with ‘non textual communications, which can be observed by peers such as “liking” a brand on Facebook or recommending (“retweeting”) a story on Twitter, as well as the more commonly studied product reviews and comments on social networks’ (Wolny and Mueller, 2013; 565). Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) summarize that contrary to traditional WOM, online WOM uses both textual and graphical elements and evaluation can be expressed through ratings, the number of ‘likes’, reviews, etc.

Based on how eWOM information has already become a ubiquitous presence, attention needs to be addressed the way in which consumers use and evaluate the information it provided (Mudambi and Schuff, 2010), where especially non-verbal forms of eWOM are significantly under researched. The modality of how online information is consumed will

determine the extent of its impact on receivers (King et al., 2014). As such, research needs to address to the various factors that influence the potential impact of non-verbal forms of eWOM and comprehending both consumer and product specific variables (Zhu and Zhang, 2009; You et al., 2015). This study will address the influence of non-verbal eWOM information on the process of product attitude development.

Overall, research dealing with eWOM communication can be classified in umbrella streams that assume either a market-level or an individual-level view of the phenomenon. The first refers to eWOM and its relationship with other market-level signals. The other addresses consumer decision-making processes and approaches eWOM as an informational input that shapes purchase decision-making (Lee and Lee, 2009). The present study will adopt the latter perspective, as it will attempt to shed light on the way in which the informational input retrieved from electronic WOM, specifically non-textual eWOM from a social platform (Jimenez and Mendoza, 2013), influences the process of attitude formation. As such, this review will cover the dimensions of eWOM considered relevant in influencing the consumers' decision-making process, particularly attitude development.

4.3 Product Factors

4.3.1 Product Factors and eWOM

Recent research has begun to address eWOM through the lens of the product variable. By 'exploring how the product itself, or the way consumers perceive it, leads to eWOM' (Moldovan et al., 2011; 110). Some authors have attempted to classify certain characteristics that distinguish products as antecedents of WOM (Berger and Schwartz, 2011) suggesting the importance of product category as being an influential factor in eWOM processes. Based on this, research suggests that the product typology influences both the importance assigned to information as well the extent of information search (Bei et al., 2004). Pauwels et al. (2011) explore the impact of an online informational website

on offline sales, and found that the product category was largely influential in determining the effect of information on product sales. Similarly, Bhatnagar and Ghose (2004) examined the modality of online information search on behalf of consumers where they confirmed that product category acts as a determining factor that influences the modality of information search in the online setting.

4.3.2 Product Category and eWOM

Based on these findings, it is important to further explore the product category factor and its relationship with eWOM, and its respective influence on attitude formation. For instance, previous research confirms that consumers are influenced by eWOM especially in the case of experiential products, rather than search products. Again, these experiential products are goods in which quality is not based upon objective evaluative criteria but instead depends on personal taste and subjective attributes (Liu, 2006). Mudambi and Schuff (2010) confirm this finding and argue that different information requirements are necessary in decision-making instances for search and experience goods. At the same time, Steffes and Burgee (2009) argue that the evaluation of search goods compared to experiential goods (especially services) is much more straightforward, given that the latter possess an idiosyncratic characteristic of intangibility, which is hard to evaluate prior to consumption. Hu et al. (2008) argue that experience goods are tightly related to an inherent characteristic of psychological uncertainty experienced by consumers. It can thus be hypothesised that in order to minimise uncertainty regarding the quality or the judgment criteria for an experience product, consumers will place more importance on eWOM. This information should offer a valuable aid to reducing uncertainty (Park and Lee, 2009; Mudambi and Schuff, 2010). Ye et al. (2011) also researched the impact of eWOM on experience goods, who confirmed a significant relationship. Hence, it is possible that the uncertainty of ambiguous product quality will lead consumers to more favourably adopt eWOM in their decision-process, to provide an external signal of product quality (Cox and Kaimann, 2015).

Along these lines, Floyd et al. (2014) conceive that hedonic goods are often chosen based on their emotional appeal, and as such, eWOM has less of an impact on this kind of choice because it is based on subjective preference. However, Ladhari (2007) suggests that for hedonic products, eWOM plays a significant role as information source for selection and evaluation instances. Furthermore, WOM serves as informational vehicle generating awareness about products. Yang and Mai (2008) have undertaken a study that focused on online videogames. Here, videogames were considered as a type of hedonic product rather than the traditional utilitarian alternative in which consumers make rational decisions. With regards to this category, the authors argue that other consumers' opinions are particularly important as individuals try to overcome the idiosyncratic uncertainty that characterises these products. Cheema and Papatla (2010) also explored the influence of online compared to offline information for purchases carried out online by taking into account the hedonic-utilitarian product category variable. This product category has a significant relationship with one's reliance on online WOM.

The relationship between product category and eWOM adoption have not yet been fully confirmed, and this area needs further investigation (You et al., 2015). Moldovan et al. (2011) suggests that a valuable area for further investigation is non-functional product types, like games, art and haute couture. In line with this suggestion, López and Maya (2012) argue that consumers will often rely on the opinions of others as a source of information, especially when facing a hedonic product. In other words, products like aesthetic goods, which exhibit high preference heterogeneity, will evoke higher levels of preference uncertainty and consequently lead consumers to search more extensively for WOM information (Broniarczyk and Griffin, 2014). Research has also shown the need for further explorations about the impact of product categories in eWOM information processing (Martin and Lueg, 2013). There is a need to investigate the influence of eWOM in specific consumption contexts (Pentina et al., 2015). Kim and Gupta (2012) suggest that future research should explore the case of affectively rich products. In the same vein, Bei et al. (2004) argue that a possible avenue for future studies is the need to investigate the process by which experience-driven goods adhere to the logics of

evaluation typical for search goods in online contexts. As such, the availability of information online may drive a change of hedonic products into search goods, as consumers are more prone to endorse reviews about search attributes rather than experiential ones (Simonson, 2016). Nevertheless, this assumption has not yet been suitably explored.

In support of these arguments, Park and Kim (2008) also suggest that the product variable needs to be considered in future research that will explore the way eWOM information is processed as in high involvement purchases, eWOM may play a rather more influential role compared to low involvement alternatives. Floyd et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis also confirms this finding; these authors show that eWOM has a greater impact on the sales of products that score high on the involvement dimension, such as affect-rich products.

4.3.3 Aesthetic Product Traits and eWOM

Extending the discussion about the relationship between product category and the influence of eWOM information, this section will focus on aesthetic products as the subject of the current research. One important point is that when the consumers are unsure about their own judgment, given its complexity, they are more susceptible to influences that come from other informational sources (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008; Lee and Ma, 2012; Hong and Chang, 2015). In other words, eWOM has a greater effect on both awareness and attitude change for ambiguous products than for those where the consumers exhibit high familiarity (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2008). Research further suggests that the impact of eWOM is more pronounced in instances where the consumer deals with less popular products (Duan et al., 2009), and when there is a higher differentiation between products (Clemons et al., 2006). Zhu and Zhang (2010) argue that consumers, when trying to diminish the risk related to a purchase decision, look for information beyond the one offered by companies or marketers.

Hence, it appears that the perceived risk associated with product attributes influences consumers' adoption decision of these products (Parthasarathy and Forlani, 2010). To be more specific, the notion of perceived risk derives from the knowledge an individual has about a product. This is known as 'the overall evaluation of the potential for loss in a product class...an overall evaluation of the consumer's prior knowledge of the rational and emotional consequences of using a product or service' (Chaudhuri, 2002; 268). It could be that the popularity of a product signals its quality, such that popular products appear to be a less risky choice (Phua and Ahn, 2014). In these cases, there won't be a high necessity to reduce this risk by reading online reviews. As a result, eWOM could be less influential for widely popular products (Chen et al., 2004). Based on these findings, it is possible that the extent of eWOM retrieval and its impact on attitude formation will be dependent upon a consumer's perceived uncertainty in judgment.

In the traditional WOM context, information is particularly relevant in instances where the product has ambiguous quality, such that the individual perceives risk in undertaking the purchase decision (Fitzgerald Bone, 1995). Online WOM serves as an indicator of product quality and value that consequently helps customers to minimise risk during a purchase decision (Zhu and Zhang, 2010). Research has suggested that prior to the rise of eWOM, this risk-minimizing role was ascribed to the product's brand and price (Kostyra, 2016). However, now eWOM offers competing quality cues that overshadow the effect of the price-quality heuristic in determining product evaluations (De Langhe et al., 2016).

Building on these findings, an additional factor that determines the influence of eWOM is product involvement. Wolny and Mueller (2013) argue that high-involvement products, such as fashion, usually attract more online conversations because their value is difficult to establish, especially their social value. Given this, research has examined the influence of the product factor by differentiating between high- and low-involvement products. Gu et al. (2012) argue that this research has been preoccupied with low-involvement products for eWOM explorations, systematically neglecting of the outcomes of high involvement products (Schaller and Malhotra, 2015). This proposition is justified with

findings that have resulted from research concerned specifically with product involvement. Literature suggests that involvement plays a significant role in determining the way in which consumers seek and share information about products (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985; Bloch, Commuri and Arnold, 2009; Kinley et al., 2010).

Certain product characteristics influence eWOM on consumers' decision making. Based on the traits identified by the literature, eWOM is expected have a major impact on the evaluation of products with characteristics of the aesthetic product category (including fine art). As such, it is possible to assume that, despite the affectively driven decision process documented in the literature, eWOM information could play a major role in shaping consumers' attitudes with regards to this product category.

Today, consumers are much more susceptible to the influence of other customers in their decision-making given the wealth of information made available by the online interconnectedness with other customers (Blazevic et al., 2013; Simonson, 2016). Jansen et al.'s (2009) findings suggest that consumers are increasingly turning to social network platforms as trustworthy sources of information with regards to potential purchases. The conversations that occur in these settings, even though not motivated by commercial interests, often make reference to product, brand or services (Wolny and Mueller, 2013). Thus, eWOM communication possesses a persuasive impact upon the perceptions and images about brands, which is rather difficult to control (Jansen et al., 2009). As such, the advent of social media makes the exchange of information between consumers increasingly easier and is predicted to further intensify customer-to-customer influence (Blazevic et al., 2013). On social networking sites, such as Facebook, eWOM could be even more influential. These platforms foster the creation of relationships among users and facilitate repeated interactions. Given the relationship between users that are exchanging product information in their conversations, the influence of eWOM is even greater (You et al., 2015). As previously mentioned, online consumer reviews are able to influence shifts in consumer product quality perceptions as well as reduce the uncertainty associated with a purchase (Koh et al., 2010).

Based on this premise, it is easy to assume that eWOM can have a major impact on product sales, as it reflects upon both product awareness (Liu, 2006; Vermuelen and Seegers, 2006) and product preferences (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Duan et al., 2005; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Dhar and Chang, 2009; Ye et al., 2011), as well as product diffusion (Berger and Schwartz, 2011). The literature notes that ‘e-WOM recommendations do influence consideration and choice’ (Gupta and Harris, 2010; 1041). In the same vein, research suggests that online recommendations are influential in determining consumer product choice (Senecal and Nantel, 2004). As such, ‘on-line consumer recommendations could shape readers’ attitudes toward a product, thereby facilitating/inhibiting their purchase intention and behaviour, and this could eventually affect the overall sales of the product’ (Cheung et al., 2009; 12). Among the major antecedents of purchase intention, scholars classify product attitude, which is the value of a product that consumers perceive (Lee and Lee, 2009). This research has shown that preference leads to behavioural intentions, such as willingness to buy (Overby and Lee, 2006). And, the more positive one’s attitude towards a product, the greater the likelihood that individual will act on it (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The following section will elaborate upon eWOM dimensions in order to illustrate its effects on the consumer attitude formation journey.

4.4 Information Characteristics of eWOM

4.4.1 eWOM Volume and Valence Dimensions

The dimensions of eWOM messages will be outlined in this section, as these elements are important traits that determine the effect of information on the attitude formation process. Research has generally measured eWOM along two dimensions: in terms of ‘volume’ that is, the amount of eWOM which is being shared (Park and Kim, 2008; Zhu and Zhang, 2009; Riegner, 2007; Duan et al., 2008); and ‘valence’ or the positive or negative evaluative character of the information shared (Liu, 2006; Moldovan et al., 2011; Gu et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2013). In this sense, the volume of eWOM is an

important factor that can signal the popularity of the product (Park and Kim, 2008; Zhu and Zhang, 2009). Furthermore, the larger the amount of eWOM, the larger is the amount of information available (Park and Kim, 2008). For new products, where the spread of eWOM exhibits a positive valence, it could drive product success; or a negatively valenced eWOM could drive product failure (Moldovan et al., 2011). Along these lines, Liu (2006) found that positively valenced eWOM increases one's level of perceived product quality.

With regards to the valence dimension, Chen et al. (2011) carried out a longitudinal study where they explored two different types of social interaction known as eWOM and observational learning. They identified that negative eWOM has a bigger impact on actual sales than positive eWOM. Similarly, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) reported that negative WOM had higher overall impact on determining sales. However, contrary to this finding, East et al. (2008) found that positive WOM will be more likely to have an impact on the brand purchase probability. As such, the relationship between the eWOM valence and product sales has not been yet fully understood. King et al. (2014) has also highlighted mixed findings, and Floyd et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis found that both volume and valence influence the sales' elasticity of products; however valence was more impactful. On the other hand, Liu (2006) and Duan et al. (2005) confirmed that volume, rather than valence, of eWOM has a more significant impact on product purchase because it signals products' popularity.

Research has reported that eWOM volume exhibits more explanatory power for the category of products that have an experiential trait (Liu, 2006). From the above it is possible to outline 'valence' and 'volume' as the two most prominent dimensions of eWOM explored in research so far. However, Chan and Ngai (2011) argue that research has so far come to different conclusions about the impact of these dimensions. Although both eWOM valence and volume have an impact on consumers' purchasing intention, their influence is not yet fully understood (Park et al., 2007). Furthermore, particular attention needs to address to the way in which these dimensions are represented in

eWOM information of a non-textual format on social media (Jimenez and Mendoza, 2013). Both of these dimensions are included in this study.

4.4.2 The Source of eWOM

Based on how consumers rely on various sources when searching for information, it is valuable to explore how they perceive eWOM information depending on the source that disseminates it. In other words, consumers must determine the value of the information the source is providing as well as the source's relative value (Weiss et al., 2008). The overwhelming amount of information available on the internet presents consumers with a choice of which sources to follow (Hu et al., 2004; Cheema and Papatla, 2010). Brown et al. (2007) argue that this attribute is rather difficult to establish in the online context because of a lack of cues. Therefore, consumers have to base their judgments on altered and limited cues that they can retrieve.

With the advent of new communication spaces in an online social format, interpersonal influence is no longer mediated by the necessary existence of strong social ties (Kiecker and Cowles, 2012), as it was with traditional WOM (King et al., 2014). Previously, social ties were categorised by the closeness of the relationship between sender and receiver, thus research usually differentiated between weak and strong types of ties; with people having a smaller number of strong ties and a larger set of weak ties. The extent of the latter type becomes more extensive with the large reach of online platforms (Blazevic et al., 2013). Godes and Mayzlin (2004) use the metaphor of 'bridges' to explore relationships between groups of individuals. Strong ties exist between group members while weak ties characterise relationships between groups. When information travels across weak ties, the chances of the information reaching more people will be enhanced.

From the contemporary information landscape, emerges the conclusion that the social tie variable does not weight obtained information, but rather weak ties are found more important influencers in guiding decision-making. Thus, there does not need to be a

strong relationship between sender and receiver in order for the receiver to perceive the information valuable for the judgment at hand. Furthermore, issues of source trust are not of paramount importance in a social media environment, as these platforms make visible a higher level of information about the user, and thus enable an individual to collect more signals of credibility compared to other platforms (Moran et al., 2014).

Chu and Kamal (2008) employed the Elaboration Likelihood Model framework in order to explore source information in the blog context. They concluded that, when the perceived trustworthiness of the source is high, consumers will be less likely to employ an elaborate route of information processing. Dellarocas et al. (2007) as well as Floyd et al. (2014) found that consumers tend to place more trust on experts compared to ordinary consumers when evaluating recommendations for hedonic product options. Racherla and Friske (2012) reinforce this finding, stating that eWOM information that comes from expert sources will be more persuasive for consumers compared to information disseminated by ordinary users.

Researchers have applied a variety of measures for source trust. Smith, Menon and Sivakumar (2005) have conceptualised the construct of recommender *trust* as comprised of two elements: source *expertise* and *rapport* with the recommender. By expertise, the authors mean the recommender's knowledge with regards to the product category, while rapport refers to the emotional bond and the level of identification between recommender and consumer. Nevertheless, Vermeulen and Seeger's (2008) results suggest *expertise* of the reviewer does not play a significant role on the impact of eWOM in changing the consumers' attitudes towards a product.

In a comprehensive overview investigating the role held by the source, Martin and Lueg (2013) list: source trustworthiness, source experience, source expertise and evidence. Among all these traits, perceived trustworthiness of the source is considered the most influential factor. This source characteristic is even more important in instances when the consumer perceives a low level of knowledge about the product (Martin and Lueg, 2013).

These above-mentioned studies did not take into account consumers' purchase goals, which lead consumers to look for eWOM information in the first place. Smith et al. (2005) argue that the consumption goal will have a moderating effect on a source's trustworthiness. Given that cognitive considerations generally drive utilitarian motivations when there are objective criteria for evaluation, the expertise of the source will be more important in judging the value of the information. On the other hand, when a goal is hedonic in nature, the criteria applied is generally affective, and thus presents a large heterogeneity in preferences. Here, the consumer will judge the value of information depending on similarity with the source. The findings of their research, suggested that consumers with utilitarian goals would be more influenced by a source's expertise, while consumers driven by hedonic motivations would be more prone to appreciate information coming from peer sources. Dhar and Chang (2009) confirm that information coming from peers is more influential in decision-making for hedonic products. Thus, the literature has not yet arrived at a clear consensus about the source of information that consumers will rely on for different consumption motivations. Here, the primary aim consists of identifying whether consumers will be more influenced by information coming from peers or by expert sources. This aspect is particularly relevant as consumers driven by hedonic or symbolic goals could evaluate information differently.

4.5 Consumer Traits and eWOM

4.5.1 Consumer Characteristics and eWOM Adoption

Even though previous research has placed more attention on the role of the sender of eWOM, there is a need for research that further investigates receiver characteristics (Martin and Lueg, 2013). In eWOM communication, the information encounter presents a substantial element of consumer-centred evaluation, which can nevertheless become problematic given the great availability of information sources found online. Here, eWOM does not have a uniform effect on every recipient, as its outcome varies depending upon person-specific factors (Sweeney et al., 2008) and as such, eWOM will

have more or less power depending on who is the recipient (King et al., 2014). The following sections will provide an overview of research that has tackled consumer traits that shape eWOM adoption.

4.5.2 Internet Usage Experience

Extant research has confirmed that the more useful one thinks online WOM is, the more likely one will be to use it (Park and Lee, 2009). Along these lines, one of the consumer factors that influences eWOM adoption is the consumer's internet usage experience. Depending on the level of internet use a consumer has, the modality in which eWOM information will be assessed will differ (Brown et al., 2007). Some authors put forward that, with increased internet experience, the influence of eWOM increases accordingly (Zhu and Zhang, 2009). Park and Lee (2009) confirm this finding, such that with increased internet use, consumers were more likely to perceive eWOM as useful. However, examining the importance of trust, Cheema and Papatla (2010) found that greater internet experience decreased one's trust in online information sources, such that more experienced internet consumers are less likely to take all eWOM information seriously. In a similar line of thinking, a further finding suggests that one's lack of internet experience may drive more naïve consumers to believe all the information they find online rather indiscriminately (Brown et al., 2007).

It appears that research has not yet reached a consensus on the role that internet experience affects how consumers perceive eWOM information (Arcand, 2017). It is thus important to further explore the role of this consumer trait because, with the ever-widening base of internet users worldwide (Alves et al., 2016), the pervasiveness of electronic WOM as an information source will continue to rise (Zhu and Zhang, 2009).

4.5.3 Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

Observing other consumers can often lead to mimicking behaviours, as the product choices of other consumers are perceived as better informed compared to one's own choices (Chen, Wang and Xie, 2011). Bailey (2005) identified one's personal susceptibility to interpersonal influence as a further factor that influences the way in which consumers rely on eWOM in their decision-making. Susceptibility means the propensity to be influenced by others opinions in their purchase decision-making (Park and Lee, 2009; Bearden, 1989). Individuals who score higher on this characteristic will be more likely to assign importance to eWOM in the development of a product attitude. In a similar fashion, Lee and Ma (2012) argue that one's susceptibility to interpersonal influence also has an effect, arguing that the typology of consumers scoring high on this dimension will perceive both higher benefits as well as higher costs in using eWOM information in their evaluations. Nevertheless, the higher a consumer's susceptibility to interpersonal influence, the more favourable their attitude will be towards eWOM information and consequently their adoption of it (Lee and Ma, 2012). Park and Lee (2009), and Chu and Kim (2011) have also confirmed these findings. They found that the higher one's level of consumer susceptibility, the higher one's evaluation of eWOM usefulness.

However, in investigating the effects of traditional WOM on immediate and delayed product judgment, Fitzgerald Bone (1995) found that consumer product knowledge (actual or perceived) as well as susceptibility to personal influence did not have a significant role in the relationship. They concluded that WOM has a strong effect on product judgment regardless of these personal variables. As such, the consumer trait of susceptibility to interpersonal influence needs further investigation, especially in the context of the current study. Given that the subject of the research is believed to have strong connotations of affective and social drivers intervening in the decision journey, the susceptibility trait needs to be examined in reference to the affective and cognitive elements within the product attitude formation process.

4.5.4 Product Class Expertise Factor

In the same token, consumer product expertise has been linked to the reception of eWOM information. Scholars have suggested that future research should explore the differences between consumer types, particularly in reference to the way in which the expertise variable influences eWOM behaviour (Moldovan et al., 2011). Consumers with a high level of expertise in a certain product category will be more likely to share their insights with others for self-enhancement reasons. The same holds true for another person-specific variable: product involvement. High levels of product involvement will result in an increased likelihood to engage in conversations about a product category in order to achieve self-enhancement (Blazevic et al., 2013).

In line with Alba and Hutchinson's (1987) argument with regards to one's varying mode of processing depending on the level of expertise, Chen et al. (2011) contend that novices that are not capable of assessing analytically the product attributes and will be more likely to rely on eWOM. In the same vein, Godes and Mayzlin (2004) posit that the effect of eWOM recommendations decreases over time because people become more aware of their preferences, and as such, collect expertise that helps them make choices without the need to rely on external advice. In support of this argument, Park and Kim (2008) argue that consumers process eWOM messages differently depending on their level of expertise, and thus different messages will have different effects on their purchase intention. They argue that consumers who lack expertise rely on WOM information, even in instances when they cannot fully understand its meaning (Park and Kim, 2008). By distinguishing between attribute-centric and benefit-centric types of review, expert consumers' purchasing intentions should be more influenced by attribute-centric reviews (i.e., technical attributes, objective data). On the other hand, benefit-centric reviews (i.e., subjective interpretations) will be more significant in influencing novice's purchase intention (Park and Kim, 2008). Following this line of thinking and building upon the Elaboration Likelihood Model taken from Petty et al. (1983), Park and Kim (2008) suggest that consumers with high expertise will employ a cognitive route of

processing and consider the quality of messages, while low expertise consumers will rely on peripheral cues such as the eWOM volume that signals product popularity.

In line with this argument, the study carried out by Doh and Hwang (2009), posits that both the level of involvement and the level of prior product knowledge, that is expertise, may act as factors on the effect induced by eWOM. In like manner, Cheung et al. (2009) report that the higher a receiver's knowledge or expertise, the less will the source be influential in determining the value of the eWOM provided.

In conclusion, Lee and Ma (2012) point out the extent to which consumers will adopt eWOM will differ dependent upon the product category, expertise and involvement of the consumer. It is thus important to explore how the expertise trait is relevant in the eWOM adoption process when taking into account the product category variable, such as the aesthetic product typology. Different outcomes could be identified and have not yet been addressed by consumer research. Specifically, the extent to which the expertise trait shapes the influence of affective or cognitive attitudinal aspects in the decision journey needs to be investigated (Schaller and Malhotra, 2015). Furthermore, the relationship between product expertise and involvement presents some important outcome commonalities, which have been pointed out also in the Chapter 3 and need to be addressed in further depth.

4.5.5 Product Class Involvement Factor

Taking into account that aesthetic products are traditionally capable of driving high levels of product involvement, previous research has proposed that consumers who are involved with a product accompany frequent usage of the product with additional activities related to it. Along these lines, Sarathy and Patro (2013) argued that high involvement individuals play an important role in the diffusion of that product class. Namely, they have the tendency to continuously look for information, possess distinctive product expertise, adopt product innovations and serve as opinion leaders (Venkatraman, 1988).

However, given internet diffusion and computer literacy, the pool of opinion leaders active on online platforms is rapidly increasing and becoming more influential (Sun et al., 2006). It is therefore important to understand involvement and its link to online information search (Gu et al., 2012).

Scholars agree that involvement influences the way consumers both search and seek for information (Gu et al., 2012). Richins et al. (1992) suggest that involvement induces both information acquisition and sharing among consumers. As Fortin and Dholakia (2000) later confirmed, information dissemination occurs when there is enduring product involvement. The higher the level of involvement of a consumer in a product class, the higher one's tendency towards external information seeking (Kinley et al., 2010). Compared to other consumers, involved consumers are interested in accumulating extensive knowledge (Sarathy and Patro, 2013). These individuals demonstrate a significantly higher use of both personal and impersonal information sources (Kinley, 2010) in order to acquire product knowledge that might help them in evaluating product alternatives. The same phenomenon occurs in the online context where online WOM is driven by involvement with the product class (Park et al., 2007).

Recent research by Martin and Lueg (2013) that deals with the impact of eWOM on decision-making, states that both involvement and self-perceived knowledge act as moderating factors for reliance on eWOM. Specifically, consumers rely on eWOM when involvement is low as well as when perceived self-knowledge is low. Here, an overarching trait identified in the previous chapters (refer to section 3.4.4) as product experience, which comprises both involvement and expertise, will be crucial in determining the influence of eWOM on the attitude journey. Further discussion about this conceptualisation will be provided in the following sections.

4.6 eWOM Outcomes

4.6.1 eWOM and the Consumer Attitude Formation Journey

Kostyra et al (2016) argue that customers interpret online reviews as quality signals; therefore, the availability of this type of information reduces the impact that product attributes have on the choice probability of customers. Based on these findings, this information helps consumers overcome uncertainty and reduces the importance of determinant factors, such as brand, price and product attributes in guiding choice. As Hu et al. (2004; 212) summarised, ‘...consumers respond through their purchase behaviour to information embedded in online reviews’. As such, the modality in which eWOM is received is crucial for understanding the role of this informational input in shaping the consumers’ decision journey, particularly attitude formation (Martin and Lueg, 2013).

With regards to the product category element, research has suggested that information is more highly regarded when the object is an experience product or corresponds with hedonic consumption goals. On the contrary, consumers looking for search products will often find enough information to make an evaluation based on commercial sources. Specifically, findings suggest that eWOM information will have more influence when dealing with experience goods, as this type of information helps reduce the uncertainty related to the purchase of this product typology (Park and Lee, 2009) as consumers look for external quality signals (Cox and Kaimann, 2015). Experience goods, compared to search goods, call for a richer information collection process due to their inherent uncertainty level (Hu et al., 2004). More specifically, consumers looking for information for a search product will find hard data, exhaustive to aid their product evaluation. On the other hand, experience products do not adhere to objective quality standards, and as such consumers collect soft data, which is often limited time-consuming to process (Bei et al., 2004). Such consumers will look for information from other consumers to determine the product’s intrinsic value, and reduce their uncertainty in order to help them in their decision journey (Hu et al., 2004). From this, research suggests that experiential products, with the availability of online information, could assume a connotation typical of search

goods (Bei et al., 2004). Thus, product type has an important influence on how the availability of eWOM drives outcomes.

Following this line of thinking, Brown et al. (2007; 4) argue that ‘WOM can convert lower order cognition and affect into higher order cognition and affect, subsequently leading to committed behaviours’. Consumers won’t respond affectively to eWOM emotionally expressive content, rather they will employ a cognitive route of processing to it. This means that regardless of the type of informational content, WOM will always be processed cognitively rather than affectively (Kim and Gupta, 2012). Simonson (2016) argued that the availability of eWOM information that aids decision-making will drive consumers to undertake product choices that have a largely rational attitudinal basis. Accordingly, ‘the abundant rational information may diminish the impact of more affective inputs’ (Simonson, 2016; 23).

Based on what has been outlined in the previous chapters, literature contends that, similar to experience goods, aesthetic products present a high level of uncertainty in product quality evaluation as a highly affective process. Following this line, eWOM information is expected to shift the process from affect to a more cognitive deliberation, whereby consumers are directed to product attributes in order to overcome the uncertainty associated with this type of product evaluation.

4.7 Conclusion

Although there have been a growing number of studies that explore the dynamics of online WOM phenomena in the last decade, the field still appears rather fragmented (Cheung and Thadani, 2012), lacking a clear consensus about its effects (Floyd et al., 2014). A large portion of consumers search for information using online WOM as a first step, consulting it prior to purchase because of its ubiquity and ease of access (Park and Lee, 2009). Namely, ‘what seems clear is that such information guides attitude and purchase intention formation’ (López and Maya, 2012; 715).

The impact of online eWOM information has been explored for a large range of products; however the way eWOM information influences consumer-decision making, and specifically attitude development, depending upon the product category, is still unexplored. eWOM literature lacks a definition of its influence in specific consumption contexts (Pentina et al., 2015), especially affect rich contexts (Kim and Gupta, 2012). As López and Maya (2012) argue, eWOM information can influence consumers' decision-making process in the opposite direction to the affect elicited in the consumers by the product itself.

Based on recent market data (see Chapter 1), which suggests that there is a growing availability of social platforms for finding and sharing art information that consumers consult on a regular basis, the influence of eWOM for this affect-rich product category calls for further investigation. In a traditional choice context, with no additional available information, previous research assumes consumers' affective responses will shape aesthetic product attitudes and choices. However, as products like aesthetic goods exhibit high-preference heterogeneity, they will evoke higher levels of preference uncertainty (Broniarczyk and Griffin, 2014), which consequently leads consumers to search more extensively for information via eWOM. To be more specific, the influence of social media eWOM is inherently trustworthy and able to signal to other customer the perceived quality of the product (Broniarczyk and Griffin, 2014), and thus may mitigate uncertainty associated with these product choices.

Given the ubiquity of the online WOM, how individuals make choices cannot be definitively determined, and thus one's product attitude may be determined by both the product itself and eWOM information. Research suggests that the exchange of information may lead customers to acknowledge others' rational recommendations and consider others' consumption choices (Simonson, 2016 Blazevic et al., 2013; Berger and Schwartz, 2011). This may result in a shift in affect-driven attitude formation for this product category. As such, certain characteristics of eWOM, including volume, valence and the source of information may present differing effects on the attitude formation

process. Furthermore, person-specific traits, such as the product class involvement, expertise, internet experience and susceptibility to interpersonal influence, may shape the process of eWOM adoption. These elements need to be further explored in relation to the influence of eWOM on this process in affect-rich contexts. The following chapter provides an outline of the philosophical stance that directed this study and the research method applied in the exploratory stage.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

5.0 Introduction

Following the review of extant literature, this chapter will present a discussion and rationale for the study's methodological approach. It will begin by explaining the philosophical stance of this research in comparison to various philosophical streams available. It will then provide a comprehensive discussion and rationale for the choice of methods, the sample and the data collection process that were employed to fulfil the aims of this study's exploratory phase. The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1) Identify variables that influence consumers' decision-making process in the development of aesthetic product attitudes in an online social context.
- 2) Explore the role of purchase goals in determining the attitude formation process in an online social context.
- 3) Determine the role that eWOM information availability plays on the attitude formation process for an aesthetic product.
- 4) Determine the interplay between affective and cognitive elements on the attitude development process.
- 5) Develop a comprehensive consumer attitude formation model for aesthetic products that accounts for variables that influence the process and the impact of eWOM information.

5.1 Research Philosophy

The question of how research should be carried out goes beyond the research methodology to include a definition of the research paradigm, design and data analysis techniques (Saunders et al., 2009). It is important to provide an exhaustive discussion that touches upon each of these elements within the research process of the current study.

Management research includes specific theoretical underpinnings that serve to inform the way in which research is conducted. As such, different approaches to theory development are needed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research process in the context of the present study (Crowther and Lancaster, 2008). The understanding of research philosophy is thus crucial for a well-devised research project. Namely, ‘all philosophical positions and their attendant methodologies, explicitly or implicitly, hold a view about social reality. This view, in turn, will determine what can be regarded as legitimate knowledge’ (Walliman, 2011; 15). As Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) have suggested, the philosophical stance that is adopted can influence the study’s findings by shaping the researchers’ understanding about the nature of knowledge. Thus, the philosophical position that has been adopted was useful as 1) it guided the choice of the design and methods adopted in both the qualitative and the quantitative stage, 2) helped the researcher discern between the most appropriate research designs 3) and offered the possibility to explore alternative designs and approaches that had not been considered initially (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). The research results presented here will make evident the philosophical underpinnings the research builds upon (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Feilzer, 2009), as no research choice is undertaken in a philosophical vacuum (Cameron, 2011).

As literature suggests, one’s philosophical stance depends on his or her disciplinary position, the stance of the researcher and previous experience. For this study, the researcher considered philosophical stances used in previous consumer decision-making research, their own knowledge background and personal research preferences. One of the most crucial decisions is the paradigm in which the research will be situated (Maxwell, 2008). In order to justify one’s perspective it is necessary to trace out the spectrum of philosophical assumptions that characterise research within the marketing field (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Cameron, 2011; Morgan, 2007). However, the analysis is not straightforward as it may appear because the notion of ‘paradigm’ has often assumed a variety of interpretations. Research in the broader social sciences finds Kuhn (1962) put forward the principal philosophical argument (Eckberg and Hill, 1979).

However, given that Kuhn (1962) did not provide a clear-cut definition of the term, but rather left significant room for interpretation, social scientists have applied the notion of ‘paradigm’ in a rather multifocal manner (Masterman, 1970; Arndt, 1985).

Regardless of these interpretations, every research paradigm adopts a specific ontology as a foundation. And the combination of ontology with a specific epistemology and methodology is what constitutes a paradigm (Creswell, 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Hallebone and Priest, 2008). The following section will provide a definition of ontology and epistemology in order to situate the present study in a philosophical framework.

5.2 The Philosophical Assumptions

5.2.1 Ontology

Ontology addresses ‘the theory of social entities and is concerned with what there exists to be investigated’ (Walliman, 2011; 15). As previously mentioned, ontology forms the basis of the philosophical assumptions that follow and include epistemology and methodology. Social scientists make, explicitly or otherwise, assumptions about the nature of the reality they are investigating (Tsoukas and Chia, 2011). As Bryman (2004) argues, the fundamental question that ontological debates address is concerned with objectivist and subjectivist positions along a continuum. On one end, the objectivist stance contends that the reality is external to the individual and has an objective nature that is independent of individuals’ perceptions. On the other end, the subjectivist stance contends that reality is socially constructed, and thus is interpreted by the individual that perceives it. Both the epistemological and methodological positions are dependent on an individual’s stance.

In this instance:

- Objectivism: Assumes that social reality and its phenomena exist independent of the individuals’ perception and thus neutral observation is possible. Reality is concrete, independent and measurable.

- Subjectivism: Assumes that social reality is constructed and thus in constant flux given that its interpretation depends on the perception of the individual. Thus, neutral observation is not possible as reality is constructed, imagined and solipsistic (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Lee and Cassell, 2011)

5.2.2 Epistemology

As previously mentioned, the ontological stance of the research will frame the epistemological assumptions of the study (May and Williams, 2002). Researchers make assumptions about how knowledge claims are justified and what is entailed in knowing, which reflects their epistemological stances (Pansiri, 2005). Epistemology ‘is concerned with how we know things and what we can regard as acceptable knowledge in a discipline’ (Walliman, 2011; 15).

Burrell and Morgan (1979; 1) define this concept as ‘the grounds of knowledge about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings’. Epistemology concerns the relationship between the researcher and the validity of knowledge that can be gathered from reality (Bryman, 2004).

Researchers make ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and epistemological assumptions about how certain they are of the reality they investigate (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Creswell (2003) defined paradigms as worldviews that shape one’s approach to research. Accordingly, a paradigm comprehends ‘a basic set of beliefs that guide action’ (Guba, 1990; 17). As previously mentioned, Kuhn (1962) first proposed the term paradigm, which included a series of assumptions about the ontology (nature of the world) and the epistemology (the way in which we can understand it) that the researcher adopts (Maxwell, 2008). The following sections will provide an overview of common paradigms in order to situate the philosophical rationale for the current study.

5.3 Research Paradigms

Because the marketing academic community still believes in producing objective knowledge with the aim of generalizability (Hanson and Grimmer, 2007; Harrison and Reilly, 2011), both quantitative and qualitative studies are often approached through the lens of the positivist paradigm (Thompson et al., 1989). In the domain of consumer behaviour, a positivist approach from psychology has been widely predominant (Simonson et al., 2001). Nevertheless, in contrast to the dominant paradigm, more recent scholars have embraced also non-positivist stances enveloped by the interpretive and postmodern perspectives. These opposing, non-positivist perspectives highlight the social complexity in which consumers carry out consumption choices and expose the emphasis placed on the rational view of consumption that is championed in the positivist school of thinking (Fleetwood and Akroyd, 2004). Among the body of work produced by this school of scholars, the Consumer Culture Theory has been tackling issues surrounding consumption and behaviour from a social point of view. It is tightly related to the symbolic aspects of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) discussed in the present research. Rather than embracing a polarising and insularised understanding of philosophical paradigms guided by tropic axioms, the present researcher considers permeable boundaries between philosophical stances as a more suitable view of the philosophical continuum (Deshpande, 1983). Rather than enclosing oneself within a pre-packed 'paradigm mentality' (Zhu, 2011; 784), the researcher believes that the philosophical perspective needs to be negotiated and used in a contextualised and referential manner in relation to the research objectives. As such, the discussion that follows will justify the philosophical stance adopted in this research and situate it in respect to the paradigms adopted in previous research.

5.3.1 Positivist Paradigm

The positivist approach to inquiry is rooted in realism and strives to obtain knowledge from one real world (Thompson et al., 1989). It was first coined and introduced by Comte

(1974) who applied the scientific method to human affairs. This stream of thought argues that knowledge can only be derived from experimentation and observation of a phenomenon in order to forge laws with the ultimate aim of generalizability (Cohen et al., 2000). The positivist notion of science is cumulative, such that new knowledge is built upon knowledge that is already known. Research carried out under a positivist lens aims to identify relationships between variables by relying on quantitative approaches to data collection. As such, it contends that science quantitatively measures phenomena that are part of a single truth (Cohen et al., 2000).

The positivist stance contends that only one science exists, and less measurable sciences can be reduced to those that are more measurable (Walliman, 2011). We can see a prevailing influence of positivist thinking in marketing, which has been adopted from economics (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000) due to historical, social and practical reasons (Cameron, 2011). Hudson and Ozanne (1988) argue that a hard positivist ontology prioritises the existence of an objective reality, which uses scientific methods to measure and test propositions (Powell, 2002; Harrison and Reilly, 2011). This approach, which wants to examine causes that influence outcomes (Creswell, 2003), is applied in the physical sciences but it also dominates the social sciences (Simonson et al., 2001). But many marketing scholars oppose the positivist perspective, noting it fails to fully recognise the complexity of social phenomena (Fleetwood and Akroyd, 2004). Consequently, marketing researchers adopted non-positivist stances, such as interpretivism, as a means to find alternatives that are more consonant with their paradigmatic definitions.

5.3.2 Interpretivist Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm has its roots in the humanist and idealist doctrines, and argues that social reality is a product of the mind (Walliman, 2011). Thus, the interpretivist school of thought contends that there is no single reality; access to this one is not direct as it is embedded in the context in which is being researched. As such, social reality is not

external, but rather is dependent upon the active experience of the researcher (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Interpretivism thus places emphasis on reality that is not invariant but is subjective and individual. Here, the researcher cannot assume the role of a neutral observer, as reality is dependent upon his preconceptions and beliefs about it (Crotty, 1998). The subjective meanings that derive from this approach are negotiated in a socio-historical context and often formed through interaction. Belk (2007: 158) argues, ‘the interpretivist concern is to understand a situation from the perspective of participants within that situation, and to explore the meanings through which they construct their reality’.

Individuals develop varied and multiple subjective meanings about their experiences. Thus, the primary aim of this research is to gather the complexity of experiences rather than reducing meanings into a few overarching ideas. The interpretive research outcomes consist of ‘identifying the motives, dynamic uses of shared meanings, individual meanings, and interactions between shared meanings and individual meanings’ (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; 511). In order to obtain this understanding, the researcher needs to fully take into account the viewpoint of research participants (Crotty, 1998). Accordingly, the relationship between researcher and informant is dialectic, as it is based on interaction and cooperation highlighting the importance of reflexivity (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Contrary to the positivist school of thought, interpretivist researchers hold an inductive approach to research, as theories are drawn from the data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

Table 5.1 Overview of the key differences between the positivist and the interpretivist schools of thinking.

Dimension of Comparison	Positivism	Interpretivism
The role of science	Identifying general laws of human conduct	Exploring how people construct the reality they experience
Unit of research	The collective	The individual
Purpose of Data	Hypothesis testing and	Inductively generate in-

	deduction	depth data
Research	Theory validation through experimental or quasi experimental approaches	Discovery of meaningful relationships
Methods	Quantitative, large samples, structured	Qualitative, in-depth, small samples
The Researcher	Independent from reality	Constructs reality
Generalization	Statistical	Theoretical Abstraction

Sources: Saunders (2011); Walliman (2011) and Creswell (2003)

As seen in the table above, there are marked differences between the two paradigmatic approaches. Given the principles of the positivist stance, the present researcher did not deem it as the most appropriate approach because it fails to capture the subtle, affective nuances that a consumer encounters. However, the interpretivist stance would not be able to provide the researcher with a comprehensive view of the investigated phenomena, as general laws that account for the changes in consumer perceptions — especially by the of eWOM information — could not be derived. Therefore, a different paradigmatic approach is proposed because it better fits the aim of capturing the hedonic aspects of consumption characterised by both person-specific and informational differences about observed and practical outcomes. Accordingly, the following section will discuss the third paradigm considered: pragmatism.

5.3.3 Pragmatism

Pragmatism is ‘a commitment to uncertainty’, which acknowledges the transitory and dynamic nature of truth where the knowledge produced by inquiry is inevitably context and time bound (Feilzer, 2009; 60). Rather than attempting to determine unchanging causal linkages or claims of truth, pragmatism seeks to investigate a certain phenomenon using methods that are most suitable to achieve it (Morgan, 1998). The aim is not to

identify causes that precede ideas, but understanding their outcomes to obtain practical solutions to problems (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011). In line with this, the pragmatic stance believes researchers should question the utility of research instead of purely trying to mirror reality (Feilzer, 2009).

The complexity of the human and social world, where facts do not correspond to theories (Powell, 2002), is reflected in the belief that truth is not certain or final, but rather it is elusive and instrumental (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010; Pansiri, 2005). That is, ‘the truth of a statement consists in its practical consequences, particularly the statement’s agreement with subsequent experience’ (Datta, 1997; 34). In line with this, there is no dualism present between mind and reality (Feilzer, 2009), and research is always embedded in social, historical and other contexts (Datta, 1997; Creswell, 2003).

By overcoming the notion of strong positivist incommensurability (Johnson et al., 2007), both qualitative and quantitative methods can be applied in this research paradigm (Hanson and Grimmer, 2007). Shared meanings and joint actions enable meaningful communication between different research streams and defined boundaries (Morgan, 2007) by informing the research question and drawing parallels from fields such as consumer research, consumer psychology and internet research. Creswell et al. (2003; 186) posits, ‘the pragmatic approach should be concerned with applications, with what works, and with solutions to problems’. Positivists’ and constructivists’ dualist approaches (Feilzer, 2009) are questioned by taking into account multiple perspectives and converging both qualitative and quantitative methods (Johnson et al., 2007). Rather than being concerned with clustered paradigmatic assumptions (Harrison and Reilly, 2011), the present researcher believes that the research problem is the focus of attention and requires a plurality of methods to gain knowledge (Creswell, 2003). By acknowledging a proposition as uncertain, but best among other rival theories, the process and outcomes of inquiry are tentative and self-critical, and thus need to be reevaluated on the understanding of the knowledge that will follow (Ormerod, 2005).

5.3.4 Choice of Paradigm

As previously outlined, given the aims of this research, an exclusively positivist approach to inquiry is not considered sufficiently receptive (Feilzer, 2009), and would not allow assimilating the complexity of unobservable concepts within the field of the present inquiry (Powell, 2002). On the other hand, a purely interpretivist approach would not allow the researcher to test hypotheses in order to generalize the obtained findings and thus achieve possibility for practical implementation. This research thus requires an approach that will enable the researcher to explore the complexity of phenomena by combining different perspectives (Cameron, 2011). Given this, the incorporation of both inductive and deductive reasoning in the process of inquiry would provide a holistic view of the problem at hand, in comparison to a single research approach (Harrison and Reilly, 2011).

In this study, the researcher endorses a view of reality reflecting an ‘experiential world with different elements or layers, some objective, some subjective, and some a mixture of the two’ (Feilzer, 2009; 8). In contrast to consumer research and psychology research that assumes a positivist stance, or on the other hand interpretivist research that approached consumption from a broader and more inclusive perspective, a pragmatic approach would better fit to provide a more comprehensive view of the way in which eWOM information alters the decision-making process of consumers for the affect-rich category of aesthetic products.

Nevertheless, one potential issue in adopting this philosophical stance is the difficulty in obtaining a synthesis of the different ways of conceiving reality and means of knowing are embraced. The major challenge is in understanding the laws that underlie consumer decision-making in comparison to the conception of the consumer as individual equipped with agency whose experience does not conform to generally definable parameters (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989). Particularly, understanding consumers’ attitude formation process as context independent and objective phenomenon, while also assuming it is

individually enacted and context dependent. The present researcher does not perceive these polarised views about the nature of reality as advantageous. However, the researcher considers reality to be transitory and dynamic, as it is time and context bound (Feilzer, 2009). The topic of the present study addresses the shift in decision-making that has occurred due to technological changes, which have made new information available and changed the modalities of perception and behaviour. The fact that reality is concrete, but at the same time depends on the context in which it is explored, cannot be discounted.

Inadequate justifications (Bryman, 2006; Bryman, 2007; Denscombe, 2008) and understanding of the philosophical issues (Morgan, 1998) behind mixed methodologies is widespread. Research implicitly adopts ontological assumptions and takes for granted ways of conceiving understanding that require attention (Tsoukas and Chia, 2011). Regarding this matter, Powell (2002) suggests that traditional philosophies are not able to grasp the epistemological complexity of certain research domains, and philosophy has to be approached proactively. As such, in order to avoid a closure of meaning in thought, which often occurs in institutionalised activities, philosophical inquiry has to be championed as it entails reflective activity.

By leveraging on the pragmatic fusion of approaches (Denscombe, 2008) and combining knowledge through various methods, it will be possible to approach the gathered data from multiple viewpoints to inform, question and enhance the findings. By combining two different methods in the research process, it will be possible to explore different aspects of the studied phenomena and grasp a fuller understanding. The following sections will outline and discuss the particular methods used in the present study.

