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Factors Driving Women Consumers To Shop Shoes Online

An Exploratory Study

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by

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Abstract

This paper investigates the factors that drive women consumers to shop shoes online. Getting to know the factors that influence female consumers to engage in online shopping activities, particularly when the products in question are experience goods with a high need for touch characteristic, such as shoes, is extremely important for marketers that aim to target this specific audience. A qualitative research method was selected, using a semi-structured, in-depth interview technique. For data collection, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted to corroborate the constructs defined in the proposed model, namely: convenience, recreation, need for touch and social e-shopping. Ten of these interviews were focused on the demand side to understand the female consumers' perspective and the other were made to two managers of a women's shoes company to represent the suppliers' viewpoint.

The main results indicate that the women consumers in this study highly appreciate the convenience aspect that shopping shoes online provides them as well as the recreational trait that online shopping offers. The need for touch is considered a very important factor in the shoe market context mainly due to the size issue inherent to this product category. Additionally, social e-shopping was found not be as important for women as it was supposed to be given the literature reviewed - they see SNS's more as a communication platform for brands, than they see it as a factor that influences their predisposition to shop shoes online.

On the suppliers' side, the interviews revealed the managers' belief in bloggers and social media influence and how this is a key part of their overall marketing strategy. Therefore, the study intends to provide interesting insights for marketers by giving the perspective of a digital-born company.

Key Words: Factors Influencing Online Shopping; Shoes; Women motivations.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

The non-stop progress of the Internet, has increased the popularity of online shopping. As indicated by several studies (e.g. Chiang and Dholakia, 2003; Zhou, Dai and Zhang, 2007), the online retail market has suffered an enormous growth over the last decades, with sales increasing every year. E-commerce is the fastest emergent retail market in Europe and North America. Online sales in the UK, Germany, France, The Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Poland and Spain grew from £132.05 billion [€156.28 billion] in 2014 to £156.67 billion [€185.39 billion] in 2015 (+18.6%). Online sales are expected to grow again to reach £182.80 billion [€216.32 billion] in 2016 (+16.7%) and £215.38 billion [€250.28 billion] in 2017 (Centre for Retail Research, 2016). It's noticeable that online shopping has become a highly profitable retail format, achieving high sales value across the world. This extreme growth shows the consumers enthusiasm for this shopping format and its importance for marketers (Lim, Widdows and Hooker, 2009).

The strong development of the e-commerce industry has led to an enormous number of transactions and we are witnessing a change in the consumer buying behaviour from the physical store to the online store (Kwak, Fox, and Zinkhan, 2002; Raman, 2014). The prompt growth of online retailing has led many researchers to perform extensive investigation in order to better understand what drives consumers to shop online. This has opened a door to a unique and vibrant market space that is challenging the traditional commerce and it's reshaping the consumers' shopping habits, forcing companies to rethink their business model approaches (Chiang and Dholakia, 2003; Rigby, 2011).

Few studies attempt to explore the gender differences in online shopping. According to Rodgers and Harris (2003), more men than women engage in online shopping activities and make more online purchases. Dittmar, Long and Meek's

(2004) study claim that men's attitude is almost the same in both traditionally and online shopping formats, while women's attitude suffer a significantly variation as they become less favourable toward online shopping. Getting to know the reasons behind it is very important for marketers that aim to target a female audience in the online channel. One of the reasons may be due to the revealed higher need for touch (NFT) characteristic that women display (Workman, 2010; Cho and Workman, 2011). This seems to be acuter in products displaying higher NFT as it is the case of experiential goods, such as clothing or shoes, that require a direct, physical experience of touch (Lynch, Kent and Srinivasan, 2001; Chiang and Dholakia, 2003).

Attempting to sell online experience goods with a high NFT characteristic, like shoes, particularly to a female audience, tends to be a difficult task for companies. So, getting to know what drives women consumers to buy these products online is of major importance for marketers. Therefore, this thesis intends to explore the main factors that lead female consumers to engage in online shopping activities, specifically in the online shoes market context, to understand the demand side. At the same time, we will try to focus on suppliers' overview to understand their perspective on these factors and how their online business strategy can incorporate them.

The research questions addressed in this study aim to contribute to the literature and management practices by offering a broad review of the motivations that impact women consumers to shop shoes online and providing two different perspectives on the subject: the demand and supply viewpoints. This study has the particularity of being one of the few that studies the factors influencing online shopping addressing the female target directly and specifically in the shoe market context, given the fact that this is a highly difficult product to sell online since shoes are considered experience goods with a high NFT characteristic.

In line with the stated purpose of this thesis, the research questions are as follows:

a) What are the main factors driving women consumers to shop shoes online?
b) How does the demand side acknowledge these factors?
c) How does the supply side acknowledge these factors?

This document is divided into six chapters. Firstly, the "Introduction" chapter establishes the main objectives, the context of the problem and the research questions. Secondly, the "Literature Review & Proposed Model" chapter explains and reviews the existing literature on consumers' motivations to shop online, gender differences in online shopping (specifically about women consumers' motivations) and the most relevant factors selected. The "Methodology" chapter describes the data collection procedures and is followed by the "Research Findings" in which the main results are analysed, specifically the results of the in-depth interviews to female consumers, to understand the demand side. The suppliers' overview is presented and discussed in chapter five. Finally, the study is concluded with a summary of the main research findings and conclusions, giving notice of possible investigation limitations and suggesting interesting topics for future analysis.

Chapter 2

Literature Review & Proposed Model

We will explore here the factors that drive consumers to engage in online shopping activities in a broader spectrum, followed by literature review regarding gender differences in online shopping and specific motivations of the female consumers. The main factors will be identified and explored in a deeper way, as well as the concept of NFT and experience goods, given the fact that this thesis aims to identify the main factors driving women consumers to shop shoes online.

2.1 Factors influencing consumers' online shopping

According to Sheth and Sisodia (1999), the fundamental issue that distinguishes online shopping from traditional shopping formats are the time and location constrains. In fact, if in the traditional shopping format consumers have to travel to one or more physical stores to get a certain product, in the online world consumers have the ability to purchase products from any place at any time they want, so time and cost of traveling are virtually eliminated (Chiang and Dholakia, 2003). The facility to shop without leaving the house or office and having the products brought to the door is of major interest to many consumers (Chen and Chang, 2003). Online shopping offers consumers the possibility to obtain free information about products and services and facilitates the process of comparison and evaluation of alternatives, empowering the online consumer to have more control and bargaining power when compared with consumers that shop in physical stores (Javadi, Dolatabadi, Nourbakhsh, Poursaeedi and Asadollahi, 2012). Consequently, this allows shoppers to engage in more efficient

shopping activities, once the search cost is reduced (Alba, Lynch, Weitz, Janiszewski, Lutz, Sawyer