5.4 The Choice of Methods

The choice of methods is grounded in the proposition of researchers capitalising on the inborn human capability of being everyday problem solvers when approaching inquiry (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Based on this premise, the paradigm issues argued by positivists (Morgan, 2007), become irrelevant (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Namely,

instead of relying on inherently set paradigmatic rules (Morgan, 2007), depending on personal views and background, the researcher employed a reflexive outlook on deciding the research questions to be explored and consequently the research methods to be adopted. In the case of this specific study, most of the previous marketing literature dealing with the aesthetic product category and the consumer journey being shaped by social informational elements either adopted a quantitative, or on the other hand an exclusively qualitative approach to inquiry. Namely, very few studies within the topic of decision-making within social media used mixed methodologies (Alves et al., 2016). Therefore, there was a need to further explore and thereafter test and measure the relationship between aesthetics and the consumer journey in order to obtain an exhaustive understanding of the elements and informational inputs shaping this process (Morgan, 1998). On this account, a combination of methods was used in order to take advantage of the different strengths that the two methods have to offer (Johnson et al., 2007; Creswell et al., 2003). With this approach, the inquiry was iterative and characterised by inductive (exploration of themes), deductive (testing of hypotheses) and abductive ways of reasoning (Harrison and Reilly, 2011; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell et al., 2003). The abductive reasoning allowed the inductive inputs of the first phase of the study to provide insight for the deductive phase that followed (Morgan, 2007).

The researcher believed that the topic of the current study first calls for an exploration of insights about participants' attitudes and understanding of behaviours (Hanson and Grimmer, 2007; Creswell et al., 2003). This is particularly relevant when investigating hedonic experiences, as they entail a high array of intangible aspects. Commonly used self-reporting measures based on managerial frameworks are not entirely appropriate based on the assumption that individuals have introspective access to their attitudes (Harrison, 2009). Thus, the question of meaning, language and their negotiation was crucial for investigating the problem at hand (Morgan, 2007).

Subsequently, a quantitative research built upon the qualitative data that identified the domain definitions and items (Bryman, 2007; Creswell et al., 2003). Specifically, a

qualitative perspective was applied in order to narrow down the important variables and items. A quantitative approach followed with a larger sample to generalize the findings to a larger population (Creswell, 2013; Bryman, 2007; Creswell et. al, 2003). The specific strategies of inquiry were in-depth interviews and an experiment.

5.5 Methodology and Structure

In order to develop systematic research, which produces insightful knowledge output, it is crucial to devise a clear and precise research process. As such, the figure that follows presents a graphical representation that depicts the steps undertaken in the current study.

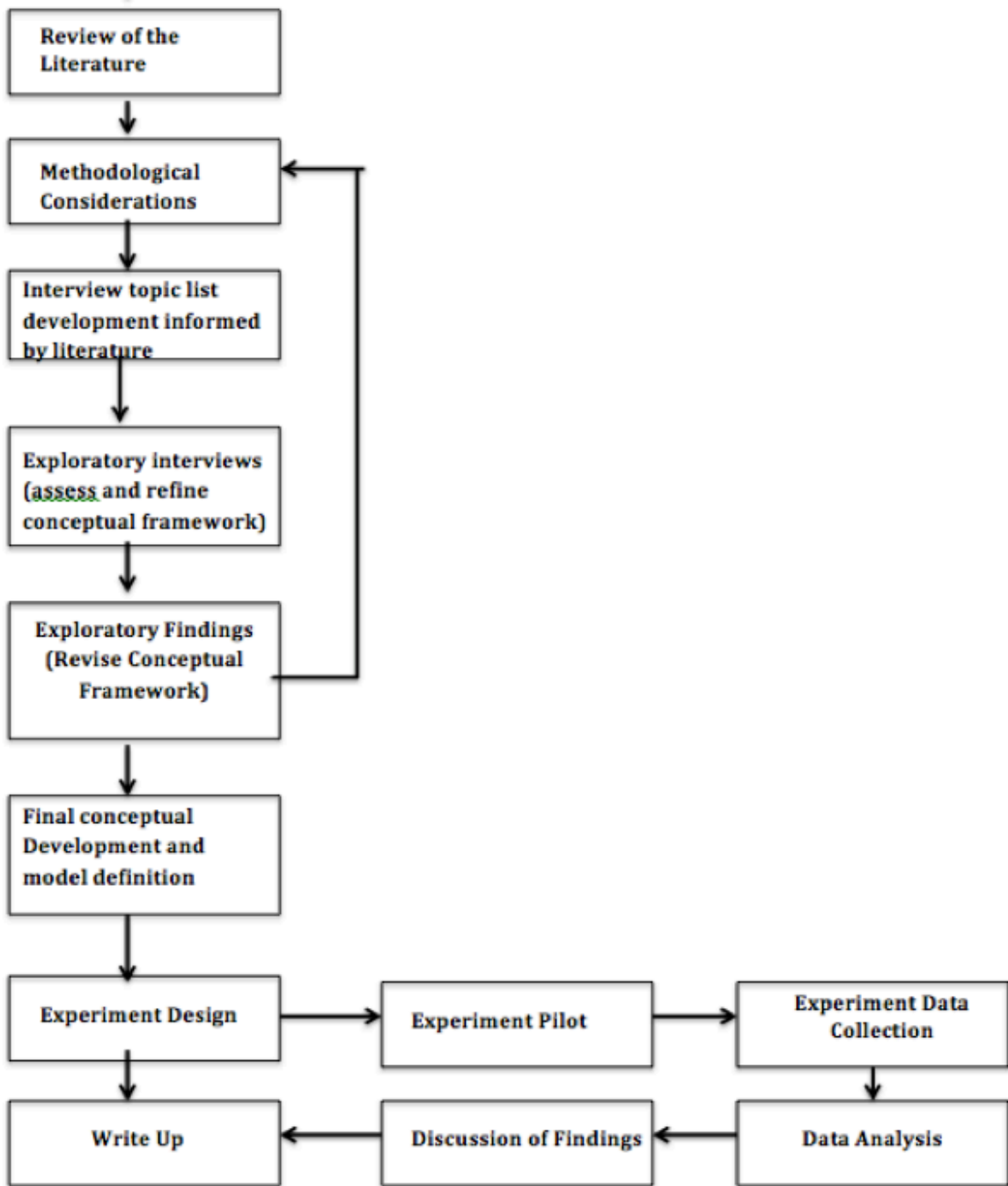


Figure 5.1 The adopted research process

5.6 The Choice of Methods

5.6.1 Research Methodologies

By 'method' we refer to the tools, techniques and various aspects of the research process employed when generating findings in a study (Bryman, 2008). Hence, May (2011; 1) argues, 'research methods are core to scientific activity'. Once an extensive literature review has been undertaken, the gap this research aimed to fulfil was more clearly defined and its scope narrowed down (Baker, 2001). Following this stage, it was possible to choose the most suitable research strategy and appropriate methodology for obtaining the data necessary to answer the research problem (Creswell, 2013). The research method that was preferred over other possible methods of data collection therefore depended on the aims of the study, the personal traits of the researcher and the audience to whom the research is meant to be addressed (Creswell, 2013).

In this respect, the first selection that was performed consisted of deciding whether the research will be designed relying on a single (qualitative or quantitative) or on a multiple method approach to inquiry (Morgan, 1998; Creswell, 2013). In this instance, the latter can be differentiated in multi method research, which uses multiple types of quantitative or qualitative approaches, in contrast to mixed methods research, which integrates the two different approaches (Harrison and Reilly, 2011; Johnson et al., 2007). In recent years, the adoption of mixed-method designs has received increasing approval from scholars in the social sciences as it allows taking advantage of both the qualitative and quantitative collection approaches for different but coordinated purposes in a single study (Morgan, 1998; Harrison and Reilly, 2011; Creswell et al., 2003). In this way there is a possibility to investigate the research problem holistically under complementing perspectives (Morgan, 2007). Based on the above and given the nature of the research problem here presented, there was a need to explore various aspects of the phenomena drawing from a range of fields. In this instance, Cameron (2011) contends that a mixed method approach is particularly applicable.

5.6.2 Methodological Selection

Mixed methodology research in marketing is rather scarce (Harrison and Reilly, 2011) and lacks integration of methods (Bryman, 2006). Thus, this specific study will rely on the capability of the two methods to inform and complement each other. Quantitative methods will be employed for measuring certain facets of the phenomena while qualitative methods will aim to explore others. Mixed method research can be employed in a variety of ways, and the first choices to be made consist in identifying:

1. Priority: which of the two methods will be given priority
2. Sequence: order in which the two different approaches are to be employed

(Morgan, 1998; Johnson et al., 2007; Harrison and Reilly, 2011).

Regarding the first point, this study will place more emphasis on the quantitative method for data collection, complemented by a qualitative method to improve the effectiveness of it. Because this study aims to explore the decision-making process that consumers employ, it is necessary to tap into the steps of the process and investigate the relationship between these and eWOM. Secondly, this research will apply an exploratory design Harrison and Reilly (2011). This entails the use of a qualitative method followed by quantitative data collection (Bryman, 2008; Creswell et. al, 2003). This methodological choice was adopted because it allows exploring and generating themes related to consumers' aesthetic product consumption and the influence of eWOM on the related attitude formation process. Thereafter, it allows questioning consumers on several dimensions of their journey and identifying the influence of eWOM on specific steps within the process through an online experiment.

One critique of mixed-methods research is that it is inherently biased due to its desire to achieve certainty of the findings (Freshwater, 2007). The challenge that is faced when adopting this method is a greater number of resources and skills compared to single-method studies (Cameron, 2011). The results of a mixed method approach are often unpredictable, which require new insights and unanticipated connections to be reached

between the two sets of data collected (Bryman, 2006). Thus, the strength of this method resides in how the two components of the study complement one another by being intrinsically related rather than independent (Cameron, 2011; Bryman, 2007). As such, it will be important to carefully plan the timelines and stages of both the components as to avoid them to drift apart in the analysis phase (Bryman, 2007). Although the benefits and robustness of this approach have been acknowledged, the use of a mixed method approach is rather limited in the marketing field (Harrison and Reilly, 2011; Cameron, 2011; Bryman, 2006; Bryman, 2008; Hanson and Grimmer, 2007). Hence, there is an opportunity for this study to make a meaningful methodological contribution as well.

5.7 Defining Exploratory Interviews

5.7.1 Overview of Exploratory Interviews

Compared to quantitative methodologies that, in some instances, entail armchair speculations and hypothesised explanations in order to interpret a phenomenon, qualitative methods permit the researcher to gain insight directly from the point of view of the participants (Morgan, 1998). Accordingly, the choice to employ qualitative methods is appropriate when the aim is to gain insight about actors' attitudes and behaviours (Saunders, 2011).

Among the most commonly used methods of qualitative data collection, we find interviews, focus groups and observation (Wilson, 2012). There are different types of interviews, which can be undertaken and include semi-structured or unstructured formats. On this ground, in the qualitative stage of this study, the collection of primary data will be undertaken by means of in-depth interviewing consumers with regards to aesthetic products. They will be asked about various aspects of their product evaluation journey, as well as their use of eWOM information. An in-depth interview can be defined as a non-structured personal interview, which by using extensive probing and open-ended questions allows the respondent to talk freely about a certain topic (Stokes and Bergin,

2006). Furthermore, Creswell (2013) argues that this research approach is even more appropriate when there is an exploratory issue to be investigated, which calls for a detailed understanding of the participants' perspectives, as in the case of this study.

Aside from familiarisation with concepts, the exploratory interview stage will also offer the opportunity to contextualise some eventual survey questions through personal experience episodes that have emerged in the discussion. Non-structured interviews are probably the most widely used format as these give some more flexibility to the researcher (Bloor et al., 2001). Specifically, by adopting this interview format, the researcher will be able to adapt both the topic of the questions as well as their order during the interview in order to better address the requirements of the situation and obtain a richer understanding (Creswell, 2013).

Nevertheless, the interviewer needs to develop a topic agenda, which will be used as a guide during the interview process (Litoselliti, 2003). Probing techniques will also enable the researcher to gather more complete information when some clarification is needed or the conversation needs to be adjusted to areas that were not first identified as important (Wilson, 2012).

The topics included in the interview agenda were based on key concepts identified in the literature and aligned with the objectives of the research (Creswell, 2013). Following this argument, McCracken (1988) suggests that a qualitative approach does not call for a generalizability of the results, but instead its main purpose is to let information emerge from participants (Creswell et al., 2003). Even though it enables the researcher to collect very rich data, it is reduced to a very limited sample of the population and thus will not be suitable for statistical analysis (Hannabuss, 1996).

5.7.2 Exploratory Interview Data Collection

Creswell (2013), Wilson (2012) and Malhotra (2010) all specify that the topic guide

should contain broader themes with accompanying follow up topics and probing questions. Here, the interview topics were developed from literature and are in line with the objectives of the research. As different stakeholders took part in the interview series — such as retail galleries, consumers, artists and fair managers — the broad themes were applied across groups of respondents, while specific questions were adapted at the stakeholder level. In line with Krueger's (1998) recommendations, the developed questions were conversational and open-ended, but at the same time limited to a single dimension in order to avoid misinterpretation. A funnel-approach was adopted, meaning general questions were asked before specific questions (Krueger, 1998).

The topic agenda addressed themes related to the perception individuals have about art as a product, the way in which they evaluate these product options, the channels they use to obtain information and the role of eWOM in this process. The topic agenda for the interviewed stakeholders is set out in Appendix 1.

The researcher recorded the interviews and transcribed the audio file into a document in order to allow easier data analysis. Also, the researcher kept written track of emergent themes and important findings during the entire interview process.

5.7.3 Exploratory Interview Sampling Considerations

Sampling methods can be categorised into probability and non-probability samples (Wilson, 2012). Contrary to quantitative research approaches, sampling in qualitative methodologies very rarely uses a probability sampling procedure. Specifically, the approach to sampling within a qualitative study needs to 'reflect diversity and to provide as much potential for comparison as possible' (Barbour, 2008; 53). By way of explanation, non-probability sampling refers to the 'use of subjective procedure of selection resulting in the probability of selection for each member of the population of interest being unknown' (Wilson, 2012; 187). The most common way to recruit participants for qualitative research is by identifying the most suitable respondents able to

provide the information that is sought in view of the research aims (Crowther and Lancaster, 2008). Among the non-probability sampling options are: convenience, purposive, snowball and quota (Walliman, 2011).

Given the aims of this research, a purposive sampling approach was deemed to be the most appropriate strategy. Purposive sampling selects participants based on specific characteristics that are important for the phenomena under investigation (Malhotra, 2010). That is, purposive sampling 'is where the researcher selects what he thinks is a 'typical' sample based on specialist knowledge or selection criteria' (Walliman, 2011; 79).

In this instance, the sample of interviewees was purposefully identified from three stakeholder groups. Multiple stakeholder groups (Carey, 1995) were included in the sample in order to obtain additional perspectives and richer data. As Seale (2004) argues, the inclusion of different stakeholder categories is a fruitful approach not in order to make correlations between groups but rather not to leave any valuable perspective out of the picture. Namely, the subject of investigation in the current study entails some components related to the social identity of consumers, which can often be misleadingly presented on behalf of the core respondents as these are not willing to recognise or articulate self-representative behaviours (Larsen et al., 2009). As such, including different stakeholder groups ensures social desirability is, to a certain extent, avoided (Schouten, 1991).

A multi-stakeholder approach was also adopted considering that different stakeholder components jointly contribute in creating and consuming the digital patina generated through the diverse social information exchanges on online platforms (Belk, 2014). This approach was most suitable given the blurred lines between production and consumption in this field (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2003) as the informants regularly engage in both production and consumption of art, as well as of the art informational content. Therefore, the researcher sought to gather data encompassing 'ideas, emotions and understanding of

all who take part in an activity in such a way that a common or shared outlook emerges' (Biesta, 2010; 716).

The first group of stakeholders included 10 individuals who defined themselves as consumers of fine art and have acquired at least three paintings during a period of 12 months. In order to recruit this group of participants, the researcher attended several exhibition openings in Glasgow and made contact with potential respondents who were afterwards invited for an interview via email. In addition, another group of respondents consisted of 12 retail galleries with an established online presence via a website and social media pages, specifically a Facebook page. The galleries were identified through a thorough search of the Facebook business pages managed by galleries operating on Scottish ground and these were contacted via email. A third group of respondents consisted of three artists, who have developed a social media presence and regularly engage in content posting. The researcher made contact with this group of informants through personal contact and engagement at various exhibition openings. Furthermore, two intermediary companies working in digital art commerce and the manager of a large art fair were contacted and interviewed in order to get better insight about the market side, and thus be able to adapt questions directed to the other stakeholder groups. A detailed overview of the respondents is presented in Appendix 2.

As previously mentioned sample sizes for qualitative research are rather small as the aim is saturation, not generalizability, of findings (Malhotra, 2010). Accordingly, the researcher stopped data collection when no new information or themes emerged from the interviews. As literature recommends 'stop when you have reached theoretical saturation, namely till when no new data is emerging' (Krueger and Casey, 2000; Asbury, 1995; Carey, 1995). A total of 28 interviews were conducted and coded as C1, C2...;G1,G2 etc.

These informants helped in corroborating, challenging and providing alternative perspectives on the accounts of the key informants and thus provided a triangulation of viewpoints to sustain a deeper understanding of the phenomena (Schouten, 1991).

Participants received an email invitation, including a brief description of the research, and were assured about data handling procedures. Respondents who did not reply to the e-mail invitation received a telephone call asking if they were willing to take part in the research.

5.7.4 Role of the researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher does not adopt a mere and detached observation of participants but rather takes an active role (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). As such, the researcher aimed to gather exhaustive and rich data by assuming an active role in the data collection process. The researcher was actively involved in the conversation with participants and guided the flow of the conversation. But in order to ensure the integrity of the findings, the researcher aimed to avoid any kind of leading questions. Also, the researcher let the interviewee lead the conversation while steering it back to the initial topic if the agenda was diverted. In qualitative research, the interviewer needs to participate in the conversation with the respondents and thus guide the interview process in the right direction in order to obtain useful information (Morrison, 1998). Furthermore, the interviewer needs to put the respondent at ease and establish rapport by building a sense of trust (Crowther and Lancaster, 2008). As such, the interviewer abided to the above-mentioned recommendations of best practice and ensured that comprehensive and meaningful data were collected.

5.7.5 Exploratory Interview Analysis

During the interview collection process, the researcher kept written notes about the emerging data and completed a written transcription of the collected interview material. Transcripts of the interviews served as basis for the analysis of the data (Malhotra, 2010).

Following this step, the researcher coded the data, which were assigned to relevant thematic categories in order to allow easier analysis and interpretation. These thematic categories were identified based on a combination of a prior theoretical understandings and inductive perspectives. Some themes were identified from the review of the literature, while some emerged during the discussion. Firstly, ‘the guideline questions and probes provide the structure for the data to be collected’ (Carey, 1995; 491), and set the lens for analysis given the already established definitions in the literature about the investigated phenomenon (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Some new themes were induced from the empirical data as literature suggests, ‘it is important to remain alert to the concepts to which participants are appealing’ (Barbour, 2007; 126). Accordingly, the researcher sought to identify the recurrent topics in the corpus of data in order to obtain a comprehensive overview of the network of the ideas that were presented (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Quotations were selected based on their ability to explain the specific recurrent themes in the corpus of data and were categorised with overarching identifying keywords assigned to each. The analysis consisted of identifying patterns in the raw data (Asbury, 1995) through thematic analysis (McCracken, 1988).

Based on Wilson’s (2012) suggestions, there are several ways in which the researcher can analyse collected data, and the approach depends upon the requirements of the research. With regards to the data coding possibilities, the use of research software, such as Nvivo, was considered. However, given the exploratory nature of the interviews aimed to gather a deeper understanding of respondents’ attitudes and perspectives instead of quantifiable insight, the software was not been deemed a suitable tool. Furthermore, due to the rather limited sample, a manual coding procedure was exhaustive in providing the necessary output for the aims of the research.

In order to ensure the validity of the analysis and interpretation of the results, the researcher can employ specific strategies to prevent misinterpretation. In this instance, participant validation was used in order to verify interpretation of the findings. Specifically, this verification strategy consists of asking some participants to assess the

validity of the interpretation and provide the researcher with feedback about it. This is similar to the procedure that Aker et al. (2011) used. In the current study, three participants completed the validation procedure and could confidently confirm an adequate categorisation of findings was carried out.

Although the data in this exploratory stage did, in certain instances, appear wide-ranging (Bloor et al., 2001), concentrated thematic priorities were successfully identified in order to derive the conceptual foundations of the research. Given the exploratory nature of the study, this stage served the purpose of filtering the most relevant variables for the aims of the study in order to be both parsimonious and comprehensive (Whetten, 1989). As such, the findings offered the opportunity to reduce the number of initial variables drawn through the literature review in order to subject them to further analysis in the quantitative stage of the study. This data was also a useful resource for the experiment development and aided in familiarisation with the concepts and language of the context (Morrison, 1998).

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological approach to fulfil the aims of the first phase of the study. The chapter first traced known philosophical stances as to situate the present study within the best fitting perspective. Following an inclusive analysis of philosophical approaches, a pragmatic philosophical approach was adopted for the study.

Next, the chapter included a comprehensive discussion of the rationale for the choice of in-depth interviewing as the methodological approach. Based on the survey of the literature, it was necessary to undertake exploratory research in the form of in-depth interviews before quantitatively testing the developed framework. The novelty of the topic as well as the lack of adequate research in the present context called for an exploratory understanding. The chapter also included a discussion about the sampling

considerations, the role of the researcher and finally an overview of the data analysis procedure.

The following chapter will present the analysis of findings that emerged from the qualitative stage of the research. These findings will be documented as they relate to the theoretical assumptions that underlie the research problem.

CHAPTER 6: EXPLORATORY FINDINGS

6.0 Introduction

The previous chapters traced the findings from extant literature that are relevant for the objectives of the study. Chapter 5 discussed and justified the methodological choice for phase one of the research. This chapter offers a summary of the qualitative findings that aim to provide a clear definition of the factors that need further investigation in the quantitative stage of the research, including elements that need to be included in the hypothesised attitude formation model.

The exploratory phase of the study aimed to gather a comprehensive insight about the influence of eWOM information in the process of attitude formation for aesthetic products in an online social context. The findings helped understand the step-by-step process consumers take in forming product attitudes, and the factors that impact this process. Furthermore, this stage helped contextualise the research by identifying the context idiosyncrasies that differentiate decision-making in this setting compared to findings from previous research, which were derived from different contexts and are not found applicable in the chosen setting.

Based on the interpretation of findings this chapter provides the foundations for the development of the conceptual framework, which will include a clarification of the research hypotheses that need testing in the quantitative stage.

6.0.1 The Selection of Participants

As previously discussed, the sample sought to reflect diversity and to provide as much potential for comparison as possible. As such, multiple stakeholder groups were recruited via purposeful sampling, including consumers, owners or managers of commercial galleries, commercial artists and intermediary companies.

The galleries that took part in the research included small-to-medium sized companies operating both on local and international markets. These galleries were able to offer both a localised perspective and were able to comment upon the wider market in respect to digitalised art consumption. Along these lines, recruited consumers came from different backgrounds, some of which have undergone professional artistic education while others were new to this field. These respondents included more experienced buyers as well as those that had ventured into art purchasing fairly recently. The artists that were recruited consisted of professionals that had completed artistic training and were selected based on their engagement with social media platforms as a way of securing a digital presence for their work. Lastly, the intermediary companies that took part in the study were newly emerging businesses in the art field that leverage internet opportunities as a commercial outlet and e-commerce channel.

Considering that the phenomena under investigation include different stakeholders who jointly contribute to creating this digital patina in terms of social information exchanges called for an inclusion of perspectives in order to gather a holistic understanding of the question under investigation. Accordingly, the recruitment procedure sought to include all levels of the ‘art machine’ (Rodner and Thomson, 2013).

6.1 The Art Product

6.1.1 Art as Hedonic Product

From the interviewees, some common themes emerged with regards to the modality in which art is thought of as a product typology. For instance, like other aesthetic goods, art is responsible for generating perceptions of luxury and luxury-evoking imaginary. Respondents view such purchases as associated with conspicuous consumption, given it represents a non-essential purchase and is understood as an indulgent activity. Hence, these findings suggest that art is frequently used in order to satisfy higher order needs (Yalch and Brunel, 1996). These findings highlight the conceptual correspondence

between ‘luxuries-wants-hedonic benefits and necessities-needs-utilitarian benefits’ (Chitturi et al., 2008; 50).

C1: I sometimes feel guilty...happy. A whole range of emotions. Like guilt that you have committed to x amount of pounds while you should maybe think about the house, pay credit card bills...but at the end you’ve got something that nobody else has got ...

Consumers often substitute purchasing art to fulfil their need through access, paying in time rather than in money. Rather than being an object of purchase for the self, art will often be given as a gift.

G12: Some people tend to buy art when there is an occasion, as a gift.

Consumers highlighted different forms of emotional relationships they formed with these product possessions, highlighting the affect-rich nature of art products. Accordingly, the link between hedonic products and affect (Zhong and Mitchell, 2010; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000) can be further extended also to the domain of aesthetic product consumption.

C5: I have had some of this stuff for a quite long time and still today I get excited the same as I did when I bought it.

C7: After I buy a piece I think it is like everything else, like when you meet someone and at first you fall in love and then it matures. I talk about art in human terms a lot.

In a similar manner, consumers enjoy the experience of anticipating the product even before the item comes into their possession (O’Curry and Strahilevitz, 2001). The affectively rich nature of these products provides a pleasurable experience and induces positive emotions even before consumers receive their items.

C9: I enjoy the entire process of buying the picture and deciding where to hang it. I think there is an entire bundle of practices associated with this, which picture to buy and where will it go. [...] A lot of the thinking goes in the process of where

the picture will go, hence a lot of them just sit there to be hanged and it is almost like I have collected them for a future house. They are not just impulse buys for today but there is also this element of planning.

Furthermore, art is approached as an affect-eliciting and consequently high-involvement product category in line with literature that argues it falls within the hedonic product typology on a more general scale (Wolny and Mueller, 2013; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002).

C5: I just enjoy looking for art. I enjoy putting my energies into that

C8: Art is all I think about, I work as a nurse but all of the day I think what art could I get. It is just a passion I think. If it is in you it is all you think about.

Lastly, consumers affirm that in order to derive pleasure from the consumption of art, they do not necessarily have to make a purchase. Consumers admitted they find browsing for art to be a very enjoyable activity. As previous research that looked at various hedonic typologies suggested (Fiore and Kim, 2005; Chen, 2009; Chen and Granitz, 2012; Belk, 1988), aesthetic consumption needs are, in certain instances, satisfied with this searching activity in itself. On the one hand, aesthetic consumption occurs through possession, by acquiring the product. On the other hand, consumers can satisfy their need for consumption through access — by either visiting galleries or browsing for art online. Given the facilities available through online art spaces, consumers tend to access art predominantly online rather than in traditional galleries. These behavioural manifestations suggest that hedonic products correspond to entirely different needs and desires compared to their utilitarian counterpart.

C7: If I don't have the money I can still look at art, as you say window shop. I could still enjoy art without buying, going to exhibitions...if I don't have thousands of pounds lying around I can still enjoy that painting. It is like when you go to see a Van Gogh, you obviously will not buy it but you go to see it, it doesn't matter

C9: Sometimes I'll go online and look for all the art I can't purchase because I think one day...I think maybe where could I put it and I imagine. I go online and just look for pictures; I could spend hours doing that.

There is variety in seeking behaviours for hedonic product consumption (Kwon and Jain, 2009), especially when respondents talked about aesthetic consumption with respect to the advantages of the internet. Specifically, the internet and social platforms that make it possible to discover and find a much larger pool of options compared to the traditional outlets.

C2: I have found some of the artists I have bought through social media. I have connected with some of them through Facebook. And I quite like it. I find it as a good way to discover art. In fact I found many artists through these media. I have also bought directly from artists online.

Furthermore, the interviews suggest that consumers will form a brand attitude towards art products and will thus exhibit logics of brand evaluation rather than product evaluation when forming an attitude towards the product. As Schroeder (2005) and Preece (2014) argue, artists have evolved into skilful brand managers who invest significant resources in building and maintaining their brand image that goes beyond the product. Accordingly, the findings suggest that there is an important element of brand storytelling involved in the selection of an art product because consumers tend to engage in online following and seek online brand engagement when the opportunity is available. This finding will be further explored through the lenses of symbolic consumption. Furthermore, this finding is of particular importance as extant literature has suggested that brand attitude guides behaviour (Fazio, 1990; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Accordingly, brand attitudes are expected to positively affect purchase intentions and brand selection (Suh, 2009).

C8: I bought a Francis Bougue for my birthday. It was my 40th birthday so I decided I would rather have that than jewellery.

G1: People do not always buy what speaks to them, what they actually like...a lot of them buys brand artists they know about

6.1.2 Hedonic Consumption of Art

Interviewees' discussions of art reflected typical hedonic consumption traits. Namely, respondents often compared their art consumption to other types of hedonic consumption, particularly aesthetic product typologies. The respondents used examples of music, literature, fashion and wine consumption to illustrate the mechanisms that intervene in their decision-making and consumption instances for art. As such, consumers' evaluative criteria and the availability of information affected product attitude formation and present important similarities to the wider category of aesthetic (hedonic) goods.

C5: Like a piece of music, when you hear a good piece of music for the first time you almost can hear something physical happening. When you look at a piece of art you've got to feel emotion for it or it must provoke an emotion.

C7: I am not interested in clothes, in usual consumerist things; I don't place value on these things. Clothes are there to cloth me, but art, music and literature they just fulfil me in any way.

Findings also presented further implications about the non-essentiality and indulgent nature that an art purchase generates mixed feelings of pleasure and guilt. In other words, consumers experience mixed feeling when purchasing art as they feel pleasure for the new product acquired, but at the same time guilt for not investing in a more useful purchase. This finding is in line with what literature argued is a common outcome of hedonic product purchases (Okada, 2005; O'Curry and Strahilevitz, 2001; Bohm and Pfister, 1996; Bazerman et al., 1998).

C5: Yes, yes on more than one occasion. But I am quite fortunate that it is not something that costed me financial strife [...] And there have been occasions when I did not have all the money there and I came to an arrangement with the artist to pay in maybe 3 instalments over several months...and then I had it hanging on the wall and thinking "What the hell have you done...what have you done?!".

C7: Buying art is always experienced with joy but also a bit of guilt. I do come from a low background family; I am not really educated in a traditional way or manner, so there is a mixture of guilt associated with this. And you know when I get it on the wall I get excited and I feel pleasure for my paintings even though there is this bit of guilt.

C2: After I buy a piece there are highs and lows. The high is actually the excitement of having bought something. Then the low is that I bought something online without seeing it. So there is sometimes the guilt associated with buying art. In order to cope with the guilt I research before buying something.

Based on these associations, consumers often feel obliged to justify the frivolity of their purchases (Simonson, 1989). Furthermore, the respondents' perception of guilt is also associated with the understanding that art has traditionally been defined as a high-threshold consumption domain with defined hierarchies of access that epitomize a field pervaded by cultural capital requirements (Üstüner and Holt, 2010; Holbrook, 2005; Joy and Sherry, 2003a). Even though, the internet has reduced entry barriers and weakened the importance assigned to traditional aesthetic codes in a range of aesthetic domains (Dolbec and Fischer, 2015; Giesler, 2008; Chintagunta, Gopinath, and Venkataraman, 2010), respondents show they are still in need of providing justification for their product choices. It appears that consumers still require external validation in order to reduce both emotional and financial risk, even when participating within a different normative system, one that is transposed to online spaces.

Placing art into the wider discourse surrounding hedonic consumption and the traits that characterise the hedonic product typology is suitable in view of the aims for this research. Furthermore, the need to provide justification in hedonic consumption supports the assumption that consumers will look for validation from different means, such as external quality cues that could be retrieved from eWOM when forming an attitude towards a product.

6.1.3 Art as Product Category and Information Search

From the interviewee accounts, a range of perceptions about art has been identified, and they have been linked to the importance that information might have in forming attitudes. The specific product traits point to an attitude formation journey that is particularly receptive to informational influences. One paramount factor is the level of perceived uncertainty in the evaluative process, which moderates the extent of affect or cognition applied when consumers form product attitudes. That is, the perceived uncertainty is associated with the amount of knowledge consumers have about the product. This aspect highlights the crucial importance of external information in providing validation and its ability to steer the outcome of the attitude formation process.

Table 6.1 Identified product traits in respect to the importance assigned to information

Product Perception	Finding	Implication
Innovative & Highly Differentiated Product	<p><i>C6: I think social media opens up access. It is multicultural. You get the chance to find artists that you would never have the chance to speak to, Japan, Korea, Malta everywhere. ...you would have never seen their artwork if they were not on Facebook</i></p> <p><i>C10: I bought two artworks from a gallery that was shutting down. They were from a famous artist and they were ridiculously cheap. I think people just didn't realize that they were worth very much.</i></p> <p><i>G8: You've got sites like Saatchi Art and a lot of other platforms for artists themselves to put on their work and they don't have to deal with the gallery and</i></p>	<p>- From the findings it emerged that there is high differentiation between product options and an elusive criterion for the evaluation of aesthetic products. Because social media has widened the range of product options, consumers will perceive a higher level of uncertainty when forming a product attitude towards this product category given that there is no rigid gauge for judgment on which attitude can be established.</p>

	<i>you know some might be successful while some will never be noticed obviously...but that again, if I was buying for myself, I'd probably first go to Saatchi Art and see what I like...so it has changed. It's not anymore that you go to a shop you say you like it, so as we said before, there are much less impulsive purchases</i>	
Ambiguous Quality	<p>G4: <i>You know, in art it is always difficult to say...if someone says a piece is good it is easy to believe it is...</i></p> <p>G5: <i>With art it is always ambiguous...unless customers have the confidence in what they are buying, they won't buy...they will always be uncertain to buy.</i></p>	- As the quality of the art product is not subject to firm objective evaluative criteria, consumers are unsure about their personal judgments. It is thus possible to infer that the experienced uncertainty is a potential factor that drives consumers to look for guidance in forming their product attitudes and to acquire validation when deciding about product preferences
Visible Product	<p>G4: <i>You know, people will always look at art as a fashion item in some way...once you put it on your wall it is a showcase for everyone to see it</i></p> <p>G6: <i>When they know it is limited, there is only 195 or 150 worldwide they still know they are getting something that is not going to be everywhere and in every house they go to...it is still a wee bit different</i></p>	- From the findings, there is a badge value assigned to the art product given the visibility of its consumption. It could thus be argued that the signified value of the product could make consumers more receptive to incorporating external cues of validation when deciding about a product purchase.
High Involvement	G7: <i>But yeah...you certainly get those kind of people that come in and spend time talking about an artist so it just happens.</i>	- The capability of this product typology in evoking high levels of product involvement (Wolny and Mueller, 2013; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002) drives some consumers to engage in

		conversations in order to share and nurture the involvement for the category. In a similar fashion, the online space could represent a suitable setting where to cultivate and further develop the product interest.
Durable Product	<p>G9: <i>You need to invest some thinking into what you are going to buy, it is a long-term investment...after all, you will have to look at the piece you chose for quite a long while [...] they have to live with it, so there is a lot of seeing it online and going back and thinking about it</i></p> <p>G10: <i>Buying a piece of art is a long-term thing you know...it needs to last for a long time. Art is a durable good so I think this is why it takes them this long to decide, it has to be the right thing you know</i></p>	- As the product is of a durable nature, it is possible to suggest that consumers will spend time and effort into looking for the right product option. Accordingly, their decisions will not be exclusively determined by their affective responses, as that will require higher complexity in the attitude formation process to reach an optimal choice.

As previously mentioned, the most important implication of these product characteristics for the attitude formation process is the high level of uncertainty involved during evaluation. Specifically, when consumers face a product that is high in uncertainty (Petrosky, 1991) and does not sustain fixed evaluative criteria (Roy and Ng; Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014), the process of attitude formation is largely shaped by informational influences.

This finding has important implications for these contextual conditions, because in this particular case, more cognitively based preferences will be used. When information such as eWOM is made available to assist the point of evaluation, the elicited affective component of attitude is overshadowed, hence making this type of product preference easier to justify (Botti and McGill, 2011; Sela et al. 2009).

Based on the these findings that depict the traits of this product category, the online channel could play an important role in changing art evaluation given online information is able to assist the formation of more stable product attitudes.

6.1.4 The Social Media Context

With regards to online commerce, several implications both for offline and online purchasing were observed. With the emergence of online commerce platforms as well as with traditional galleries establishing a largely online presence, consumers' purchase journeys have undergone considerable changes. One notable change is that the base of art buyers has noticeably increased. This channel has thus offered an opportunity to individuals who were not familiar with the product class to purchase via online channels.

G8: Art is becoming something that everyone can get so there is a much bigger audience as well because it is much more accessible nowadays, it is not just for a particular elite. So as much as it is harder it is also easier because there are many more people buying it [...] So whenever we have a new piece coming we inform our existing client band. And usually we would get a response from them...so we do have collectors so to speak. But we also get more and more people approaching us online and coming to us rather than just through the gallery door.

C1: ...most artists have websites-so that works. You know, you can approach somebody from their website and buy it. Artists have Facebook profiles so it is accessible to buy even that way.

For some art consumers, the gallery environment is not necessary, as these buyers find the availability of information online sufficient to make informed purchasing choices. The mediating role the gallery once held is no longer imperative as consumers are increasingly leveraging online communication opportunities to get directly in touch with the producers.

C5: I prefer going to the artist. In today's kind of social media savvy society, I don't actually think I have to be dependent on galleries.

G9: Online however represents a major threat and problem for commercial galleries. You see very often that people when they want to buy a piece they connect with the artist directly either through social media or other online routes...in this way they don't need any more an intermediary and galleries are being left out in this process

Along these lines, buyers will very likely find an artist they consider buying through social media by following either brand content or content posted by art enthusiasts alike.

A3: I would not be selling my art if there was no social media, it would not be seen. There are a lot of ways to be seen online.

C1: I buy when I stumble upon it. It is like when you go shopping for something, you can never find it. I might go from one artist's page to another artist's page and get a few pages away. You just stumble upon it.

A2: I work hard to promote, and with social media it is much easier for the artist to show their work these days. I just returned from Amsterdam last week and my thoughts are always so sad when I visit the Van Gogh Museum, Gosh what would Van Gogh think of his arts being so special to his country, and the worlds community too, he struggled and hardly made any money, and me, the tools for exhibiting on media are at the end of my fingertips (I guess timing plays a big factor in many things).

The increasing disintermediation of galleries and the weakening of their opinion leader roles are attributable to the rise of online mediated consumption spaces. These spaces offer the possibility to engage in conversations about art where consumers can both share and look for information. The internet's democratising opportunity (Belk, 2014) has reshaped the market and is changing traditional purchasing modalities.

C5: I mean, everybody is entitled to look at art, to like it or dislike it and to have an opinion about art

C4: I would probably have a good look before, go online and check it out more...I would probably investigate. I think it would make me more certain. I would also have a look around at other paintings and make sure this is the one I want...there might be others that would be interesting to me but I just don't know they exist

Furthermore, considering that the large majority of artists have now an established presence on social media platforms, they can work on their promotion and marketing efforts without the need to rely on a gallery for their support and quality validation. They become managers of their own brands in addition to their roles as opinion leaders.

G9: A lot of artists are now starting to build or have already gathered quite an impressive presence online...the online side for art is indeed a very valuable route for the artists...

C8: I get a lot of emails from galleries abroad asking me to exhibit and finding me on social media. Also, a lot of people are asking me to buy through social media or email. People find my art on Facebook and people have looked at it and they want to buy it....

A1: I've sold lots of stuff through social media. I've got a page where people engage. People for example that bought something from the gallery then add me as a friend.

As already mentioned previously (refer to section 6.1.1), buyers assume a brand rather than a product approach, thus they look for opportunities to engage with artist brands through social platforms. Because of this new mode of interaction between customers and artists, buyers extensively follow the content that artists post on social media.

G11: when people buy art they invest in the artist a little bit, insofar as they put this thing on the wall and other people are bound to comment on it and they like to be able to say, 'oh this is a Glasgow artist, trained at GSA, she does such and such' ...they like to be able to say that because there is something kind of tangible [...] the story makes it even more personal.

6.2 The Attitude Formation Process

6.2.1. Response

Because of the affectively rich nature of the art product, gallery owners have observed a notably longer decision-making process than before the advent of online spaces. Because these informational influences now easily available, consumers' attitudes are not entirely determined by affective elements.

G9: Almost never will someone purchase a piece impulsively...it is a process to come to a decision, they need to think about it. If they find something that interests them they will not buy it but will wait and come again to see it with a friend or someone else to also get their opinion. Just then they might eventually buy it [...] Buying art is very rarely an impulsive decision...this is why having a strong online presence is very useful. When you have an online presence you give to people the opportunity to think about it before committing.

As Millar and Tesser (1986, 1992) explain, consumers' attitudinal outcomes can be driven either by affective or cognitive elements. Thus, depending on whether the more salient component is affective or cognitive, the process will lead to different attitudinal outcomes. As such, it is expected that consumers will employ an affectively driven process when evaluating these hedonic and aesthetic options. Research assumes that affect is capable of directly driving attitude as well as eventually behaviour (Cohen et al., 2006). Nevertheless, participants in the study often remarked that consumers will not always be guided by their initial affective responses in forming product attitudes that will thereafter guide behaviour. The findings suggest that consumers often do not rely on the affective response as they invest significant thinking and attentive reasoning into the evaluative process. As such, consumers, in certain instances, will not exclusively be led by their initial affective response to the product; rather several different factors will determine the character of the attitude formation process.

G9: I think that when a person buys a piece there is in the first place a very instinctive like, but in order to actually commit and buy the piece there is a much

longer process going on. There is a choice but the person needs to rationalise the reason why they like a certain piece in order to buy it [...] people like it instinctively but the final choosing is much longer and complex

In specific instances, the consumer's attitude formation process is significantly longer and characterised by information retrieval and evaluation rather than merely affective attitudinal components. With a large number of online art platforms and online galleries, consumers have suggested that they invest a significant amount of time and resources in looking for the optimal product before making a purchase. Literature has suggested that feelings are the major antecedents of evaluative judgments when referring to hedonic products, while for utilitarian ones these are cognitions (Kempf, 1999); however in an online mediated marketplace bolstered with a wide variety of informational cues, the relative importance of these evaluative inputs needs to be contextualised.

6.2.2. Basis of Evaluation

Research distinguished between affect-based attitudes, which are formed on merely the experienced affective response, and rational attitudes, which are determined by the knowledge and information about the product being assessed. Based on these two responses, consumers will develop an attitude towards the product they are considering (Wyer et al., 1999). Research has so far suggested that hedonic products will be assessed following an affective evaluation modality (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009). In other words, affectively based attitudes take place when the consumer relies on the affective response as a source of information (Schwarz, 2010; Chowdhury et al., 2015). Despite the affectively rich nature of art that is expected to drive attitudinal outcomes purely based on the elicited affect, different dynamics have emerged from the interviews. Contrary to the assumption that consumers will evaluate and accordingly purchase art based on their instinctive affective response to it, a different process seems to be employed. Gallery owners have consistently remarked that consumers need guidance in their choices. They find it is rare to find consumers who do not ask for additional information or advice when

deciding on a purchase. Furthermore, interviewees reported that consumer's initial preferences will often change throughout the process as a result of these informational inputs and opinions, suggesting that the quality for aesthetic products is malleable. Based on these findings, it is important to take into account the role of available informational cues that the consumer can retrieve at the point of evaluation.

G3: Yes, they certainly want to be given advice and some a lot of guidance...they want to know and I'm happy to help them. And yes, it often happens that they change their mind....they listen to me and then something that they were entirely not interested in starts becoming appealing...it's not unusual to happen I would say

G9: Well I would say that people sometimes do not stick to their initial instinctive reaction...their preferences can change from the first reaction they had. They take into consideration the alternative perspective you give them about a piece and sometimes their preference changes when they learn about it and appreciate this alternative view

G1: It is difficult to say with art you know...I don't think people buy art impulsively, it is not an irrational choice. I think it is very common that people end up buying a piece just because they have been persuaded to buy it...they need guidance.

As extant literature suggests, higher levels of ambiguity (Andrade, 2005) or less information about it, results in a greater likelihood that consumers will use an affective response to form their attitudes (Greifeneder et al., 2010). That is, affect will be used as source information more likely than reasoned evaluation when there is ambiguity present (Forgas, 1995; Gasper, 2004). Accordingly, it is possible that consumers will be more likely rely on affect as information in instances that see little additional information about the present product. In other words, when there is little information present, individuals will rely on their affective response, as this is elicited immediately on exposure (Pham et al., 2001). The findings show that when information accompanies a product, such as in the contemporary online marketplace, consumers are more likely to undertake a

cognitively driven attitudinal process that relies on the accessibility of these informational inputs. In certain instances, consumers change their product preferences once they are offered additional information. This means that when cognitive resources are not constrained (Shiv and Fedorkhin, 1999), individuals evaluate the option more favourably on the cognitive dimension.

But consumers are not relying merely on the information from market actors, such as galleries. They increasingly engage in self-led information searching behaviours. For instance, owners affirm that consumers look for artists on Google during and after gallery visits, take pictures of the paintings' labels, etc. As such, the internet and the information availability this channel offers is having an extensive impact on the informational role that gallery owners once monopolised.

G8: The decision-making process is longer, we have especially noticed that at the art fair. Everyone has got a smartphone in their hands and they take a picture of the work, they take a picture of the label and then they go away. So people do their own research because information is nowadays readily available so the process is much longer than before. And this can be encountered much more in London than in Scotland somehow....so yeah definitely. Research is a big thing. And you know it is always more difficult to sell a piece once someone has gone away.

G3: It is not rare that someone comes in, sees a work or I show him a work that he likes and then takes a picture of the label, they never come back...so it depends very much on the motivations why you are actually buying it.

G2: Yes, they do a lot of researching online...they like to do their own homework...take their time to think about it...

With the rise of online information and a longer decision-making process, it is possible that consumers will be equally influenced by the available eWOM information. Following this argument, affectively driven attitudes could be altered, driving the basis of evaluation from affect towards cognition. The large amount of informational sources

available through online mediated platforms could drive consumers to rely more extensively on cognition when evaluating an art product in a social media context given the large availability of eWOM on these platforms. This shift has important implications, including whether one's attitude is based on affective or cognitive components, the product attitude and accordingly product choice, as the behavioural outcome in consumers, changes accordingly (Shiv and Fedorkhin, 1999). Specifically, traditional views specify affect and cognition as evaluative bases for attitude formation (MacKenzie, et al., 1986). Such elicited affect and cognition are thus conceived as affective and cognitive elaborations, which serve as the in-process outputs in determining brand attitudes (Petty et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2012). Given the implications of different informational forms on attitude development highlighted in the qualitative findings, it is possible to contend that, in the social media setting, consumers will more extensively rely on cognition rather than affect as the predominant basis for product attitude formation.

6.2.3 Product Attitude

Respondents commonly reported that the quality of an art product is difficult to establish, and as such consumers feel uncertain in forming an attitude about products. As noted in the literature, this is due to the fact that art is based on a subjective conception of value (Preece, 2014; Roy and Ng, 2012; Sgourev, 2014). Based on these assumptions, the findings of the exploratory stage of the research point out that the evaluation of quality in art is subject to a range of both person-specific and context-related factors.

I1: The challenge is for buyers to determine the quality of the piece as well as how buyers evaluate original work. For a lot of people the differences may be imperceptible especially online and so you go on and buy the one that is 200 pounds rather than 2000 because you can't see the difference.

C4: Generally speaking, I think you can kind of gauge quality and if you are not sure you should ask. I think people get confused a lot with printmaking because they will buy a print and spend a lot of money on it while it actually it is not worth that amount of money as it is a mechanized process.

Given the idiosyncratic challenges facing product evaluation, consumers often rely on a gallery brand to guide their choices based on trust. As such, galleries serve as opinion leaders that help overcome consumer uncertainty and the risk associated with a faulty product choice. Namely, these institutions are capable of providing consumers with advice and guidance in their product attitudes and accordingly steer product choices. Compared to the traditional setting, the development and maintenance of such relationships is more challenging to maintain through online channels without the possibility to engage in personal contact or interaction.

G8: [about novice buyers] It is a strange process, is a strange concept to price art, what it is that you should pay... then we sort of build relationships with our clients quite strongly because we go and install the work, we advise them. They are probably the most loyal to us...obviously they can buy art wherever they want but they tend to, when they are looking for a piece, they always tend to come first to us.

G7: People ask and you give them a sort of guidance and personal views because they want to hear your voice and hear what you are saying....

I5: So I think galleries will always be there for the simple reason that we spoke about already...people will always look for direction

However, the internet now allows artists to establish a strong brand without the assistance of a gallery, which could change the role that traditional gatekeepers hold in aiding product attitude development (Kolb, 2014). The emergence of social media platforms changed how gatekeepers determine what considered good or bad art, as this function is rapidly being taken over by amateur consumers.

6.3 The Implications of eWOM Information

6.3.1 Availability of eWOM Information

With regards to information retrieved from online channels, eWOM represents an important source aiding attitude formation. When consumers were asked to articulate the way in which they discover art and find the products they want to buy, a very common reply was Facebook. Among other available platforms, Facebook figures as the most widely adopted channel for following art-related content. The eWOM generated through this platform helps to generate awareness of the products available on the market.

G11: I think that Facebook is a better solution for artists than a website. Because people need to find your website in order to see your work. While on Facebook or Twitter some of your friends will like a picture and then another friend will like the picture and you'll get to see it. It might be a Twitter feed or Facebook post that takes them there but it must be something that takes them there rather than someone just randomly popping around and Googling stuff to find your work.

C5: I will search the internet to look for art. I look at it. I discover the artists from there, the artist I want to commission from now, I've found her from the internet and it was all through a page that I liked on Facebook. I bought quite a few pieces from a certain artist that I found through the internet...

C7: I buy when I come across an artist by accident, or I already know the artist. In a few instances I have bought a piece and then I met the artist and things like that. I may see an online gallery or someone might share a piece of work they really like on Facebook and I just fall in love.

C8: I like looking for artists online, discovering them through social media. That is pretty much everything I do on social media. Just scroll and look. I always see something new that I haven't seen before, something every day. You wouldn't see them otherwise unless you went to art galleries. I find it as a useful way to find art

Furthermore, eWOM does not only generate awareness about products, but it also provides consumers with further insight. From this kind of information, consumers are both made aware of available products as well as their popularity. Depending on the eWOM information available, consumers are able to discern the opinions that other consumers have about the product or artist they are evaluating.

C1: *It is weird because you for example look for one artist and then half an hour later you are looking at a completely different one as a result of that, if you know what I mean. Through friends of friends you find artists that you like and art that you like*

C6: *In art you are expected to like an artist, because your peers say he is great you will probably like it. You know the story about Banksy in Central Park, he was selling his work for 15 dollars and only 10 people bought the art. And after they found out it was Banksy and a piece of 15 dollars was worth a thousand. And it makes the point that if people don't know the artist they will not buy it. If you know who the artist is and you know someone likes it you will buy it. So I do think it makes a big difference. 'Oh you know who this artist is...he is such an such...'. Which I think is a sad thing. But if the artists don't show their work, they will never sell so this is why the internet works.*

C6: *It is peer pressure you know, people say oh this guy is really popular and people will try to buy some of his work.*

A1: *When I get a sale, I promote it on social media. I'm like 'oh this sold and that other one as well', and other people see this. And it works. Those that were thinking of buying then buy when they see this. I am not posting for how much but I start receiving messages from other people.*

As such, consumers often discover artists whose work they consider purchasing by visiting these social platforms and by following online conversations. Given these developments, artists and their products can be noticed and discussed in spaces exclusively online. Online conversations and social sharing can appear to have an impact on how consumers make attitudinal judgments with regards to art.

G5: *People need guidance...they are very much influenced about what they find about the artist...about the information they find about him on their own and the artist's reputation. Nowadays it is very easy to create buzz around someone, around an artist...and people are influenced by that.*

Based on this, eWOM via social media is able to signal the popularity of a product to consumers unfamiliar with it, as well as provide an indication of other consumers' opinions about the artwork/artist. In this way, the information acquired through peer feedback helps reduce individuals' evaluative uncertainty and informs attitude development, as it provides an indication on how the product resonates with other consumers.

I1: I think people are influenced by the artist's online brand. Anything you can do to help people connect with you as an artist, with your story, your process. And you kind of expect that nowadays because if you go to look for an artist and you don't see that, and you look for another and you do see that, there is a better chance you will be connecting with this one. It is not a necessity but it does do you a favour.

C1: Things that you like are always things that have been probably already bought you know. Which makes it easier for you to go 'ok'. Probably that something that has been bought you'll go someone bought that. But obviously things that haven't been bought make you hesitant. Because again, it is committing money.

C2: Yes, the emotions that a piece evokes are important but...I will have a look at Facebook, at the Facebook page.

6.3.2 Influence of eWOM

Research suggests that information serves a primary function in relation to the process of preference formation (Kaplan, 1987). This means that consumers' preferences were enhanced in instances when information accompanied the object being evaluated (Russell, 2003; Silvia, 2005).

Following this conceptualisation and extending this finding to the context of social media, this study found that consumers look extensively for information when they need to evaluate an art product. As López and Maya (2012) argue, significant changes in the

affective mechanisms typical for these instances could be encountered online that are not present in offline environments. From these interviews, the presence of alternative information cues about the product influences the modality in which consumers form product attitudes in this context.

G6: Yes, certainly. I get a lot of that [asking for more information]. People want to know where the artist comes from, if they are Scottish or not, what age is the artist, what experience they have, did they graduate from art college...that kind of thing you know.

G1: Yes, people are not sure when they are interested in something...they do ask me for advice quite regularly and I am happy to give it to them. You know, sometimes when they are undecided and I can see that after I have spoken with them, I just tell them to go home and look up for the artist yourself...just Goggle it

Information sources, such as Facebook and Twitter, are able to provide consumers with knowledge and alternative perspectives, which accordingly inform their buying decisions by comparing their own preferences to the choices of other art buyers. As such, the presence of these newly established sources of information appears to alter the effect of affective response on one's product attitude. Given new information, it appears that consumers are decisively more deliberate in their product choices.

The qualitative data suggests that consumers engage both in following artists' pages (profiles) as well peer consumers when it comes to art related topics. The variety of sources that are being consulted through social media indicate that consumers acquire eWOM both internally and externally to the brand. Even though content shared through marketing communications has the overt goal of consumer engagement and interaction with the brand, it is still defined as eWOM dissemination (Liang et al., 2011). Along these lines, 'a Facebook post is defined as an advertising-like message content that induces consumer responses' (Chen, Kim and Lin, 2015; 209). As such, the combination of commercial and social user activities on social media platforms blurs the lines between personal and professional use of the channel (Simonson, 2016). It follows that, regardless

of the underlying motivations involved in the sharing of social content, this type of communication results in the spread of information of an eWOM format. Consumers thus find it difficult to discern between eWOM as a product of a commercial activity or as an outcome of community interaction (Liang et al., 2011).

C3: I would say that the number of likes and followers on social media influences the perception you get of an artist.... I think if you see someone with 3000 followers you would think he is successful, you get this impression.

6.4 Dimensions of eWOM

6.4.1 Valence and Volume

The dimensions of eWOM messages are important in determining the effect of information on the attitude process. The data collected from the qualitative interviews indicates that specific dimensions of such information are relevant for the evaluative process. As this kind of information is predominantly collated through social platforms, one of the most prominent dimensions mentioned was the *volume* of eWOM. In other words, depending on the number of likes, shares and comments about a particular artist or one of the products, consumers will come to learn about its existence, popularity and perception amongst other consumers. Thus, the volume of eWOM signals both product awareness (Liu, 2006; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2006) and product preferences (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Duan et al., 2005; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Dhar and Chang, 2009; Ye et al., 2011). In some ways, the popularity of a product signals its value, and popular products appear to generate more favourable attitudes because uncertainty is minimised.

A1: If I do a portrait then I will post photos on Facebook of the various stages, the process. Artists do it and I started doing it. And I started receiving likes [...] Some of it is true but I post something that I think will be interesting. I think about what I am posting, I am careful in what I post and when I post it [...] I try to encourage them. I have some people who try buying online some painting that is

already sold and they are waiting for the next project so I am posting comments of previous buyers and other people contact me to buy...it is almost like manipulation.

The *valence* dimension of eWOM identified in previous studies did not appear relevant in this context. Namely, online customer reviews may be differentiated between quantitative and qualitative reviews where the first type entails exclusively a rating while the latter provides a written description (Kostyra et al., 2016). Here, the valence dimension of eWOM information is textual. The respondents often mentioned that eWOM information about art usually entails a positive character or feedback and an exclusively quantitative format (e.g., likes, shares etc.). Rare are the instances where negative or more qualitative eWOM can be encountered. Given the largely positive character of eWOM information retrieved from online platforms and the low extent of negative and qualitative feedback, this eWOM aspect will not be addressed, as it does not mirror the information found in actual Facebook conversations; it also highlights the need to research eWOM in a non-textual format.

C10: People are too kind, they say it is great it is lovely and you think no tell me what you really think because that is just a phrase. You want actual feedback. Give some neutral feedback even. Everyone wants to say something positive and that's lovely but it is not the real world.

6.4.2 eWOM Source

The question of the eWOM source providing information about the product frequently arose in the interviews. Some respondents indicated that they would follow the recommendations of sources that possess a brand status. That is to say, they will collate eWOM information from either gallery or artist brands as they perceive these as having higher levels of expertise compared to other possible sources. Some respondents also indicated that the higher the level of source expertise, the higher regard they had about the recommendations the source provided.

C3: I got in touch with quite a lot of artists, they are all very friendly. Most of my friends on Facebook are artists.

C9: ...It will maybe have a small influence if someone knowledgeable tells me something about it. This friend of mine buys quite a lot and he knows stuff and I think he is more into theory about what the artist was trying to convey.

Paul: The good thing about Facebook is that when you start following artists you get to see other pages and other artists. This is how you get to know new ones; you don't deliberately go to look for them. Or basically on invitation, this is how you get to look at it.

On the other hand, another set of accounts suggested that consumers are influenced also by a different type of informational source when adopting eWOM information. Some consumers join online art social communities in order to develop their interest in art and engage in conversations, relying on the information of peer opinion leaders rather than formal gatekeepers, such as galleries.

C7: Generally I learn about art through Facebook, I'm being invited to galleries [...]I think it is a really good tool. The thing why I like Facebook is that you go to a page than you can see his work, you can follow him. It is great because with Twitter and Facebook you can get in contact with so many people so it results also in new markets. It is a very good thing. There are many artists that I like and I would not get the chance to see them if it wasn't for Facebook.

C6: I think that people that are collecting are very knowledgeable and important [...]I would trust someone by example. If they have someone in their collection and I've seen it on their wall than probably I would trust their judgment.

C3: Maybe the person that is the most similar to me would have the edge in making me change my opinion. I am sometimes put off by curators

Along these same lines, consumers do not necessarily need to trust the opinion of the expert or the gallery owner as they now have infinite possibilities to retrieve necessary

information online. In certain instances, individuals prefer to consult a peer source instead of an expert one.

G8: *I think it does a lot because people...you can give them the information but then obviously they don't necessarily trust you, if it would be great if they did. Well, to be honest, anything I buy I probably Google it beforehand, very rarely do I make a purchase without having at least a five minute research on it...*

C1: *Yes I look for information. I think the internet is probably the best. Because I am interested in this so when you are interested you will go looking for information...but it is where to find it. Facebook is quite good. Because everyone is connected, everyone seems to know. You meet people and it is good, I like it.*

6.5 Factors Influencing the Attitude Formation Process

From the interviews, art is evaluated similarly to other hedonic products, but it also appears to depend on person-specific and motivational factors. The following section will provide an overview of the particular traits that were identified in the accounts of the respondents.

6.5.1 Hedonic/Symbolic Consumption Goal

Rather than being an exclusively affective driven decision, participants remarked that consumers always acquire art for a carefully selected reason, which can be either purely hedonic or for another reason.

G12: *People buy for all sorts of reasons, but there must be a reason. You never have someone coming in and saying 'aha, that one', there is a reason why they are buying that picture.*

Aside from the pleasure-evoking aspects of art consumption, some additional dimensions came into view from the interviewees' narratives, which were not entirely related to its hedonic properties. One of the most important themes referred to the symbolic sides of

consumption. In accordance with what has been previously outlined in consumer literature, aesthetic products can be conceptually related to symbolic consumption (Bloch et al., 2003; Creusen and Schoormans, 2005; Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012; Alba and Williams, 2013). Therefore, in order to understand the attitude formation process of consumers, rather than an exclusively emotional approach, it is important to take into account how the social meaning of this product category (Harrison, 2009) influences the process.

When describing their interest in art, individuals showed a close relationship to their identities and individualities. As Park et al. (1986) and later Keller (1993) reported, the value that consumers attach to products can come in the form of symbolic benefits. To be more specific, these benefits are associated with consumers' needs for social approval and identity expression, which are fulfilled through the consumption of products perceived as rich in prestige and fashionability.

C3: I can't imagine life without art...it is kind of attached to me. It is a part of me. [...]

C5: Before I started collecting I would have called it extravagant but not now. Now I've got some work and I've got it hung on my walls...it's quite important to me and is something I do spend money and invest time and energy in. So it must be something important to me [...] my eldest daughter passed a comment the other week "all your pieces are dark"...she didn't mean in colour, what she meant is in subject and in tone. "They are all good but they are all dark". So I suppose it does reflect who I am...I suppose.

C9: When my friends come by, they say 'Oh you have pictures rather than posters you can buy in home stores'. I have to admit that I have Ikea pictures on the wall to fill up a hole, but I can't wait to get them off the wall....I don't think it is snobby, I suppose it is about being different.

Furthermore, art is not perceived only as a solitary experience. Consumers affirm that others (friends, co-workers, family) identify and categorise them through these product

possessions. As such, art is used as a vehicle to communicate to others their group identities. It communicates elements of identity these individuals want to be perceived and associated with. From the interview findings, consumers appear to consume art as a means of identity communication.

C4: What's interesting, people come into my home and if they don't know that about me already, they will know there is an artist type person in here, because of the way it is decorated. I don't have pictures of IKEA to match my sofa, I have paintings, pottery and different types of creative objects...people recognize right away that there is a creative person or a person with an interest in creativity ...but I think it reinforces who I am and that's important to me. I would rather have one thing that is original and creative rather than having lots of them and buying them really cheap so it has value because it is special or it is different...it reinforces things that I believe in and who I am

C1: I think art is very important. Before I was into music, and I would buy music every week but I think as I get older things change. So I went from music to art. If I have the option to go to a pub or to visit a gallery, I would rather go to the gallery.

Along these same lines, art is capable of serving as a means to communicate and reinforce individuals' identities given the strong social connotations it possesses. Some peculiar goals, which are not purely linked to hedonic consumption, emerged from the consumer interviews. One was a close relationship between art as a commodity and emotional drivers, which are used in conspicuous consumption. In such instances, art becomes subject to the influence of fashion and symbolic communication acquired through social meaning (Chaudhuri, 2006; Colbert and St-James, 2014; Bloch et al., 2003; Belk, 1988) rather than an evaluation based solely on one's affective response. In other words, rather than assigning importance exclusively to the feelings they are experiencing when evaluating a product, consumers engage in rational assessments.

G3: Why people buy art?....I think in recent years there is a big trend in buying art...I don't say that before it was much different but nowadays you can really

notice it...it is evident that people often buy a piece merely because it is trendy, it is considered fashionable. So nowadays I think art is ending up as a fashion purchase, it is regarded as a commodity very often.

G3: As I said, art is very much a commodity nowadays...I think this got worse with the advent of all these online platforms...it has become very fashionable and it is thus influenced by fashion.

Similar to other aesthetic products, which are visible during consumption and considered badge-products, art is largely subject to fashion trends. Consumer preferences about these types of products are thus subject to the influence of peer evaluations and popularity, as these products are consumed for social acceptance and identity expression needs. Hence, the art product is required to possess attributes that signal high prestige and fashionability. Accordingly, the existence of a brand, which signals a product's characteristics and popularity, assumes significant importance in the development of preferences. Specifically, the social status that brands convey is related to consumers' symbolic associations and identity expression efforts.

G6: Buyers ask for more information because it just opens up. If they are buying an original, people want to know if it is going to be valued. But also for their own sake so they can tell their friends and they can show off. If it is a well-known artist for example, they can tell them.

G11: You have always a few artists that publicize their work well and they become kind of status symbols. A few years ago there was Peter Howson in Glasgow and all these people with a big watch had a Peter Howson at home. So they felt confident that they should have it...it tapped into the confidence that marketing gives to people.

Bian and Forsythe (2012) argue that in instances when individuals have symbolic motivations (e.g., identity expression and group belonging), rational considerations guide their decision-making, as it could be deliberative (Dubé et al., 2003). These interviews

conclude that art is often an object of these symbolic consumption attempts, and consumers spend considerable time evaluating these product choices.

G8: Oh 100%, art is a flash purchase; even though it is now accessible, it is a status purchase to a high degree. I used to work in interior design and in London there are a lot of houses where you need to have a humongous Damian Hirst in the lobby...why would you have that? Because everyone knows who is Damian Hirst and that he is super expensive. A very very obvious manifestation of their wealth....you know, they might obviously love the piece and this is why they have it but they are manufactured so, unlikely.

Based on these grounds, the findings revealed that consumers who use symbolic motivations linked to identity, status and prestige to evaluate a product are more likely to rely on the opinions of others. As such, it is possible to suggest that when directed by these consumption goals, consumers could be more responsive to eWOM information because cognitive components acquire more salience during product attitude development. Based on this finding, it is possible to argue that affectively driven preferences differ considerably from deliberative product choices undertaken out of symbolic motivations.

G11: There are two types of people that come to the gallery. The first has a lot of money, a fancy watch and designer clothes and a huge big expensive house so they have got everything else. The thing is that when it comes to buying their watch or car, they know what they are supposed to buy because there are industries of marketing purely set aside to tell them which watch to buy, which one other people will recognize from a distance. And so they feel confident about these purchases because it has been told to them which brands they should be buying. When it comes to art, that does not exist to the same extent [...] when you go to these peoples' houses the big give away is the art they have, you go 'oh my god this is dreadful stuff' [...] they also get sniffy about paying in comparison to people who appreciate art.

G5: Art is definitely a commodity...it much more fashion oriented nowadays then it used to be in the past...so you get people buying something they do not necessarily like but they buy it anyway...they buy it because it is fashionable. You know, if you are in a gallery looking at a piece and someone comes in and says it is disgusting...you will have a second thought about it, even though you maybe liked it initially

Given that the internet offers a much wider pool to collect opinions and acquire social insight about trends and popularity of products, consumers are more attentive to these information sources. Gatekeepers within the art world no longer dictate their choices; rather the information comes from a larger group of art enthusiasts and consumers alike. Contrary to hedonic purchases that are made because of affective responses to a product, symbolic consumption presents a more deliberative and cognitively based character, which calls for information and opinion gathering in the evaluation stage.

C9: I don't want to impress anyone with my pictures; I just enjoy looking at them. However, the Jack Vettriano I have been hesitant in buying, everyone has it. His work has become Ikea, it has almost passed his own image and has become a meta image.

G1: People do not always buy what speaks to them, what they actually like...they buy brand artists they know about

As such, when consumers possess hedonic goals, their feelings will be more salient in determining their attitudes about the product. When the consumer is driven by symbolic goals, the experienced feeling will not always be exhaustive. In such instances, the consumer will retrieve additional information for a cognitive assessment of the product. As summarised in this quote, the consumption of art is driven by different goals that can be either hedonic or symbolic.

G4: I don't think there is one particular motivation why people buy art...I believe there are several reasons. Sometimes they buy just because they like the piece, or it matches their home design and goes well with their furniture...so just because

of décor. Other times however they buy for prestige...in this case they mostly buy brand artists...by buying those they can show off with the knowledge they have about art

Thus, purely affectively driven processes are consonant with the hedonic view of consumption of the art product. Nevertheless, given the large amount of information and opinions available online, even hedonically driven purchases can become more deliberative and cognitively based than before the advent of the online channel. In social media spaces, consumers who are guided by symbolic goals as well as, in certain instances, those guided by hedonic motivations, will elaborate on available information rather than rely exclusively on their affective reactions when reaching an attitudinal decision.

6.5.2 Product Class Expertise

The findings illustrate that expertise is a trait that extensively shapes consumers' process modality when evaluating an art product. Here, expertise is defined as product class knowledge, based on Beatty and Smith's (1987) conceptualisation, and is the individual's perceived knowledge and understanding of products within a particular product class. Accordingly, expert consumers evaluate product attributes on largely cognitive grounds given the knowledge they possess. As such, their product attitude is not purely based on the affective response these experience.

G2: Yes I do, yes I do think there are differences between novice and expert buyers. But very quickly...sometimes it is just surprising how quickly they can become real connoisseurs and discerning...it is brilliant, it is a good thing to watch. Yes there are some buyers that are...they are as knowledgeable as me...or even they know more....and then there are those people that do not know anything about art, they are just buying what they like...but that is just as good as well. That's fine, there is a mix.

G5: *Yes, there is a big difference between people that are not new to buying art and more inexperienced buyers. I would say that in 9 out of 10 cases of novice people buying art, they will buy purely based on aesthetics...they will buy what they like aesthetically. Experienced buyers on the other hand look for different things...they are almost looking for something different, something unique and rather different from the others*

C4: *I think I will probably think about it before, I don't think I would buy impulsively. I will have a think about it, even if it has taken only a couple of hours I will think about it.*

C3: *Maybe I can't get a purely emotional response when I see an artwork because of all the knowledge I have...maybe this natural emotional response is contaminated with the knowledge I have*

On the other hand, consumers with a low level of expertise form attitudes based on their initial affective responses to the product without a cognitive assessment of it. Here, the decision-making process is decidedly shorter, making impulse purchases a rather common occurrence for this category of buyers.

G3: *I would say that novice buyers compared to people that have more experience in this field buy in a different way. They will more likely buy instinctively...they will react impulsively and buy the piece they want. But we are trying to teach them...we are trying to make them recognize the differences and appreciate the quality of a piece of art. They need to understand what is behind it*

C5: *I've bought stuff on the spur of the moment like that. I mean, I have bought stuff that I still don't know who painted that....I bought them in 10 minutes after seeing them[...]. I've got pieces that I don't know why I like them. Art is purely for myself...yeah it is very nice to see, it must be nice to look at right...for myself it has to give a feeling, it must bare an emotion, provoke an emotion within. Look for example at this piece...I don't know why I like it.*

From the findings of the study, one's level of knowledge about art will determine whether their attitude development is guided predominantly by affect or rational deliberation. This finding extends previous research, wherein a higher level of expertise will lead consumers to assess the product based on internal cues (product attributes), whereas a lower level of expertise will make consumers rely on external cues (price or brand). As Althuizen and Sgourev (2014) argue, this difference is due to the fact that experts have prior knowledge about the category that enables them to assess the quality without the aid of external cues. In a social media environment, quality cues are presented also in the form of eWOM content that could impact the attitude process.

6.5.3 Product Class Involvement

One additional trait that appeared relevant in attitude formation is one's level of involvement in the product category. Art, as mentioned in the previous sections, is perceived as a highly involved typology, and as such a very rapid involvement is common among individuals. Consumers report that they develop almost addiction-like behaviours and rapidly evolve into highly involved consumers, considering art as a hobby or a lifestyle activity.

G8: Most of our first time buyers go onto like a spree...so first they buy a piece...and this has literally happened between 10 and 15 times over the last six months where they come in and at first they are sort of intimidated by the sort of gallery...even if they live in Harriot Row....so they can clearly sort of afford it. So you know, but it is a strange process, is a strange concept to price art, what it is that you should pay...so they will buy one piece and usually within two weeks they will buy another two. So it is almost addictive, a new hobby they find.

C9: It is like an addiction. I used to buy a lot of CDs and I was addicted to that...and music and art go hand in hand I think. I love it...some people love football, some people like gym, some people like art. It depends what you are really into.

A1: It is almost like an addiction when people start buying art. Like shoes, dresses....They purchase maybe a couple of pieces then they becomes obsessed.

However, high levels of product involvement do not necessarily indicate formal expertise and knowledge. Some consumers have no formal education about art, and the knowledge they are able to gather does not always correspond to traditional expertise in the field. Thus, one's level of expertise does not increase with one's level of product involvement. Rather, highly involved consumers develop experience with the product category and increase their level of *perceived* rather than factual expertise. The interviewees indicated that a high level of expertise does not necessarily guarantee an increase in the level of consumption of the product category. This purchasing trait however, is most commonly encountered among individuals with high levels of involvement. As such, high involvement will drive high subjective knowledge rather than factual expertise and subsequently influence evaluation modality and behavioural outcomes.

These findings suggest that consumers can have significant experience with art but not necessarily a high level of formal expertise to inform their buying decisions. Contrary to previous research (O'Cass, 2004), one's level of product involvement has not been found to influence consumers' product knowledge. The findings of this exploratory phase suggest that even though highly involved consumers engage in information retrieval, they do not necessarily acquire the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions. Without a formal education in this field, it is very often difficult to build the necessary knowledge to become experts.

C4: And I wonder about that because there is so much online people can find that at the end they build a market for it that kind of feeds itself. But I don't know if this market ever becomes educated and understanding what is that they are buying, their boundaries are never pushed so they buy what they already know. I think that all the social media does that [...].because that audience has not been exposed to anything else so they are reinforced to think their judgment is good, while there is much better work out there. If you are never pushing your

boundaries, you are sitting there as a 50 year old drinking a baby champ because you never learned to try something else, and see the difference between quality product and not. There is so much art out there online and a lot of people do not understand quality even though they are very confident about their knowledge. They think they know more than what they do because they always stay in their comfort zone. We are not creating an audience for art that pushes boundaries.

C7: Yes, I absolutely enjoy learning about art. I am not a dry academic though. I learn what I am interested in otherwise I don't learn it. If I buy something, I go and learn about the artist, about the artists' work.

Rather than increasing one's level of formal expertise, a high degree of product involvement enhances their degree of perceived expertise.

C8: I like to think about myself as knowledgeable. If you are passionate about something you learn about it.

C2: Well I post content about art and artists on social media just to see the amount of likes I get....just a matter of interest. So I am active online also because artists will get more likes as we are friends on social media.

It could be suggested that the relationship between involvement and perceived knowledge needs further exploration and may be linked to literature that argues for an overarching product experience factor that shapes product attitude.

6.5.4 Consumer Online Experience

From the results of this qualitative study, the familiarity consumers have with the internet and eWOM information platforms impacts their reliance on it for product attitude development. These findings suggest that individuals will assess eWOM information differently based on their level of internet experience,.

The likelihood that a consumer will engage in online conversations and eWOM information acquisition depends on his familiarity with the internet, regardless of one's

product experience or consumption goals. The experience a consumer has with online platforms, such as social media, influences the extent to which he incorporates online information in the attitude formation process, as this experience impacts consumer confidence about such informational sources. Buyers who are experienced in using the internet to retrieve information, take this informational source into account when forming product attitudes, compared to less experienced users.

G9: I think there is also a significant difference in terms of demographics. The older generation of art buyers likes coming to the gallery to enjoy the experience the gallery is able to offer them. On the other hand, the segment of younger buyers does not look necessarily for this brick and mortar experience, rather they prefer looking online for opinions and pieces that may interest them.

The same applies for the likelihood of consumers purchasing a work online rather than in a traditional offline setting. Depending on a consumer's experience with online shopping, the likelihood of making online art purchases will vary accordingly.

I1: It depends also on how people like to buy. You have people that like to buy in a certain way so I don't see that everything will be online but a multichannel market, a blend.

G10: I would say that at the end you have two types of customers, those that want to buy online and those that do not want to do it...regardless of what they are buying. So from what I've seen, a lot of people prefer coming to the gallery for the experience we give them...on the other hand some people do not like it.

This is particularly important because with the ever-expanding base of worldwide internet users, the influence of electronic WOM as an information source will rise, requiring further investigation (Zhu and Zhang, 2009; Alves et al., 2016). Accordingly, this trait needs to be examined in reference to the way in which eWOM information is incorporated in the process of product attitude formation.

6.5.5 Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

Susceptibility is the propensity of consumers to be influenced by others' opinions in their purchase decision-making (Park and Lee, 2009). Extant literature suggests that when consumers are unsure about their own judgments given the complexity in evaluating the quality of the product, they become more susceptible to influences from other informational sources (Bruyn and Lilien, 2008; Lee and Ma, 2012). The higher a consumer's susceptibility to interpersonal influence, the more favourable their attitude will be towards eWOM information and adopting it (Lee and Ma, 2012). However, in investigating the effects of traditional WOM on immediate and delayed product judgment, Fitzgerald Bone (1995) found that one's susceptibility to interpersonal influence did not significantly moderate the relationship. In order to verify research that has been undertaken in other product categories, this consumer trait has been taken into account for aesthetic goods. The findings from this qualitative study suggest that this consumer trait forms the basis upon which consumers develop attitudes towards aesthetic products and the influence eWOM information has on this process.

C7: I guess though it is a common response of people to base their judgment on these cues. They want to be reassured; they want to know from their peers they bought the right TV, the right coat, the right car, the right art...a lot of people do care about this stuff.

Given that research is not clear-cut with regards to this consumer trait, the present research considers this factor in how consumers evaluate an aesthetic product.

6.6 Conclusion

Based on the results that emerged from the qualitative interviews, some important implications were drawn. First, insight about the context of the research and justification for the current study points to the changes that occur in consumers' attitude formation process for aesthetic products due to the rise of online social spaces. Specifically,

Facebook was cited as the most widely consulted platform for sharing and collecting information about art. Here, it was possible to conclude that information alters consumers' decision process and shifts the basis of product attitude towards more rational deliberation, rather than affect. Consumer product attitudes appear to be more rationally driven, making consumers more receptive to informational influence, such as those retrieved via eWOM. The relationship between one's initial *response* to the product, the *basis of product evaluation* and the final *product attitude* needs to be investigated further. The dimensions of eWOM that have the largest impact on this process are the *volume* and the *source expertise* of eWOM. Additionally, some person-specific factors, such as the *consumption goal* of the consumer, the *product class experience*, the *online experience* and the *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* were identified as elements worth testing.

Based on these findings and in respect to the aims of the research, a conceptual framework was developed according to a set of research hypotheses that are discussed in the following chapter. The qualitative findings served as the basis upon which the attitude formation model was developed, and thus enabled the researcher to pin down different factors that may be particularly relevant for the context of this investigation.

CHAPTER 7: CONCEPTUAL CHAPTER

7.0 Introduction

The review of the literature presented in the previous chapters on aesthetic products, attitude formation and eWOM information provided the theoretical background for the development of the present study. The exploratory research phase gathered further insight to help contextualise the research problem and refine the model to be tested in the quantitative stage.

The literature that has been surveyed in the preceding chapters included an overview of theories and concepts from consumer research, digital marketing and consumer psychology. This provided an overview of the phenomenon across different fields of enquiry. A lack of coherent interpretations and comprehensive understandings of eWOM information in affect-rich contexts, particularly on the attitude formation process of aesthetic products, called for an exploratory study in order to fill this research gap. This chapter presents the conceptual relationships and gaps identified in the exploratory findings.

To date, literature has not provided an overarching framework that accounts for the influence of eWOM on product attitudes for the affectively rich category of aesthetic goods. Here, there have been different conceptualisations about the affectively driven decision process for this category in a traditional setting, but no study has attempted to investigate how the process is transposed to the online social setting. This environment is characterised by a very large pool of easily retrievable information and social knowledge exchange. The literature, to date, has not provided an empirical model that would confirm the influence of eWOM information on the attitude formation process for aesthetic products in an online social context. The exploratory study helped provide a deeper understanding about the research problem.

7.1 The steps defining the Attitude Formation Process

7.1.1 Cognitive and Affective Response

The findings of the exploratory study showed that consumers perceive art as a hedonic product category. Given the affect-rich nature of hedonic products (Hekkert, 2006; Suh, 2009; Rottenstreich and Shu, 2004), consumers' reaction to this typology exclusively comes from an affective response (Chaudhuri, 2006; Palazon and Delgado-Balatter, 2011; Hoegg and Alba, 2008).

But the interview findings point out that one's initial response to a product is not entirely affective. One's initial perception of the product can also manifest as a cognitive response. But some specific consumer traits determine the way in which the product is initially perceived and thus shape the saliency of one or the other product response. This finding offers a domain-specific understanding of the process that has been used in previous research (Leder et al., 2004; Pham et al., 2001; Hagtvedt et al., 2008). Existing literature assumed that consumers employ an affectively driven attitude formation process informed only by the initial affective product response when evaluating these product options (Page and Herr, 2002). But by addressing consumers' attitude development modalities in the exploratory study, individuals often do not rely on the affective response as they also employ extensive thinking and attentive reasoning when forming attitudes. In order to understand how the response components shape product attitudes (McManus and Furnham, 2010), the relative importance assigned to the affective and cognitive response needs to be examined, particularly with how it relates to eWOM influences.

7.1.2 Basis of Evaluation

As literature defined, affect-based attitudes are formed on the experienced affective response, while rational attitudes are determined by the knowledge and information about

the product being assessed (Wyer et al., 1999). Affect and cognition have been recognised as the two main evaluative elements on the basis which consumers form attitudes (MacKenzie et al., 1986; Chen, Kim and Lin, 2015; Petty et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2012).

The exploratory findings pointed out that aesthetic product preferences often change during the attitude formation process as a result of information inputs, which may manifest as eWOM cues. Specifically, aesthetic product attitudes are highly malleable and dependent upon the informational cues made available at the point of evaluation. As such, the basis of evaluation increasingly shifts from affect towards cognition because of newly availability online WOM information. Cognitive attitudinal components gain in saliency and accessibility (Simonson, 2016) as consumers rely more extensively on these elements as they become available through online mediated platforms. Contrary to literature that contends that hedonic products will promote the development of affective attitudes (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Roy and Ng, 2012; Shwarz, 2010), the product attitude formation process in this context progressively assumes a cognitively based constitution because of new eWOM informational inputs now accessible.

7.1.3 Product Attitudes

The exploratory findings illustrate bi-dimensional attitudes, where one's attitude is composed of both affective and cognitive elements (Fiore and Kim, 2005; Lee et al., 2011). Contrary to previous research that argues affect directly determines aesthetic attitudes, both affect and cognition jointly shape attitude development. In line with this finding, initially stated product preferences are altered based on one's insight acquired through external cues. Given the specificity of the motivational factors involved in aesthetic consumption, information could be even more important for consumers with symbolic purchase goals compared to those with hedonic goals. Page and Herr (2002) argue that informational cues are even more relevant when consumers are trying to establish their objective judgment through a cognitive evaluative mode that is associated

with self-representation needs, rather than when these are expressing their affective response (liking/not liking) guided by hedonic motives.

The results revealed that social knowledge retrieved from eWOM information acquires extensive importance in symbolic consumption. Given these findings, the study will aim to explore the way in which the availability of eWOM information and consumption goals influence the relationship between one's initial response to a product and one's later developed attitude.

In linking the exploratory findings back to the literature, it is possible that the availability of eWOM information causes a change in consumers' product attitude formation process. Forming attitudes about aesthetic products in an online social setting differs from the process if there was no additional information available. Looking at the steps within the process, exposure to the object elicits both affective and cognitive responses, although in varying degrees of saliency. When the response to an aesthetic product is not accompanied by eWOM, it will not directly determine the basis upon which the product is evaluated once the consumer is presented with these informational cues. Along these lines, it is predicted that a consumer's consumption goal will impact upon the relationship between the initial response and the basis upon which the product is evaluated in the presence of eWOM informational cues.

Specifically, the following hypotheses emerged:

H1 The availability of eWOM information has an influence on the initially stated product attitude of consumers driven by both Hedonic and Symbolic consumption goals

H2a The Affective response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation

H2b The Cognitive response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation

H3a The Affective response will have an influence on the character of the Basis of Evaluation depending upon the consumption goals of the individual

H3b The Cognitive response will have an influence on the character of the Basis of Evaluation depending upon the consumption goals of the individual

7.2 The Dimensions of eWOM information

7.2.1 eWOM Source Expertise

In line with these arguments, the exploratory findings emphasised the influence of eWOM in enhancing the saliency of cognitive components in one's attitude formation. Information made available helps reduce the ambiguity associated with the product and provides external justification. However, the dimensions of the eWOM message are important factors that determine the effect of information on one's attitude formation and require further investigation in this consumption domain.

Given that eWOM information is viewed as a specific type of social influence that has an effect on consumers' decision journey and provides crucial information. Extant literature has suggested that, expert sources will be privileged for hedonic products (Dellarocas et al., 2007; Floyd et al., 2014; Racherla and Friske; 2012); while others have affirmed peer consumers will be more influential (Smith et al., 2005). The literature review and the qualitative findings provide no clear-cut preference, so one of the aims of the second stage of this study is to identify whether information coming from peers or information provided by expert sources pays a larger role in consumers' attitude development.

7.2.2 eWOM Valence

Previous research has categorised eWOM information along two overarching traits: ‘volume’ (Park and Kim, 2008; Zhu and Zhang, 2009) and ‘valence’ (Liu, 2006; Moldovan et al., 2011; Gu et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2011). Here, the valence of eWOM is defined as the positive or negative based on the information that is shared. However, the valence dimension available in eWOM information that is exclusively textual. Fine art related eWOM information is mainly retrieved from Facebook and presents a largely positive valence, quantitative format and low extent negative or qualitative feedback. Accordingly, the valence dimension of eWOM is not included in the study, as it does not accurately mirror the information found in actual Facebook conversations for this consumption context.

7.2.3 eWOM Volume

Previous research defined the ‘volume’ of eWOM as the amount, or the number, of informational messages available (Riegner, 2007; Duan et al., 2008). In the qualitative study, the volume dimension significantly impacted individuals’ evaluation of the art product. In other words, depending on the number of likes, shares and comments about a particular artist or one of the products, consumers come to learn about its existence as well as learn about the product’s popularity and reputation. As a consequence, this informational dimension taps cognitive elements in the form of quality cues, which help reduce the uncertainty involved in the evaluative process as well as signal resonance with other consumers. Furthermore, as Chan and Ngai (2001) argue, research has offered different conclusions about the impact of volume on consumers’ attitude formation process for specific product categories; the role of this dimension will be further investigated.

Volume and source expertise have been included in the study in order to determine their impact on an individual’s product attitude. The above findings also highlight the

importance of eWOM that enhances the saliency of cognition in the attitude formation process. It is thus expected that product attitude will be impacted differently depending on the level of eWOM that accompanies the attitude product.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4 The more cognitively based is the Basis of Evaluation, the Product attitude will be influenced by:

- a) eWOM Volume,*
- b) Source Expertise of eWOM*

7.3. Influencing Factors

7.3.1 Consumption Goal

The qualitative findings highlighted the importance of adopting a motivational view when addressing the attitude formation process. More specifically, literature argued that for hedonic products, consumers are driven by exclusively affective factors (Suh, 2009; Rottenstreich and Shu, 2004; Chowdhuri et al., 2015). Aside from the hedonic perspective, the insight acquired through the exploratory research indicates that consumer preferences about this type of product are often driven by symbolic consumption motivations. Accordingly, literature contends that this type of consumption elicits cognitively based evaluations (Charters, 2006; Bian and Forsythe, 2012; Dubé et al., 2003), as product attitudes are shaped in reference to external validation and endorsement. Following these arguments, the qualitative findings suggested that symbolic goals may shift the attitude process to more cognitive components that take into account informational inputs rather relying exclusively on one's affective response to the product.

The literature concludes that product typology plays a role in determining the attitude process that will be employed, thus differentiating between affectively and cognitively

based product attitudes. This study explores a motivational perspective to hedonic consumption. The attitude process that consumers employ is more cognitively based when product choice is driven by symbolic consumption rather than hedonic motivations. When the evaluation of a product is motivated in view of a symbolic consumption goal, the influence of eWOM information as a cognitive input is more extensive given the cognitive drivers that underpin this type of consumption. Appropriately, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H5 Consumers with a Symbolic purchase Goal will have a more cognitively based Evaluation compared to consumers with a Hedonic Goal

7.3.2 Product Class Experience

Expertise in the product class is ‘the ability to perform product related tasks successfully’ (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; 411). Extant research has consistently identified one’s level of expertise as playing an important role in determining differences between product attitudes and product preferences (e.g., Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014; Hekkert et al., 2003; Hekkert and Van Wieringen, 1996a). The findings of the qualitative study denote that, depending on the level of expertise a consumer has about art, product attitude is guided predominantly by affect or cognition. As such, literature contends that expert consumers are more apt to suppress their intuitive affective responses in order to assign more importance to cognitive deliberations about the quality of the product (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014). In order to understand the influence of novel information and knowledge consumers can acquire through eWOM, this trait will need to be considered prior to the model testing. As such, differences between expert and non-expert consumers could offer insight for understanding the way in which information that is stored in memory or retrieved on spot increases the saliency of the cognitive elements in the evaluative process.

Along these lines, the importance of involvement on the consumer decision process was highly relevant in defining the process during which consumers evaluate and form product attitudes about the aesthetic product category. From the interviews, it was clear that consumers perceive art as a highly involving product category, and thus quickly develop high levels of product class involvement. As previous findings about the influence of this consumer trait on the development of product attitude presented contrasting arguments (i.e. Giese et al., 1996; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Kinley et al., 2010; Bruwer et al., 2013), it is important to investigate this dimension in the current study.

Furthermore, results from the qualitative research suggest that one's expertise does not increase in concomitance with the level of product involvement. Highly involved consumers develop experience with the product category that reflects *perceived*, rather than factual, expertise. Even when one has significant experience with the product category, consumers do not necessarily acquire a high level of formal product expertise to inform their buying decisions; instead, they merely develop perceived knowledge. As a consequence, the association between involvement and perceived knowledge needs to be further explored and linked to the discussion of an overarching product experience factor that shapes product attitude development (Park and Moon, 2003; Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012).

Thus, it is hypothesised that an overarching construct of Self-Knowledge and Involvement, defined as product experience, shapes the attitude formation process. Particularly, the amount of product experience a consumer has will determine the importance assigned to the affective and the cognitive reception of the product. Depending on this consumer trait, the influence of eWOM information will have more or less impact on the product attitude these develop. It is thus important to understand how the consumer profile influences the process steps and the extent of responsiveness to informational cues in respect to the final attitude outcome.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses were developed:

H6 There is a relationship between Self-knowledge and Product Involvement combined together to create a new higher order variable of Product Experience.

H7a Product Experience will have an influence on the affective response an individual has about the product

H7b Product experience will have an influence on the cognitive response an individual has about the product

H8 The Product Experience will have an impact on the Attitude for products:

- a) With low eWOM Volume
- b) With high eWOM Volume
- c) With low Source Expertise eWOM
- d) With high Source Expertise eWOM

7.3.3 Consumer Online Experience

One of the other traits that influenced the adoption of eWOM information in the exploratory research was the extent of a consumer's online experience. There have been findings about how this trait influences consumer decision-making and particularly attitude development (Arcand, 2017), with some authors arguing for a positive relationship (Brown et al., 2007; Zhu and Zhang, 2009), while others arguing for a reversed effect (Park and Lee, 2009; Cheema and Papatla, 2010). By addressing this aspect in the qualitative research, the findings suggest that familiarity with the internet channel shapes their information acquisition behaviours and thus impacts upon their level of engagement with eWOM. It appeared that a consumer's engagement in online conversations for information retrieval is contingent on their familiarity with the channel, regardless of motivational and personal traits.

Accordingly, this factor needs to be further explored in order to establish its impact on the attitude formation process. By distinguishing between the specific eWOM dimensions that were found relevant in this context, it will be possible to identify how the online experience trait guides consumers in relating informational cues to evaluative outcomes.

Accordingly, the following is proposed:

H9 Online Experience will have an impact on the Attitude for products:

- a) With low eWOM Volume*
- b) With high eWOM Volume*
- c) With low Source Expertise eWOM*
- d) With high Source Expertise eWOM*

7.3.4 Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

Susceptibility to interpersonal influence is a general trait defined as ‘the need to identify with or enhance one's image in the opinion of significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands; the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions; and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others or seeking information from others’ (Bearden et al., 1989; 473). Here, susceptibility is a consumer’s propensity to be influenced by others opinions in their purchase decision-making (Park and Lee, 2009), as the product choices of other consumers are perceived as better-informed compared to personal choices (Chen et al., 2011).

Even though extant literature has highlighted the largely cognitive character of product evaluations in highly susceptible consumers (Park and Lee, 2009; Pham, 1998), the role of this variable has not been entirely researched in the online context for specific types of products and will be thus included in the investigation in order to assess its effects on the consumer attitude journey. Following this argument, it is hypothesised that in higher

susceptibility individuals, rational considerations will overtake the affective inputs as basis for the development of product attitude and consequently the reliance of eWOM information. It is thus suggested that:

H10 The level of Susceptibility to interpersonal influence will have an influence on the Basis of Evaluation

7.4 Theoretical Model

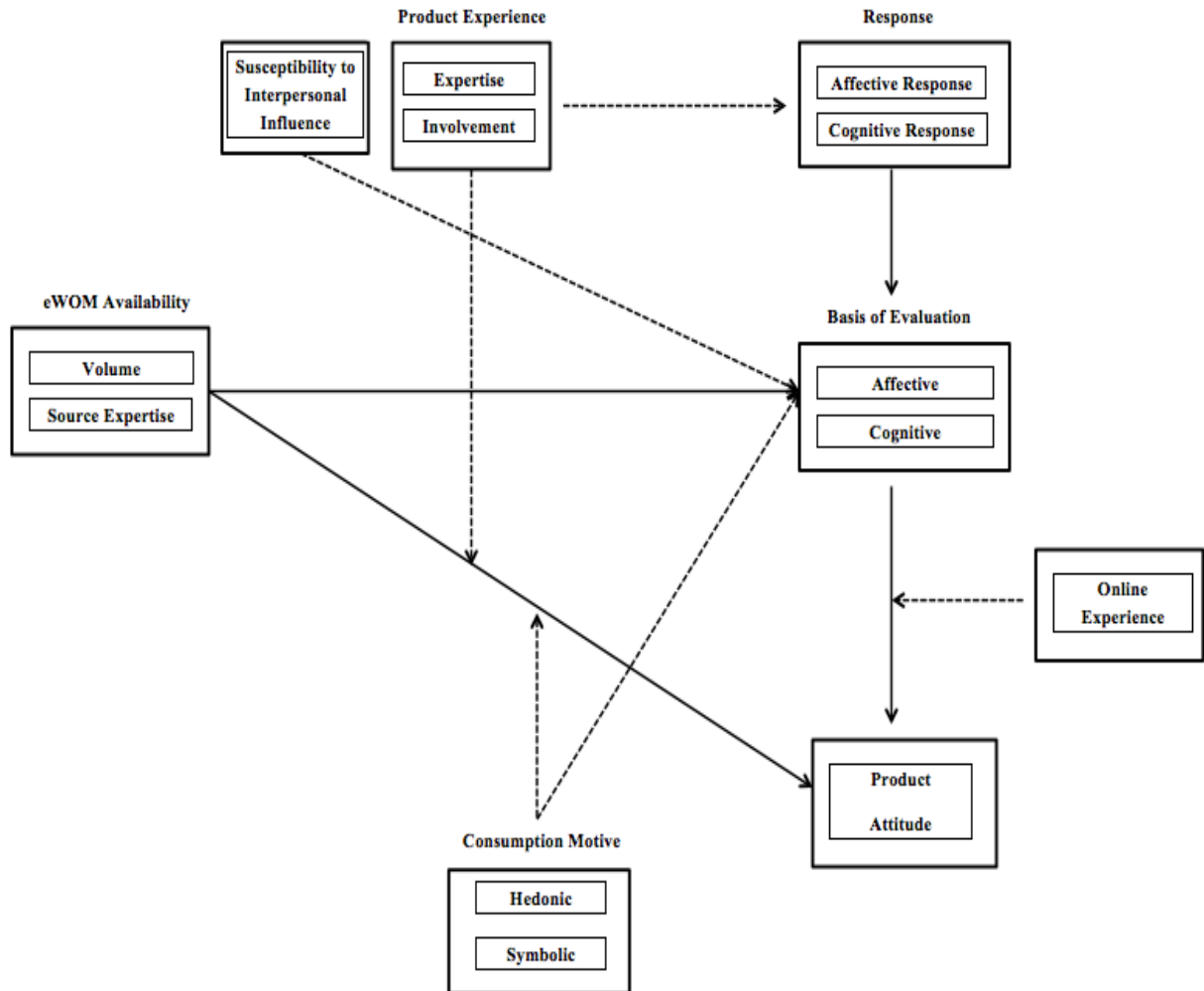
Based on these variables and in line with the objectives of the research, the following model has been developed and will be tested in the empirical research.

Online WOM information, with the dimensionalities of *Volume* and *Source expertise* may influence the *basis of the evaluation* and accordingly the overall *attitude towards the product* that a consumer develops after being exposed to it. Here, it is predicted that, depending on the eWOM dimensionality, the basis upon which product attitude is formed will differ from one's initial *response* to the product.

The process is also expected to be influenced by some person-specific and motivational factors. Specifically, the level of consumer product class *expertise* and *involvement* are hypothesised to form an overarching construct defined as product class experience. Hence, this trait will have an effect on the character of the *response* to the product as well as the later product *attitude* that develops. Furthermore, the degree of consumer *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* is predicted to have an effect on the way in which consumers will form their *attitudes*. The level of *online experience* will also play a role in determining the way in which the consumer will perceive the eWOM information that accompanies the evaluated product. Lastly, the motivational drivers of the consumer, defined as the consumption *goals*, will shape the process. Consumers driven by hedonic goals will exhibit a more pronounced affective process, while consumers driven by symbolic goals will evaluate the product based on more rational considerations and thus

will be subjected to larger informational influences in forming their product attitudes.

Figure 7.1 Proposed theoretical model accounting for the product attitude formation process for aesthetic products in respect of the influence of eWOM



Given the conceptual framework outlined in the chapter, the following hypotheses have been developed and will be tested in the quantitative stage of the study.

Table 7.1 Overview of the hypothesis informed by the review of the literature and the qualitative findings

H1 The availability of eWOM information has an influence on the initially stated product attitude of consumers driven by both Hedonic and Symbolic consumption goals

<i>H2a The Affective response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation</i>
<i>H2b The Cognitive response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation</i>
<i>H3a The Affective response will have an influence on the character of the Basis of Evaluation depending upon the consumption goals of the individual</i>
<i>H3b The Cognitive response will have an influence on the character of the Basis of Evaluation depending upon the consumption goals of the individual</i>
<i>H4 The more cognitively based is the Basis of Evaluation, the Product attitude will be influenced by:</i> a) <i>eWOM Volume,</i> b) <i>Source Expertise of eWOM</i>
<i>H5 Consumers with a Symbolic purchase Goal will have a more cognitively based Evaluation compared to consumers with a Hedonic Goal</i>
<i>H6 There is a relationship between Self-knowledge and Product Involvement combined together to create a new higher order variable of Product Experience.</i>
<i>H7a Product Experience will have an influence on the affective response an individual has about the product</i>
<i>H7b Product experience will have an influence on the cognitive response an individual has about the product</i>
<i>H8 The Product Experience will have an impact on the Attitude for products:</i> a) <i>With low eWOM Volume</i> b) <i>With high eWOM Volume</i> c) <i>With low Source Expertise eWOM</i> d) <i>With high Source Expertise eWOM</i>

H9 Online Experience will have an impact on the Attitude for products:

- a) With low eWOM Volume*
- b) With high eWOM Volume*
- c) With low Source Expertise eWOM*
- d) With high Source Expertise eWOM*

H10 The level of Susceptibility to interpersonal influence will have an influence on the Basis of Evaluation

7.5 Clarification of variables

This section will provide an overview of the variables that have been identified in the review of the literature as potentially influential for the customer's decision journey for the purchase of aesthetic products.

The second stage of the study adopts a quantitative approach that helps identify the temporal order and the measurement of the considered variables. The adoption of a quantitative approach differs significantly from a qualitative approach in terms of language and presentation of the relationships between the variables of interest (Field, 2009). Particularly, this study includes seven independent variables, one moderator variable, and three dependent variables. As May (2011) explains, an independent variable is said to have an influence over the dependent variable and precedes it in temporal order.

Table 7.2 Proposed Temporal order of Variables Influencing the Consumer Decision Journey

Temporal Order	Variables	Reference
Independent	eWOM Volume	Duan et al. (2008), Berger et al., (2009), Gupta and Harris (2005),

		<p>Lee et al. (2008)</p> <p>Park and Lee (2009),</p> <p>Park and Kim (2008),</p> <p>Archak et al. (2010),</p> <p>Kostyra et al. (2016),</p> <p>Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006)</p>
	eWOM source Expertise	<p>Cheung and Thadani (2012),</p> <p>Cheung et al. (2008),</p> <p>Senecal and Nantel (1994),</p> <p>Steffes and Burgee (2009),</p> <p>Smith et al. (2005),</p> <p>Fitzgerald Bone (1995),</p> <p>Dellarocas et al. (2007)</p> <p>Floyd et al. (2014)</p> <p>Racherla and Friske (2012)</p>
Moderator	Purchase Goals	<p>Kempf (1999),</p> <p>Adaval (2001),</p> <p>Suh (2009),</p> <p>Rottenstreich and Shu (2004),</p> <p>Khan et al. (2005),</p> <p>Chowdhury et al. (2015),</p> <p>Botti and McGill (2011),</p> <p>Bloch et al. (2003),</p> <p>Creusen and Schoormans (2005),</p> <p>Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer (2012),</p> <p>Alba and Williams (2013)</p> <p>Palazon and Delgado-Balatter (2011),</p>

		Dubé et al. (2003) Pham (1998)
Dependent	Affective Response and Cognitive Response	Chaudhuri (2001; 2006), Shiv and Fedorikhin (1999), Palazon and Delgado-Balatter (2011), Page and Herr (2002), Veryzer (1993), Hekkert (2006), Mano and Oliver (1993), Hoegg and Alba (2008), Leder et al. (2004), Pham et al (2001), Hagetvedt et al. (2008) McManus and Furnham (2010)
	Basis of Evaluation	Wyer et al. (1999), MacKenzie et al. (1986), Petty et al. (2001), Kim et al. (2012), Shiv and Fedorikhin (1999), Khan et al. (2005), Dhar and Wertenbroch (2002), Lee and Lee (2009), Crites et al. (1994), Edwards (1990), Millar and Tesser (1986), Chen et al. (2015), López and Maya (2012), Bohm and Pfister (1996)

	Product Attitude	Kim et al. (2012), Dhar and Wertenbroch (2000), Cohen et al. (2006), Schwartz (1990), Schwartz and Clore (1996), Althuizen and Sgourev (2014), López and Maya (2012), Page and Herr (2002)
Independent	Online Experience	Brown et al. (2007), Zhu and Zhang (2009), Park and Lee (2009), Cheema and Papatla (2010), Arcand (2017)
	Product Class Involvement	Giese et al. (1996), Petty and Caccioppo (1986), Zaichowsky (1985), Gu et al. (2012), Kinley et al. (2010), Sarathy and Patro (2013), Bruwer et al. (2013), Doh and Hwang (2009), Martin and Lueg (2013)
	Product Class Expertise	Althuizen and Sgourev (2014), Hekkert et al. (2003) , Hekkert and Van Wieringen (1996a), Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer (2012), Greifeneder et al. (2010), Juslin (2013),

		Schaller and Malhotra (2015)
	Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	Park and Lee (2009), Bailey (2005), Lee and Ma (2012), Pham (1998), Arcand (2017), Fitzgerald Bone (1995).

Based on the study’s hypotheses, the following chapter will discuss the methodological approach that was adopted in the quantitative stage of the research and provide justification for the choice of methods.

7.6 Conclusion

Based on the conclusions from the qualitative study, this chapter identified variables that may intervene in the product attitude formation process in online social spaces. The survey of the literature served as basis for the development of the qualitative study that refined a model that can be tested in a later quantitative stage. Based on the obtained insight, an individual’s initial *response* to an aesthetic product, which can be higher on *affect* or *cognition* depends on one’s *product experience*, and subsequent steps in the process will be determined by specific factors.

The consumption *goal* driving the consumer and the *basis for product attitude* formation can be either affect- or cognition-based. As such, eWOM information will have more or less of an impact on its formation depending on whether the consumer employs affective or cognitive means of evaluation. However, the influence of information on product attitude will also depend on the *volume* of eWOM and the *expertise* of the source providing the information. Lastly, person-specific variables, including *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* and the *online experience* of the consumer, are theorised to impact specific steps within the attitude formation process for aesthetic products in online

social contexts. Based on the above, a theoretical framework was developed and the initial relationships between variables that have been hypothesised. The following chapter will provide an outline of the research approach adopted for the quantitative testing of the hypothesised framework and the methodological choices that were undertaken..

CHAPTER 8: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

8.0 Introduction

Following the qualitative data collection and the conceptual development presented in the previous chapter, the purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the second stage of the study. In order to fulfil the aims of the study, this stage of the research employed a quantitative methodological approach.

The chapter will provide an overview and justification of the methodological procedure that was applied. It will begin by introducing experimental designs in research, followed by a discussion of the design process and the supporting questionnaire, the data collection stage and the online experiment. Furthermore, the sampling procedure and the methodological limitations will be outlined and justified. Possible sources of error and the ethical implications of the study will also be discussed.

8.1 Online Experiment

The first stage of the study, which involved a set of in-depth exploratory interviews, was followed by a quantitative research approach. Compared to qualitative methods that aim to obtain a deeper insight, quantitative methods are employed in order to collect numerical data about motivations, attitudes and behaviours (Spiggle, 1994). By relying on a predominantly deductive approach to inquiry, quantitative methods are concerned with identifying and measuring relationships among variables (Saunders, 2011; Baker, 2001). Therefore, the relationships identified through the literature review and the qualitative findings (Morgan, 1998) were measured and tested in order to obtain an exhaustive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Contrary to correlation research, experimental research involves the direct manipulation of variables (Field, 2009). The emphasis placed on experimental research that allows

researchers to identify causal relationships marked the emergence of modern science (Hacking, 1983). As Millsap and Maydeu-Olivares (2009; 23) state, ‘experiments are characterized by the: (1) manipulation of one or more independent variables; (2) use of controls such as randomly assigning participants or experimental units to one or more independent variables; and (3) careful observation or measurement of one or more dependent variables’. Here, the first and third conditions differentiate experimental research from other research approaches.

In recent years, a growing number of studies have focused on methods that measure consumer preferences. As such, the development and adoption of structural equation models in experiments, that include both choice and related variables, has been recommended as a solution that helps provide a comprehensive understanding of the choice process (MacKinnon and Dwyer, 1993). Given that the aims of the current study involve an exploration of the way in which social eWOM information influences the decision-making process of consumers, with focus being placed on the various steps in the attitude formation process, this procedure has been deemed the most suitable approach to meet the set objectives. Compared to a survey research, an experiment allows to identify specific steps in the process that a questionnaire would not be able to accomplish as it relies on self-reported measures (Harrison, 2009). However in experimental designs, the choice scenario is, to a certain degree, informational and contextually impoverished compared to a real-life setting. Furthermore, consumers in a natural context have a larger set of product options to consider compared to an experimental context. Accordingly, there is a potential risk of reducing external validity by the high importance assigned to context effects within the choice setting (Simonson, 2008).

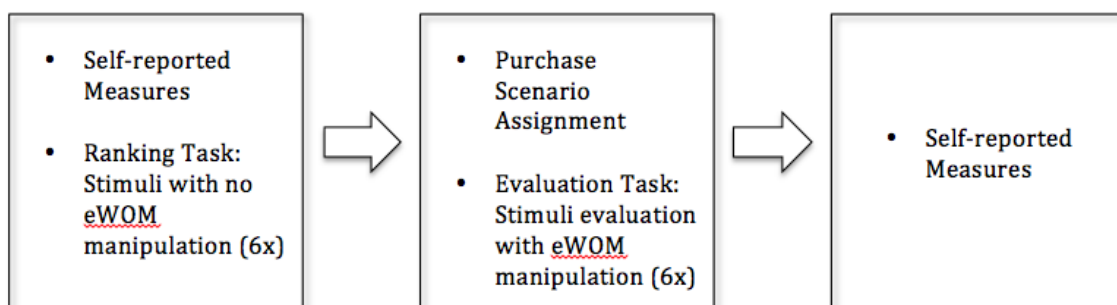
Even though experiments that test real and actual behaviours enhance the realism of the experimental manipulations, these types of experiments are not able to provide insight about the psychological processes involved in the measured phenomenon (Morales et al., 2017).

In the social sciences, there is always a trade-off between the amount of manipulation over the participants' experience and the generalizability of the findings (Cronbach, 1957). When the aim of the research is concerned with the analysis of attitudes rather than the documenting of actual consumption behaviours, artificial manipulations are suitable (Morales et al., 2017). Given that the aims of this study that involve the testing of the psychological process involved in the formation of product attitudes, a more artificial experimental design has been employed even though it may reduce the generalizability of the findings.

8.2 Experiment Development

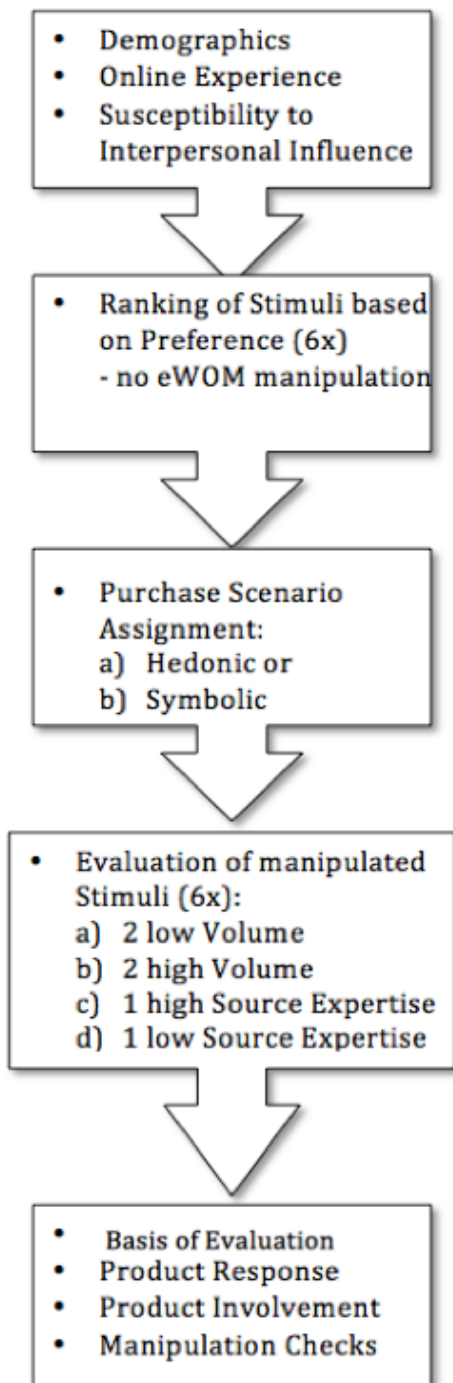
As previously mentioned, the research design is a fundamental step in the research process where several aspects need to be carefully planned in order to develop an adequate experiment for the purposes of the study (Harris, 2008). This experimental task involved participants evaluating six paintings that were manipulated with different eWOM availability conditions. Participants were assigned to either a Hedonic or Symbolic purchase goal scenario condition, which was aimed at guiding their product evaluations. Before and after completing the experimental task, participants were asked to complete a set of questions as a self-reported measure of the study variables of interest.

Figure 8.1. A graphical representation of the experimental procedure



The most popular method of investigation when dealing with WOM is found in survey designs where participants are asked directly about their communication behaviours. But such methods experience major issues with recall and self-reporting biases that thereafter represent a source of error (Dellarocas et al., 2007). Furthermore, De Bruyn and Lilien (2008), argue that survey methods predominantly measure the final outcomes of WOM communication without accounting for the steps that occurred in the decision process. This study therefore adopted an experimental design, which allows the researcher to tap into consumers' decision-making process in order to effectively determine the way in which eWOM influences the step-by-step development of product attitudes.

Figure 8.2 Step-by-step outline of the experimental procedure



As previously outlined, the objective of this research is to identify the influence of eWOM on the attitude formation process of consumers in view of a potential purchase of an aesthetic product. Fine art was used as the subject of the study, given the pronounced

affective components that determine its consumption. Therefore, it represents a suitable example to explore the process of eWOM for the wider category of aesthetic products. This study will not measure the impact of eWOM on actual sales as previous studies have done, as this does not correspond to the research aims of the present (e.g., Dhar and Chang, 2009; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Clemons et al., 2006; Dellarocas et al., 2007; Zhu and Zhang, 2010).

8.3 Experiment Design

8.3.1 The Experimental Procedure

The design of an experiment includes deciding a comprehensive plan for appointing respondents to treatment conditions, as well as the statistical tests that will be carried out on the collected data (Finch et al., 2016). Along these lines, the activities associated with designing an experiment are as follows:

1. 'Formulation of statistical hypotheses that are germane to the scientific hypotheses.
2. Determination of the treatment levels (independent variable) to be manipulated, the measurement to be recorded (dependent variable), and the extraneous conditions (nuisance variables) that must be controlled.
3. Specification of the number of experimental units required and the population from which they will be sampled.
4. Specification of the randomization procedure for assigning the experimental units to the treatment levels.
5. Determination of the statistical analysis that will be performed' (Kirk, 1995; 1–2).

In line with these recommendations, several decisions were taken regarding the format of the experiment and the accompanying questionnaire (attached in Appendix 3). The overarching aim of the experimental design was to define the dependent, independent and nuisance variables as well as determine the statistical procedures that will be undertaken on the data (Finch et al., 2016).

The participants taking part in the study were asked to complete an online experiment on their perceptions of fine art. The first group of respondents consisted participants that had no prior knowledge or expertise in the field of art (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014). The second group were considered to be fine art experts (Augustin and Leder, 2006). Participants in each of the experimental groups performed all phases of the experiment individually. Aside from the experimental tasks, participants completed an online survey (Sue and Ritter, 2011) that included measures about manipulation checks, dependent variables and independent variables. In order to describe the experimental situations, verbal accounts of the conditions and tasks were the preferred method over other alternatives. Foxall (1997) argues that the adoption of verbal descriptions of the consumption context is a better research strategy compared to more complex techniques like videos, slides or photographs. As such, with written descriptions, consumers ponder about the situations using their own learning history and previously acquired experience. Thus, a verbal account was preferred as the use of photos, slides or videos could evoke specific reactions to the depicted scenes rather than compel consumers to use their own rules and previous learning in specific settings.

The experiment was implemented through a mixed factorial design. A factorial design is a type of experimental where all the levels of one treatment are implemented on each level of the second treatment, thus the treatments are completely crossed (Field and Hole, 2002). In this instance, the researcher has the ability to concurrently assess both the treatments of interest (Millsap et al., 2009). For this particular study, the first treatment corresponded to the Purchase Goals, where participants were randomly assigned to either Symbolic or Hedonic Goals. López and Maya (2012), Kempf (1999), Scarabis et al. (2008), Pham (1998) all employed similar procedures when studying decision-making

processes associated with hedonic and utilitarian consumption. Random assignment refers to the way in which respondents are assigned to different experimental treatments. This procedure was adopted because a well-developed design where randomisation is appropriately employed leads to a better interpretation of causal relationships between variables compared to studies that rely on observational data (Millsap et al., 2009). The core assumption underlying this practice is that the identification of causal parameters is made available. In this instance, each participant is assigned a probability $0 < \pi < 1$ to the first condition and probability $1 - \pi$ to the second condition and consequently this assignment becomes ignorable (Millsap et al., 2009).

The second and third treatment consisted in manipulations of eWOM availability levels that accompanied the product stimulus under evaluation. One treatment included the volume of available eWOM (high and low eWOM Volume), while the third treatment involved the expertise of the source providing the eWOM (high and low eWOM source Expertise). Each participant was subjected to all of the eWOM manipulations. Following, each participant was assigned to evaluate each of the six stimuli and was assigned to a consumption goal scenario between symbolic and hedonic goal alternatives. Altering the levels or values of an independent variable in order to determine its effects on the participants scoring on the dependent variable is defined as manipulation in experimental research. As such, the levels of the independent variable that are manipulated are described as the conditions of the experiment (Harris, 2008). As defined in the literature, manipulation means the deliberate altering of the levels or values of the independent variables used in the study in view of examining its effects on the dependent variables, thus inferring a cause-effect relationship (Harris, 2008). To be more specific, as stated by Millsap (2009; 24) 'a causal relationship exists: (1) if the cause precedes the effect; (2) whenever the cause is present, the effect occurs; and (3) the cause must be present for the effect to occur'.

In order to avoid confounding issues (Adaval, 2001), the order of the manipulations were randomised. An approximately equal number of participants were assigned to the two

goal scenario manipulations in an unsystematic manner and based on random procedure. Eliminating possible confounding variables is a way of ensuring there is no possible alternative and rival cause that induces changes among the DVs of interest (Harris, 2008).

Along these lines, measures can be used either to determine the outcome of an experimental manipulation (i.e., Basis of Evaluation) or to measure attitudes that are naturally pre-existing (i.e., Product Class Experience) (Sansone et al., 2003). The first set of questions addressed participants' demographics, such as gender, age as well as formal expertise in the field. Next, participants were assigned to the Goal manipulation and asked to evaluate the set of stimuli (6x) presented with altering levels of eWOM to accompany them. Then, participants were asked to complete a set of questions that measured various variables of interest for the aims of the current study (via self reports). The items that were included in the questionnaire were selected based on the literature review, qualitative findings and the objectives of the research (Saunders, 2011).

8.3.2 Materials and Stimuli

In view of the objectives of the study, materials were used with the aim of manipulating the independent variables. In terms of the eWOM manipulation, materials were created on the Facebook social network because the interviews identified Facebook as the primary platform used to collect information about the product category. A further justification consisted in the fact that recent research indicates Facebook is the most widely adopted by companies (Alves et al., 2016). Consistent with previous research within the topic and which adopted similar experimental designs (e.g., Hong and Chang, 2015; Pham et al., 2015; López and Maya, 2012), the design of the Facebook page and its contents for the artists, Facebook posts and shared posts was created for the experimental purposes of the study and mimicked the real appearance of the platform. In this instance, 'a Facebook post is defined as an advertising-like message content that induces consumer responses' (Chen, Kim and Lin, 2015; 209). All treatment pages and posts were kept identical in style and layout, differing only in name, the presented product and eWOM

manipulation in order to maintain consistency across conditions (Park and Lee, 2009). Use of Facebook ensured a more realistic experimental environment compared to fictional platforms (Zhang et al., 2010). Art experts assisted in choosing the artworks based on similar artist status and congruency in artistic style in order to avoid marked differences between the chosen set of stimuli (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014). No price information was available in order to avoid any effect price might have on the expressed product preference. The following section will serve to provide an outline of the manipulations that were included in the experimental procedure with the rationale for their inclusion in the study.

8.3.3 Availability of eWOM Information

eWOM Source Expertise

In order to account for the source expertise variable, the ‘Shared by’ element from Facebook was adopted. Specifically, respondents were presented with the stimulus in the form of Facebook post accompanied by a list of five users who have previously shared the stimulus post within their social network. Low eWOM source Expertise was manipulated by presenting the post as ‘shared’ by ordinary users with fictitious names. On the other hand, high eWOM source expertise was manipulated by presenting the post as ‘shared’ by users considered as experts in the art field, such as: gallery, curator, artist and art magazine. This procedure has been employed in previous research (Smith et al., 2005). Here, expertise was operationalised in the form of a high and low level where expertise was cued through the number of restaurants the recommender had visited and their experience with the product category. Similarly, Fitzgerald Bone (1995) manipulated expertise by providing background information about the source — namely, their occupation and place of work in order to cue the level of the providers’ expertise. But when wanting to emphasise the low expertise of the source, there was no mention of the respective place of work.

eWOM Volume

Analogous to previous research undertaken by Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) and Phua and Ahn (2014), eWOM volume was manipulated by displaying a different number of ‘likes’ to the Facebook page and Facebook post on which the stimulus was being evaluated. Low volume conditions (conditions A and C in appendix 3) had 67 likes to the Facebook page of the artist and 11 likes to the Facebook post about the painting; 231 likes to the Facebook page of the artist and 3 likes to the Facebook post about the painting. On the other hand, the high eWOM volume condition (conditions B and D in appendix 3) presented respectively 9,833 likes to the Facebook page of the artist and 75 likes to the Facebook post about the painting; 2,988 likes to the Facebook page of the artist and 103 likes to the Facebook post about the painting.

Similar to previous research by Lee and Lee (2009) and Phua and Ahn (2014), respondents were shown four different eWOM conditions and were asked to evaluate each of the manipulated stimuli. In order to allow respondents to make comparative decisions, two contrasting manipulations were shown one after the other (high versus low volume, high versus low source expertise). The eWOM volume dimension was highlighted congruently through the number of ‘likes’ to the Artist Facebook page and the number of ‘likes’ to the Facebook post about the stimulus being evaluated.

Goal Scenario Manipulation

The experimental design implemented a Purchase Goal scenario manipulation with two conditions: a symbolic and a hedonic purchase goals condition, in order to examine its effects on the dependent variables of interest. This procedure is justified by the use of product category manipulations in research that employs experimental designs. Specifically, research has often used hedonic-utilitarian product typologies as the subject of studies that explore consumers’ decision-making process and the factors affecting it (e.g. Kempf, 1999; Adaval, 2001; Chowdhury et al., 2015). This study applied a

manipulation method similar to the A-B treatment conditions used by Avnet et al. (2012) where the researchers adopted a pleasant-unpleasant treatment condition in order to assess its differential influence on attitudes towards the product being evaluated. In a later experiment, the same authors adopted a hedonic-utilitarian perspective as a treatment manipulation for consuming and evaluating the presented stimulus. In line with previous (Pham, 1998), this study applied a consumption goal manipulation where participants were assigned to either a hedonic or utilitarian goal condition. This type of manipulation has also been used by Pham et al. (2013) and Hong and Chang (2015), where respondents were assigned a hedonic-utilitarian consumption goal and asked to evaluate a stimulus, in this case a movie. But instead of the utilitarian goal scenario, the current research employed Hedonic and Symbolic goals as from the literature review and the qualitative findings it emerged that this element needs to be assessed in reference to the attitude formation process and the influence of eWOM. These types of experimental instructions alter the importance that respondents place on feelings or cognition in the attitude formation process (Pham, 1998; Yeung and Wyer, 2004), which corresponds to the aims of the present study.

In addition, the qualitative findings (refer to section 6.1.1) suggest that when consumers engage in evaluative processes, they form a brand attitude towards art products and will thus exhibit logics of brand evaluation. Accordingly, the goal scenario manipulation has taken into account this finding and adopted wording that provided the respondents with a more realistic decision scenario for the experimental manipulation.

Based on the above, the following instructions were provided:

*You are looking for an artist to buy that: ‘Purchase Scenario Symbolic or Hedonic’
Having in mind this purchase scenario, please provide an evaluation of the presented artist.*

Purchase Scenario	Purchase Goal Scenario	Developed based upon
Hedonic	“An artist that would give you pleasure; would	- based upon Kempf (1999), Keller (1993), Park et al.

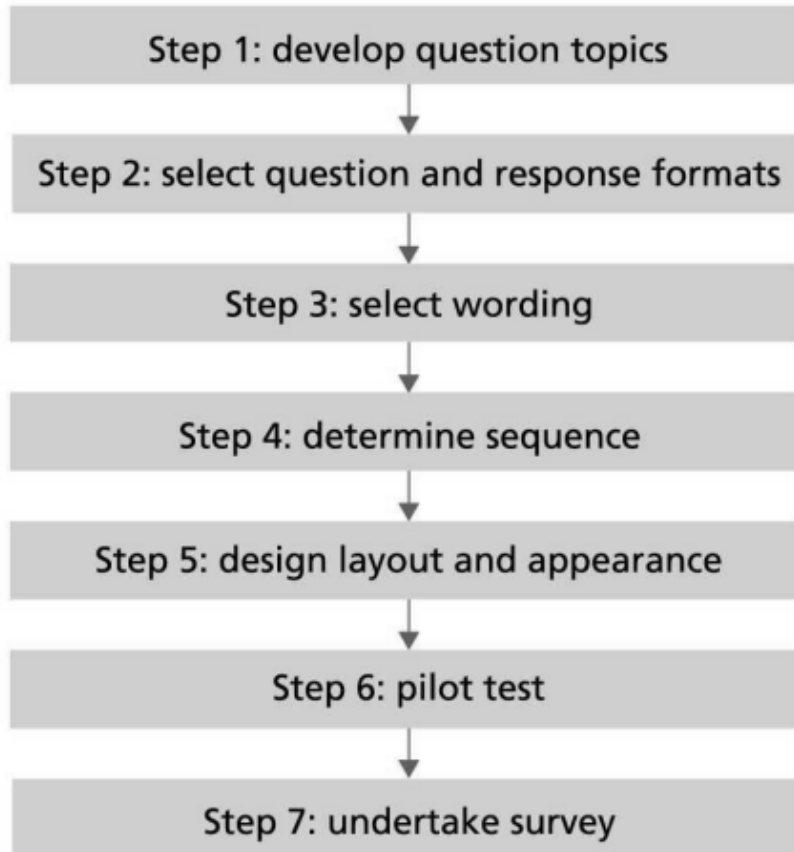
	make you feel good; that you would enjoy”	(1986) and the qualitative findings
Symbolic	“A symbol for high social status, an artist that would allow you to fit within important social situations and an artist that would be seen by others.”	- based upon Bian and Forsythe (2012), Keller (1993), Park et al. (1986) and the qualitative findings

8.4 Questionnaire Design Process

Like previously suggested, the experimental tasks were accompanied by a questionnaire meant to assess the other set of variables of interest within the study. As Saunders (2011; 360) explained, a questionnaire is defined as a method of data collection ‘in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a pre-determined order’. Among the different types of surveys available, this research specifically employed a self-administered survey delivered via an online questionnaire (Foy, 2004). The online survey was preferred over the traditional off-line alternative as it permits an approach to a very large and diverse population while also targeting specific groups (Macri and Tessitore, 2013). Moreover, the online tool offers advantages in terms of cost, response rate and reach (Foy, 2004). Nevertheless, the quality of the collected data is markedly influenced by the format of the developed questionnaire (Saunders, 2011). Specifically, a poor questionnaire format, especially in self-administrated settings, can lead to response biases and a misunderstanding of common conversations (Wilson, 2012). Here, the the questionnaire design was an iterative process rather than a straightforward activity. In developing the questionnaire, the researcher addressed the stages of the design process as interlinked and as jointly contributing to the successful development of the research instrument (Malhotra, 2010). And before the questionnaire was fielded, the following

steps were considered, and the instrument adapted according to the recorded performance.

Figure 8.3 The steps involved in the questionnaire design



Adapted from Saunders (2011)

In order to ensure a successful development of the research instrument, all the recommended steps in the design process were undertaken and are presented in the sections that follow.

8.5 Question Development

8.5.1 Question Content

In terms of the questions used in the questionnaire, the researcher had in mind the research objectives and aims as well as the findings from the first phase of the study (Wilson, 2012). Once the research questions were precisely developed, it was possible to draft the questionnaire instrument for the main data collection (Saris and Gallhofer, 2007). As Creswell et al. (2003) point out, the information acquired through the qualitative data was used to guide the questions and format that were employed. The online setting further justified the reliance on qualitative data to guide the development of the questionnaire (De Vaus, 2013).

The questions also considered participant characteristics and their ability to understand, answer and adequately interpret their content and meaning (Wilson, 2012). One of the most fundamental aspects in developing a set of items is the content and the wording of the questions that will be used, and as such, questions for the instrument were phrased to maximise face validity. Emphasis was placed also on wording strategies that minimise possible response ambiguities and biases (Schuman and Presser, 1981).

8.5.2 Response Format

In order to justify the response format, a discussion of available formats is necessary. The three main response format types are: open-ended questions, closed questions and scaling questions (Wilson, 2012; Creswell et al., 2003; De Vaus, 2013; Saunders, 2011). Open-ended questions are open requests for answers that allow the respondents to formulate the answer in their own words. Because there are no answer options provided, the respondent chooses the format and wording of the response (Saris and Gallhofer, 2007). These types of questions are thus capable of providing a higher degree of information, as respondents can provide more detailed answers (Tourangeau et al., 2000). However, research suggests that closed format questions are more convenient because they do not require extra coding effort (Saris and Gallhofer, 2007). Namely, the major difficulties the researcher encounters during the analysis stage of open-ended answers are relative to interpretation issues and definitions of categories among the collected

responses (Wilson, 2012). Closed questions require respondents to choose an answer from a list of provided choices. The first type of closed questions is dichotomous, with commonly 'yes' or 'no' answer choices. The second type is multiple-choice, where respondents can choose from a list of more than two options (Krosnick and Fabrigar, 1997).

However, the aims of this research necessitated a response format with ordering between response options, which corresponded to scaling type questions. In line with the requirements of this study, scaling questions are commonly used for the numerical measurement of attitudes, opinions, feelings and perceptions. Given the format of the answers obtained, the researcher was able to submit the data collected to a wide array of statistical analyses (De Vaus, 2013). In other words, these measures reflect respondents' standpoints in numerical form, and contrast with nominal measures that indicate a categorical characteristic (Sansone et al., 2003). The advantage of using interval measures lies in the fact that these measures provide both an indication of the relative position of respondents on a construct as well as the extent to which they differ from other respondents (Townsend and Ashby, 1984).

In the marketing literature, the two most common scaling formats are the Likert Scale and the Semantic Differential Scale (Wilson, 2012). These two types of scales were adopted, as they correspond to scales previously used in the relevant literature as well as because they allowed for collected data to be subject to statistical procedures that addressed the objectives of the research. Multiple-item scales were preferred over single-itemed, as these were more likely to provide accurate information given that sources of error were minimised (Sansone et al., 2003). Specifically, a Likert approach to scaling responses, where respondents are instructed to indicate their level of agreement with a set of statements, was adopted. The scale ranged from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' and was presented on a 7-point symmetric format (Sansone et al., 2003). With regards to the points used for the response scales, the researcher strived to maintain a balance in view of the research aims. A large number of points within the scale can capture finer

nuances in response; however, random error can increase in the respondents' ratings. As such, research examining item reliability and validity in respect to scale point number has suggested an optimum of 5 to 7 points (Krosnick and Fabrigar, 1997). Based on these considerations, a 7-point scale was adopted across measures within the present study. Furthermore, verbal labels accompanied the numerical format of the answer options. Research has demonstrated that when employing verbal labels across points on the scale rather than just on endpoints, the reliability and validity of the scale increases (Krosnick and Fabrigar, 1997).

In addition, other measures within the questionnaire required the use of semantic differential scales. This scaling approach consisted in using a set of bipolar rating scales, typically on a 7-point format. In these instances, the respondent needed to evaluate the statement and indicate his rating on a scale which endpoints were labelled by evaluative adjectives with opposite meaning (Crites et al., 1994).

8.5.3 Question Order

Another important point in the questionnaire creation process was the order in which the items were presented to the respondents. The ordering of the questions can influence both the response distribution as well as the inter-item correlation in the analysis stage (Schuman and Presser, 1981). As such, question sequencing and order were carefully considered.

During the instrument development process, a logical sequencing with questions that tackled the same topic were grouped together in sections (Sarris and Gallhofer, 2007). Although some scholars suggest that demographic questions should be asked at the end of the questionnaire, the present study collected more generic data at the beginning followed by subject specific questions (Webb, 2000). The study commenced with some background information and details about the study in addition to the participant

informed consent. Then, questions relevant to other topics the experiment aimed to explore were presented in an order that followed specific themes.

8.5.4 Questionnaire Layout

The layout and the overall design of the questionnaire that accompanied the experiment were of vital importance. Literature recommends the instrument be presented with an attractive and easily understandable layout (Wilson, 2012). Accordingly, the researcher used Qualtrics online software to create and distribute the questionnaire. Questions were collected on separate pages and responses were forced in order to avoid missing data and secure a more accurate analysis. As the questionnaire was distributed online, pictures, instead of real paintings, had to be used for the experimental manipulations. This procedure presents some potential issues by reducing artworks into stimuli; some of the contextual elements typical for a natural setting were discounted in the online context (Brieber et al., 2014). Nevertheless, as familiarity with the online channel for art purchasing purposes is growing, this procedure reflected the way in which consumers make art evaluations online.

8.6. Research Experiment Measurement (Questionnaire Scales)

This section will provide a summary and justification of the measurements and the scales that were used in the survey instrument, which accompanied the experiment. All the adopted measurements have been retrieved from previous research and were carefully evaluated in view of the aims of the present study.

As Creswell et al. (2003) suggests, the correct choice of scales is essential to obtaining meaningful data for analysis. With this in mind, researchers should explicitly state the relationship between measurement and theoretical background by this means delineating the assumptions behind the use of such measures (Crites et al., 1994).

Furthermore, given the specific purposes of this study, the survey design needed to be informed by the insights gained from the qualitative study (Morgan, 1998). In this way, it was possible to identify more accurately question formats as well as variables and predictors of outcomes to be tested with the survey strategy (Baker, 2001). In line with these recommendations, the following scales were in the present study in order to identify the variables of interest.

1. Product Type: Hedonic Versus Utilitarian Products

A manipulation check was required in order to assess whether participants in the experimental procedures perceive art as a hedonic product rather than utilitarian. This check intended to identify whether respondents suitably comply with the goal manipulation conditions. Kim and Morris' (2007) scale, which was later used by Kim et al. (2012), was adopted for this purpose.

Participants were asked the following question: 'Would you characterize fine art as primarily a functional product or an entertainment/enjoyable product?' Participants rated their responses on a seven-point scale, where a score of 1 indicated 'primarily for functional use', and a score of 7 indicated 'primarily for entertainment use'.

2. Affective and Cognitive Response

As previous literature suggests, both affective and cognitive elements of the product encounter need to be captured (Brieber et al., 2014; Leder et al., 2004). A recent study by Schaller and Malhotra (2015) illustrated the importance of adopting different measures when assessing the affective or cognitive responses and attitudes. This study applied two separate scales for measuring the affective and the cognitive response. Chen et al. (2015) and Kim et al. (2012) also used similar scales. The items used for the affective response scale were: (1) 'Generally, I have many different feelings in response to Fine Art'; (2) 'Generally, for me, Fine Art elicits lots of different feelings'.

Cognitive response was rated with the items: (1) ‘Generally, I have many rational thoughts in response to Fine Art’; (2) ‘Generally for me, Fine Art elicits a lot of thinking’ The items of both scales were rated on a 7-point scale from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree’.

3. Product Attitude

Hagtvedt and Patrick (2009) used a similar scale in an experiment on different product manipulations. These authors used a brand attitude measure on a seven-point semantic differential (unfavourable–favourable, negative– positive, bad–good, unpleasant–pleasant, and dislike very much–like very much), later combined in a brand attitude scale. The same scale, but in a shorter format, was adopted also in the eWOM study undertaken by Lopez and Parra (2016). Similarly, Scarabis et al (2008) assessed the affective and cognitive aspects of choice options later combined to form a relative appraisal measure. Here, adopted scale came from Avnet (2012) who used it in a similar context where participants were asked whether they were willing to buy a book based on manipulated eWOM. As such, the scale consisted of five 7 point semantic differential items anchored at: ‘good/bad’, ‘favourable/unfavourable’, ‘like/dislike’, ‘interesting/not interesting’ and ‘worth buying/not worth buying’.

4. Basis of Evaluation

In previous research, Pham et al. (2015) applied Basis of Evaluation as a variable that indicated the extent to which respondents based their attitude on their rational consideration of options or on their affective basis of evaluation. Similarly López and Maya (2012) measured the extent of rational thinking as a mediating variable when testing the relationship between affective elements of respondents and their purchase intention for a selected product. Ultimately, the scale applied in the current study for measuring the basis of product evaluation in the consumer attitude process was adopted from Scarabis et al (2008), Shiv and Fedorikhin (1999) and Smith et al. (2005).

Participants were asked to evaluate on a 7-point bipolar scale if their evaluation was based upon rational consideration or affective factors. Five items were combined in order to form a single scale, where higher values indicated a more rationally driven basis of evaluation while lower values indicated a more affectively driven evaluative basis. Each participant was asked to indicate the basis of his/her evaluation on five, seven-point items with the following statements: 'Based on this purchase task, my final decision about which artist to buy was driven by'. These items were anchored by 'my thoughts (1)/my feelings (7)', 'my willpower (1)/my desire (7)', 'my prudent self (1)/my impulsive self (7)', 'the rational side of me (1)/the emotional side of me (7),' and 'my head (1)/my heart (7).'

5. Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

Susceptibility means the propensity of consumers to be influenced by others opinions in their purchase decision-making (Park and Lee, 2009). Pham (1998) used susceptibility as a covariate when assessing the relationship between different consumption goals and decision-making. Any variable that is assumed to have an effect on the dependent variable and was not controlled through the experimental design is called covariate and reflects a source of variation within the data (Kirk, 1995). Both literature and qualitative findings indicated that the different levels of the susceptibility trait that differentiates respondents could influence the dependent variable in the current study.

In order to assess consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence, a 3-item scale was adopted. The measure was used in a similarly in Bailey (2005) as part of the larger CSII scale proposed by Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989). Susceptibility is a commonly assessed and measured as factor in studies dealing with eWOM information and decision-making (Smith et al., 2005).

The scale used in the current study was taken from Park and Lee (2009), which was previously adapted from Bearden et al. (1989) and Schroeder (1996). The scale was

composed of three items measured on a 7-point agreement scale and included:

- (1) 'I consider others' opinions when I purchase goods',
- (2) 'I mind what others think about me when I purchase something',
- (3) 'I consider what others want when I buy something'.

6. Online Experience

Although previous literature adopted scales to measure respondents' attitudes about reviews, this study aimed to measure a more general attitude and thus a different scale was adopted (Jimenez and Mendoza; Park and Kim, 2008). Because the context of study was Facebook, it was deemed more appropriate not to focus solely on the specific attitude respondents have towards online reviews. As such, a scale used by Park and Lee (2009) was adopted to measure respondents' experiences with the internet. One's online experience means internet usage and the role of eWOM in their purchasing decisions. Davis et al (1989) first applied the scale, which was refined by Park and Lee (2009) in online context. The set of statements was rated on a 7-point scale and included the following: (1) 'Online consumer reviews are useful to me'. (2) 'Online consumer reviews make purchasing easier'. (3) 'Online consumer reviews make me a smarter shopper'. (4) 'Online consumer reviews are very beneficial to me'. (5) 'I read online consumer reviews frequently'. (6) 'I often search consumer reviews on the internet'. (7) 'I refer to online consumer reviews whenever I need information on companies or goods'.

7. Actual and Perceived Product Class Self-Knowledge

As Fitzgerald Bone (1995; 216) define, 'actual knowledge reflects what a consumer truly knows about a product as information that is currently stored in and retrievable from long-term memory. Perceived knowledge is what the consumer thinks he or she knows about the product; thus, perceived knowledge is high if a consumer feels he or she knows a great deal about the product'. Here, expertise is defined as product class knowledge that follows Beatty and Smith's (1987) conceptualisation. It is an individual's perceived

knowledge and understanding of products within a particular product class. Actual knowledge was assessed by asking respondents whether ‘They have completed at least one year of Art History or Fine Art course at university level’. This was a binary choice question where respondents had to reply with either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’.

Self-reported knowledge was used as further assessment of the perceived expertise respondents have in the product category. This trait was assessed also in previous literature and experimental studies (e.g., Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014). Perceived Self-Knowledge was assessed adopting the scale proposed by Fitzgerald Bone (1995) and which was applied in an analogous experimental study. In this instance, the scale was composed of three items included: (1) ‘Rate your knowledge of Fine art as compared to the average person’s,’ which used a seven-point ‘One of the LEAST knowledgeable’ to ‘One of the MOST knowledgeable’ response format; (2) ‘How knowledgeable do you consider yourself when it comes to Fine Art?’ which used a seven-point ‘expert’ to ‘not at all knowledgeable’ response format, and (3) ‘Do you think you can make a satisfactory purchase of an artwork based on only your own knowledge, without another person’s help?’; where 1 indicated ‘Absolutely not’, and 7 indicated ‘Absolutely yes’.

8. Product Class Involvement

Involvement is defined in literature as the extent of engagement that individuals experience with a product class (Mueller, 1999; Kinley et. al, 2010) and implies that an individual is deeply moved by enduring interest towards the product category (Goldsmith and Emmert, 1991; Kim, 2005). The product involvement scale was adopted from Verhagen, Boter and Adelaar (2010). The authors adapted the scale from previous work by Mittal (1995) and Mittal and Lee (1988). The items were rated on a 7 point scale from Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree and included: ‘Fine Art is very important to me; Fine Art does matter to me; Fine Art is an important part of my life.’

9. Familiarity with the Stimulus

Consistent with Pham et al. (2015), respondents were asked if they were already familiar with any of the presented experimental stimuli (paintings). As Lacher and Mizerski (1994) suggested, the need to avoid pre-existing familiarity with the stimuli is insurance that respondents will base their attitudes on the current experience rather than on already acquired previous experiences with it. As such, respondents were required to express whether they were already familiar with any of the presented artists before taking part in the experiment. A dichotomous question was presented in the form of ‘Were you already familiar with any of the presented artworks?’. Participants who replied ‘yes’ were directed towards the end of the questionnaire, and their previous responses were not registered for further analysis. The rest of the respondents completed the questionnaire.

10. Involvement with the Task

In order to determine if potential confounds existed, respondents were asked to evaluate their involvement with the experimental task on a 7-point scale. The scale was adopted by Avnet (2012), as a confounding check and consisted of the following items rated on a scale from 1 to 7: ‘I watched the ad very carefully’; ‘I did not take the task of watching the ad very seriously’; ‘I watched the ad as if I was really interested in its message’. The scale was similarly used later on by Chang and Pham (2013) who applied this check in an analogous study dealing with consumer decision-making. The scale consisted of the same items but applied to the purchase of an apartment.

The scale in the current study stated: (1) ‘I went through the choices as if I was really evaluating an artwork to buy’; (2) ‘I evaluated the choice options very carefully’; (3) ‘I did not take the task of evaluating the choice options very seriously’.

Table 8.1 The scales used with according literature source

Variable	Scale	Source
Product Type	<p>‘Would you characterize fine art as primarily a functional product or an entertainment/enjoyable product?’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rated on a seven-point semantic differential where a score of 1 indicated ‘primarily for functional use,’ and a score of 7 indicated ‘primarily for entertainment use.’ 	Kim and Morris (2007), Kim et al. (2012)
Basis of Evaluation	<p>‘Based on this purchase task, my final decision about which artist to choose was driven by.’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These items were anchored by ‘my thoughts (1)/my feelings (7)’, ‘my willpower (1)/my desire (7)’, ‘my prudent self (1)/my impulsive self (7)’, ‘the rational side of me (1)/the emotional side of me (7),’ and ‘my head (1)/my heart (7).’ 	Scarabis et al (2008), Shiv and Fedorikhin (1999), Smith et al. (2005)
Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	<p>(1) ‘I consider others’ opinions when I purchase goods.’ (2) ‘I mind what others think about me when I purchase something.’ (3) ‘I consider what others want when I buy something.’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items measured on a 7-point agreement scale 	Park and Lee (2009), Bearden et al. (1989), Schroeder (1996).

Familiarity with the Stimulus	<p>‘Were you already familiar with any of the presented artworks?’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answered in a ‘yes-no’ format 	Chang and Pham (2013)
Involvement with the Task	<p>(1) ‘I went through the choices as if I was really evaluating an artwork to buy’; (2) ‘I evaluated the choice options very carefully’; (3) ‘I did not take the task of evaluating the choice options very seriously’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items measured on a 7-point agreement scale 	Avnet (2012), Chang and Pham (2013)
Affective and Cognitive Response	<p>Affective: ‘Generally, I have many different feelings in response to Fine Art; Generally, for me, Fine Art elicits lots of different feelings.’</p> <p>Cognitive: ‘Generally, I have many rational thoughts in response to Fine Art; Generally for me, Fine Art elicits a lot of thinking.’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items measured on a 7-point agreement scale 	Chen et al. (2015), Kim et al. (2012, adapted from Jeong, 2008)
Product Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7-point semantic differential items anchored at: ‘good/bad,’ ‘favourable/unfavourable,’ ‘like/dislike,’ ‘interesting/not interesting,’ and ‘worth buying/not worth buying’. 	Avnet (2012)

<p>Online Experience</p>	<p>(1) 'Online consumer reviews are useful to me.' (2) 'Online consumer reviews make purchasing easier.' (3) 'Online consumer reviews make me a smarter shopper.' (4) 'Online consumer reviews are very beneficial to me.' (5) 'I read online consumer reviews frequently.' (6) 'I often search consumer reviews on the internet.' (7) 'I refer to online consumer reviews whenever I need information on companies or goods.'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items measured on a 7-point agreement scale 	<p>Park and Lee (2009)</p>
<p>Actual and Perceived Product Class Self-Knowledge</p>	<p>Actual: 'Have you completed at least one year of Art History or Fine Art course at university level'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answered in a 'yes-no' format <p>Perceived:</p> <p>(1) 'Rate your knowledge of Fine art as compared to the average person's,'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7-point 'One of the LEAST knowledgeable' to 'One of the MOST knowledgeable' <p>(2) 'How knowledgeable do you consider yourself when it comes to Fine Art?'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7-point 'expert' to 'not at all knowledgeable' 	<p>Althuizen and Sgourev (2014), Fitzgerald Bone (1995)</p>

	<p>response format</p> <p>(3) Do you think you can make a satisfactory purchase of an artwork based on only your own knowledge, without another person's help?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7-point from 'Absolutely not' to 'Absolutely yes'. 	
Product Class Involvement	<p>'Fine Art is very important to me; Fine Art does matter to me; Fine Art is an important part of my life.'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items measured on a 7-point agreement scale 	Verhagen, Boter and Adelaar (2010), Mittal (1995), Mittal and Lee (1988)

8.7 Sampling

The first step in choosing an appropriate sample for the study consists of defining the population of interest. A population is the entire group of people relevant to the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008), and the sampling frame is the set of people eligible to take part in the research, and thus 'potential respondents in the population' (Wilson, 2012).

As recommended, participants were selected based on traits that are relevant to the dependent variables of interest (Harris, 2008). Because the context of the current research is consumers' attitude formation process in an online setting and the influence of eWOM on this process, the selection of respondents who are familiar with these channels was important. Maity et al. (2014) suggested that younger consumers look extensively for online information before undertaking a purchase decision. Furthermore, due to the rise of internet penetration and literacy, the influence of eWOM is spreading across all age groups (Sun et al., 2006). In support of these selection criteria, recent market reports suggest that first-time art buyers are increasingly driven by information they collect

online through social platforms.

As such, the entire UK population aged 18+ with a solid knowledge and use of the internet was considered to be the population for the present study and was recruited via an online panel service. In order to account for the different consumption experiences these participants might have about art, the researcher made use of the Product Experience variable measured in the study. Given the difficulties in accurately classifying consumers based on the extent of their consumption, the experience variable was measured in order to identify different value levels within the sample and was adopted as a proxy for past consumption experience.

To select expert participants, an email invite was circulated by the student office of a major institution offering university education in fine art. This selection approach has been previously used in existing domain literature (e.g., Scarabis et al., 2008). Specifically, the selection of students is common when dealing with experimental research (Kempf, 1999, Smith et al., 2005). Particularly, research suggests that students serve well as surrogates for attitudinal-level consumer research, rather than at a behavioural level of analysis (Calder, Phillips, and Tybout, 1981). Although this procedure might be considered problematic in terms of its impact on the experiment's external validity, research suggests that when there is no measurement of actual behaviour and instead prioritises attitudes towards a product or behaviour, this is a suitable strategy for answering the research goals (Beltramini, 1983). Following these criteria, art history students were selected as expert respondents for the study (Augustin and Leder, 2006).

Even though two different strategies were used to recruit participants, this is not an issue of concern. Because familiarity with the internet was considered as a crucial participant characteristic, both groups meet this criterion. Participants coming from the online panel service are deemed just as literate as the students (Kim and Park, 2005; Kim et al., 2012).

8.7.1 Probability and Non-Probability Sampling

There are several approaches to sampling available in research; however these can be grouped into two overarching categories: probability and non-probability sampling (Wilson, 2012). A probability sampling approach takes place when there is a known probability of selection for each member of the population of interest. The most important advantage of this approach lies in that it allows the researcher to gain information from a representative sample of the population of interest (Baker, 2002). Hence, by adopting probability sampling, research is able to make generalizations to the entire population based on the data that was collected from the sample. Nevertheless, probability sampling is considerably more demanding in terms of both time and costs (Malhotra, 2010); due to time and cost restrictions, this approach was not adopted in the present study.

A non-probability approach to sampling occurs when there is no definite probability of selection for each of the population units (Baker, 2002). As a result, this type of sampling procedure presents several advantages in terms of time and cost of recruitment. But here, the researcher has no precise knowledge about the extent of representativeness of the sample to the population (Saunders, 2011). Notwithstanding these drawbacks, most of the research within the marketing field adopts this sampling approach given its strategic advantages (Wilson, 2012). As such, this study applied a non-probability approach in the form of convenience sampling by recruiting the most readily available members within the population of interest.

8.7.2 Types of Sampling Methods

As mentioned in the previous section, there were a wide range of sampling methods available to the researcher. The table below provides an outline of the different approaches used in probability and non-probability sampling.

Non-Probability Sampling	Probability Sampling
Convenience Sampling	Simple Random Sampling
Judgment Sampling	Systematic Sampling
Quota Sampling	Stratified Random Sampling
Snowball Sampling	Cluster Sampling

Adapted from Saunders (2011) and Wilson (2012)

This study applied a non-probability approach in the form of convenience sampling whereby the method for participant selection was carried out on the basis of the researcher's convenience (Malhotra, 2010). In view of the aims of the study and the resources available for the research, this method was deemed as the most appropriate approach, and was employed by relying upon participants from an online panel and upon participants recruited through an e-mail invite to the research.

8.7.3 Online Panel

Reliance on data from online sources has widely increased both in academia and market research with the advancement of technology, particularly the internet. Online data collection presents several advantages, which are primarily based on a more accessible way to large sample recruitment and reduced complexity in reaching different populations of interest. An online panel can be defined as 'a pool of registered persons who have agreed to take part in online studies on a regular basis' (Göriz et al., 2007; 474). Previous research in the field of eWOM has commonly relied on panels in order to obtain suitable data (e.g., Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Clemons et al., 2006; Dellarocas et al., 2007; Duan et al., 2008; Zhu and Zhang, 2010).

Having in mind the aims of the present research, an online panel was used as it presented a suitable means to achieve a diverse sample of the UK population and which reflects the characteristics of real consumers, thus allowing the researcher to collect information on individuals' decision-processes. Specifically, an online panel was used for the recruitment of non-expert participants, while expert participants were recruited via an

email invite.

By utilising an online panel, the researcher secured a time-efficient and systematic data collection method that allows for gathering reliable data (Baker et al., 2010). However, also some potential drawbacks need to be addressed, which consist mainly in the quality of the recruited respondents (Görizt et al., 2000). One of the concerns that arise with online panels is that some panellists can turn into ‘professional respondents’ due to the large number of completed surveys, consequently biasing their responses (Dennis, 2001). In order to avoid this type of bias that could ultimately influence the quality of the collected data and undermine statistical power (Chandler et al., 2015), the researcher ensured that members of the panel were allowed to take part in the experiment just one time and opted for a selection of participants pre-screened by the number of studies they took part in the past (limiting the number to three studies). Therefore, UK residents aged over 18 and with participation that adhered to the above requirements were employed as inclusion criteria.

8.7.4 Sample Size

A further step that required consideration was the size of the sample. A pragmatic decision was made when weighting time, costs and statistical issues (Saunders, 2011). Although a large number of respondents within the sample could have minimised sampling error, the available resources as well as the aims of the study indicated the appropriate number of responses that were required (Wilson, 2012).

As such, the statistical techniques employed to analyse the collected data as well as the objectives of the study determined the most appropriate size for the research sample. When conducting general linear models such as ANOVA analyses and regressions, there are recommended sample sizes that should be reached. Pallant (2010) suggests that a sample of 200 respondents is appropriate in order to allow for safe statistical analysis. Furthermore, when data of around 200 cases is collected, parametric tests can be

undertaken, even if the data slightly deviates from the assumption of normality. Given the above recommendations, a sample of more than 200 participants per purchase scenario group was collected in order to grant a safe statistical procedure in view of the objectives of the study. As such, it was possible to safely compare between hedonic purchase goal and symbolic purchase goal groups of participants as each consisted of at least 200 participants.

8.7.5 Missing Data

One of the problematic points during data analysis is the existence of missing data (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Some of the reasons behind missing data can lie in data entry faults on behalf of the researcher (for paper-based surveys), respondent attrition or respondents failing to answer some of the presented questions. Especially in online surveys, software or connectivity malfunctioning can result in missing data. As such, the main concern behind missing data occurs when there is a systematic and evident pattern in missing data (Baraldi and Enders, 2010), which is more concerning than the amount of the data missing (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), the pattern of missing data is more important than the amount missing. Missing data that are scattered randomly pose less serious problems because there are statistical valid ways to diminish their effect (Baraldi and Enders, 2010; Hair et al., 1998), while non-randomly distributed missing data (even if less in number) can be an issue for the generalizability of results and require further elaboration to examine the reasons behind their occurrence. Occasionally, missing data even require the deletion of variables that seem to cause or present the non-random distribution of the missing values (De Vaus, 2013).

For the purpose of this study, a forced choice format was implemented in order to avoid missing data related issues and ensure a complete data from every participant. The software used for the experiment administration forced participants to provide an answer

to every question in order to allow proceeding to the following question. This approach did not add any bias in the estimate of the parameters, even though it reduced the amount of usable data (Allison, 2009).

8.8 Pilot Study

Consistent with the procedure adopted in previous studies (Hong and Chang, 2015; Chang and Pham, 2013), the researcher undertook a pilot study to test the experimental design for the main study. Before the full survey was distributed, an offline pilot study was conducted to straighten out any eventual issue of the survey and improve experimental validity (Baker, 2003). Even though the experimental design and form of the questions was developed based on previous literature as well as the qualitative stage of the study, this further step was necessary to assess the adequacy of the research design. Because the data collection took place through an online experiment, it was important to determine the clarity and ease of interpretation of the developed instrument before the final launch (De Vaus, 2013). A pilot testing procedure involves administering a reduced number of experiments or questionnaires with the aim of identifying any possible issues or problems within the developed research design (Webb, 1992). Along these lines, pilot testing follows the same administrative procedure as the official experiment, and allows for the identification of potential problem areas (Saunders, 2011). Accordingly, participant selection in this instance was consistent with the chosen sampling frame for the main study (Black, 1999).

The number of respondents for this type of data collection is rather small (Wilson, 2012); in this instance, it consisted of 15 participants who took part and provided feedback about the experimental procedure. Comments and feedback were collected orally and notes were taken about suggestions for question phrasing amendments, which consisted in minor adjustments to the order and question phrasing (Baker, 2003). This exercise allowed the researcher to get also an idea about the experiment time length and set the parameters for the online panel. In addition, respondents were asked about perceptions of

the experimental manipulations, such as the distinction between high-low eWOM volume examples, high-low eWOM source expertise and goal scenario manipulations (Phua and Ahn, 2014). The collected comments indicated that the experimental manipulations were adequately chosen and were suitably developed in light of the intended aims of the experimental task.

8.9 Sources of Error

Possible sources of error within the present study have been identified under sampling and non-sampling errors (Field, 2009). Specifically, the first type of error takes place due to sample selection related problems, while the second arises from human error. As such, sampling error can be, to a certain extent, estimated while non-sampling error is more difficult to quantify and more problematic to overcome (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Random sampling error refers to the intended the difference between an estimate of the population and the true mean value of the population. This type of error occurs in non-probability approaches when data is collected from a sample of the population rather than the entire population of interest (Wilson, 2012). Due to time and cost restrictions and in line with previous research within the topic, this study employed a non-probability sampling approach. However, steps were undertaken in order to ensure the suitability of the sample during recruitment to avoid potential sources of error.

Non-sampling error can also be encountered, which is the error that emerges from factors other than the sampling approach, such as the research problem definition, the measurements, missing responses and the data analysis (Malhotra, 2010). In this instance, non-sampling error could occur due to participants not understanding the questions or tasks, as well as their willingness to provide an accurate response or recall of the question (Field, 2009). Along these lines, participants may also deliberately misreport their opinions because of social desirability biases (Wilson, 2012). However, the researcher made use of a pilot test before the main experimental launch in order to check for potential issues and thus minimize the chance for non-sampling error. Furthermore, as

responses were anonymised, issues related to desirability biases were minimised.

In conclusion, experimental control helps minimise error variance and can be implemented following a series of different methods. Here, the researcher adopted the use of treatment randomisation, stratified participants into groups with high homogeneity or also use refined techniques to measure the dependent variables. Along these lines, another possible method is to apply analysis of covariance in order to minimise error variance and effects of nuisance variables by combining regression analysis with analysis of variance (Sansone et al., 2003). As such, the researcher made use of these strategies in order to minimise possible sources of error.

8.10 Ethical Issues

The researcher ensured all ethical implications were respected, both in the development stage of the study as well as in the data collection process. Ethical issues within a study can incur when the boundaries between personal and professional interests are not maintained, and when the researcher does not respect the confidentiality of respondents' data (Creswell, 2003). Adhering to the University of Strathclyde's ethics regulations, both the qualitative as well as the quantitative data collection were approved by the ethics committee. During the qualitative phase of the study, participants were invited either through an email (professional respondents) or a direct message, and provided with a document that explained the aims and the details of the study. Given that qualitative data needs to be transcribed for easier analysis, respondents were made aware that the interviews were audio recorded but used for solely research purposes, and names were kept confidential.

In the quantitative stage, which involved an online experiment, the appropriateness of the experimental task and the questions within the survey element were checked through a pilot study. Furthermore, before commencing the experiment, participants were provided with an outline of the aims of the study, a description of the experimental task and length,

as well as the contact details of the researcher. Participants signed an online consent form to take part in the research.

8.11 Limitations

The limitations of the current study are primarily related to the methodological choices that were adopted. Due to time and participant access constraints, respondents were recruited from an online panel, and fine art students were used as sample of experts. This could be seen as a limitation of the current study, however, alternative recruitment methods would have caused a different series of restrictions in terms of the research objectives. A cross-section of internet-literate, but diverse, consumers with varied experiences was reached. At the same time, fine art students present a higher level of field knowledge and experience compared to the average consumer and were selected for the expert group, overcoming potential sampling limitations.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, one additional limitation consists of the manipulations used for the experimental tasks. Given the online administration format for the experimental tasks and the software used for the data collection, the researcher made mock-up Facebook pages and artwork stimuli rather than real paintings. Accordingly, some of the contextual elements and interactive platform features were discounted (Brieber et al., 2014).

8.12 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview and discussion of the methodological choices that were carried out for the quantitative stage of the research. Following the insight acquired from the qualitative data and in line with the research objectives, several methodological decisions were made. First, a discussion about the experimental methodological selection was presented, and the procedure was outlined. Second, the chapter examined the decisions that were taken in the design phase of the experiment. The materials used for

the experimental task and the variables included in the procedure were explained and justified. This included also an overview of the process used for the development of the questionnaire that accompanied the experimental tasks. Third, the chapter served to provide a rationale for employed measures, the sampling approach as well as the online panel used for the data collection. Fourth, the handling of missing data, possible sources of error, ethical issues and limitations were explained in reference to best practice procedures recommended in the literature. The following chapter will present the findings that were obtained from the quantitative phase of this research.

CHAPTER 9: DATA ANALYSIS

9.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the methodological approach used in the quantitative stage of the research, grounded from the literature review and the qualitative findings. Based on the research hypotheses and theoretical framework, this chapter will present the findings of the quantitative stage of the study. In order to analyse collected data, a series of statistical procedures were employed. The statistical software package used in order to investigate the hypothesised relationships was SPSS 22.0.

The chapter commences with an overview of the sample characteristics and descriptive information of the collected data. Then, the chapter presents the analyses that were carried out in order to assess the adequacy of the experimental procedure and the suitability of the implemented manipulations. First relationships were tested and findings of initial hypotheses presented. Then, the chapter focuses on the main analysis, which included Structural Equation Modelling, using AMOS software. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also carried out to determine the validity of variables for the main structural testing. The analysis further consisted of testing the developed model in order to assess the attitude formation process, and the influence of eWOM information.

9.1 Sample Profile

An online-administrated experiment accompanied by a questionnaire was conducted and completed by 427 participants. As discussed previously, two sample groups were included in the study. The experiment was administered to two groups of participants based on their level of Fine Art expertise, (that is expertise in the product category under investigation). Namely, a group of Fine art Experts and a group of non-Experts were included in order to gather responses from a sample with different levels of product expertise. The first consisted of students that have completed at least one year of Fine Art

or Art History course at the University level (UK based), while the second included an online panel of UK residents over the age of 18. All questionnaires were examined for response bias based on reverse-coded questions and screened based on minimum time of completion. A total of 20 questionnaires were discarded based on the applied criteria.

The combined sample of 427 participants was 48% male and 52% female. The age group of the sample spans from 18 to 55+ years old, in line with the demographic profile of the average internet user. Sample descriptives indicate that 70% of participants fall within the 18-34 age group, 27% 35-54 age group and 2% are 55+ years old. The Fine Art Expert group comprised in total 99 (23%) participants while the non-Expert group included 328 (77%) participants. A verification question was included in the survey that asked participants whether they have completed a year of university art course in order to secure a suitable sample of respondents deemed as Expert consumers.

Table 9.1 Complete description of the sample's profile

Combined Sample		
Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
GENDER		
Male	204	48
Female	223	52
AGE		
18-34	306	72
35-54	112	26
55+	9	2
Total	427	100
Expert Sample		
Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)

GENDER		
Male	53	53
Female	46	47
AGE		
18-34	76	77
35-54	21	21
55+	2	2
Total	99	100
Non Expert sample		
Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
GENDER		
Male	151	49
Female	177	51
AGE		
18-34	228	70
35-54	93	28
55+	7	2
Total	328	100

9.2 Preliminary Analysis

In order to carry out the main analyses of the collected data, the responses were inputted into SPSS 22.0 software. In order to avoid data entry mistakes, data cleaning was carried out, which is an important exercise prior to the actual data analysis in order to avoid data entry mistakes (Field, 2009). This procedure was undertaken with the use of SPSS.

9.2.1 Computing Composite Variables

Before any statistical analysis can be done, collected data must be prepared. With the help of SPSS software, the overall composite variables were computed from multiple

scale items for all the measures within the study. This procedure allows the researcher to use composite variables in the statistical analyses that follow.

Reliability Analysis

When conducting quantitative research with measurement scales, it is important to determine the reliability of the scales in order permit them to further statistical analyses. Reliability is extent to which the data collection and statistical procedures employed in a study will present consistent results across studies that will follow (Saunders, 2011). In other words, it represents the degree to which a scale will yield consistent results when used in different measurements (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Accordingly, reliability can be assessed by defining the following three aspects (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008:109):

1. Will the measures yield the same results on other occasions?
2. Will other observers reach similar observations?
3. Is there transparency in how sense was made from the raw data?

Internal consistency is a major concern when dealing with reliability issues. It is defined as whether all the items forming a scale are measuring the same underlying construct. Based on this, scale reliability can be assessed through inter-item association; where high values indicate there is consistency in results and thus the reliability of the scale is adequate (Saunders, 2011).

Among the available reliability checks, the Cronbach's Alpha test is the most widely used. Cronbach (1957) proposed the measure based upon the average value derived from the different data split combinations and by way of computing the correlations for each split. The coefficient is estimated by first calculating the variance of single items and consequently the co-variance between groups of items that are part of the same scale (Field, 2009). Pallant (2010), suggests that in order to ensure an adequate scale reliability, the coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha should achieve a value above 0.7. Along these lines, Hair et al. (1998) argued that an Alpha value below 0.6 is not considered acceptable.

All of the scales used in the present study have been found in the literature. For each of the scales measured in the current study, a Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated. Two scale items, precisely the third item in the Susceptibility scale and the fourth item in the Product Involvement scale were reversed coded, such that they contained a negatively worded statement.

Table 9.2 Cronbach's Alpha coefficients used to determine the reliability of the scales within the study.

Factor	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Scale Variance If Item Deleted	Corrected Item Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Affective Response	Response3	.774	2	1.225	.638	.
	Response1			1.633	.638	.
Cognitive Response	Response2	.878	2	1.275	.612	.
	Response4			1.326	.612	.
Involvement (Product)	Involvement 1	.887	4	11.922	.859	.813
	Involvement 2			14.013	.591	.912
	Involvement 3			12.275	.822	.828
	Involvement 4			12.055	.753	.855
Basis of Choice	Basis1	.884	5	37.857	.659	.873
	Basis2			37.663	.713	.860
	Basis3			38.776	.653	.874
	Basis4			35.218	.801	.839
	Basis5			35.817	.777	.845
Product Attitude (E)	E1	.966	5	33.526	.909	.956
	E2			32.999	.921	.954
	E3			32.764	.912	.956
	E4			32.898	.885	.960
	E5			32.779	.883	.961
Product Attitude (F)	F1	.958	5	39.959	.901	.945
	F2			39.106	.909	.944
	F3			40.073	.868	.950
	F4			37.493	.878	.949

	F5			37.646	.868	.951
Involvement (Task)	InvolvT1	.842	3	2.483	.693	.793
	InvolvT2			2.398	.754	.736
	InvolvT3			2.373	.676	.812
Self-knowledge	SelfKnow1	.777	3	8.945	.742	.576
	SelfKnow2			8.701	.704	.603
	SelfKnow3			9.159	.445	.912
Online Experience	OnExp	.889	7	19.087	.709	.874
	OnExp			18.747	.652	.877
	OnExp			18.251	.665	.875
	OnExp			17.652	.777	.863
	OnExp			16.742	.700	.872
	OnExp			15.586	.741	.868
	OnExp			17.877	.622	.881
Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	Susceptibility 1	.702	3	3.919	.239	.875
	Susceptibility 2			1.890	.684	.370
	Susceptibility 3			2.038	.716	.327

The Cronbach's Alpha values shown in table for each scale in the present study have achieved a coefficient above this critical value apart from Susceptibility to Interpersonal influence which had a borderline value of .702. When eliminating Item 1 of the scale, the Cronbach's Alpha value rose to .875 and thus justified the item dropping in order to achieve higher reliability. All the measured scales have internal consistency and can be deemed as reliable for future analyses.

Reliability Analysis of Composite Variables

In order to aid the statistical procedures required to test the hypotheses, additional reliability coefficients were calculated. Reliability analysis of composite variables was undertaken in order to ensure a more manageable variable format and allow for easier interpretation of the obtained results. Here, composite variables have been developed to account for the attitudinal data obtained through the experimental manipulations of

eWOM. The experimental conditions consisted of 2 stimuli per eWOM Volume condition where respondents were asked to rate their Product Attitude on a scale two times: two times on a high eWOM stimulus (B and D painting) and two times a low eWOM stimulus (A and C paintings). Accordingly a composite variable was developed from the items of Attitude A and C, and a second variable from the items of Attitude B and D. As such, it was necessary to carry out further reliability analysis in order to ensure consistency was maintained. As can be seen in the below figures, all the composite variables present adequate reliability levels above 0.7 (Pallant, 2010).

Table 9.3 Cronbach's Alpha coefficients used to determine the reliability of composite variables within the study

Factor	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Scale Variance If Item Deleted	Corrected Item Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Product Attitude A_C	EV_A1	.898	8	60.181	.542	.783
	EV_A2			59.902	.555	.781
	EV_A3			61.230	.473	.791
	EV_A4			58.772	.529	.785
	EV_A5			60.102	.546	.783
	EV_C1			64.229	.492	.790
	EV_C2			63.993	.470	.792
	EV_C3			64.095	.433	.795
	EV_C4			65.474	.366	.802
	EV_C5			63.724	.429	.796

Factor	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Scale Variance If Item Deleted	Corrected Item Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
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Product Attitude B_D	EV_B1	.840	8	72.247	.668	.812
	EV_B2			71.792	.639	.815
	EV_B3			71.814	.597	.819
	EV_B4			72.075	.598	.819
	EV_B5			70.925	.633	.815
	EV_D1			81.109	.450	.833
	EV_D2			80.824	.432	.834
	EV_D3			81.009	.395	.837
	EV_D4			80.641	.413	.836
	EV_D5			78.328	.490	.829

All of the composite variables have internal consistency and can be deemed as reliable for future analyses.

9.2.3 Normality - Means (Sd)/ Skewness/ Kurtosis of Individual Items

Normality is defined as the distribution of the measured variables within the study, and it is a way in which it is possible to determine the degree of fit with the normal distribution (Howell, 2007). In quantitative studies, assessing normality is one of the first recommended steps (Pallant, 2010). The normality of the data was determined by looking at the values of skewness and kurtosis indicated in the following table.

Table 9.4 Normality values of the items within the study

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Hedonic/Utilitarian	5.62	1.24	-1.026	1.141
OE_1	4.25	.673	-.987	2.363
OE_2	4.05	.773	-1.159	2.558
OE_3	3.79	.838	-.766	1.001
OE_4	3.98	.825	-.839	1.148
	3.75	1.031	-.783	.014
OE_5	3.63	1.11	-.741	-.273
OE_6	3.98	.942	-1.098	1.119

OE_7	2.77	1.08	.157	-.867
	2.82	1.01	-.008	-.626
SUS_2	3.40	1.50	.295	-.674
SUS_3	3.18	1.50	.453	-.587
EV_A1	3.16	1.55	.368	-.796
EV_A2	3.41	1.67	.268	-.949
EV_A3	2.85	1.50	.648	-.322
EV_A4	4.13	1.55	-.311	-.685
EV_A5	3.99	1.64	-.219	-.929
EV_B1	3.88	1.72	-.131	-1.065
EV_B2	4.22	1.70	-.346	-.841
EV_B3	3.75	1.72	-.061	-1.067
EV_B4	4.15	1.47	-.119	-.804
EV_B5	4.08	1.48	-.133	-.860
EV_C1	4.21	1.58	-.165	-.968
EV_C2	3.72	1.57	.091	-.961
EV_C3	3.73	1.55	.094	-.839
EV_C4	5.20	1.20	-.752	.619
EV_C5	5.15	1.26	-.850	.759
EV_D1	5.17	1.33	-.754	.396
EV_D2	4.94	1.33	-.671	.291
EV_D3	4.93	1.38	-.642	.083
EV_D4	4.03	1.46	-.071	-.670
	3.95	1.49	.009	-.814
EV_D5	3.90	1.53	-.054	-.832
EV_E1	3.79	1.55	.125	-.907
	3.62	1.56	.154	-.765
EV_E2	4.45	1.55	-.353	-.530
	4.45	1.61	-.438	-.574
EV_E3	4.21	1.59	-.317	-.574
EV_E4	3.93	1.80	-.168	-1.102
	4.18	1.80	-.282	-.977
EV_E5	3.86	1.84	.083	-1.266
	3.57	1.77	.364	-.972
EV_F1	4.27	1.76	-.131	-.954
EV_F2	4.05	1.85	.031	-1.202
EV_F3	4.04	1.83	.003	-1.163
EV_F4	4.29	.844	-1.390	2.009

EV_F5	4.27	.834	-1.227	1.553
BAS_1	4.35	.895	-1.372	1.211
BAS_2	2.99	1.53	.296	-1.077
BAS_3	3.71	1.62	-.190	-.964
BAS_4	4.37	1.93	-.189	-1.092
BAS_5	3.56	1.15	-.720	-.240
BAS_5	3.61	1.12	-.741	-.141
BAS_5	3.10	1.27	-.126	-1.151
Involvement Task	2.99	1.10	-.158	-.826
Involvement Task	3.05	1.32	-.107	-1.152
Involvement Task	3.24	1.31	-.349	-1.022
SQ_1	2.64	1.30	.384	-.950
SQ_2	3.03	1.42	-.066	-1.363
SQ_3				
RES_2				
RES_4				
RES_3				
RES_1				
AI_1				
AI_2				
AI_3				
AI_4				

The above table presents the descriptive statistics of the each single items measured in the study. It provides information about mean and standard deviation values as well as skewness and kurtosis. The assessment of normality can be carried out also by using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk test. However, literature recommends avoiding tests when the dataset includes more than 150 cases. The tests are sensitive to sample size, and it is thus suggested using the values of skewness and kurtosis to assess normality (Field, 2009). Along these lines, as the current dataset contained more than 150

cases (i.e., 427 cases), and an assessment of normality for composite variables was carried out:

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Susceptibility	2.7939	.98981	.171	-.645
Online Experience	3.9180	.69568	-.800	1.268
SelfKnowledge	3.6901	1.41770	-.108	-.803
TOTAL_InvolvementTask	4.3060	.74852	-1.187	1.195
TOTAL_Art_Involvement	2.9947	1.15995	.028	-.844
TOTAL_BasisOfEvaluation	3.9597	1.50038	.130	-.954
TOTAL_Affective_Response	3.5902	1.07662	-.730	-.102
TOTAL_Rational_Response	3.0492	1.07954	-.166	-.775
Total_A_C	3.5897	1.11479	-.042	-.409
Total_B_D	4.5379	.96064	-.390	.323
Total Score Artist E	3.8581	1.42986	-.026	-.859
Total Score Artist F	4.2426	1.55021	-.348	-.708

From the above values, it can be concluded that a large number of items show a platykurtic (negative kurtosis), thus indicating flat distributions (Pallant, 2010). Even though in the social sciences, normality of the data is a rare occurrence, the items do not exhibit extreme cases of skewness and kurtosis as most of the values lie within a < 1 or > -1 (Kline, 2011). The sample of this study is 427 cases far exceeded the 200 proposed by Tabachnik and Fidell (2007) as suitable for the application of parametric statistical analyses. Consequently, the use of parametric tests in this instance is considered appropriate.

9.2.4 Testing for Multivariate Normality

Normality can be described in terms of univariate and multivariate normality. Given that the collected data showed a normal distribution, the analysis could proceed with checks for multivariate normality. The assessment of multivariate normality is undertaken by calculating the values of Mahalanobis distance, which is defined as the distance of a case

from the 'centroid' of cases (Field, 2009). With the aid of this test, the 12 composite variables of the study were assessed, and cases that presented unusual patterns were spotted. The maximum value registered in this instance was 35.630. This number was then compared with a critical value, which is determined by using the critical values of chi-square table, with the number of dependent variables as the degrees of freedom (df) value. The criterion for multivariate outliers is Mahalanobis distance at $p < .001$, assessed as a chi square (χ^2) with degrees of freedom equal to the number of variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; 99). The calculation of the Mahalanobis distance was carried out by applying a regression analysis. Specifically, the ID number of the cases was selected as the dependent variable, and the 12 items of the questionnaire as the independent variables. For 12 items the criterion of χ^2 at $p < .001$ is 26.217 (table of critical values of χ^2 as in Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Any value with Mahalanobis distance above this threshold is considered a multivariate outlier. The analysis revealed 9 cases of multivariate outliers. The values for nine cases were reported by SPSS: Case 145 with Mahalanobis distance 28.901, case 351 with a value of 35.63, case 5 with a value of 33.058, case 37 with a Mahalanobis value 29.703, case 306 with a value of 28.012, case 233 with a value of 28.322, case 346 with a value of 26.825, case 104 with a value of 26.541, case 122 with a value of 26.519.

All cases of univariate and multivariate outliers were checked elaborately, and outliers could not be attributed to a data entry or a re-coding problem. In accordance with several researchers (Hair et al., 1998) who argue that, in the social sciences, outliers are usually a valid representation of reality (when there are no obvious data entry errors), outliers were retained in this dataset for further analysis. The following section will provide a comprehensive outline of the results of the analyses that were conducted to test the research hypotheses.

9.2.5 Experiment Pre-Test: Control, Hedonic and Symbolic Goal groups Comparison

A control condition is an experimental condition that does not have any causal variable, which is suspected to have an effect on the measured dependent variables. The test here involved a comparison between the presence and the absence of this variable on the dependent variable of interest, and involved specifically the preference ranking of stimuli that was presented to respondents (Harris, 2008). A pre-test was conducted in order to verify the suitability of the experimental stimuli as well as of the experimental procedure. The pre-test did not include any Goal or eWOM manipulation, rather respondents were asked to rank and evaluate based on their preference the set of paintings to be included in the following experimental procedure.

Along these lines, in order to test the perception of stimuli without the availability of eWOM information, a Mann Whitney U Test was performed on the following purchase scenario groups: Control, Symbolic Goal and Hedonic Goal; as this test is not compromised by group sample size (Agresti, 2013).

The Mann-Whitney U is a non-parametric alternative used to identify whether there are differences between two groups on a dependent variable of interest (Agresti, 2013). Accordingly, the Mann-Whitney U is the non-parametric equivalent of the independent groups t-test (Dancey and Reidy, 2008).

Because the preference ranking was requested on behalf of respondents, a comparison between groups, based on median values, was necessary. A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in ranking score between control (no goal), symbolic and hedonic purchase goal scenario. Distributions of the ranking scores for control, symbolic and hedonic were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median ranking score for all the six paintings was not statistically significantly different. As such, the test suggests that the main experiment test participant groups subjected to the Goal scenario manipulations did not exhibit significantly different perceptions in the initial evaluation for the presented stimuli.

Table 9.5 Mann Whitney U Test between Control, Symbolic and Hedonic Purchase Scenario Groups

Report						
Median						
Purchase Scenario	Q9_1 - Ranking 1	Q9_2- Ranking 2	Q9_3- Ranking 3	Q9_4- Ranking 4	Q9_5- Ranking 5	Q9_6- Ranking 6
Symbolic	5.00	2.00	4.00	3.00	2.00	4.00
Hedonic	5.00	2.00	4.00	3.00	2.00	4.00
Control	5.00	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
Total	5.00	2.00	4.00	3.00	2.00	4.00

Control and Symbolic Comparison

Test Statistics^a						
	Q9_1 - Ranking 1	Q9_2- Ranking 2	Q9_3- Ranking 3	Q9_4- Ranking 4	Q9_5- Ranking 5	Q9_6- Ranking 6
Mann-Whitney U	2894.500	2830.000	2489.000	3127.500	3446.500	3148.000
Wilcoxon W	24839.500	3391.000	2434.000	3688.500	4007.500	3709.000
Z	-1.529	-1.745	-0.616	-.894	-.006	-.848
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.126	.081	.091	.371	.996	.397

a. Grouping Variable: Purchase Scenario

Control and Hedonic Comparison

Test Statistics^a						
	Q9_1 - Ranking 1	Q9_2- Ranking 2	Q9_3- Ranking 3	Q9_4- Ranking 4	Q9_5- Ranking 5	Q9_6- Ranking 6
Mann-Whitney U	20858.500	21688.000	20377.000	21924.000	21096.000	22428.000
Wilcoxon W	42803.500	45559.000	42322.000	45795.000	44967.000	46299.000

Z	-1.554	-.900	-1.924	-.698	-1.380	-.290
Asymp. Sig. (2- tailed)	.120	.368	.054	.485	.168	.772

a. Grouping Variable: Purchase Scenario

Thus, it is safe to suggest that there were no significant differences between groups of respondents. When respondents were presented with a preference-ranking task of stimuli with no eWOM manipulation, the groups did not exhibit varying preferences. As such, it is possible to undertake further analyses on the collected data as no preference bias was identified within the sample.

9.2.6 Involvement with Task based on Experimental Groups

In order to assess whether all groups were equally involved with the experimental task, levels of involvement were checked across respondents similar to Kempf (1999), Adaval (2012) and Pham's (1998) procedure. An independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were differences in task involvement scores between symbolic and hedonic goal scenario participants (Howell, 2010). A univariate test was chosen, as there were two groups of respondents, symbolic and hedonic purchase condition groups, assessed against the involvement with task variable measured on a continuous scale (Finch et al., 2016).

From the results, there were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. There were 201 participants in the symbolic goal group and 226 participants in the hedonic goal scenario group. The level of involvement with the task was found to be slightly higher in the hedonic scenario condition ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.70$) than in the symbolic scenario condition ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.79$). There was homogeneity of variances for task involvement scores for symbolic and hedonic goal group participants, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .130$).

The Task involvement score in the hedonic goal condition was 0.13 (SE = 0.07) higher than the symbolic goal condition involvement score. But the difference between scores was not statistically significant ($P=0.60$), and therefore it isn't possible to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. As such, participants in both groups showed an equal amount of involvement with the tasks they were asked to take part in (Field, 2009). Both groups of participants were equally involved in the experimental task, which allowed the researcher to subject the collected data to further analyses consistently as there were no significant effects of the manipulations on the experienced involvement with the task.

9.3 Hedonic/Utilitarian Category Perception based on Experimental Groups

In order to assess if there were significant differences in the way in which participants perceive the functional or hedonic nature of the art product, a manipulation check was carried out. In line with the Kempf's (1999) procedure previously, participants were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 (utilitarian) to 7 (hedonic) how they perceive art.

An independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were differences in Art perception (Hedonic/Utilitarian) scores between symbolic and hedonic goal scenario participants (Howell, 2010). There were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. There were 201 participants in the symbolic goal group and 226 participants in the hedonic goal scenario group. Here, the higher was the score, the higher was the Perception of Art being a Hedonic rather than a Utilitarian Product. The level of Hedonic Art Perception was higher in the symbolic scenario condition ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.15$) than in the hedonic scenario condition ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.31$).

There was no homogeneity of variances for Art Perception scores for symbolic and hedonic goal group participants, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .021$).

The art perception scores in the symbolic goal condition were 0.232 (SE = 0.08) higher than in the hedonic goal condition. Nevertheless, the difference between scores was not statistically significant ($P=0.052$), and therefore there was no significant difference in scores between groups (Field, 2009). Given that art as product category was perceived as hedonic across groups of participants, the hedonic and symbolic scenario manipulations have been confirmed appropriate in view of the developed experiment objectives.

9.4. Comparison between Preference Rankings and Ranked Product Attitudes

In order to understand whether the availability of eWOM had an effect on participants' product attitudes, a Sign Test was carried out. The test aimed to assess whether there is a median difference in product attitude scores before and after the experimental manipulations were implemented, as this test is appropriate in instances of change assessments in ordinal data (Conover, 1999). Product attitude scores following the eWOM manipulations were ranked from the lowest to the highest attitude score and compared to pre-manipulation ranks given to the paintings by the participants.

A Wilcoxon test was not used because the shapes of the distributions were not symmetrical as inspected from the histogram (Hollander and Wolfe, 1999). The analysis was split by Goals in Symbolic and Hedonic Group in order to allow an easier assessment of the ranking differences between manipulations. Based on this procedure, a Sign Rank test was performed in order to understand whether there was a change in Product Attitude after assigning participants to a purchase scenario and manipulating eWOM availability. Data are medians unless otherwise stated. A sign test with continuity correction was used to compare the differences in product attitudes with the different eWOM conditions (Conover, 1999).

a) Symbolic Goal Group

Of the 201 participants recruited for the study, the availability of low volume eWOM (A and C stimulus) elicited a decrease in ranked attitudes in 110 participants and 116

respectively, whereas 43 participants and respectively 46 did not decrease their attitudes and 48 and 39 respectively saw no change in attitude. Overall, participants evaluated the product less favourably in the low eWOM volume condition (A stimulus Mdn =5; C stimulus Mdn = 4) than the no eWOM available condition (A stimulus Mdn =4, C stimulus Mdn =2), a statistically significant decrease in the median of the differences of 1, $z = 5.336$, $p = .000$. and respectively 2, $z = 5.42$, $p = 0.000$.

On the other hand, the availability of high volume eWOM (B and D stimulus) elicited an increase in ranked attitude in 59 participants and 63 respectively, whereas 87 participants and respectively 67 did not decrease their evaluation and 55 and 71 respectively saw no change in attitude. Overall, participants evaluated the product more favourably in the high eWOM volume condition (B stimulus Mdn =4; D stimulus Mdn = 2) than the no eWOM available condition (B stimulus Mdn =5, D stimulus Mdn =2), a statistically significant increase for B in the median of the differences of 1, $z = -2.23$, $p = .025$ while there was no significant difference for condition D with difference of 0, $z = .223$, $p = 0.792$.

With regard to the source expertise manipulation, the low eWOM source expertise (E stimulus) elicited a decrease in ranked attitude in 99 participants, whereas 68 participants did not decrease their attitude and 34 saw no change in attitude. Overall, participants evaluated the product less favourably in the low source expertise eWOM condition (E stimulus Mdn =4) than the no eWOM available condition (E stimulus Mdn =3), a statistically significant decrease in the median of the differences of 1, $z = 2.321$, $p = .020$.

On the other hand, the availability of high source expertise eWOM (F stimulus) elicited an increase in ranked attitude in 33 participants, whereas 138 participants did not decrease their attitude and 30 saw no change in attitude. Overall, participants evaluated the product more favourably in the high source expertise eWOM condition (F stimulus Mdn =2.5) than the no eWOM available condition (F stimulus Mdn =4), a statistically significant increase for F in the median of the differences of 1.50, $z = -7.953$, $p = .000$.

b) Hedonic Goal Group

Of the 201 participants recruited for the study, the availability of low volume eWOM (A and C stimulus) elicited a decrease in ranked attitude in 109 participants and 120 respectively, whereas 63 participants and respectively 52 did not decrease their attitude and 54 and 54 respectively saw no change in attitude. Overall, participants evaluated the product less favourably in the low eWOM volume condition (A stimulus Mdn =5; C stimulus Mdn = 3.5) than the no eWOM available condition (A stimulus Mdn =4, C stimulus Mdn =2), a statistically significant decrease in the median of the differences of 1, $z = 3.430$, $p = .001$. and respectively 1.5, $z = 5.109$, $p = 0.000$.

On the other hand, the availability of high volume eWOM (B and D stimulus) elicited an increase in ranked attitude in 43 participants and 77 respectively, whereas 122 participants and respectively 74 did not decrease their attitude and 61 and 75 respectively saw no change in attitude. Overall, participants evaluated the product more favourably in the high eWOM volume condition (B stimulus Mdn =3; D stimulus Mdn = 4) than the no eWOM available condition (B stimulus Mdn =5, D stimulus Mdn =2), a statistically significant increase for B in the median of the differences of 2, $z = -6.072$, $p = .000$ while there was no significant difference for condition D with difference of 2, $z = .163$, $p = 0.871$.

With regard to the source expertise manipulation, the low eWOM source expertise (E stimulus) elicited a decrease in ranked attitude in 114 participants, whereas 60 participants did not decrease their attitude and 52 saw no change in attitude. Overall, participants evaluated the product less favourably in the low source expertise eWOM condition (E stimulus Mdn =4) than the no eWOM available condition (E stimulus Mdn =3), a statistically significant decrease in the median of the differences of 1, $z = 4.018$, $p = .000$.

On the other hand, the availability of high source expertise eWOM (F stimulus) elicited an increase in ranked attitude in 45 participants, whereas 123 participants did not decrease their attitude and 58 saw no change in attitude. Overall, participants evaluated the product more favourably in the high source expertise eWOM condition (F stimulus

Mdn =4) than the no eWOM available condition (F stimulus Mdn =4), a statistically significant increase for F in the median of the differences of 0.50, $z = -5.941$, $p = .000$.

From these results, the availability of eWOM caused a change in respondents' ranked preferences for the evaluated stimuli. Namely, there was a difference between the control and manipulated condition across both groups of respondents. Here, low eWOM volume causes a decrease in positive attitude, while high eWOM volume drives an increase in positive product attitude in participants from both goal groups. The same applies for the eWOM source manipulation where a low expertise eWOM source presented with the stimulus will cause a drop in the ranked attitude. A stimulus accompanied by a high source expertise eWOM will lead to a positive shift in attitude compared to the no eWOM condition. In conclusion, the availability of eWOM, regardless of its dimension, will lead to a change in consumers' relative product attitude.

9.5 Product Attitude depending on eWOM availability

A repeated measures ANOVA is commonly used to assess the difference between participants' responses of three or more levels of a within-subjects factor (Pallant, 2010). The test is conducted within-subjects as the levels contain the same cases within each level (Field, 2009). A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was thus conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in Product Attitude over the different interventions of eWOM available to accompany the product stimulus being evaluated. As seen in previous research that determines attitudinal differences between treatment conditions, an analysis of variance was opted for, similar to Pham and Chang (2013) and Avnet (2012). A repeated measures ANOVA was carried out, but the assumption of Sphericity was not met given that in this test, $p = <.05$ (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). As such, the produced bias needed to be corrected by adjusting the degrees of freedom used in calculating the p . The correction is defined by epsilon (ϵ) and the method that was used to estimate it is the Greenhouse-Geisser correction (Maxwell and Delaney, 2004).

The results determined that mean Product Attitude differed statistically significantly between Levels of eWOM availability, that is Low eWOM Volume, High eWOM Volume, Low Expertise of Source and High Expertise of Source ($F(2.347, 999.720) = 57.126, P < 0.0005, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .118$).

Table 9.6 Results of the repeated measures ANOVA

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects

Measure: Product Attitude

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
eWOM_Availabiliy	Sphericity Assumed	223.620	3	74.540	57.126	.000	.118
	Greenhouse-Geisser	223.620	2.347	95.289	57.126	.000	.118
	Huynh-Feldt	223.620	2.361	94.731	57.126	.000	.118
	Lower-bound	223.620	1.000	223.620	57.126	.000	.118
Error (eWOM_Availabiliy)	Sphericity Assumed	1667.567	1278	1.305			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	1667.567	999.720	1.668			
	Huynh-Feldt	1667.567	1005.607	1.658			
	Lower-bound	1667.567	426.000	3.914			

Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that a higher volume of eWOM available elicited a higher level of Product Attitude as B and D order paintings exhibit a higher attitude mean compared to paintings ordered A and C (4.53 ± 0.96 vs 3.58 ± 1.1 , respectively), which was statistically significant ($P < 0.0005$). When looking at the Expertise level of the recommender providing eWOM, both low (E) and high expertise (F) recommender source painting exhibit a higher attitude mean than the low volume

condition painting (3.85 ± 1.4 vs 4.2 ± 1.5 , respectively), which was statistically significant ($P < 0.0005$). Both source expertise conditions present a lower mean compared to the high volume eWOM condition. As such, the most favourable product attitude was exhibited in the high volume condition, followed by source expertise high, source expertise low and eventually low volume of eWOM. The following table indicates the means for all product attitude measured per eWOM level and their significance.

Pairwise Comparisons

Measure: Product_Attitude

(I) eWOM_Availability	(J) eWOM_Availability	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
AC	BD	-.948*	.062	.000	-1.112	-.785
	E	-.268*	.066	.000	-.444	-.093
	F	-.653*	.097	.000	-.911	-.395
BD	AC	.948*	.062	.000	.785	1.112
	E	.680*	.081	.000	.466	.893
	F	.295*	.074	.001	.098	.493
E	AC	.268*	.066	.000	.093	.444
	BD	-.680*	.081	.000	-.893	-.466
	F	-.385*	.084	.000	-.606	-.163
F	AC	.653*	.097	.000	.395	.911
	BD	-.295*	.074	.001	-.493	-.098
	E	.385*	.084	.000	.163	.606

Based on estimated marginal means

Therefore, we can conclude that different levels and dimensions of eWOM availability influence respondents in their product attitude of the presented stimuli.

9.6 Product Expertise and Character of the Response (Affective and Cognitive)

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance MANOVA was run to determine the effect of Expertise on the character of the product Response. Two measures of Response to Art were assessed: Affective Response and Cognitive Responses. Participants were assigned to either the Expert or the Non Expert Group depending on their level of Art Expertise, which was assessed by asking about completed art university courses. Preliminary assumption checking revealed that data were normally distributed, there were no univariate or multivariate outliers, as assessed by boxplot and Mahalanobis distance ($p > .001$), respectively; there were linear relationships, as assessed by scatterplot; no multicollinearity ($r = .393$, $p = .002$); and there was homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, as assessed by Box's M test ($p = .003$).

Expert Participants scored higher in the Cognitive Response with considerable difference in scores from the Non-Expert group ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.6$; $M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.1$, respectively). With regards to the Affective Response Scores, the Expert Group again showed higher scores but the difference was not pronounced as compared to the Cognitive Response ($M=3.88$, $SD=0.8$; $M=2.82$, $SD=1.0$, respectively)

Table 9.7 Results of the MANOVA analysis
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	TOTAL_Affective_Response	39.885 ^a	1	39.885	37.346	.000
	TOTAL_Rational_Response	69.369 ^b	1	69.369	69.028	.000
Intercept	TOTAL_Affective_Response	4356.384	1	4356.384	4079.067	.000
	TOTAL_Rational_Response	3323.221	1	3323.221	3306.894	.000

ArtCourse	TOTAL_Affective_Response	39.885	1	39.885	37.346	.000
	TOTAL_Rational_Response	69.369	1	69.369	69.028	.000

a. R Squared = .081 (Adjusted R Squared = .079)

b. R Squared = .140 (Adjusted R Squared = .138)

c. Computed using alpha = .05

The differences between the two Expertise groups on the combined dependent variables was statistically significant, $F(2, 424) = 39.146, p < .001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .844$; partial $\eta^2 = .156$. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs showed that both Affective Response scores ($F(1, 425) = 37.346, p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .081$) and Cognitive Response scores ($F(1, 425) = 69.028, p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .140$.) were statistically significantly different between the participant groups with different Expertise in Art, using a Bonferroni adjusted α level of .025. Thus, a consumer's level of expertise will have an influence on their response when encountering the product. Here, a higher level of expertise will induce both a higher cognitive as well as affective response to the product. Information, which in this instance is stored in memory, has important implications on the attitude process. Accordingly, the influence of novel information retrieval needs to be explored in relation to the consumer attitude development process in order to understand the interplay of cognitive and affective elements shaping this process.

9.7 Basis of Evaluation differences between Goal (Symbolic/Hedonic)

The following section will present the analysis conducted to compare the differences between the hedonic and the symbolic purchase scenario in terms of whether their product evaluations were primarily based on affect or cognition.

In order to assess the difference between product evaluation basis scores between the two groups of purchase scenario respondents, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was

undertaken. Even though the t-test is commonly used as statistical procedure when comparing the measured scores between only two groups of respondents, ANOVA tests are considered more robust against Type 1 and Type 2 errors (Pallant, 2010), and as such will be used for the present analysis.

The higher the basis of evaluation score higher is, the cognitive rather than the affective basis of the evaluation respondents have opted for. Data are presented as mean \pm standard deviation. The basis of evaluation in the symbolic goal condition was higher ($n=201$, 4.20 ± 1.4) than in the hedonic purchase goal condition ($n=226$, 3.74 ± 1.5). This means that there is a statistically significant difference in Basis of evaluation where the symbolic goal has elicited a higher cognitive rather than affective basis of evaluation compared to the hedonic goal scenario.

Goal	Basis of Evaluation
Symbolic (a)	4.20 (1.4)
Hedonic (b)	3.74 (1.5)
Anova Results (Difference between the goals)	F(1,425)= 10.371

As the one-way ANOVA holds to the assumption that the population variances of the dependent variable are equal for all groups of the independent variable, a homogeneity of variance check was undertaken in order to prevent from Type I error (Hsu, 1996). Here, there was homogeneity of variance, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p=.406$).

Table 9.7 Results of the repeated measures ANOVA

ANOVA

TOTAL_BasisOfEvaluation

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

Between Groups	22.843	1	22.843	10.371	.001
Within Groups	936.144	425	2.203		
Total	958.987	426			

As can be seen in the above table that presents the ANOVA test results, there is a statistically significant difference between respondents depending on their purchase goals. The basis of evaluation score for the symbolic and hedonic purchase scenario groups present different results for the mean score with a $p=.001$. Consequently, respondents assigned to a symbolic goals purchase scenario manipulation scored their basis of product evaluation higher, that is more cognitively based, compared to respondents assigned to the hedonic goals purchase scenario manipulation whose evaluation was more affectively based.

9.8 Structural Equation Modelling

A multivariate method of analysis was applied in order to obtain an overall assessment of the hypothesised decision-making process of consumers for the product attitude formation for aesthetic products and the influence of eWOM. This approach will be adopted as a more accurate alternative to multiple regression and thus will allow to test the suggested relationships between variables within the theoretically developed decision-making model. As Cudeck and du Toit (2009) suggest, ‘the name “structural equation model” describes the two major elements of the method: first an algebraic representation of latent variables that underlie manifest variables, and secondly a system of linear regressions among the latent variables’ (515). This technique is particularly appropriate for research developed on experimental designs and will be thus applied to explore the relationship between the decision process steps.

Structural equation modelling is the multivariate analysis method used in this study to explain the relationships among specified variables in the theoretical model. There are several techniques to identify estimates for each free parameter, such as the ordinary least

squares (OLS), generalized least square (GLM) and maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). This study will apply MLE, as this approach is more flexible compared to the other options. Furthermore, this is a robust method that allows data to overcome issues related to violations of normality (Hair et al., 1998). This method of analysis was employed particularly as compared to regression models it allows identifying true scores from possible measurement error. As such, SEM can be defined as a statistical model that defines the relationships between the studied variables (Cudeck and du Toit, 2009).

Model fit is judged based on the model's ability to appropriately fit the data and is accounted for by several criteria. Structural equation modelling provides the study with two different models: the measurement model and the structural model (Byrne, 2009). The first reflects the adequacy of the model based on the extent to which the hypothesised relationships are appropriate and the model accounts for the theoretical assumptions on which it is based. The second depends on the technical appropriateness of the model in explaining the data (Cudeck and du Toit, 2009)

9.8.1 Amos Graphics v.22

AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) v.22 is the statistical software used to carry out the analyses. The software allows testing of means and covariance structures, and it is the most up-to-date version available. The software is equipped with various features, such as a graphical interface, missing data estimation as well as multi-group data analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2006) and thus a user-friendly interface assists the analysis (Byrne, 2009). With AMOS, it is possible to test both the measurement and the structural model developed through SEM. The pre-defined assumptions required in order to apply a multivariate technique were assessed and appropriately fulfil the requirements. In view of undertaking a complete SEM analysis, two models were developed as follows.

9.8.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (The Measurement Model)

In Structural Equation modelling, the measurement model that is developed is defined as Confirmatory Factor analysis or CFA (Hair et al., 1998). A CFA analysis was deemed appropriate for the present study, as the latent structure of the variables has been established in previous literature and the qualitative phase of the research. All the scales that have been used for the current study were borrowed from previous research, and no new items were added to complement or change the meaning of original scales. Hence an EFA, which is a technique used for variable reduction that identifies the item properties within constructs, has not been undertaken (Ng et al., 2010)

Consequently, a CFA was necessary to determine whether the fit of the model was adequate (Kline, 2011). By using a CFA, it is possible to determine the validity and reliability of each of the constructs that will be used in further analysis as well as its psychometric properties (DeVellis, 2012). Along these lines, the confirmatory factor analysis helps evaluate the relationship between observed variables and their latent factors, thereby establishing the value of the regression path between them by calculating their factor loadings (Hair et al., 1998).

Before proceeding to the actual analysis, a necessary step is to assess the validity of the measurement model (Kline, 2011). Goodness of fit measures will thus be used to estimate the validity of the model, similar to the criteria used for the structural model evaluation. This step will provide information about the extent to which the proposed model accounts for the correlations between variables in the data (Brown, 2015). The measurement of the structural model cannot take place if there is no validity established for the measurement model for what concerns the full factorial structure. This step will allow for a confident interpretation of results obtained in view of the structural model measurement (Byrne, 2009).

Among the various existing indexes that are available for measuring the fit of the model, there is no one comprehensive index for testing the model fit. As such, it is considered appropriate practice to report between 3 and 6 indexes in order to indicate the overall evaluation of the produced model fit (Byrne, 2009; Brown, 2015; Kline, 2011). Based on the above, the following indexes will be reported in the present study with their achieved and recommended values: Chi Square, CFI, NFI, GFI, SRMR, RMSEA, RMR.

9.8.3 Fit Indices

With the aim of examining the model fit and testing the proposed hypotheses, a selection of fit indices will be used, as these serve to indicate the difference between the estimated population covariance matrix and the original sample matrix (Byrne, 2009). We refer to these recommended thresholds when making judgments about the extent to which a theorised model describes the actual data (Finch et al., 2016). Each of the available indices evaluated the fit of the model based on different criteria (Kline, 2011). In line with what was mentioned previously, there is the need to report between 3 and 6 indices; this study will examine the goodness-of-fit values of the Chi Square test (CMIN), CFI, NFI, GFI, SRMR, RMSEA and the RMR.

Table 9.8 outlines the recommended threshold values for each of the goodness-of-fit tests applied in this study.

Table 9.8 Overview of the adopted fit indices

Fit Index	Value of Good Fit	Reference
Chi Square	p-value > 0.05. Not Applicable for large sample size >200 (Hair et al., 1998; Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996).	Byrne (2009)

CFI	CFI > 0.90	Bentler (1990)
NFI	NFI > 0.90	Bollen (1989)
GFI	GFI > 0.90	Joreskog and Sorbom (1996)
SRMR	<.08	Hu and Bentler (1999)
RMSEA	RMSEA < 0.08	Browne and Cudeck (1993)
RMR	≤.08	Hu and Bentler (1999)

9.8.4 Relationship between Art Involvement and Self-Knowledge

In order to establish whether a higher order construct exists among the Product Involvement and Perceived Self-knowledge variables, a set of analyses was undertaken. As an exploratory step, a Pearson's product-moment correlation was run to assess the relationship between Art Involvement and Self Knowledge. Preliminary analyses showed the relationship to be linear with both variables adequately normally distributed, as assessed by Skewness and Kurtosis values, and there were no outliers. The Pearson correlation coefficient can present a value that spans from -1.00 to 1.00. 1.0, which represents a perfect negative to a perfect positive relationship. As such, the value of r stands for the strength of the relationship among the assessed variables (Field, 2009). As Cohen (1988) proposed, the strength of the relationship can be defined by the following correlation coefficient values:

Pearson correlation (r) Values

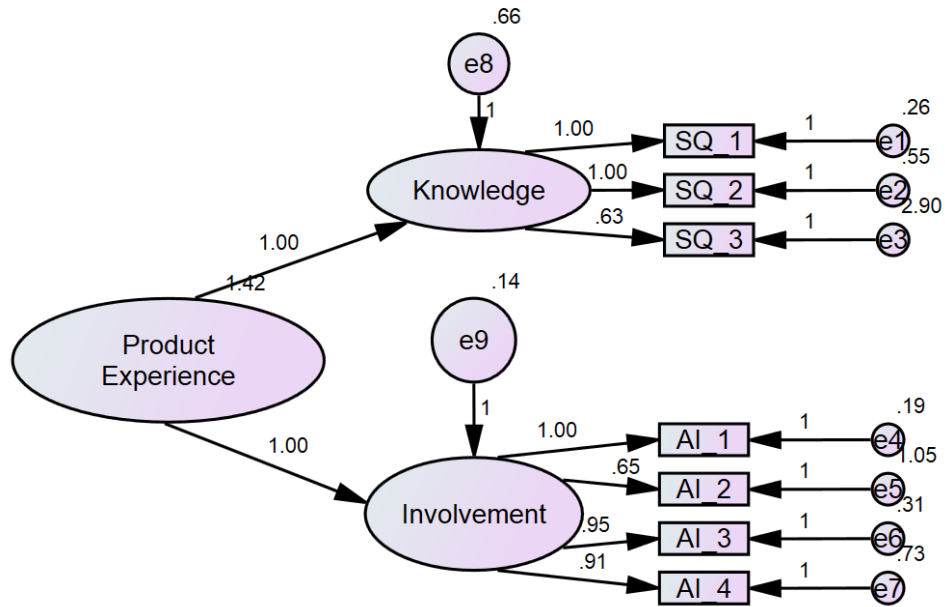
r= .10 to .29 or r=-.10 to -.29	Small
r= .30 to .49 or r=-.30 to -.49	Medium
r=.50 to 1.0 or r=-.50 to -1.0	Large

There was a positive correlation between Art Involvement and Self Knowledge, $r(425) = .681$, $p < .0001$, with level of involvement explaining 46% of the variation in reported Self Knowledge. As such, based on Cohen's (1988) classification, there is close to a large effect between the variables.

Based on these results, the existence of a second order variable composed by Product Involvement and Perceived self-knowledge could be hypothesised. In order to obtain a more parsimonious and interpretable model, it was hypothesised that a second order construct can be derived from these two variables. As previous literature suggests, product involvement and perceived product self-knowledge are both factors that underlie the definition of product experience. As such, a second order construct was developed rather than a first order variable with correlated factors and tested by applying a CFA on the suggested components of Product Experience.

Because second order variables have no established scales that can be used to measure them accordingly, a CFA assessment was required (Cudeck and du Toit, 2009).

Figure 9.1 CFA outlining the regression weights.



	Estimate	P(.Sig)
SQ_1 <--- Knowledge	1.000	Reference Point
SQ_2 <--- Knowledge	1.000	.000
SQ_3 <--- Knowledge	.628	.000
AI_1 <--- Involvement	1.000	Reference Point
AI_2 <--- Involvement	.654	.000
AI_3 <--- Involvement	.948	.000
AI_4 <--- Involvement	.910	.000

From the results of the CFA, it appears that both Involvement and Perceived Self-knowledge load highly on the underlying construct of Product Experience and are statistically significant ($p = .000$). Nevertheless, it is important to assess the model fit to examine if any item should be removed or if the model should be submitted to modification for improving model fit. The indices outlined in table (Chi Square test

(CMIN), CFI, NFI, GFI, SRMR, RMSEA and the RMR) will be assessed in order to identify if the model has goodness-of-fit.

Fit Index	Goodness of Fit Value	Recommended Value of Good Fit	References
Chi Square	.326	$P > .05$	Byrne (2009)
CFI	.999	$\geq .90$	Bentler (1990)
NFI	.993	$> .95$ Good Fit $> .90$ Acceptable Fit	Bollen (1989)
GFI	.992	$> .90$	Joreskog and Sorbom (1996)
SRMR	0.022	$< .08$	Hu and Bentler (1999)
RMSEA	0.019	$.05 < RMSEA \leq .08$ Adequate Fit $.08 < RMSEA \leq .1$ Mediocre Fit $\leq .06$ Good Fit	Browne and Cudeck (1993)
RMR	0.022	$< .05$ $\leq .08$	Hu and Bentler (1999)

The table shows that the model has goodness-of-fit with ‘good’ fit indices from the results of the CFI, NFI, GFI, SRMR, RMSEA and the RMR. However, the chi-square index shows an inadequate overall fit where $p = 326$. In this instance, however, a non-significant chi-square is not concerning. As previously mentioned, the chi-square value depends on the sample size, where a large number of cases cause the value to increase.

As such, this index is not applicable for large sample sizes that include more than 200 cases (Hair et al., 1998). Along these lines, Tabachnik and Fidell (2007) argue that a sample size of 150+ with good alternative fit indices enables the researcher to disregard the chi-square test. Furthermore, among the modification indices output produced by AMOS, there is no suggestion provided for a recommended modification.

Standardised regression weights

	Estimate	P
TOTAL_Art_Involvement <--- Prod.Experience	.973	***
TOTAL_SelfKnowledge <--- Prod.Experience	.699	***

It is also useful to look at the R2 value, which is referred to as the squared multiple correlations output within AMOS. According to Cohen (1988), values above .25 can be considered a large effect. The R2 value informs the level of variance the variable accounts for on the dependent variable (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2007). Table 9.9 illustrates the values of the squared multiple correlations output.

Table 9.9 Squared multiple correlations output

Squared Multiple Correlations Output (Default model)

	Estimate
TOTAL_SelfKnowledge	.489
TOTAL_Art_Involvement	.948

Table 9.9 shows all high squared multiple correlation values above .25. This indicates that each variable explains a high percentage of its variance, with the error variance explaining a lower percentage on most variables (Cohen, 1988).

These results show there is an underlying latent variable of Product Experience composed of Product Involvement and Perceived Self-Knowledge. This finding was previously

proposed in the literature and initially identified through the qualitative study, but was empirically confirmed here by the CFA.

9.8.5 Conceptual Measurement Model

The conceptual model was developed based on variables that emerged from the literature review and the qualitative findings. The aim of the model is to test consumers' decision-making process, specifically the attitude formation process for aesthetic products by looking at the relationship between the initial response, basis of evaluation and product evaluation. Furthermore, it aims to explore how product involvement and perceived self-knowledge relate to the underlying construct of product experience and how this impacts one's initial response. The model also aims to determine the role of online experience and susceptibility to interpersonal interest on the variables of interest. Lastly, the difference in modelled relationships will be explored by examining the role of the purchase goals respondents have been assigned to on the relationship between response and basis of evaluation. Namely, the models will be compared between the hedonic and symbolic goal group in order to determine whether differences exist between the hypothesised relationships.

The items used for each of the variables are outlined below and have been adopted from previous literature within the topic. The table presents the measured variables and, where applicable, the latent variables examined in the study.

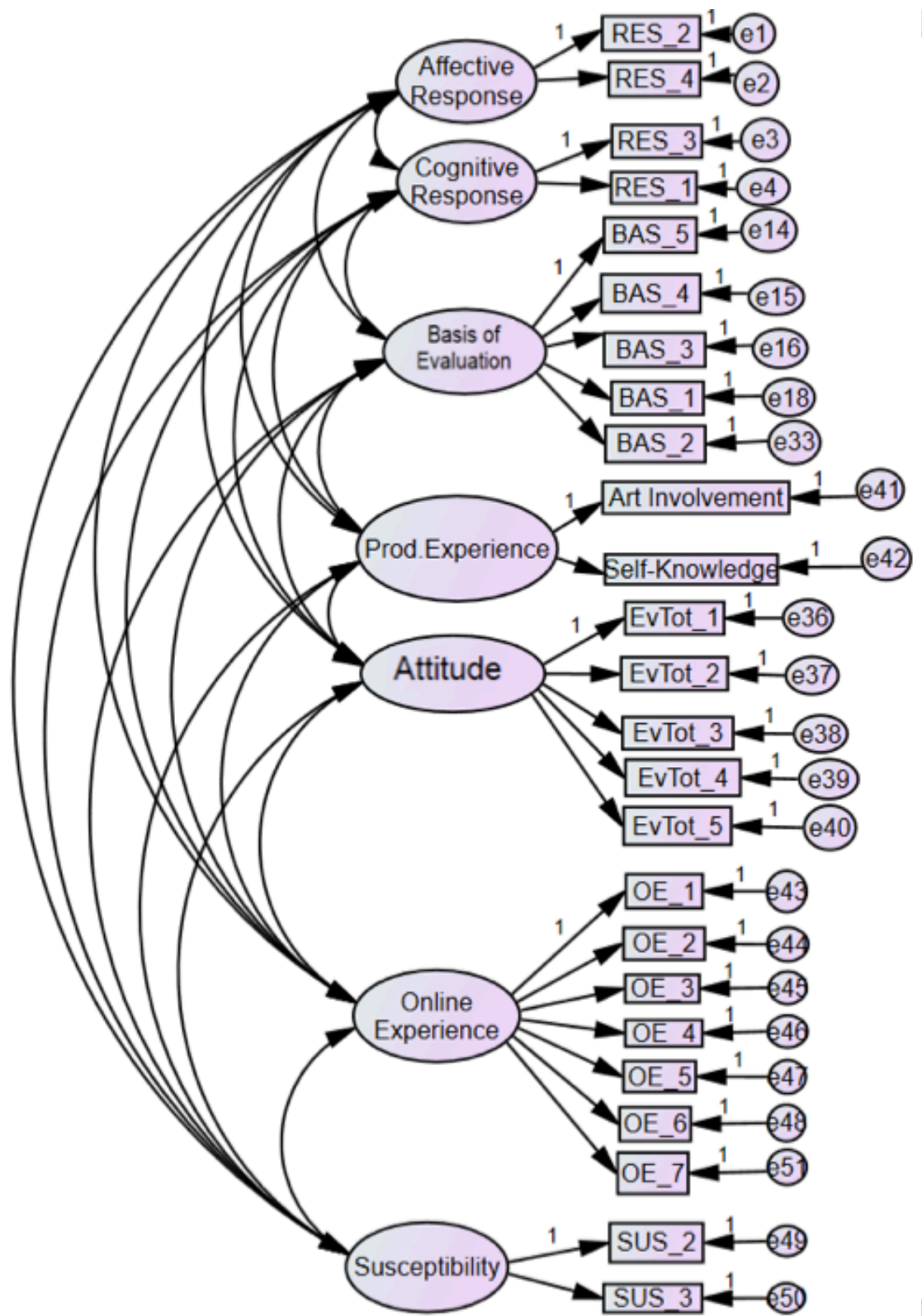
Table 9.10 Conceptual Measurement Model Variables

Items	Composite Variable	Latent Variable
RES_2 RES_4	Affective Response	
RES_1 RES_3	Cognitive Response	

BAS_1 BAS_2 BAS_3 BAS_4 BAS_5	Basis of Evaluation	
EvTot_1 EvTot_2 EvTot_3 EvTot_4 EvTot_5	Product Attitude	
Involvement Self Knowledge		Product Experience
OE_1 OE_2 OE_3 OE_4 OE_5 OE_6 OE_7	Online Experience	
SUS_2 SUS_3	Susceptibility	

The above table defines the variables that will be tested in the following analyses with their according scale items. The validity of the variables needs thus to be examined through the hypothesised measurement model.

Figure 9.2 The hypothesised measurement model



As shown in figure 9.2, two observed variables are hypothesised to load on an underlying latent variable named 'Product Experience'. Circular error terms were added to the left of each observed variable. The arrows from these circular error terms outline the impact of measurement error either random or unique on the observed variables (Byrne, 2009). Double-headed arrows between exogenous variables indicate relationships that are unanalysed and represent covariance between the exogenous variables with no particularly implied direction of effect (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

9.8.6 Model Identification

Prior to estimating the parameters in the model, it is necessary to assess the model identification. Namely, each parameter in the model can be free, fixed or constrained. Here, free parameters are unknown and thus will have to be estimated, fixed parameters are usually fixed to a value of 0 or 1 as they are not free; and constrained parameters are imposed to be equal to other parameters as they are unknown. The identification of the model will therefore depend on the classification of the parameters (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). Accordingly, a parameter is identified if it shows the same value across all equivalent sets. If all the parameters in the model are identified, then the model is defined as identified, which will not occur if one or more parameters result not identified. As such, the identification of a model involves determining whether the data collected is enough to obtain solutions for each of the parameters to produce the estimated population covariance matrix (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2007). As such, in order for the achievement of parameter solutions in the CFA, the number of parameters needs to be lower compared to the number of variances and co-variances (Byrne, 2009). In the present study, the number of data points surpasses the number of parameters to be estimated; the model is considered over-identified and thus can be subjected to the CFA measurement (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004).

9.8.7 CFA Measurement Model

As defined in the previous sections of the chapter, the collected data fulfils the assumption of normality as well as there are no extreme outliers in the data as inspected from the Mahalabobis test, further the model resulted as over-identified. Based on this, the measurement model was tested and the results are reported below in table 9.11.

Table 9.11 The results of the measurement testing

Fit Index	Goodness of Fit Value
Chi Square	.000 (751.296, df= 254)
CFI	.932
NFI	.902
GFI	.873
RMR	.070
SRMR	0.45
RMSEA	.068

If the goodness of fit values show that the model should be further improved to fit the data, model modifications can be made following the recommendations provided by AMOS within the modification indices section of the output (Finch et al., 2016). But aside from obtaining adequate statistical results, the model should provide meaningful insight about the collected data. As such, from the calculated fit indices it appears that the model fits the data well, but it can be subjected to further improvement in order to provide a more appropriate theoretical model (Byrne, 2009). As such, a following step included model modifications based on the recommendations provided in the AMOS output.

9.8.8 Measurement Model Modification Indices

The adoption of SEM is commonly exploratory in nature, such that the primary purpose behind it is to identify an adequate structure for the data through a process of pondered

model modifications. With this aim, if a model does not adequately represent the data, a model presenting a better performance will be adopted (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). Hence, before proceeding to running the Structural Equation Model (path model), it is important to consult the modification indices output within AMOS to identify if any improvements can be made with regards to model fit. However, there need to be theoretical justification for performing such modifications and thus the favoured changes need to be supported by theoretical background (Cudeck and du Toit, 2009).

With the modification indices output, the software classifies the model modifications in terms of covariance, variances and regression weights. The M.I. value specified in the output defines the chi-square value while the ‘Par Change’ value stands for the drop in parameter change (Bryne, 2013).

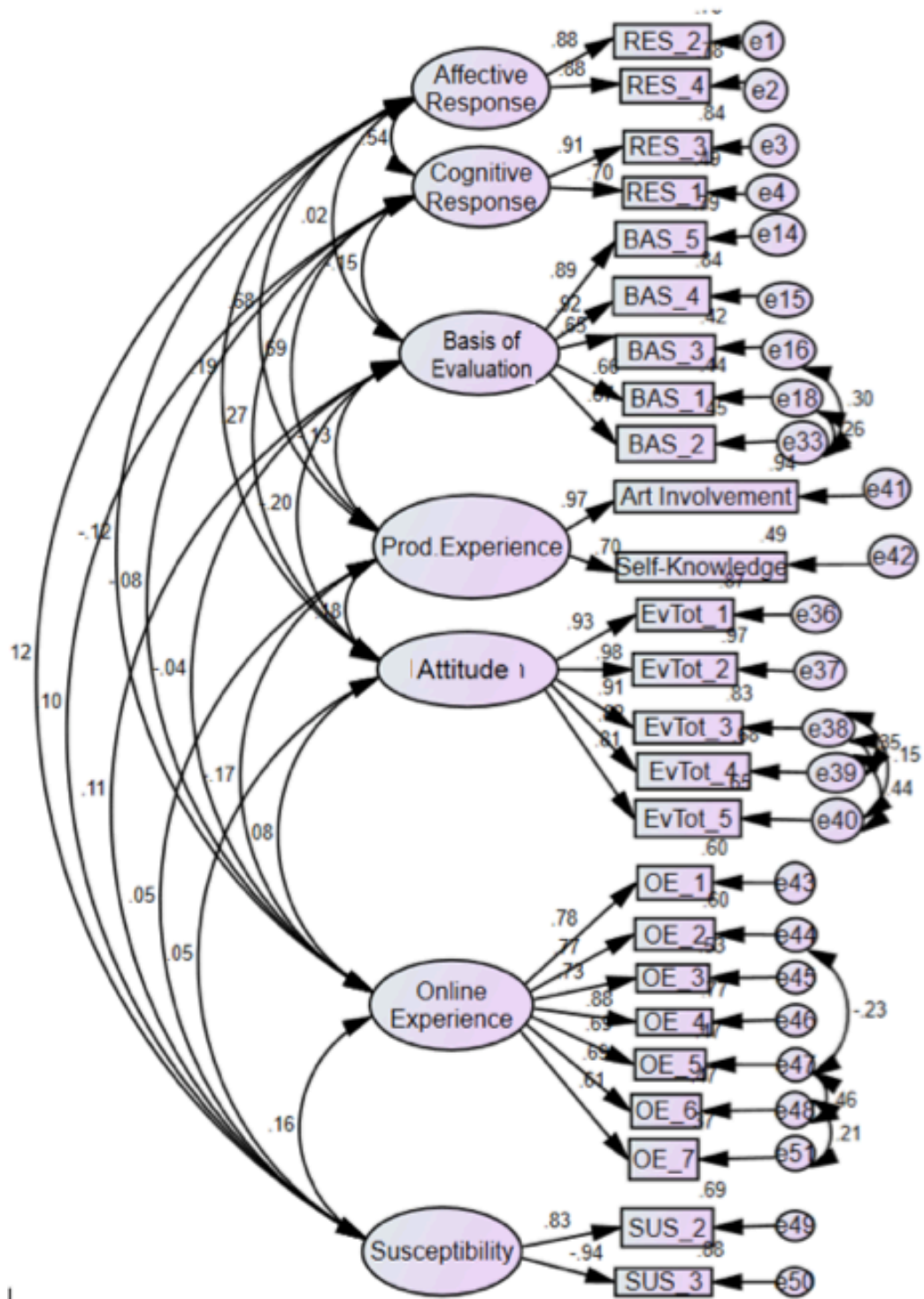
The modification indices have indicated a set of modifications to the measurement model over the threshold value of 15.0 as recommended by Spirtes, Scheines and Glymour (1991); the suggested modifications were undertaken. Modification indices below this value do not require changes in the model as a priority. The modifications concern the relationship among items within single variables and as such given the similarity between items constituting the scales, there is theoretical justification to undertake the modifications. The modification indices over a M.I. value of 15 are presented in the following table.

Table 9.12 The M.I. indices of value over 15

	M.I.	Par Change
e33 <--> e16	29.271	.457
e33 <--> e18	20.372	.395
e39 <--> e40	60.156	.087
e38 <--> e39	21.670	.034
e44 <--> e47	35.699	-.121
e48 <--> e51	19.277	.125
e47 <--> e48	94.412	.280

The modified model can be seen in figure below. Here, new parameters have been added between the suggested error terms provided within the modification indices output. The measurement model in figure outlines the regression weights of the observed variables on the underlying latent variables. Additionally, we can see the covariance estimates between each of the variables.

Figure 9.3 The results of the CFA



9.8.9 Modified Model

The goodness-of-fit statistics for the model modification show an overall improvement in the fit of the model. The Chi Square reduced from 751.296 (d.f. 254) to 434.369 (d.f. 246). Also, the remaining fit statistics exhibited an improvement in recommended value for goodness of model fit.

Table 9.13 The goodness-of-fit statistics

Fit Index	Goodness of Fit Value
Chi Square	.000 (434.369, df= 246)
CFI	.974
NFI	.943
GFI	.927
RMR	.061
SRMR	0.42
RMSEA	.042

Chi-Square

The chi-square is significant at $p=000$ and $CMIN = 434.369$. Nevertheless, as argued by the literature, the chi-square does not need to be significant in order for the model to be defined as well fitting. For sample sizes above 200, the chi square statistic will be biased and as such should be disregarded in the fit assessment because of its inaccuracy (Hair et al., 1998).

Here, it is useful to look at the measure of the chi-square the $x^2/d.f.$ as an alternative solution (Finch et al., 2016). Following the recommendation proposed in the literature, the relative chi-square value should be within the value of 2 or 3 (Kline, 2011) while others propose a wider frame of 5 (Schumacker and Lomax, 2014) in order for the model achieving good fitness. A relative chi-square of 1.766 shows a good fitting model.

Comparative Fit Index (CFI)

The Comparative Fit Index is a fit statistic with a comparative objective. This statistic

compares the present model fit with a 'null' model, which is based on the assumption that the latent variables in the model are uncorrelated (Byrne, 2009). As presented in table 9.13, the CFI has a value range from 0 – 1 with a value $> .90$ indicating good fit (Bentler, 1990). The CFI value reported in table for the assessed model is .974, which is a value over the cut-off, proposed by literature and thus suggesting good fit of the model.

Normed Fit Index (NFI)

The Normed Fit Index for the current model is .943, which indicates that the model provides a better fit compared to the null model that amounts to 94%. Following the recommendations provided by Bollen (1989), the NFI should be above .95 and thus the present model indicates an achieved fit within this value cut-off.

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)

The values of the GFI range from 0 – 1, where a good fit index of GFI falls above .90 (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996). The GFI value for the present model is .927, which can be identified as good fit given the value that it has achieved.

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation is among the most commonly used statistics for the evaluation of the model goodness of fit. It is based on the non-centrality parameter, and it is considered as an absolute measure of fit. This fit statistic is particularly suitable to accommodate larger sample sizes (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The statistic ranges from 0 to 1 with lower values indicating better fit. In this instance, the achieved value of RMSEA is .042, indicating good fit according to the values that Browne and Cudeck (1993) propose.

Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)

Hu and Bentler (1999) recommend that the RMR values should fall below the cut-off point of $\leq .08$. The RMR statistic obtained in the current model assessment is .061, thus indicating goodness of fit.

Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

SRMR means an absolute measure of model fit where closer is the obtained value to the value of 0 the model presents a better fit. In this instance, the achieved 0.42 is therefore below the cut-off value of less than .08 (Hu and Bentler, 1999), representing good fit.

Table 9.14 The standardised regression weights

Standardised Regression Weights

			Estimate	P
RES_2	<---	Affective_Response	0.884	***
RES_4	<---	Affective_Response	0.885	***
RES_3	<---	Cognitive_Response	0.914	***
RES_1	<---	Cognitive_Response	0.697	***
BAS_2	<---	Basis_Ev	0.669	***
BAS_3	<---	Basis_Ev	0.651	***
BAS_5	<---	Basis_Ev	0.887	***
BAS_1	<---	Basis_Ev	0.665	***
BAS_4	<---	Basis_Ev	0.917	***
EvTot_1	<---	Product Attitude	0.935	***
EvTot_2	<---	Product Attitude	0.983	***
EvTot_3	<---	Product Attitude	0.909	***
EvTot_4	<---	Product Attitude	0.823	***
EvTot_5	<---	Product Attitude	0.805	***
OE_1	<---	Online_Experience	0.776	***
OE_2	<---	Online_Experience	0.772	***
OE_3	<---	Online_Experience	0.727	***
OE_4	<---	Online_Experience	0.879	***
OE_5	<---	Online_Experience	0.687	***
OE_6	<---	Online_Experience	0.685	***
SUS_2	<---	Susceptibility	0.83	***
SUS_3	<---	Susceptibility	-0.94	***
TOTAL_SelfKnowledge	<---	Prod.Experience	0.7	***
TOTAL_Art_Involvement	<---	Prod.Experience	0.972	***
OE_7	<---	Online_Experience	0.607	***

The model shown outlines the standardised regression weights, outlined also in the previous section. Standardising the regression weights allows for comparison between each variable (Pallant, 2010). Table 9.14 outlines the standardised regression weights, which all load highly and significant at $p = .000$

It is also useful to look at the squared multiple correlations output defined as R2. Research recommends that values above .25 constitute a large size (Cohen, 1988). Namely, the R2 value stands for the accounted variances that are registered on the dependent variable (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

Table 9.15 The squared multiple correlations

Squared Multiple Correlations: (All - Default model)

	Estimate	p
OE_7	.369	***
Susceptibility_3	.884	***
SUS_2	.688	***
OE_6	.470	***
OE_5	.472	***
OE_4	.773	***
OE_3	.529	***
OE_2	.596	***
OE_1	.601	***
TOTAL_SelfKnowledge	.491	***
TOTAL_Art_Involvement	.945	***
EvTot_5	.649	***

EvTot_4	.678	***
EvTot_3	.826	***
EvTot_2	.967	***
EvTot_1	.874	***
BAS_1	.442	***
BAS_4	.841	***
BAS_5	.788	***
BAS_3	.423	***
BAS_2	.448	***
RES_1	.486	***
RES_3	.836	***
RES_4	.783	***
RES_2	.782	***

It is possible to note that Table 9.15 shows squared multiple correlation values above .25. This indicates that each variable explains a high percentage of its variance with the error variance explaining a lower percentage on most variables (Cohen, 1988). Furthermore, following the confirmatory factor analysis, the composite reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were calculated for all the model constructs and are outlined in the table below.

These values were computed with the aid of a software package (spreadsheet) by Gaskin (2012). The composite reliability of all the constructs showed values above .70, which assesses the internal consistency of the construct and Hair et al., (1998) confirm that values above .70 are considered acceptable. Accordingly, all the constructs demonstrate an average variance extracted (AVE) > .50, which satisfies convergent validity of the constructs as scores are above the recommended threshold of .5 (Fornell and Larcker,

1981).

Table 9.16 Composite reliability and AVE values

Attitude	Prod.Experience	Basis_Evaluation	Cognitive_Response	Affective_Response	Online_Experience	
0.952	0.832	0.875	0.793	0.783	0.892	CR
0.798	0.717	0.588	0.661	0.783	0.544	AVE
0.071	0.480	0.041	0.480	0.466	0.031	MSV
0.989	0.980	0.969	0.951	0.931	0.908	MaxR(H)
0.083	-0.175	-0.045	-0.080	-0.125	0.738	Online_Experience
0.189	0.683	0.017		0.885		Affective_Response
0.267	0.693	-0.150				Cognitive_Response
-0.203	-0.131					Basis_Evaluation
0.184						Prod.Experience
						Product Attitude
						Susceptibility

Susceptibility	0.880	0.786	0.025	0.990	0.158	0.121	0.103	0.106	0.051	0.055	
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9.9 Structural Model Testing and Hypothesis Testing

Following the validation of the variables loading on the respective latent variables, and the measurement model fit statistics suggesting an overall good fit; the next step involves the development of the structural equation model.

Structural equation modeling includes a set of techniques used for estimating the relationships between variables in a simultaneous manner, similarly to multiple regression analysis but with a more robust output (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). In this instance, the relationships that have been developed in the measurement model are converted into a set of structural equations in order to identify whether the theoretical conceptualization of the model holds true (Byrne, 2009). The software used to carry out the analysis was AMOS 22. The next paragraph will outline the set of hypotheses that were tested with this analysis.

9.9.1 Model Hypotheses

As the CFA model exhibited good fit, the tested variables will be used in the structural model assessment. No scale item or variable was required to be deleted, and the composite variables have been identified suitable for application in the structural model, as such no further tests on the data are required.

The development of the path model was based on the topic literature review and the qualitative stage of the current study. The developed hypotheses are as follows:

<i>H1 The availability of eWOM information has an influence on the initially stated product attitude of consumers driven by both Hedonic and Symbolic consumption goals</i>
<i>H2a The Affective response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation</i>
<i>H2b The Cognitive response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation</i>
<i>H3a The Affective response will have an influence on the character of the Basis of Evaluation depending upon the consumption goals of the individual</i>
<i>H3b The Cognitive response will have an influence on the character of the Basis of Evaluation depending upon the consumption goals of the individual</i>
<i>H4 The more cognitively based is the Basis of Evaluation, the Product attitude will be influenced by:</i> <i>c) eWOM Volume,</i> <i>d) Source Expertise of eWOM</i>
<i>H5 Consumers with a Symbolic purchase Goal will have a more cognitively based Evaluation compared to consumers with a Hedonic Goal</i>
<i>H6 There is a relationship between Self-knowledge and Product Involvement combined together to create a new higher order variable of Product Experience.</i>
<i>H7a Product Experience will have an influence on the affective response an individual has about the product</i>
<i>H7b Product experience will have an influence on the cognitive response an individual has about the product</i>
<i>H8 The Product Experience will have an impact on the Attitude for products:</i> <i>e) With low eWOM Volume</i> <i>f) With high eWOM Volume</i> <i>g) With low Source Expertise eWOM</i> <i>h) With high Source Expertise eWOM</i>

H9 Online Experience will have an impact on the Attitude for products:

e) With low eWOM Volume

f) With high eWOM Volume

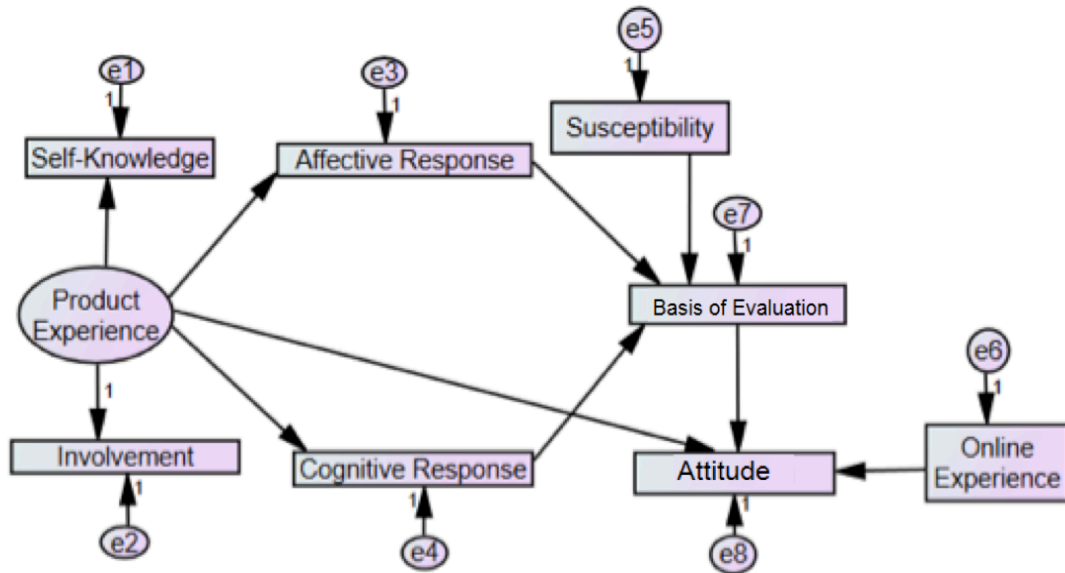
g) With low Source Expertise eWOM

h) With high Source Expertise eWOM

H10 The level of Susceptibility to interpersonal influence will have an influence on the Basis of Evaluation

The relationships illustrated in figure 9.4 are a graphical depiction of the model. These relationships are therefore transferred into equations and the model is then estimated for statistical fit (Finch et al., 2016). The Product Attitude variable within the model will firstly include attitudes from the low eWOM Volume condition (AC), high e WOM Volume (BD) and thereafter low source expertise eWOM (E) and lastly the high expertise eWOM source condition (F). The different conditions of the evaluation will be assessed in order to test the decision process employed when consumers face a stimulus with varying levels of eWOM and accordingly serve to identify differences in the attitude formation process.

Figure 9.4 Proposed relationships within the developed model



2.9.2 Structural Model Identification

The model identification check is an important step in the structural modeling procedure, similarly to the requirements of the CFA. The structural model presented in this study over identified, as the identification requirements have been met. There are more data points than parameters to be estimated in the model (Byrne, 2004). According to Byrne (2009), the formula for calculating the number of data points in the model states as follows; data points = $p(p+1)/2$, where p = the number of measured variables. In this case, we have $8(8+1)/2 = 36$ data points with 18 parameters to be estimated. The model in the figure is therefore over-identified with 18 degrees of freedom. Thus, the model is adequate for structural equation modeling.

9.10 Structural Equation Model Results

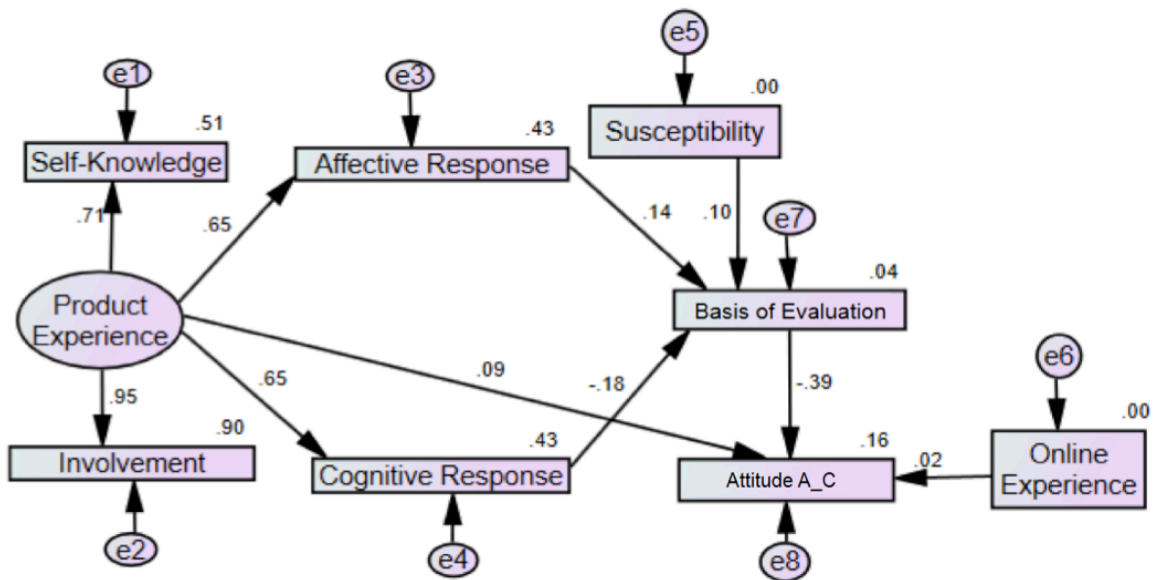
The figures below outline the results of structural equation modelling and account for the different levels of eWOM that have been tested, conditions:

- a) AC (low eWOM volume),
- b) BD (high eWOM volume)
- c) E (low eWOM source expertise)
- d) F (high eWOM source expertise)

a) Condition AC – Low Volume

The model specified below indicates the results obtained when looking at the product attitude for stimulus AC. Specifically, it illustrates the relationship between the various steps in the decision process when the brand being evaluated was accompanied by a low volume of eWOM information.

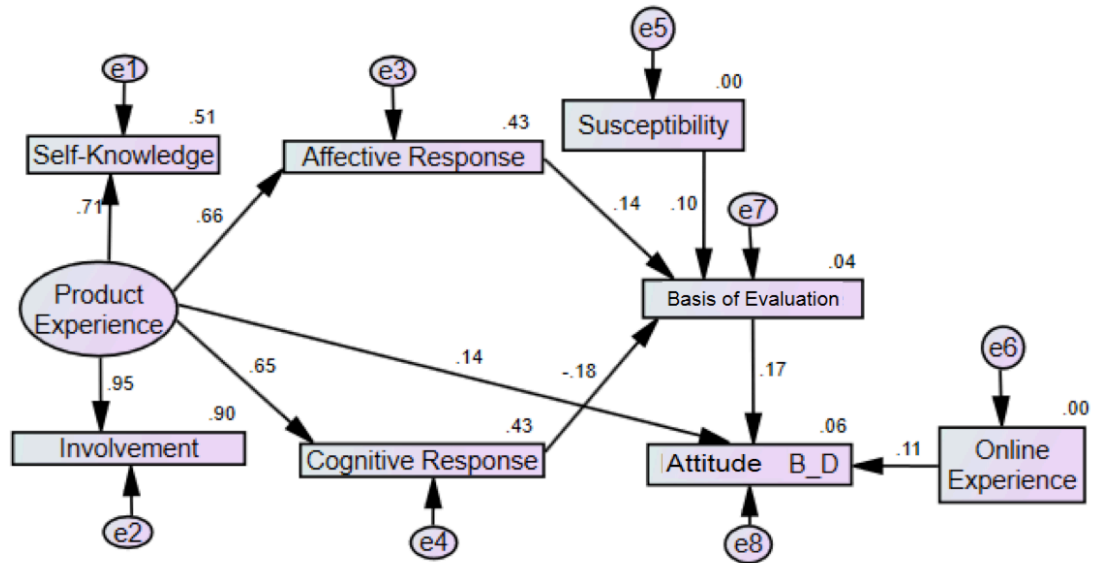
Figure 9.5 Obtained relationships within the AC developed model



b) Condition BD- High Volume

The model specified below indicates the results obtained when looking at the product attitude for stimulus BD. Specifically, it illustrates the relationship between the various steps in the decision process when the brand being evaluated was accompanied by a high volume of eWOM information.

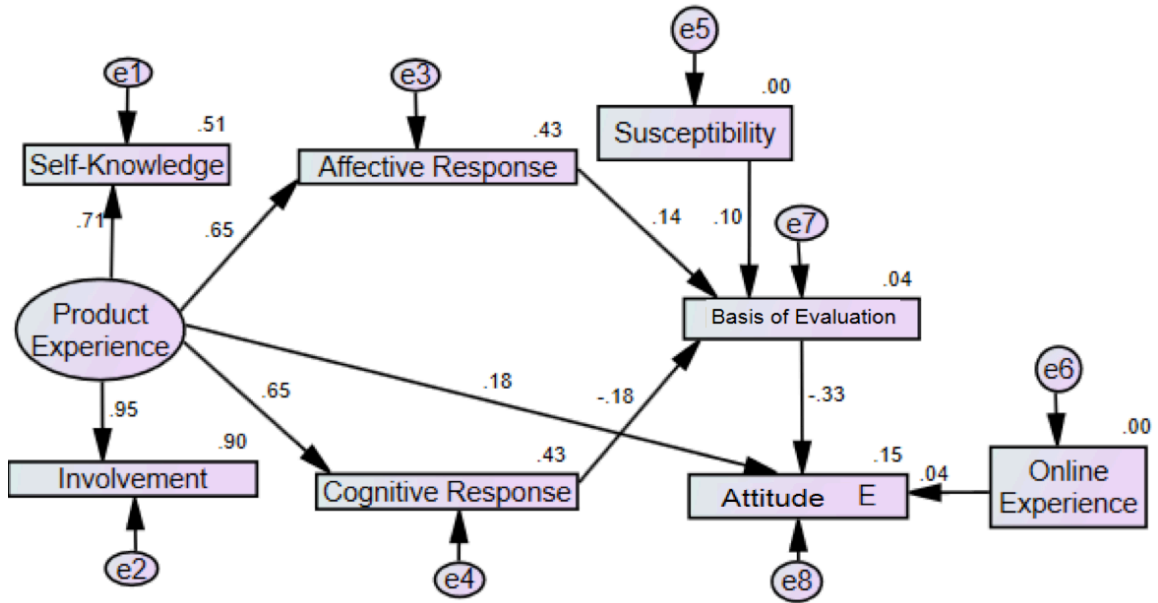
Figure 9.6 Obtained relationships within the BD developed model



c) Condition E – low eWOM source expertise

The model specified below indicates the results obtained when looking at the product attitude for stimulus E. Specifically, it illustrates the relationship between the various steps in the decision process when the brand being evaluated was accompanied by a low source expertise of eWOM information.

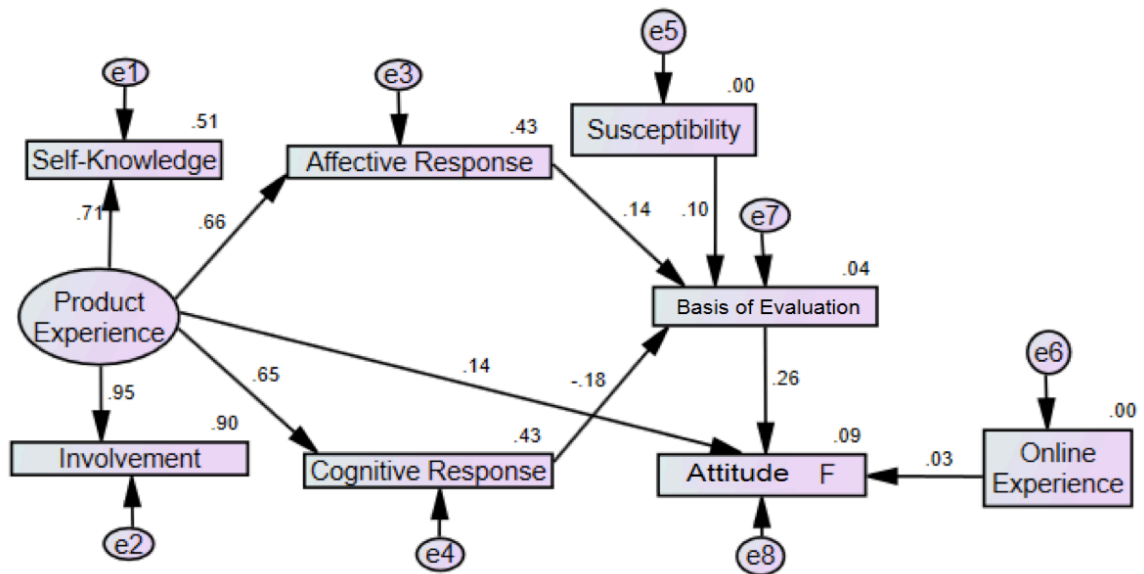
Figure 9.7 Obtained relationships within the E developed model



d) Condition F- high eWOM source expertise

The model specified below indicates the results obtained when looking at the product attitude for stimulus F. Specifically, it illustrates the relationship between the various steps in the decision process when the brand being evaluated was accompanied by a high source expertise of eWOM information.

Figure 9.8 Obtained relationships within the F developed model



9.10.1 Assessing Fit of the Structural Model

The fit indices that were used in assessing the fit of the CFA measurement model were applied in assessing the fit of the structural model. The goodness-of-fit statistics can be found in the table 9.17.

Table 9.17 Obtained goodness-of-fit statistics

Fit Index	Fit Values A_C	Fit Values B_D	Fit Values E	Fit Values F	Recommended Value	References
Chi Square	.000 (64.975)	.000 (81.629)	.000 (51.260)	.000 (57.863)	P > .05	Byrne (2009)
Relative Chi-Square	3.610	4.535	2.848	3.215	< 5	Schumacker and Lomax (2004)
CFI	.942	.918	.958	.948	≥.90 ≥.95	Bentler (1990) Hu and Bentler (1999)
NFI	.923	.899	.938	.927	>.95 Good Fit >.90 Acceptable Fit	Bentler and Bonett (1980)
GFI	.964	.965	.972	.968	>.90 >.95	Joreskog and Sorbom (1996) Schumacker and Lomax, (2010)
SRMR	.065	.0658	.0578	.0600	<.08	Hu and Bentler (1999)
RMSEA	.078	.091	.066	.072	≤.05 Good Fit .05<RMSEA ≤.08 Adequate Fit .08<RMSEA ≤.10 Mediocre	Schumacker and Lomax (2004) Hu and Bentler (1999)

					Fit ≤.06 Good Fit	
RMR	.062	.066	.058	.065	<.05 ≤.08	Joreskog and Sorbom (1996) Hu and Bentler (1999)

The analysis of the structural model on goodness-of-fit reported the chi-square, CFI, NFI, GFI, SRMR, RMSEA and the RMR as shown in table.

Chi-Square

The chi-square was not significant where $p=000$ and $CMIN (A_C)= 64.975$, $CMIN (B_D)= 81.629$, $CMIN (E)= 51.260$, $CMIN (F)= 57.863$ respectively. As argued in literature, the chi-square should be not significant in order for the model to be defined as well fitting. It was previously reported that for large sample sizes above 200, the chi square statistic will be biased and as such should be complemented with other measures in the fit assessment (Hair et al., 1998).

Here, it is useful to look at other measures of goodness of fit in order to assess the overall model where a value of 3 was suggested (Kline, 2011) but other researchers propose a wider frame of 5 (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004) in order for the model to achieve good fitness. The relative chi-square for all 4 models thus presents a suitable value below the threshold of 5.

Comparative Fit Index (CFI)

The Comparative Fit Index is a fit statistic with a comparative objective. This statistic compares the present model fit with a ‘null’ model, which is based on the assumption that the latent variables in the model are uncorrelated (Byrne, 2010). As presented in the

table, the CFI has a value range from 0 – 1 with a value $> .90$ indicating good fit (Bentler, 1990). The CFI values reported in table for the assessed models are CFI (A_C)= .942; CFI (B_D)= .918; CFI (E)= .958; CFI (F)= .948, which are all values over the cut-off, thus suggesting good fit of the models.

Normed Fit Index (NFI)

The Normed Fit Indexes for the current models are NFI (A_C)= .923; NFI (B_D)= .899; NFI (E)= .938; NFI (F)= .927 respectively, which indicates that the models provide a better fit compared to the null models which amount to 92%; 89%, 94%, 92%. Following Bentler and Bonett's (1980) recommendations, the NFI should be above .95 in order to claim good fit and above .90 for adequate fit. Hence, the present models indicate an adequate fit within this cut-off value. Nevertheless, as it can be seen in the results, the NFI value for the B_D could be further improved as it fails to reach the recommended cut-off for adequacy of fit.

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)

The values of the GFI range from 0 – 1, where a good fit index of GFI falls above .90 (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996). The GFI value for the present models are GFI(A_C)= .964, GFI(B_D)=.965, GFI(E)= .972, GFI(F)= .968. These values can be identified as good fit in comparison to the recommended cut-off.

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation is among the most commonly used statistics for the evaluation of the model goodness of fit. It is based on the non-centrality parameter, and it is considered an absolute measure of fit. This fit statistic is particularly suitable to accommodate larger sample sizes (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The statistic ranges from 0 to 1 with lower values indicating better fit. In this instance, the achieved values of RMSEA are RMSEA (A_C) = .078, RMSEA (B_D) =.091, RMSEA (E) = .066, RMSEA (F) = .072, thus indicating largely good fit according to the values proposed by Browne and Cudeck (1993). Nevertheless, the RMSEA of B_D has resulted in a value above the

recommended fit thus suggesting further improvement can be done on this model.

Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)

Hu and Bentler (1999) recommend that the RMR values should fall below the cut-off point of ≤ 0.08 . The RMR statistics obtained in the current model assessment are RMR(A_C) = .062, RMR(B_D)=.066, RMR(E)= .058, RMR(F)= .065, thus indicating goodness of fit.

Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

SRMR indicates an absolute measure of model fit where closer is the obtained value to the value of 0 the model presents a better fit. In this instance, the achieved SRMRs are as follows: SRMR(A_C)= .0658, SRMR(B_D)=.065, SRMR(E)= .0578, SRMR(F)= .0600 therefore below the cut-off value of below .08 (Hu and Bentler, 1999), representing good fit.

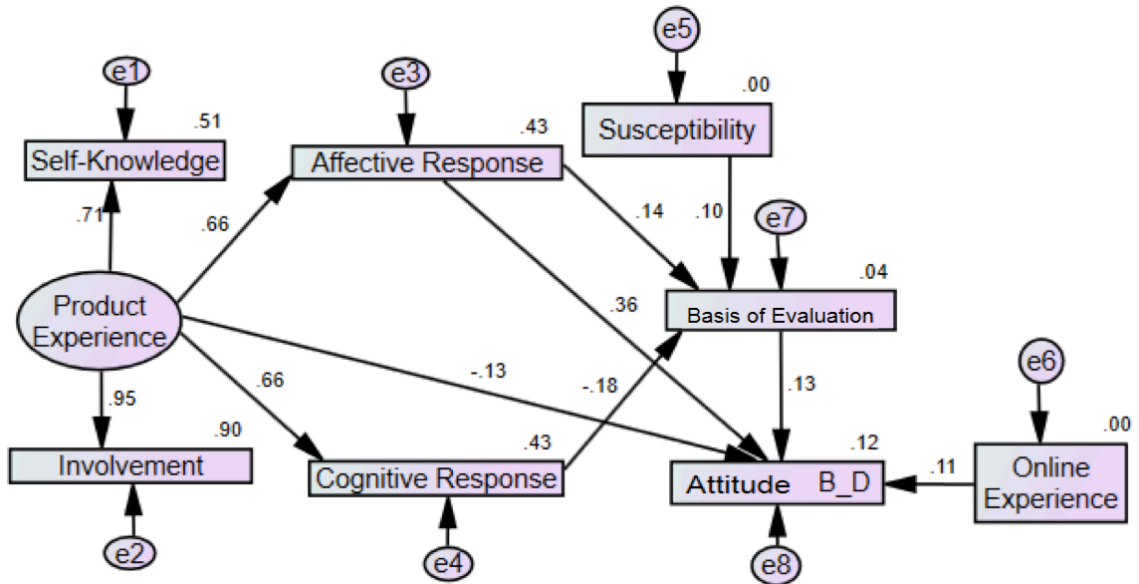
9.10.2 Summary of Structural Model Goodness of Fit

The results shown in the table above indicate that the models present overall good fit according to the cut-off fitness values proposed in the literature. Significant Chi-square values were produced but adequate CMIN have been reported as alternative measure, well-fitting RMSEA, NFI and GFI, a good fit index for the RMR, CFI and the SRMR. Based on the obtained results, only the condition BD model did not fulfil adequately all the fit criteria. In this instance, it would be useful to look for further model improvement by incorporating the modification indices proposed in the AMOS output (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1997). As previously mentioned, the modification indices that present a value above 15 and solid theoretical justification can be applied to the model to foster the overall model fit. From the present output of model BD, the following modification index is suggested:

	M.I.	Par Change
Attitude B_D <--- TOTAL_Affective_Response	15.839	.168

As such, this modification is applied by inserting the suggested parameter within the structural model. The modified BD model is presented thus in the figure below.

Figure 9.9 The modified BD model



The goodness-of-fit statistics for the modified BD model can be seen in table below.

Table 9.18 The goodness-of-fit statistics for the modified BD model

Fit Index	Fit Values B_D	Recommended Fit Value	References
Chi Square	.000 (49.697)	P > .05	Byrne (2009)
Relative Chi-Square	2.923	< 5	Schumacker and Lomax (2004)
CFI	.958	≥.90 ≥.95	Bentler (1990) Hu and Bentler (1999)

NFI	.938	>.95 Good Fit >.90 Acceptable Fit	Bentler and Bonett (1980)
GFI	.972	>.90 >.95	Joreskog and Sorbom (1996) Schumacker and Lomax, (2004)
SRMR	.0577	<.08	Hu and Bentler (1999)
RMSEA	.067	≤.05 Good Fit .05<RMSEA≤.08 Adequate Fit .08<RMSEA≤.10 Mediocre Fit ≤.06 Good Fit	Schumacker and Lomax (2010) Hu and Bentler (1999)
RMR	.057	<.05 ≤.08	Joreskog and Sorbom (1996) Hu and Bentler (1999)

From above, there was an improvement in the model fit statistic. The modified model thus presents fit indices that fall within the recommended threshold values for all the fit criteria. From AMOS modification indices output, there are no new parameters suggested over the recommended value of 15. Further analysis on the model can thus be undertaken with adequate confidence in interpretation.

9.10.3 Standardised Parameter Estimations Structural Model

The standardised regression weights need to be assessed in order to determine the significance and strengths of the relationships hypothesized in the model. The regression weights from the evaluated structural model show good loadings with several significant relationships as outlined in table 9.19

Table 9.19 Standardised Regression Weights of Structural Model

Standardizes regression Weight			Estimate	P
Rational_Response	<-	Ex	0.655	***
Affective_Response	<-	Ex	0.654	***
BasisOfEvaluation	<-	Rational_Response	-0.176	***
BasisOfEvaluation	<-	Affective_Response	0.136	0.011
BasisOfEvaluation	<-	Susceptibility	0.11	0.036
SelfKnowledge	<-	Ex	0.712	***
Art_Involvement	<-	Ex	0.951	***
Attitude A_C	<-	BasisOfEvaluation	-0.392	***
Attitude A_C	<-	Ex	0.089	0.059
Attitude A_C	<-	OnlineExperience	0.023	0.608
Attitude B_D	<-	BasisOfEvaluation	0.128	0.006
Attitude B_D	<-	Ex	-0.126	0.063
Attitude B_D	<-	Affective_Response	0.364	***
Attitude B_D	<-	OnlineExperience	0.106	0.021
E_Attitude	<-	BasisOfEvaluation	-0.333	***
E_Attitude	<-	Ex	0.179	***
E Attitude	<-	OnlineExperience	0.044	0.33
F_Attitude	<-	BasisOfEvaluation	0.258	***
F_Attitude	<-	Ex	0.143	0.004
F Attitude	<-	OnlineExperience	0.027	0.57

All hypothesised relationships have been confirmed apart from: Experience on Attitude AC and B_D, Online Experience on Attitude A_C, E and F. Namely, there was no direct effect on the variables as hypothesised in the model development stage. All other relationships show statistically significant regression weights and confirm the research hypotheses. Along these lines, the model demonstrates a good fit based on the provided fit statistics. As a confirmation of this result, none of the modification indices presented a value above the 15 critical point. As such, no modifications to the current model are deemed necessary.

Table 9.20 Modification Indices from Structural Model (Regression Weights)

Regression Weights: (all - Default model)

			M.I.	Par Change
A_C				
Susceptibility	<---	Affective_Response	4.602	0.096
OnlineExperience	<---	Ex	9.214	-0.097
OnlineExperience	<---	Susceptibility	8.527	0.099
OnlineExperience	<---	Affective_Response	4.613	-0.067
A_C	<---	Rational_Response	7.66	0.126
Art_Involvement	<---	BasisOfEvaluation	7.645	-0.061
SelfKnowledge	<---	OnlineExperience	5.225	-0.165
SelfKnowledge	<---	A_C	4.489	-0.096
B_D				
Susceptibility	<---	Affective_Response	4.602	0.096
OnlineExperience	<---	Ex	9.223	-0.097
OnlineExperience	<---	Susceptibility	8.527	0.099
OnlineExperience	<---	Affective_Response	4.613	-0.067
Art_Involvement	<---	BasisOfEvaluation	7.617	-0.061
SelfKnowledge	<---	OnlineExperience	5.248	-0.165
E				
Susceptibility	<---	Affective_Response	4.602	0.096
OnlineExperience	<---	Ex	9.215	-0.096
OnlineExperience	<---	Susceptibility	8.527	0.099
OnlineExperience	<---	Affective_Response	4.613	-0.067
Art_Involvement	<---	BasisOfEvaluation	7.601	-0.061
SelfKnowledge	<---	OnlineExperience	5.211	-0.165
F				
Susceptibility	<--	Affective_Response	4.602	0.096
OnlineExperience	<---	Ex	9.223	-0.097
OnlineExperience	<---	Susceptibility	8.527	0.099
OnlineExperience	<---	Affective_Response	4.613	-0.067
F_Attitude	<---	Affective_Response	5.353	0.155
Art_Involvement	<---	BasisOfEvaluation	7.668	-0.062
SelfKnowledge	<---	OnlineExperience	5.244	-0.165

9.11 Parameter Estimates of the Final Structural Model

As no modifications to the model were necessary, the models can be further interpreted in reference to the research aims. The results from table on the standardised regression weight estimates illustrate the following relationships:

- a) A variable Product Experience is made up of Product Involvement, regression weight = .951, $p = .000$. Following, Product Expertise is also made up of Product Self-Knowledge, regression weight = .712, $p = .000$. Thus, Product Experience is the combination of, the amount of Involvement an individual has about the product category as well as the amount of an individual's perceived knowledge in the product category.
- b) The Experience in the Product category will have an effect on the Affective Response the individual has about the product. The regression weight in this instance was =.654, $p=.000$. It is possible to conclude that the higher one's Product Experience, the higher their affective response about the product will be. Alternatively, the lower one's experience with the product, the lower their affective response will be.
- c) The Experience in the Product category will have an effect on the Cognitive Response the individual has about the product. The regression weight in this instance was =.655, $p=.000$. It is possible to conclude that the higher one's Product Experience, the higher their level of the cognitive response will be. Alternatively, the low experiences about the product translate to lower cognitive responses about the product.
- d) The Affective response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation when deciding about product. The regression weight in this instance was =.136, $p=.011$. This means that the higher one's

affective response to the product, their Basis of Evaluation is more likely to be cognitively based. The lower one's affective response to the product, their Basis of Evaluation is more likely to be affectively driven.

- e) The Cognitive response that the individual has about the product effects the character of the Basis of Evaluation when deciding about a product. The regression weight in this instance was $-.176$, $p=.000$. It can be concluded that the higher one's cognitive response to the product, the Basis of Evaluation will be more affectively based. Accordingly, the lower one's cognitive response to the product, one's ultimate basis of evaluation will be more cognitively driven.
- f) The Susceptibility to interpersonal influence has an effect on the Basis of Evaluation. There is a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables represented by a regression weight of $.110$ $p=.036$. From this result, the higher an individual scores on the Susceptibility trait means his product evaluation is more likely to be cognitively oriented. On the other hand, the lower an individual's susceptibility, the Basis of Evaluation will be more affectively driven.
- g) The Basis of evaluation has a statistically significant impact on the Product Attitude. However, its impact differs depending on the eWOM that accompanies the product being evaluated. Here, it was found that:
 - a) Low eWOM Volume (A_C): The higher one's Basis of Evaluation, meaning it is more cognitively driven, the less positive will their attitude will be when the product is characterised by low Volume eWOM, $-.392$, $p=.000$. This means that, lower scores of Basis of Evaluation, or more affectively driven evaluations, correspond with more positive attitudes for the product in this eWOM condition.

- b) High eWOM Volume (B_D): The higher one's score of Basis of Evaluation, or the more cognitively driven, the more favourable one's product attitude will be when the product is characterized by high Volume eWOM, $\beta = .128$, $p = .006$. Alternatively, lower scores of Basis of Evaluation, or more affectively driven, correspond to less favourable attitudes for the product accompanied by a low volume of eWOM.
- c) Low eWOM Source Expertise (F): The higher scores of Basis of Evaluation, or the more cognitively driven, are associated with less positive attitudes about the product when the product is characterised by low eWOM Source Expertise, $\beta = -.333$, $p = .000$. This means that, lower scores of Basis of Evaluation, or the more affectively driven, are associated with more positive attitudes about the product characterized by eWOM provided by low expertise consumers.
- d) High eWOM Source Expertise (E): Higher scores of Basis of Evaluation, or the more cognitively driven, indicate more positive attitudes for the product characterised by low eWOM Source Expertise, $\beta = .258$, $p = .000$. On the other hand, low scores of Basis of Evaluation, or more affectively driven, correspond with less positive attitudes for the product accompanied by eWOM from a low expertise source.
- h) The level of the Product Experience the consumer has will have an effect on his product attitude, but it will depend on the eWOM supporting the product and the source of eWOM. Here, higher Product Experience will correspond to more favourable attitudes for products characterised by low source expertise eWOM, $\beta = .179$, $p = .000$; as well as high expertise eWOM, $\beta = .143$, $p = .004$
- i) The Affective response that the individual has about the product effects his attitude when it is accompanied by a high volume of eWOM. The regression

weight in this instance was $\beta = .364$, $p = .000$. It can be concluded that the higher one's affective response to the product, the more favourable one's attitude about the high eWOM volume product is likely to be. Accordingly, lower affective responses to the product correspond with lower ultimate product attitudes when accompanied with high eWOM volume.

- j) The online expertise of the consumer will play a role on the way in which the individual will develop product attitude, although it will depend on the eWOM that supports it, $\beta = .106$, $p = 0.21$. Here, high levels of online experience are associated with higher attitudes for products that are characterised with a high volume of eWOM. Low levels of online experience are associated with less favourable consumer attitudes.
- k) The following relationships in the model have produced a non-significant result: Online Experience on Product Attitude (A, E, F) and Product Experience on Product Attitude (A_C and B_D).

9.11.2 Squared Multiple Correlations from the Structural Model

The squared multiple correlations indicate the extent of variance that the predictor variables explain. The remaining variance is explained by the error variance (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). According to Cohen (1988), values above .25 can be considered a large effect. The results of the squared multiple correlations are presented in table 9.21.

Table 9.21 Results of the squared multiple correlation

	Estimate
Susceptibility	0
Rational_Response	0.428
Affective_Response	0.432

OnlineExperience	0
BasisOfEvaluation	0.039
Involvement	0.904
Self-Knowledge	0.508
Attitude A_C	0.163
Attitude B_D	0.122
Attitude E	0.148
Attitude F	0.086

Based on Cohen's (1998) critical value of large effect correlations being above .25, several tested relationships have a large effect. Along these lines, other variables exhibit smaller effect sizes, and thus the following relationships emerge:

- a) The predictors of the Rational Response account for 42% of its variance, and thus the error variance of Rational Response accounts for 58%.
- b) The predictors of the Affective Response account for 43% of its variance, and thus the error variance of Affective Response accounts for 57%.
- c) The predictors of the Basis of Evaluation account for 4% of its variance, and thus the error variance of Basis of Evaluation accounts for 96%.
- d) The predictors of Attitude account for 16%(A_C), 12%(B_D), 14%(E), 8%(F) of its variance, and thus the error variance of Attitude accounts for 84%, 88%, 86%, 92%.
- e) The predictors of Product Involvement account for 90% of its variance, and thus the error variance of Product Involvement accounts for 10%.
- f) The predictors of Self Knowledge accounts account for 50% of its variance, and thus the error variance of Self Knowledge accounts for 50%.

9.12 Goal Moderation on the Relationship between Response and Basis of Evaluation

In order to assess whether respondents' purchase goals moderate the relationship between their initial response and the character of the basis of evaluation, a multi-group comparison was carried out. Multi-group comparisons are a special form of moderation in which a dataset is split along values of a grouping variable, in this instance between the hedonic and the symbolic purchase scenario group. Then, the previously hypothesised models are tested with each set of data (Byrne, 2004). The models are tested for the hedonic and the symbolic purchase goals group separately. The use of multi-group comparisons determines if relationships hypothesised in a model will differ based on the value of the moderator (Hayes, 2013). Here, the relationship between the affective and cognitive response with the basis of evaluation character will be examined in respect to the moderating role of the purchase goal. The moderating role will be assessed across the different eWOM levels in order to ensure consistency of the hypothesised relationship across experimental conditions.

Model	Unconstrained Chi Square (df)	Fully Constrained Chi Square (df)	Chi Square Threshold	Affective Response -> Basis of Evaluation	Cognitive Response -> Basis of Evaluation
AC	103.3 (36)	123.4 (45)	117.14	103.9	113.3**
BD	85.7 (38)	105.1 (45)	89.54	86.4	95.7**
E	75.4 (36)	98.7 (45)	79.24	76.1	85.4**
F	97.4 (36)	116.7 (45)	101.24	98.1	107.4**

From these results, the Purchase Goal has a moderating effect on the relationship between the Cognitive Response and the character of the Basis of Evaluation. However, the goals will not influence the relationship between affective response and basis of evaluation. The results suggest that the finding is consistent across eWOM availability conditions and attitudes. Particularly, the following relationship emerged:

Standardized Regression Weights

Goal	Standardized Regression Weight	Estimate	P
Symbolic	BasisOfEvaluation <--- Rational_Response	-.357	***
Hedonic	BasisOfEvaluation <--- Rational_Response	-.006	.941

When consumers are driven by a symbolic consumption goal, they have a lower cognitive response to the product, and more of their evaluation will be based on rational considerations. On the other hand, a hedonic goal won't affect the relationship between the cognitive response and the later basis of product evaluation. Thus, it is possible to contend that, regardless of the eWOM information available, a symbolic consumption goal will change the process by altering the relationship between response and basis of evaluation.

9.13 Overview of Hypotheses

H1 The availability of eWOM information has an influence on the initially stated product attitude of consumers driven by both Hedonic and Symbolic consumption goals

Supported: After exposure to eWOM information, consumers driven by both symbolic as well as hedonic goals have changed their initially stated product preferences.

H2a The Affective response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation

Supported: The higher one's affective response to the product, the more likely they are to use cognition in their Basis of Evaluation. Accordingly, the lower one's affective response to the product, the more likely their basis of evaluation will be affectively driven.

H2b The Cognitive response that the individual has about the product affects the character of the Basis of Evaluation

Supported: Higher cognitive responses to the product correspond to affective Basis of Evaluation. Lower cognitive responses to the product are associated with cognitively driven basis of product evaluations.

H3a The Affective response will have an influence on the character of the Basis of Evaluation depending upon the consumption goal of the individual

Not Supported

H3b The Cognitive response will have an influence on the character of the Basis of Evaluation depending upon the consumption goal of the individual

Supported: A symbolic purchase goal moderates the relationship between the Cognitive Response and the character of the Basis of Evaluation. In this instance, lower cognitive responses to the product correspond with a greater likelihood in consumers to base their attitude on a cognitive evaluation of the product rather than on affect.

H4 The more cognitively based is the Basis of Evaluation, more favourable will be the Attitude about products:

- a) With high eWOM Volume,*
- b) With high Source Expertise eWOM*

Supported:

- a) Higher Basis of Evaluation scores, or those that are more cognitively driven, are associated with less favourable attitudes about the product when the product is characterized by low Volume eWOM.
- b) Higher Basis of Evaluation scores, or those that are more cognitively driven, are associated with more favourable attitudes about the product when the product is characterized by high Volume eWOM.

- c) Higher Basis of Evaluation scores, or those that are more cognitively driven, are associated with less favourable attitudes about the product when the product is characterized by low eWOM Source Expertise.
- d) Higher Basis of Evaluation scores, or those that are more cognitively driven, are associated with more favourable attitudes about the product when the product is characterized by low eWOM Source Expertise.

H5 Consumers with a Symbolic purchase Goal will have a more cognitively based Evaluation compared to consumers with a Hedonic Goal

Supported: Consumers with a symbolic purchase goal have a more cognitively driven Basis of Evaluation compared to consumers who evaluate the product in view of a hedonic consumption goal.

H6 There is a relationship between Self-knowledge and Product Involvement combined together to create a new higher order variable of Product Experience.

Supported: Product involvement and perceived product self-knowledge are both factors that underlie one's product experience. As such, a second order construct was confirmed.

H7a Product Experience will have an influence on the affective response an individual has about the product

Supported: Those with higher Product Experience will experience greater affective response about the product. Alternatively, those with lower experience will have lower affective responses towards the product.

H7b Product experience will have an influence on the cognitive response an individual has about the product

Supported: Those with higher Product Experience will experience greater cognitive responses about the product. Alternatively, those with lower experience will have lower cognitive responses towards the product.

H8 The Product Experience will have an impact on the Attitude for products:

- a) With low eWOM Volume*
- b) With high eWOM Volume*
- c) With low Source Expertise eWOM*
- d) With high Source Expertise eWOM*

Partially Supported: A consumer's level of Product Experience will affect their product attitude; nevertheless this will depend on the eWOM that supports the product and its source. Here, higher levels of Product Experience were associated with more favourable attitudes for products characterized by low-source expertise as well as high-expertise eWOM (users' friends).

H9 Online Experience will have an impact on the Attitude for products:

- a) With low eWOM Volume*
- b) With high eWOM Volume*
- c) With low Source Expertise eWOM*
- d) With high Source Expertise eWOM*

Partially Supported: A consumer's online expertise will play a role on the attitude developed about the product, although it will depend on the eWOM that supports it. Here, higher levels of online experience were associated with more favourable attitudes for products characterized by a high volume of eWOM. Lower levels of online experience resulted in a less favourable product attitude.

H10 The higher is the Susceptibility to interpersonal influence of the individual, higher will be the cognitive rather than affective Basis of his Evaluation

Supported: One's Susceptibility to interpersonal influence has an effect on the Basis of Evaluation when forming a product attitude. Those who are more susceptible base their product evaluations using cognition. On the other hand, those who score lower on susceptibility base their evaluations on emotions when forming a product attitude.

9.14 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings obtained from the quantitative data analysis that tested the research questions and the hypothesised relationships presented in the theoretical framework of the study.

The analyses that were undertaken with the aim of answering the research questions included: repeated measures ANOVAs, MANOVAs, Reliability analysis, Normality analysis and CFA. In order to test the hypothesised model accounting for the attitude development process that included eWOM information, Structural Equation Modelling was adopted.

The next chapter will elaborate upon these findings by relating the quantitative results to the exploratory research findings and the insight previously acquired from the literature. A detailed discussion of the step-by-step attitude formation process will be presented and the variables that influence this process will be further examined, with specific focus on the impact of eWOM information.

10. CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

10.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed discussion of the findings of the online experiment by relating them to the qualitative findings and the information that was collected through the literature review.

Although recently there have been a growing number of studies that investigate the dynamics of eWOM information, there is still no clear consensus on its effects on the consumer decision journey and the process of product attitude formation, especially for the affect-rich category of aesthetic goods. Extant research in the consumer behaviour domain has focused on rational consumption without addressing affectively rich consumption contexts. Given the ever-growing pool of social platforms available to share eWOM information, this study aimed to address this research gap by investigating how eWOM on Facebook influences individuals' attitude formation process for this product category. As such, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the way in which information on eWOM social platforms influences the consumer attitude journey by accounting for consumer and informational variables.

A step-by-step model that outlined the attitude formation process for the aesthetic product category was developed. The following sections will thus address each of the research objectives by providing a discussion of the findings that emerged from the study.

10.1 Research Objectives

As outlined in the introductory chapter of the research, a number of research objectives were developed. The objectives were outlined based on the insight acquired from the review of the literature and later informed by the qualitative findings. Accordingly, the quantitative stage of the research provided an empirical test to the set aims.

10.2 Objective 1

Identify variables that influence consumers' decision-making process in the development of aesthetic product attitudes in an online social context.

With regards to the first objective, the main finding of this research is that the attitude formation process for aesthetic products is not as straightforward as previous literature contended. In an online social context, the attitude a consumer forms about an aesthetic product is not pre-established by the product typology, rather it is dependent upon person-specific and informational factors.

First, in an empirical confirmation of theoretical assumptions identified by other scholars, the findings of this study confirmed the existence of a higher order construct called 'product class experience', which was composed of perceived knowledge and product involvement. The response that the aesthetic product elicits in this context is not universally affective, but rather depends upon one's level of product experience, which has important implications on the following steps of the decision journey. These findings suggest that product experience influences the way in which consumers retrieve quality cues from the eWOM available. Those with higher experience place more importance on qualitative cues rather than quantitative cues. Along these lines, eWOM volume has a greater impact on individuals' with more internet experience. This finding suggests that the confidence consumers have with internet alters the influence of eWOM dimensions that are considered when forming product attitudes. This research extends our understanding of the dynamics involved in peer-to-peer influence on social media by revealing that consumers who are more susceptible to the influence of peers evaluate products based on a rationally developed attitude, consequently making them more responsive to eWOM informational influences, even for affect-rich products. Lastly, the research confirmed the importance of motivational factors, such as consumers' consumption goals, in investigating the decision journey and the influence of eWOM information on product attitudes.

As previously suggested, literature asserts that a consumer's decision-making process is determined by the type of stimulus that the individual encounters (Suh, 2009; Khan et al., 2005). That is, the consumer considers the product in terms of the benefit that the consumption will provide him with, resulting in either a rational or affective attitude. Specifically, research consistently argued that, based on the utility that the product is able to provide, a consumer will assume either a hedonic or utilitarian attitude towards it (Batra and Ahtola, 1991). But this research has identified that the process of attitude formation is not exclusively determined by the product typology. Rather, a series of factors influence this process in an online social context. These findings suggest that consumer, motivational and information related factors intervene and shape the consumer attitude development for this product category. Rather than being an exclusively affective driven process, the consumer experience with the product class as well as the level of online experience and susceptibility to interpersonal influence will intervene in the process and weigh on the influence of eWOM information availability.

The findings of this study point out that consumers with higher levels of formal expertise in the product category have a higher cognitive response compared to novice art consumers. When looking at the cognitive and affective response consumers have towards aesthetic products and in this instance, particularly art, it is evident that novice consumers predominantly experience affective response while expert consumers undergo a cognitive one given the knowledge stored in memory. This finding highlights the importance of knowledge in shaping attitude formation and confirms the need to explore information retrieval as cognitive input that steers the saliency of attitudinal elements.

Along these lines, the results suggest that higher levels of involvement in the product class correspond with higher perceptions of knowledge about the product class, even though no formal expertise is present. As such, a higher-level construct of product class experience was created, composed of an individual's level of involvement and their self-knowledge. The creation of this construct confirms the theoretical relationship between the two traits suggested in previous literature. Scholars have theorized about the

relationship between product expertise and involvement (Charters and Pettigrew, 2003; Doh and Hwang, 2009; Bloch et al., 2003) as well as Martin and Lueg (2013) who suggested that, given the extensive information search, time and resource commitment to the product class, highly involved consumers perceive themselves as product experts. Contrary to the assumption holding that those with low product expertise will be more reliant on eWOM information in evaluative instances (Martin and Lueg, 2013), these findings provide an alternative perspective. Namely, consumers with different levels of product experience perceive products differently depending on the type of eWOM that accompanies the product. Here, consumers with more product class experience evaluate products more favourably when they are recommended by either a low or high expertise source eWOM. eWOM volume does not play a role in influencing consumers' product evaluations, as more experienced consumers look for qualitative, rather than quantitative, eWOM information in forming their product attitudes.

Another consumer trait that emerged as influential in attitude development in the eWOM social context is the experiences consumers have with the online channel. Contrary to research that suggests more experience with online channels will drive individuals to more favourably adopt eWOM information in forming their product attitudes (Zhu and Zhang, 2009; Park and Lee, 2009; Brown et al., 2007), these results find that this relationship is not entirely straightforward. Here, product attitudes will be more favourable when the eWOM information that accompanies a product is of a high eWOM volume.

Further along these lines, the susceptibility to interpersonal influence trait has also been important in determining a product attitude. Extending the findings of Cheema and Kaikati (2010), the findings suggest that highly susceptible consumers are more likely to base product attitude on rational deliberation rather than affect. This finding provides an explanation for previous research that suggests that greater susceptibility leads to a higher propensity to rely on eWOM information when forming a product attitude (Park and Lee, 2009; Lee and Ma, 2012; Pham, 1998).

Along these lines, the motivational factor underlying the attitude journey is also of paramount importance. Specifically, depending on whether the consumer is driven by symbolic or hedonic goals, the decision process will vary and will be further discussed under Objective 2.

10.3 Objective 2

Explore the role of purchase goals in determining the attitude formation process in an online social context.

The purchase goal of the individual emerged as a vital factor when considering how consumers form attitudes in an online social context and the influence of eWOM on the decision journey. Consumers looking to fulfil consumption needs related to status and identity expression have a more rationalised attitude towards the product, which consequently leads them to rely more extensively on the socio-cultural cues retrieved from eWOM information. However, the results suggest that in an online setting, consumers also driven by hedonic motivations alter their initial product preferences as eWOM information becomes available and provides quality cues that offer internal justification and reduce the uncertainty associated in evaluating products with an ambiguous quality, such as aesthetic goods.

The individual will employ affect as information depending on its relevance. That is, depending on the extent to which the individual believes the experienced feeling is important and relevant for determining the evaluative judgment of the product (Greifeneder et al., 2010). When consumers are driven by symbolic goals, affect will be perceived as less relevant compared to hedonic consumption motivations. Accordingly, consumers driven by symbolic goals present a higher cognitive basis for their product preference formation compared to consumers driven by hedonic goals. Here, it was determined that an individual's consumption goal will serve as a moderating factor in the

relationship between one's initial response to the product and the later basis on which the consumer forms a product attitude. The results point out that lower cognitive responses experienced for the product lead to more cognitively based evaluations among those with symbolic goals. As such, it is possible that consumers looking to fulfil consumption needs related to status and identity expression will have more rationalised evaluations, which will consequently lead to more extensive reliance on eWOM information in forming their product attitudes.

Goals are considered motivating drivers that determine consumers' decision-making process (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999). Here, consumers use eWOM product information in order to help them fulfil consumption goals (Zhang et al., 2010). Through engagement in eWOM communication, consumers are able to infer the socio-cultural meaning of the product (Brown et al., 2007), and eWOM information assumes even more importance when consumers prioritise this type of consumption. This finding is in contrast to Chen, Kim and Lin's (2015) findings wherein affective elaboration of Facebook posts is more influential in forming product attitudes, regardless of the level of involvement, product category and source of the post. However, this finding can be explained by the different product category adopted in the study.

Furthermore, the results of this study point out that those individuals driven by hedonic goals will also change their product attitudes once exposed to eWOM information. Product attitudes registered before offering individuals additional information about the evaluated stimuli differ from those that individuals expressed after being exposed to eWOM. This finding differs from literature that suggests affect is used as source of information in hedonic product evaluation. Hence, the fact that eWOM information influences attitude formation also in hedonic-driven consumers is likely because the availability of additional information increases the perceived meaningfulness, and thus the hedonic value, that the individual experiences (Russell, 2003; Palmer et al., 2013). With the achievement of understanding and meaning identification, the hedonic value experienced increases equally, possibly due also to a reduction in the level of uncertainty

and internal justifications that become available (Leder et al., 2004). In conclusion, even though hedonic goals engender a more affectively based attitude, eWOM information is an important source that enters the process and shapes product attitudes in consumers exposed to it. For consumers motivated by both symbolic and hedonic goals, there is an effect on initially developed product preferences, which extends our understanding of the influence of eWOM information in reference to motivational factors involved in consumption.

10.4 Objective 3

Determine the role that eWOM information availability plays on the attitude formation process for an aesthetic product.

Contrary to previous research that primarily focused on utilitarian consumption choices, this research sought to understand the influence of social eWOM information on the development of product attitudes in affect-rich contexts. Here, the information-rich setting of social media has a large impact on the way in which consumers perceive products and brands, even for affect-rich categories. Particularly, the availability of eWOM information causes a shift in one's initial response to the product to the later product attitude that consumers develop as these informational cues drive an increasingly cognitive assessment of the product. The highest impact will be accounted by eWOM information characterised by a high volume dimension and followed in importance by eWOM information coming from sources possessing a high level of expertise. Nevertheless, the relative importance assigned to these dimensions will depend upon a consumer's product class experience. These findings confirm that the context in which products are viewed influences the basis on which they are evaluated, suggesting that in an online social context even affective responses convert into cognitive appraisals due to the rational character of the informational cues available.

Research posits that user-generated content has a remarkable impact on the decision-making processes, evaluation and purchase intention of products (Kronrod and Danziger,

2013). However, a clear understanding was missing on how consumers make attitudinal judgments in the context of social media for this affect-rich product category (Chen, Kim and Lin, 2015). Previous research has stated that the affect-rich nature of aesthetic products will elicit affective responses, which will directly determine consumers' attitudes towards the considered product. Nevertheless, the results of the current study point out that this relationship is not straightforward in the online social context. Namely, the experienced affective response will not directly determine the evaluation if there is available information that accompanies the product being evaluated, such as eWOM information. Compared to the direct influence that feelings have on judgments, the affect as information strategy, especially in the case of evaluative judgments, occurs in heuristic conditions (Forgas, 1995; Hong and Chang, 2015; Pham and Avnet, 2004). Namely, literature suggests that in many instances, people rely on their affective reactions to a target, as they perceive these to be informatively valuable given there is no concurring information available. In affective decision instances, individuals adopt affect in judgments following the rules that apply for any other type of informational input (Schwarz and Clore, 2007; Schwarz, 2010). Its impact on judgment will decrease with the consideration of alternative eWOM information. Consequently, when consumers encounter difficulty in establishing the quality of a product, their product attitudes are more favourable in accordance with the amount of information available (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014), as attitudes tend to be externally validated by eWOM information. Previous psychology research has found that in instances with complex stimuli, information that provides the consumer with additional insight will increase one's enjoyment with the stimuli (Juslin, 2013). In the present study, product attitudes were altered once eWOM information was made available and were shaped based on the informational dimensions made present. In an online mediated context, the availability of eWOM information is able to shift consumers' decision process towards more cognitive and rational deliberation, rather than the affective, hedonic consumption contended in previous literature.

The results of the current study show that, regardless of the type of informational content, eWOM will always be processed cognitively (Kim and Gupta, 2012). Thus, art

evaluation in the online context will increasingly resemble the process associated with utilitarian product decision-making. These dynamics, which are shaping the consumer attitude process, may be related to the particular channel where evaluation takes place. With this objective, particular informational dimensions of eWOM contribute differently to the process of attitude formation. Previous research has explored a large series of information-specific traits that have an impact on consumer decision-making. However, given the particular context of the current research, which dealt with aesthetic products in an online social context, not all dimensions of eWOM were relevant in shaping the product attitude due to context idiosyncrasies. As such, the dimensions that were important included the volume and source expertise as informational traits. Thus, as consumer decision-making exhibits important similarities across the wider category of aesthetic products, the eWOM dimensions relevant in an art related social context are applicable to the wider aesthetic category, as consumers look for similar informational cues.

10.5 Objective 4

Determine the interplay between affective and cognitive elements on the attitude development process.

This objective was aimed at adding to extant knowledge about decision-making in affect-rich contexts. Regardless of the affective product elements, affect directly determines attitudes predominantly in heuristic conditions. When there are informational restrictions, the affective response experienced on exposure to the product does serve as the only input in the attitude formation process. On the contrary, when there are no informational limitations, eWOM inputs enter the decision process, and thus induce a shift in product preferences. Accordingly, attitudes are formed on a rational ground and the influence of affect is suppressed. Product preferences that are initially developed based on affect alone are adapted based on the quality cues retrieved from the newly acquired eWOM

information. This shift in preference has an important consequence as product preference leads to behavioural intentions, such as willingness to buy.

As the interplay between affective and cognitive decision making elements is still subject to debate in the literature (Bigné et al., 2008), this study has aimed to explore it in the online mediated context by applying it to the case of affectively rich products. As Cohen et al. (2006; 27) suggest, 'the relation between affective responses and object evaluation is so strong that, for a long time, affect and evaluation (attitude) were considered to be synonymous'. Literature has so far suggested that feelings are major antecedents of evaluative judgments when referring to hedonic products, while cognitions are important for utilitarian products (Kempf, 1999). However, in an online mediated marketplace bolstered with a wide variety of informational inputs, this is not the case anymore. Drawing a comparison, Gerger et al. (2014) and Brieber et al. (2014) identified that the type of context changes the way in which individuals respond emotionally to art, and accordingly influences the judgment they form about it. These findings can be contextualised to these decision dynamics and extend our understanding about the influence of eWOM information in the online social context. The results of this study point out to the fact that the decision modality consumers employ in the online setting is extensively influenced by eWOM information. Rather than solely relying on affect as information, eWOM acts as cognitive input in the consumer decision process, given that it offers an external validating cue for product attitudes. In accordance with what was argued in previous literature, cognitive preferences differ from product evaluations based on affective evaluation. By incorporating eWOM in the decision process, consumers will exhibit preferences in line with the informational value that eWOM provides, as this will be perceived as a quality cue that aids evaluation, and shifting the decision process from affect to rational deliberation. This has important implications. When the affective attitudes prevail over cognition, consumers are more likely to engage in impulse purchases. On the other hand, when consumers employ cognition, they rationally make better decisions and make fewer impulse purchases (Coley and Burgess, 2003).

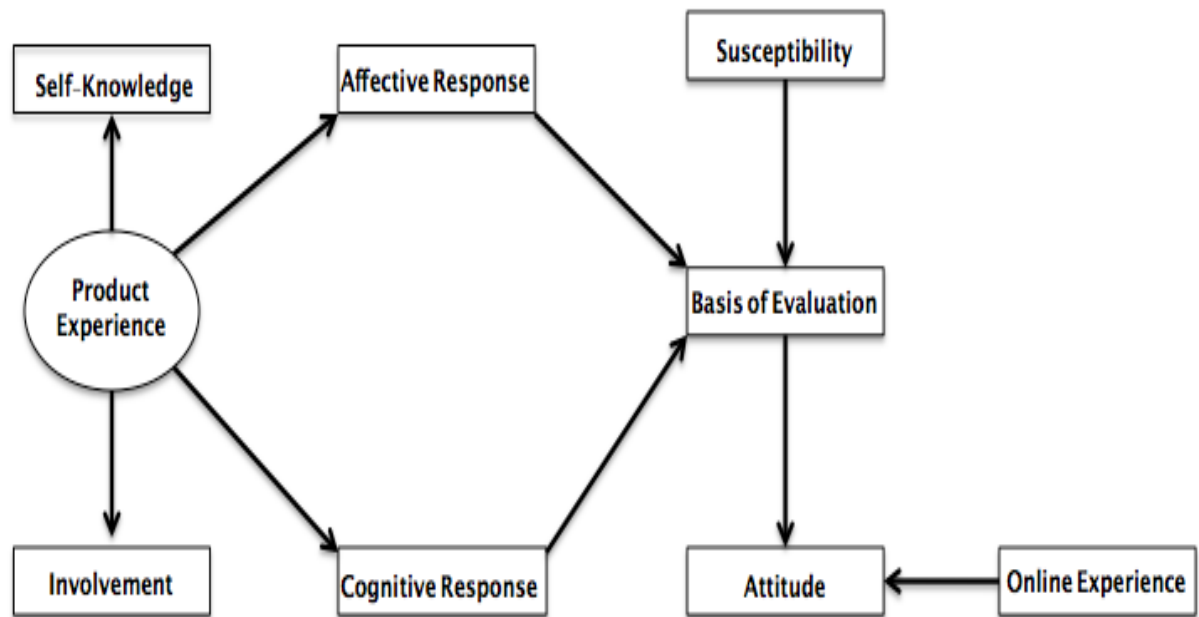
Compared to utilitarian products, hedonic products are not just more difficult to justify but there is also more difficulty in quantifying the benefits they provide (Okada, 2005; Sela et al., 2009). Research has shown that people choose among the options that will be easily justifiable in view of the evaluation on behalf of the group they belong to. This phenomenon occurs even when there is no explicit need to offer such justification, but individuals, regardless, feel obliged to provide it (Simonson, 1989; Kivetz, 1999). Along these lines, eWOM could be an important factor that justifies a purchase decision and shapes product attitudes accordingly. The need to provide justification overshadows the affect linked to this kind of responses by eliciting more cognitive thinking. Consumers change their evaluations, causing their taste to be congruent with the situational requirements.

10.6 Objective 5

Develop a comprehensive consumer attitude formation model for aesthetic products that accounts for variables that influence the process and the impact of eWOM information.

The last objective of this research aimed to develop a comprehensive attitude formation model for aesthetic products in an online social context that accounts for person specific and informational influences. The findings suggest that product response depends upon a consumer's product experience, which later develops into the overall product attitude. However, personal factors such as the consumption goals, internet experience, as well as susceptibility to informational influence, shape the relationship between the initial response and the product attitude. Depending on whether the basis for evaluation is more cognitively or affectively determined, eWOM information has a larger influence. Accordingly, the dimensions of eWOM volume and source expertise have differential effects on the decision process. Following the experimental results, the product attitude formation model was developed accounting for the influence of eWOM information in the preference formation process.

Figure 10.1 Developed product attitude formation model



10.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the findings from the quantitative stage of the research. Here, results were explained and related back to the qualitative findings for each of the variables that were taken into account. Accordingly, the chapter provided an analysis of the product under investigation by pointing out the importance of the context and the product characteristics in determining the influence of eWOM on the decision journey. Accordingly, these findings highlighted the need to undertake context-specific eWOM investigations. Insight acquired from the research was presented for each of the set objectives defined at the onset. Accordingly, the quantitative findings were supported and contextualised by the information that was collected in the first phase of the research.

Then, the analysis of the findings was related to the overarching aim of the research that was established at the onset of the study. Accordingly, the following chapter will serve to provide a detailed discussion of the findings in relation to the contributions this research will make to marketing theory and practice.

11. CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

11.0 Introduction

Online WOM and its influence on consumer decision-making are of paramount importance when it comes to tailoring marketing strategies and communications. In the last decade, there have been a growing number of studies that explore the dynamics of online WOM phenomena; however the field appears to be still rather fragmented (Cheung and Thadani, 2012) and lacks a clear consensus about its effects (Floyd et al., 2014). As such, there is little knowledge about what occurs when eWOM information is received, and how this alters the consumer decision process (Martin and Lueg, 2013). Particularly, eWOM literature is very disparate, as it lacks an overarching understanding of its influence in specific consumption contexts and product categories (Pentina et al., 2015).

Accordingly, this study has answered the call for research that explores the consumption of hedonic product subcategories (Pentina et al., 2015), which are non-functional products like games, art and haute couture (Moldovan et al., 2011). Specifically, it addressed the influence of eWOM on the attitude formation process for affectively rich products (Kim and Gupta, 2012). The relationship between retrieval of eWOM information and product attitude development was applied to the case of aesthetic products and the related steps in the process have been explored. Aesthetic products have been taken as extreme example of hedonic goods that elicit affect in consumers.

11.1 Research Context

In response to authors who have put forth many theoretical assumptions (e.g., Bloch, 1995; Lacher and Mizerski, 1994; Leder et al., 2004; Bigné et al., 2008), these findings provide empirical support for the decision-making process within the wider category of aesthetic products by presenting important similarities. Similar implications of eWOM

information on product attitudes are present in the wider category of aesthetic products. Despite previous research suggesting that aesthetic products are the object of emotional differentiation (Wolny and Mueller, 2013) given their affect-rich nature, the findings of this study point out that product preferences for this product category are easily influenced by cognitive inputs, such as those retrieved from eWOM.

Previous literature assumed that higher levels of ambiguity corresponded with higher likelihoods of feelings informing individuals in their evaluative instances (Greifeneder et al., 2010; Andrade, 2005; Forgas, 1995; Gasper, 2004). However, ambiguity is primarily determined by a lack of information, which helps reduce this evaluation uncertainty. Consumers aim to minimise the anticipated regret associated with a risky product choice (Simonson, 1992; Zhu and Zhang, 2009; Parthasarathy and Forlani, 2010) by turning to eWOM as a validating informational source. Accordingly, the main contribution of this study is that, for affect-rich products, affect directly influences one's attitude exclusively in heuristic conditions. This finding thus provides a contextualised understanding of the affect as information postulates (Forgas, 1995; Hong and Chang, 2015; Pham and Avnet, 2004), and defines the conditions that limit their applicability. Furthermore, this finding contributes to attitude research, as it confirms the need to develop a more situated understanding of process shifts in specific attitude clusters and provides context where evaluation occurs on these changes (Albarracín and Shavitt, 2018). Extending previous findings about the influence of context in product experiences in offline settings (Augustin et al., 2008; Leder et al., 2004; Cupchik et al., 2009; Juslin, 2013), this study showed that art evaluation in the online context resembles the process associated with utilitarian products. This change in attitude process can be attributed to the importance of the experiential framing that a particular context creates, as an online setting alters the perception of emotional stimuli (Gerger et al., 2014; Brieber et al., 2014). The nature of the channel, which allows consumers to compare several product options, the physical absence of the product, as well as the availability of a large pool of information is responsible for increasing analytical evaluations. In addition, this finding can be further related to how social media erode the role of traditional institutions, which highlights that

the interpretation of objects needs to be situated in a context where new institutional logics emerge (Akaka et al., 2014). As such, eWOM research should adopt a context-specific lens rather than transferring findings from one context to another.

11.2 Attitude Structure and Formation

The study of consumer attitudes is of paramount importance in consumer research because it offers insight about the way in which consumers form product preferences and their likelihood to undertake specific behaviours (Bodur et al., 2000; Chaudhuri, 2006). Contrary to the affective primacy contended in consumer research (Suh, 2009; Rottenstreich and Shu, 2004; Palmer et al., 2013) and in support of the interactionist perspective on consumer attitudes (Forgas, 1995; Wyer, 1999; Chaudhuri, 2006), this empirical study confirmed that consumers experience both an affective and a cognitive response when presented with an aesthetic product. This finding presents an interesting avenue for both marketing theory and practice, as informational elements impact the weight assigned to one or the other type of response, is used to form the overall attitude towards the product. As such, this study attested that the theorised shift (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009) from an affect-based route to reason-based routes occur when the product is situated in an information-rich social online context and the product evaluation is congruent with the situational requirements. This decision process is regarded as a learning experience (Pachauri, 2002), during which an individual's attitude evolves. The findings of this study show that consumers often do not exhibit a linear attitude process, where the character of one's response shapes the following product attitude. This finding is related to the argument that conceives information as entailing intrinsically rational elements (Kim and Gupta, 2012; Simonson, 2016). In contrast to recent findings (Chen, Kim and Lin, 2015), consumers do not respond affectively to the eWOM informational content; rather they employ a cognitive route of processing it, because information gets evaluated on rational grounds. Specifically, this research confirms that with the exchange of information consumers acknowledge rational recommendations and take into consideration others' consumption choices (Blazevic et al., 2013; Berger and Schwartz,

2011), even for affectively driven product choices. This result informs the literature that tackles the formation and structure of attitudes, providing support for the constructivist argument (Wegener and Carlston, 2014) that conceives attitudes as largely unstable and constructed as an outcome of online evaluation rather than a construct stored in memory. Furthermore, this argument highlights how social inputs have a normative influence (Albaraccin and Shavitt, 2018) on attitude formation and change. It follows that, ‘the notion that preferences are constructed raises fundamental questions about the meaning of preferences. It also has important practical implications, for example, with respect to the development of effective marketing strategies and market research techniques’ (Simonson, 2008; 113).

11.3 Information as an Attitudinal Input

The findings of this study confirmed that eWOM information on social media influences consumers’ product attitudes even in affect-rich decision contexts. This finding is related to extant research that shows how other consumers’ opinions in the online social context represent an external quality cue (Koh et al., 2010; Fitzgerald Bone, 1995; Cox and Kaimann, 2015). Accordingly, the evaluative difficulty (Althuizen and Sgourev, 2014) that consumers experience is reduced by the retrieved information. Extending previous findings in other consumption contexts (Russell, 2003; Silvia, 2005), there is a premium placed on the role of information in relation to the process of attitude and preference formation even for affect-rich product choices. This finding adds novel insight to the debate about how the internet shapes aesthetic product preferences, from top-down dictated to collectively negotiated (McQuarrie et al., 2015) and democratised (Arsel and Bean, 2013; Dolbec and Fischer, 2015). Furthermore, this finding can be related to the fact that, even though hedonic consumption is tightly linked to affective aspects, consumers’ approach this kind of consumption with mixed feelings (Okada, 2005; O’curry and Strahilevitz, 2001; Bohm and Pfister, 1996; Bazerman et al., 1998). In hedonic consumption instances, eWOM provides internal justification for the chosen product option; while in symbolic consumption instances, eWOM information is able to offer a

validating cue that enhances external justification opportunities. Thus, both individual and socially determined factors shape the attitude process.

As such, these findings suggest that the popularity of an aesthetic product is cued with the help of a large volume of eWOM, which can be quantified as user 'likes'. A large volume of eWOM on social platforms signals product quality, making popular aesthetic brands a less risky choice. With regards to the source that provides the information, expert sources are more influential in defining attitudes for aesthetic products. As such, this finding still holds true to the fact that good taste is traditionally understood from and ascribed to the opinion of experts (Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2012). This is the case even though expertise cannot be accurately determined in this context and needs to be inferred from available user information. With this obtained insight, this study tried to expand upon the argument that suggests, 'the more interesting research questions are not about user ratings on their own but about the implications of the changing consumer information environment, an important component of which is user reviews' (Simonson, 2016; 844).

11.4 The Consumer and the Attitude Process

So far, research has contended that consumers will appreciate a hedonic product exclusively for its own sake and exclude any utilitarian purpose it may serve (Lacher and Mizerski, 1994). Nevertheless, the findings of the study show that aesthetic products, such as art, are closely related to symbolic consumption that exhibits different dynamics in determining product choice. The question surrounding the personal relevance and the symbolic meaning of products (Pachauri, 2002) in respect to the behaviour that follows is emphasised. Accordingly, these results support the need to assume a motivational perspective when exploring consumption behaviours and the influence of information on them. Contrary to previous research that employed a generalist hedonic approach, this study confirms that the underlying symbolic elements of consumption cannot be discounted. Given that art is linked to customers' self-image and status, a wrong brand choice can have both inner and outer-directed consequences. These findings thus

highlight that eWOM information, in the context of aesthetic product choices, not only reduced uncertainty but also offers assurance about the associated social connotations. It is possible to assume that attitudes are also directed towards strategies for maintaining the public self, rather than being purely self-exhaustive. Accordingly, the findings contrast with the argument that assumes consumers employ a different processing mechanism, an affective or cognitively based evaluation, depending solely on the hedonic or utilitarian nature of the product (e.g., Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Roy and Ng, 2012; Chowdhuri et al., 2015; Kempf, 1999).

Furthermore, the results of the study point to the close relationship between category involvement and consumer perceived self-knowledge. This finding provides empirical support for the relationship that Charters and Pettigrew (2003), Doh and Hwang (2009), Bloch et al. (2003) as well as Martin and Lueg (2013) all theorised. In hedonic products, consumers' perceived level of expertise could be higher than actual expertise. This is because expertise is linked more to experience than to actual knowledge (Park and Moon, 2003). In other words, the more a consumer is involved in a product, their perception of expertise increases as well as also increasing one's confidence in purchasing decisions (O'Cass, 2004; Harari and Hornik, 2010; Park and Moon, 2003). The current study extends these findings by establishing the existence of a higher order construct, defined as product experience, which is composed of product involvement and self-knowledge, which determines the influence of eWOM on decision-making. As such, the findings of this study suggest that one's perceived experience equally drives an increase in both cognitive and affective response. This finding relates to Gupta and Harris' (2010) work, which suggests that experience can be linked to levels of motivation. Specifically, consumers scoring lower on this trait, and thus less motivated, use eWOM inputs as a heuristic to make suboptimal choices, focusing exclusively on the recommended product and adopting quantitative eWOM. On the other hand, highly motivated consumers extend their search, employing cognitive effort to look for qualitatively richer eWOM. Thus, the pre-existence of information or specific domain knowledge facilitates attitude formation. This means that more experienced consumers are susceptible to content and cognitive

beliefs rather than the extent of endorsement. On the other hand, lower involved consumers, who do not possess this characteristic, are more easily persuaded by arguments with questionable qualitative standards (Giese et al., 1996).

One additional consumer-centred factor that plays a role in the attitude formation process is one's susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The higher an individual's score on the susceptibility trait, the more likely he is to use cognitive evaluations. As such, more cognitively oriented evaluations are subject to a higher informational influence that comes from eWOM in shaping product attitudes.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that consumers' familiarity with eWOM information platforms impacts on their reliance on eWOM information when it comes to evaluating products. Previous literature has suggested that, depending on the consumer trait of the level of online usage experience, individuals assess eWOM information differently (Brown et al., 2007). However, the findings of the study suggest that a consumer's online experience plays a role in product evaluations in specific conditions, depending on the type of eWOM that supports the evaluated product. This is particularly important because with a growing base of internet users, and over a billion of social media users worldwide (Simon and Tossan, 2018), the influence of eWOM as an information source will continue to rise (Zhu and Zhang, 2009). These findings thus highlight the importance of exploring network effects on attitudes between socially connected users. It also emphasises the functional role of attitudes, including the need to further understand how consumers alter their attitudes for self-presentation purposes (Albarracin and Shavitt, 2018).

11.5 Theoretical Contributions and Implications

Recent research that has attempted to assess the influence of eWOM on attitude development has mainly focused on utilitarian consumption contexts and given less attention to affect-rich consumption modes. Therefore, this study answers the call for a more complete understanding about the effect of eWOM information in altering

consumers' decision-making about aesthetic product consumption. Existing literature has reported a lack of understanding on how eWOM information influences attitude formation and alters the influence of affect after taking into account the product category variable, especially for hedonic product subcategories.

Accordingly, this study makes several contributions to theory, which our understanding of the way in which consumers form product attitudes in an online social context, particularly those towards aesthetic products. First, the study proposed and empirically tested a new theoretical model depicting the aesthetic product attitude formation process, including variables that impact the process in an online social context. Previous contributions sought to understand the outcomes of eWOM availability on sales performance, while a different stream of research identified consumers' motivations to disseminate eWOM. More contemporary research attempted to address the influence of eWOM on single steps involved in the process of attitude development, but was situated exclusively in utilitarian consumption contexts, thus failing to address the idiosyncrasies of affect-rich consumption. The model developed here contributes to our knowledge about the influence of social eWOM information on affectively charged decision instances when consumers form attitudes towards aesthetic products.

Along these lines, previous research has commonly defined aesthetic products as those that elicit affect-driven decisions because their affect-rich character is able to fulfil pleasure attainment goals. Given this assumption, literature has suggested that, in evaluating aesthetic product options, consumers are guided exclusively by the experienced affective response as basis for product attitude formation, rather than relying on other informational inputs.

Existing literature has not attempted to investigate additional dimensions that intervene in the attitude process, especially those in today's information-laden consumption scape. But this study's findings point out that consumers' decision-making process about art is determined by each consumer's consumption goal; where affect or cognition have different weights on the overall product attitude that develops. Here, consumers who

prioritise symbolic goals present a more rationally based decision process and thus are more influenced by eWOM information. In retrieving eWOM information, consumers look for peer validation about their product evaluations, which enables them to reduce the uncertainty associated with an ambiguous product choice. However, the findings highlight that information is also largely important for consumers driven by hedonic goals. The availability of external cues, in the form of eWOM, reduces the uncertainty involved with the evaluation of an aesthetic product. In varying degrees, eWOM availability impacts the product attitudes of consumers who prioritise symbolic and hedonic goals, as this information alters one's initial product preferences.

A further contribution that emerged from this study relates to the interplay between affective and cognitive components in the attitude formation process. Contrary to research that suggests that aesthetic products engender either an affective or cognitive response that accordingly informs the product attitude, the present findings reveal a different perspective. Here, one's initial response does not directly determine the basis upon which product attitude is established. Rather, informational inputs retrievable from social media eWOM are able to suppress initial affective responses, inducing a shift towards cognitive consideration during attitude development. Accordingly, the contribution made by this research consists in the finding that eWOM information enters the decision process as a cognitive input that steers cognitive evaluative preferences. Here, consumers' consumption goals act as moderating factors in the relationship between the initial response and their later attitude development.

Additionally, some specific consumer-level variables intervened in the attitude development process for aesthetic products. The results of this study present empirical evidence for the previously hypothesised relationship between one's perceived expertise and product class involvement. The two variables together form an overarching construct defined as 'product class experience'. Although no objective expertise is developed, a consumer's perceived knowledge about the product class increases with one's involvement. Contrary to what has been argued in previous literature, the level of product

class experience influence both the product response and the final product attitude. Along these lines, this study found that the attitude a consumer develops about an aesthetic product in an online social context depends on consumer-specific factors, including: product class experience, experience with the internet, and their susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

The last contribution of this study includes a definition of the specific informational dimensions of eWOM that shape attitude formation. Extant research has identified a large number of information-specific traits that affect consumer decision-making, but no study has explored the eWOM dimensions that are specific to the affect-rich context. Due to contextual idiosyncrasies, not all dimensions of eWOM were relevant in shaping product attitudes for aesthetic products in an online social context. As such, this finding points out that eWOM information is defined by different dimensions depending on the context in which it is found, and thus assumes context-specific traits. The dimensions that acted on the process include the volume and source expertise as informational traits. Specifically, when a product is accompanied by a high volume of eWOM and when the source that is disseminating the eWOM is perceived as having a high level of product expertise, consumers develop a more favourable attitude towards the product. As consumers look for analogous informational cues across a wide range of affectively rich consumption contexts, this finding can be extended to the eWOM information dynamics that are taking place within the wider category of aesthetic goods.

11.6 Managerial Implications

From the results of this study, several managerial recommendations will help inform marketing practice.

Even though fine art has previously held an exclusive status, pervasive social media has increased the following and purchasing of art, making them important tools for communication and marketing purposes. However, these results suggest that businesses

operating in this field fail to develop a social media presence as a marketing channel. The findings obtained from this study point out changes that occur in the consumer decision journey for this product category, providing recommendations for business management of these platforms.

First, the results suggest that eWOM has a pervasive impact on consumer attitude formation with regards to the aesthetic product category, and art in particular. As such, especially the volume dimension appeared decisive in developing favourable attitudes towards a product in an online social context. In order to leverage this information, businesses could exploit social media marketing strategies that disseminate a larger volume of eWOM information. It is important to highlight that all social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter as well as Instagram offer the possibility to advertise posted content by using the advertising options within the platform. Specific to Facebook, businesses can either boost posts about products or setting up an advertising campaign through the Facebook business page in order to collect a higher amount of eWOM.

Along these lines, the eWOM source that provides information appeared to be a significant factor in developing favourable product attitudes. Expert recommendations were more influential than ordinary users in shaping consumers' product attitudes. In this instance, a beneficial strategy would consist of using expert consumers to recommend chosen products. Thus, companies should aim to target opinion leaders, as these individuals are most likely to share opinions and information through social platforms. Within their marketing toolset, social platforms offer the possibility to target specific segments of users based on a different series of demographic as well as interest-related variables. Businesses should try to gather a large number of expert followers by promoting their business pages to art experts. This strategy can be executed based on detailed profiling, which is collected through 'Custom Audience' options. It is also possible also to target expert consumers by adopting a 'Demographic' or 'Interest' based targeting approach offered on these social platforms, and thus target them with promoted content.

This study's findings have pointed out that, for consumers driven by symbolic motivations, information will be even more important because these individuals exhibit a more rational basis for attitude development. In order to meet these consumption needs, it will be important to reflect symbolic associations in the communication that accompanies a promoted product. By referring to aspects of status and prestige, it is important to highlight the perception of product uniqueness and scarcity. It would also be beneficial to drive social brand engagement in order to further sustain the symbolic meaning associated with the product. Social-identity appeals should be used for products that are consumed for social identity functions. And in general, the communication needs to be congruent with the product function in order to achieve favourable attitudinal responses.

Following these suggestions, the findings have pointed out that in an online social context, consumers alter their initial responses in forming product attitudes. If the aim is to facilitate product purchase and reduce comparison between product options, it would be beneficial to implement strategies that aim at retaining consumers on the primary retail platform, in most cases, the website. To do so, it is important to devise website content that offers consumers exhaustive information necessary to make an informed purchase, without the need to refer to third-party platforms for additional information. Here, efforts should be made to offer the consumer assurance about product quality. It is good practice also to enable professional expert advice, by implementing website chat functionalities. Along these lines, the findings highlight the possibilities of social commerce in the aesthetic domain, which still lags behind other products. This new type of business strategy would enable marketing managers to facilitate the purchase process and take advantage of the natural environment in which consumers access social information and cultivate their interests in art.

Lastly, the decision process for the wider category of aesthetic products presents some important similarities that need to be considered when tailoring suitable marketing strategies. These managerial recommendations are also suitable for businesses operating in fields such as high fashion, design and wine, and similar products.

11.7 Limitations and Future Research

In conclusion, this section will discuss potential research opportunities for further investigation within the topic, which derive from this study's limitations. The experimental design that was adopted in the present research made use of mock Facebook pages that mirror the social platform; however, these pages lacked other interactive functionalities due to Qualtrics' software limitations. As such, future research could include real interaction with the range of Facebook functionalities in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the consumer decision-making on these platforms. To aid in this process, some open source plugin extensions are available to researchers. Along these lines, by using real Facebook users in the experimental study, future research should explore the influence of additional eWOM dimensions, such as the similarity with the source providing the information. Then, it would be possible to explore the influence that source characteristics, such as homophily or one's rapport with the source, have in shaping a consumer's attitude formation process. This would more comprehensively mirror the real peer-to-peer dynamics that occur within social networks.

A further limitation of this study is the eWOM dimensions taken into account. As the findings of the qualitative study pointed out, the valence dimension of eWOM is not commonly encountered in real Facebook conversations about the product category. Nevertheless, in order to confirm the validity of this finding, future research should employ methods based on observation, such as netnographic methods or sentiment analysis through text mining, as to identify the character of interactions that take place on this platform. In addition, in order to accurately test and measure the development of the attitude process without the bias associated with self-reporting measures, research in the field of cognitive science might be able to advance our understanding about the development of attitudes within a brain process perspective.

Furthermore, an opportunity for future exploration involves the fast evolving nature of social platform functionalities. After the experimental procedure was completed,

Facebook introduced new eWOM format possibilities. This included the introduction of redesigned 'Like' buttons called 'Facebook Reactions'. This new feature gives users the ability to express their opinions on content using affective expressions represented through emojis. It would be worthwhile to explore how the new informational content influences consumers' attitude formation process in light of these new emotional expressions.

Lastly, as the present study adopted fine art as the case of study, and it would be beneficial to look at other aesthetic product categories in order to confirm the wider applicability of the findings. This study contends that consumers' decision process for the wider category of aesthetic products undergoes similar changes after exposure to eWOM. Accordingly, future research should determine its effects across the range of aesthetic products in order to develop an overarching understanding of the influence of eWOM information on attitude development in affect rich consumption contexts.

Due to time and scope restrictions, this study investigated the dynamics that occur on the social platform Facebook. In order to extend our understanding of social information influencing product attitude formation, further research should attempt to replicate these findings on social platforms with more visual features, such as Instagram or Pinterest.

11.8 Conclusion

This chapter served to provide a comprehensive discussion of this study's research findings. A concluding overview of the implications and contributions was provided for each of the set research objectives. The chapter also presented a theoretical contribution and implications that help our understanding of the way in which consumers form product attitudes in an online social context towards aesthetic products. The key contribution of this research is a new theoretical model that explains the aesthetic product attitude formation process with respect to the influence of eWOM information. The contributions to theory were analysed at a managerial level in order to identify how they

can inform marketing practice. The study's limitations were presented and discussed in reference to future research opportunities.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Agendas

a) Consumers

The purpose of this interview is to explore how the availability of information found online influences the purchase decision making of consumers with regards to visual art products. The aim is furthermore to gauge what information elements are important in the decision and how these influence product evaluation, preference formation and ultimately the intention to purchase an artistic product.

The responded will be asked to think about instances of art product purchase while answering the questions.

a, b, c, d will be used as prompts

1) Introduction

- a) Introduction of the interviewer
- b) Explain the purpose of the interview
- c) Explain the purpose of the study
- d) Interviewee details

2) Internet Behaviour

- a) Frequency of use, daily, weekly...
- b) Duration of use- number of hours per week
- c) Social platforms used
- d) General Purpose, shopping, information searching, social networking
- e) Motivations – hedonic or utilitarian usage of internet (enjoyment or task related)

3) Online Information

- a) Do you use the internet as a source of information?
- b) What type of information do you look for – information about products, reviews, product ratings?
- c) Where do you prefer gathering information, offline or online? Why?

3) **Consumer Profile**

1. Consumer Perceived Expertise

- a) Frequency of art product purchase, monthly, yearly...
- b) Do you consider yourself knowledgeable about the product category?
- c) How often do you look for information about the product category?
- d) Do you find it easy to express the reasons behind your product preferences?

2. Consumer Involvement

- a) What importance do you assign to the product category?
- b) Do you enjoy learning about the product category?
- c) What importance do you assign to purchasing the right product?

4) **Hedonic Consumption Patterns**

- a) Why do you purchase the product category in question?
- b) When do you usually purchase these products?
- c) Do you think before making a purchase or you buy impulsively?
- d) How do you feel after purchasing an item from the product category?
- e) Do you experience guilt or a need to provide justification after a purchase?

Hedonic Motives

- f) How does the product category make you feel?
- g) To what extent are the emotions that the product evokes important to you?
- h) In what mood are you usually when purchasing?

Symbolic Motives

- i) How is the product category linked to your identity?
- j) Do your purchasing choices communicate something to the people around you?
- k) Does the product you choose help you in reinforcing your personality?
- l) Do you buy the product just because it makes you feel good?

5) Decision-Making

1. How do you decide about buying a visual art product?

- a) What do you look for in an art product?
- b) Do you pay attention to the various product attributes or you look at the product in totality?
- c) How do you evaluate the quality of the product?
- d) Do you feel uncertain at times in judging the quality of the product?
- e) Does the context in which you see the product influence your evaluation of the same?

2. Do you look for additional information before making a purchase?

- a) Will you consult some information sources before deciding to make a purchase?
- b) Which kind of sources?
- c) After consulting some information source, have you started looking at attributes of the product you didn't notice previously?
- d) Does the availability of information make you feel more certain about your choice?
- e) Does the information you receive about a product influence at times your attitude toward the same?
- f) Do you feel less guilty if you gather information before a purchase rather than making an impulsive choice?
- g) Have you ever started to appreciate a product after receiving more information about it? If yes, what kind of information was it?

3. How do you judge the usefulness of the information you find online?

What are you looking for?

- f) Is the source that provides the information important to you? In which way (expertise / similarity to source)?
- g) Are you looking for strong arguments to be provided in order to find the information useful?
- h) Does the popularity of the product, in terms of many people talking about it, make you at times change your attitude towards the same? In which way?

- i) Does the information you find online influence your decision to purchase a product?
- j) Even though you liked a product at first, would you consider purchasing another one because people online say it is a better quality piece?

6) Closing

- a) Any additional information interviewee would like to give
- b) Any questions
- c) Thank interviewee

b) Galleries

5) **Introduction**

- e) Introduction of the interviewer
- f) Explain the purpose of the interview
- g) Explain the purpose of the study
- h) Interviewee details
- i) Company details

6) **Internet Presence**

- a) Does your company have a website? Why?
- b) Do you have a presence on social platforms? Which ones?
- c) What is your degree of activity on these platforms?
- d) Do you monitor your internet presence?
- e) Do you offer the possibility of online purchases? Why yes or no?

7) **Marketing Effort**

- a) What does your marketing activity consist of?
- b) How do you promote the artists you represent?
- c) Who are your most profitable customers?
- d) How do they buy?
- e) How do your customers learn about you?

8) **Profile of the Average Customer**

- a) Regular customers or one-offs mostly?
- b) Expertise of the average customer
- c) Frequency of purchases
- d) How many items per purchase averagely?

- e) Interaction with stuff?

9) **Difference between Low and High Expertise Customers**

- a) How do they decide about the item they want to purchase?
- b) How long it takes them to decide?
- c) Do they ask you for advice?
- d) Do they come browsing or with a clear idea of their wants?
- e) Do they show steady preferences?
- f) Do they ask the stuff for further information?
- g) Why they buy generally?

10) **Opinions about the Market**

- a) How do you think the art market is changing with the advent of internet?
- b) Do you think an internet presence influences the business?
- c) Do you think customers are influenced in their purchases by the information and opinions they find online?
- d) How? Is there a difference between experts and novices?
- e) Do you think there are fewer customers who buy impulsively nowadays?
- f) What is your prediction about the changes that will happen in the future for the business?

6) Closing

- a) Any additional information interviewee would like to give
- b) Any questions
- c) Thank interviewee

c) Other Interviewees

Art Fair Manager

- a) Can you tell me a bit about yourself, what is your role and relationship with the fair?
- b) Can you tell me a bit more about the idea of establishing the art fair in Glasgow?
- c) Who is the fair aiming to attract, in terms of target audience?
- d) How would you describe the average visitor?
- e) From your experience, what are the differences between novice and more experienced art enthusiast and buyers?
- f) What are the motivations for visiting - browsing, discovery, social activity or buying?
- g) How did you choose the exhibitors?

- h) How did it go, are you happy with the results?
- i) Could you give me some details about the range of art that was displayed?
- j) Were the exhibitors happy with the sales they made?
- k) On which communication channels did you rely for the marketing of the fair?...
Social media etc.
- l) How would you describe the Glasgow art scene, or Scottish – compared to
England, the market is less developed right?
- m) Do you think people are intimidated by the art world?
- n) Does the availability to consult various information sources online and thus teach
oneself reduce this feeling of intimidation?
- o) Is the customer base especially the one of novice buyers growing?
- p) How do you think the market is changing with the availability of online art
platforms?
- q) Do you think traditional gatekeepers and taste making hierarchies are starting to
be altered nowadays with internet?
- r) Galleries said that very often they are nowadays cut off – what do you think about
that?
- s) Do you think people are influenced by the information they find online – ex
online presence of the artists, what other people say about an artist etc.
- t) Do you think art is becoming a fashion item?
- u) What are your predictions about the future market?

Intermediaries

- a) Can you tell me a bit about yourself, what is your role and relationship with the
fair?
- b) Can you tell me a bit more about the idea of establishing the business?
- c) How does it operate? Are you happy with the results so far?
- d) What are your future plans?
- e) How would you describe the average artist using your website? Gallery?
- f) How do you recruit them?
- g) Why do you think they need such a service?
- h) On which communication channels did you rely for the marketing of the
business?
- i) How would you describe the UK art scene?
- j) How do you think the market is changing with the availability of online art
platforms?
- k) Do you think traditional gatekeepers and taste making hierarchies are starting to
be altered nowadays with internet?

- l) Galleries said that very often they are nowadays cut off – what do you think about that?
- m) Do you think people are influenced by the information they find online – ex online presence of the artists, what other people say about an artist etc.
- n) What are your predictions about the future market?

Artists

- a) Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
- b) Do you sell the art you do?
- c) Where?
- d) How do you establish the price?
- e) Do you have an online presence – page, twitter account?
- f) How do you use it?
- g) What do you think about the current art market in the UK – galleries intermediaries?
- h) What do you think about galleries?
- i) Do you try to promote your art?
- j) How do people approach you when they like your work, want to buy?
- k) Did someone ever approach you online wanting to buy your work? How did it go?
- l) Do you use social media to keep you informed about the current art environment?
- m) Do you think traditional gatekeepers and taste making hierarchies are starting to be altered nowadays with internet?
- n) Do you think people are influenced by the information they find online – ex online presence of the artists, what other people say about an artist etc.
- o) Do you think art is becoming fashionable, a fashion item?

APPENDIX 2

Overview of respondents in the qualitative stage of the research

Respondent	Details	Interview Length	Respondent Code
Art Consumer	Female	0:45	C1
Art Consumer	Male	1:15	C2
Art Consumer	Male	0:39	C3
Art Consumer	Female	0:40	C4
Art Consumer	Female	0:41	C5
Art Consumer	Female	0:50	C6
Art Consumer	Male	0:51	C7
Art Consumer	Female	0:43	C8
Art Consumer	Female	0:55	C9
Art Consumer	Female	1:10	C10
Retail Gallery	Male	0:34	G1
Retail Gallery	Female	0:40	G2
Retail Gallery	Female	0:38	G3
Retail Gallery	Female	0:42	G4
Retail Gallery	Female	0:41	G5
Retail Gallery	Male	0:50	G6
Retail Gallery	Male	0:40	G7
Retail Gallery	Female	0:37	G8

Retail Gallery	Male	0:37	G9
Retail Gallery	Female	0:30	G10
Retail Gallery	Male	0:31	G11
Retail Gallery	Female	0:39	G12
Art Fair Manager	Male	0:50	AF
Intermediary Company	Male	0:34	IC1
Intermediary Company	Male	0:37	IC2
Artist	Male	1:15	A1
Artist	Male	0:50	A2
Artist	Female	0:36	A3

APPENDIX 3

Design of the online experiment used in the quantitative stage of the research

University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow

What is your gender?

Female Male

How old are you?

18-34
 35-54
 55 and above

Have you ever completed, or are enrolled at the moment, in a university course related to Fine Art?

Yes
 No

Would you characterise Fine Art as primarily a **functional** product or an **entertainment/enjoyable** product?
(Rate your response on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1= Primarily functional and 7=Primarily Entertainment / Enjoyable)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Primarily Functional | | Primarily Entertainment / Enjoyable

<< >>

Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)

Thinking about your purchases of products in general, please rate to what extent do you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Online consumer reviews are useful to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online consumer reviews make purchasing easier.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online consumer reviews make me a smart shopper.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online consumer reviews are very beneficial to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I read online consumer reviews frequently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often search consumer reviews on the Internet.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I refer to online consumer reviews whenever I need information on companies or goods.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider others' opinions when purchasing goods.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I mind what others think about me when I purchase something.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't consider what others want when I purchase something.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)

In your own personal opinion, please rank the presented artworks in order of your preference.

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



How would you rank the above presented artworks?

Press and hold your mouse on the artwork number and drag it up or down to change its rank.

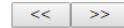
- Artwork 1
- Artwork 2
- Artwork 3
- Artwork 4
- Artwork 5
- Artwork 6



Now imagine that you are looking for an artwork to buy from the selection of artists that will follow.
All of the paintings that will follow fit within your budget limitations.

For this purchase imagine the following scenario. You are looking for an artist to buy that would be:

"A symbol for high social status, an artist that would allow you to fit within important social situations and an artist that would be seen by others."



Artist 2

Facebook Page

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for 'Artist 2'. The profile picture is a colorful abstract painting. The cover photo is a dark grey banner with the text 'Artist 2 Artist' and buttons for 'Like', 'Message', and a three-dot menu. Below the banner are tabs for 'Timeline', 'About', 'Photos', 'Likes', and 'Videos'. The 'Timeline' tab is active, showing '67 people like this' and a status update that says 'Artist 2 added 4 new photos'. An 'ABOUT' section is visible on the left, containing the text 'Original Paintings by Glasgow based artist.' and the URL 'http://www.artist2.co.uk/'.

Facebook Post about Painting

The screenshot shows a Facebook post from 'Artist' with the text 'added a new photo.'. Below the text is a large image of the same colorful abstract painting seen in the previous screenshot.



Like Comment Share

Sophie Sanders, Steve Muir, Michael McGarry and 8 others like this.



Write a comment...



Press Enter to post.

You are looking for an artist to buy that would be:

"A symbol for high social status, an artist that would allow you to fit within important social situations and an artist that would be seen by others."

Having in mind this purchase scenario, please provide an evaluation of the presented artist.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like
Not Interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting
Not Worth Buying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Worth Buying

<< >>

Artist 1

Facebook Page

Artist 1
Artist

Like Message

Timeline About Photos Likes Videos

9,833 people like this

ABOUT >

- Original Paintings by Glasgow based artist.
- <http://www.artist1.co.uk/>

Status Photo/Video

Write something on this Page...

Artist 1 added 4 new photos.
39 mins · 🌐

Facebook Post about the Painting

Artist 1 added 4 new photos.
39 mins · 🌐

Some of my Work



Like Comment Share

75 people like this. Top Comments -

19 shares

You are looking for an artist to buy that would be:

"A symbol for high social status, an artist that would allow you to fit within important social situations and an artist that would be seen by others."

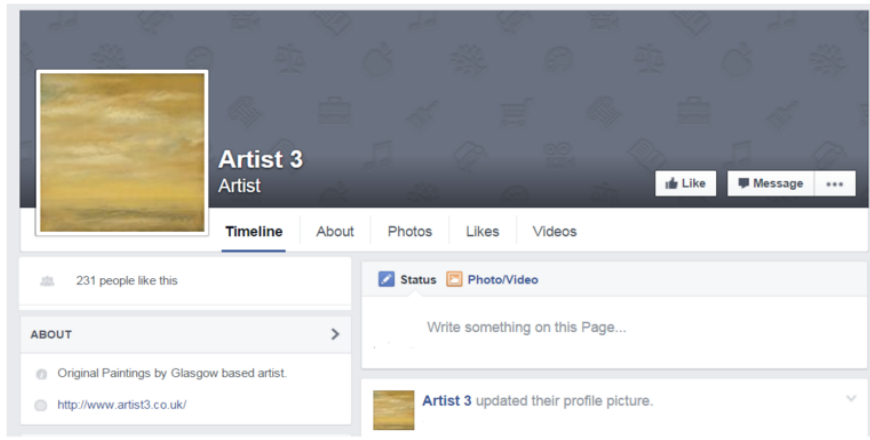
Having in mind this purchase scenario, please provide an evaluation of the presented artist.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like
Not Interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting
Not Worth Buying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Worth Buying

<< >>

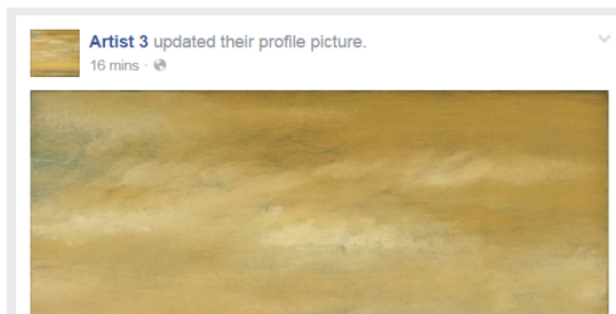
Artist 3

Facebook Page



The screenshot shows the Facebook profile page for 'Artist 3'. The profile picture is a square painting with a textured, golden-brown and yellowish palette. The cover photo is a dark blue background with a repeating pattern of faint, light-colored icons. The page name 'Artist 3' is displayed in white, with the word 'Artist' below it. To the right of the name are buttons for 'Like', 'Message', and a three-dot menu. Below the name are tabs for 'Timeline', 'About', 'Photos', 'Likes', and 'Videos'. On the left side, there is a section for 'ABOUT' with a right-pointing arrow, containing two items: 'Original Paintings by Glasgow based artist.' and 'http://www.artist3.co.uk/'. In the center, there is a text input field with the placeholder 'Write something on this Page...'. On the right, there is a notification that says 'Artist 3 updated their profile picture.' with a small thumbnail of the profile picture and a dropdown arrow.

Facebook Post about Painting



The screenshot shows a Facebook post from 'Artist 3'. The post text reads 'Artist 3 updated their profile picture.' followed by '16 mins · 🌐'. Below the text is a large rectangular image of a painting, which is a close-up of the same textured, golden-brown and yellowish palette seen in the profile picture. The painting has a soft, blended appearance with subtle variations in tone and texture.



Like Comment Share

3 people like this.

1 share

You are looking for an artist to buy that would be:

"A symbol for high social status, an artist that would allow you to fit within important social situations and an artist that would be seen by others."

Having in mind this purchase scenario, please provide an evaluation of the presented artist.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like
Not Interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting
Not Worth Buying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Worth Buying

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Artist 4

Facebook Page

The screenshot shows the Facebook profile of 'Artist 3 Artist'. The cover photo is a landscape painting with a warm, golden-brown sky. The profile picture is a smaller version of the same painting. The page has 2,998 likes. The 'ABOUT' section lists 'Original Paintings by Glasgow based artist.' and a website URL 'http://www.artist1.co.uk/'. The timeline shows a post from 'Artist 3' stating 'Artist 3 added a new photo.' with a small thumbnail of the painting.

Facebook Post about Painting

The screenshot shows a Facebook post by 'Artist 3' titled 'Artist 3 added a new photo.' The post features a large, detailed landscape painting with a dramatic, cloudy sky in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. Below the painting are the interaction buttons: 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Share'. At the bottom, it says 'Angelic Yard Limited, Laura Hopkins, Bjørn Søndergaard and 100 others like this.' and 'Top Comments'.

You are looking for an artist to buy that would be:

"A symbol for high social status, an artist that would allow you to fit within important social situations and an artist that would be seen by others."

Having in mind this purchase scenario, please provide an evaluation of the presented artist.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like
Not Interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting
Not Worth Buying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Worth Buying

<< >>

Artist 5

Painting



Some online feedback about the presented Painting

People who shared this



Amy Wilson

 Add Friend

- 
Amy Wilson
Add Friend
- 
Ellis Henry
Add Friend
- 
Sarah Ross
Add Friend
- 
Elizabeth Johnstone
Add Friend
- 
Fraser Kirk
Add Friend
- 
Pauline Anderson
Add Friend

You are looking for an artist to buy that would be:

"A symbol for high social status, an artist that would allow you to fit within important social situations and an artist that would be seen by others."

Having in mind this purchase scenario, please provide an evaluation of the presented artist.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like
Not Interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting
Not Worth Buying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Worth Buying

<<
>>

Artist 6

Painting



Some online feedback about the presented Painting

People who shared this

- 
Fraser Alleander
Artist
Add Friend



Fraser Alleander

Artist

Add Friend



Maxfield Gallery

Art gallery

Add Friend



Metropolitan Arts

Arts & entertainment

Add Friend



MK Gallery

Art gallery

Add Friend



Art Nuveau Magazine

Magazine

Add Friend



Pace Gallery

Art gallery

Add Friend

You are looking for an artist to buy that would be:

"A symbol for high social status, an artist that would allow you to fit within important social situations and an artist that would be seen by others."

Having in mind this purchase scenario, please provide an evaluation of the presented artist.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like
Not interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting
Not Worth Buying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Worth Buying

<< >>

Based on this purchase task, my final decision about which artist I would buy was driven by:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My Feelings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My Thoughts
My Desire	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My Willpower
My Impulsive Self	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My Prudent Self
The emotional side of me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The rational side of me
My Heart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My Head

Please rate the following statements on a scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I went through the choices as if I was really evaluating an artwork to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I evaluated the choice options very carefully.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not take the task of evaluating the choice options very seriously.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Were you already familiar with any of the presented artworks?

- Yes
 No



How knowledgeable do you consider yourself when it comes to art?

Please rate your knowledge on a scale where 1= Not at all knowledgeable and 7= Expert

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at ALL Knowledgeable | | Expert

Please rate your knowledge of art as compared to the average person's.

Please rate your knowledge on a scale where 1= one of the LEAST knowledgeable and 7= one of the MOST knowledgeable

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
One of the LEAST knowledgeable | | One of the MOST knowledgeable

Do you think you can make a satisfactory purchase of an artwork based on only your own knowledge, without another person's help?

Please rate your knowledge on a scale where 1= Absolutely NOT and 7=Absolutely YES

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Absolutely NOT | | Absolutely YES

Please rate the following statements on a scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Fine Art is very important to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generally, I have many rational thoughts in response to Fine Art.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fine Art does matter to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generally, I have many different feelings in response to Fine Art	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fine Art is an important part of my life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generally for me, Fine Art elicits a lot of thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't have a strong interest in Fine Art	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generally for me, Fine Art elicits lots of different feelings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

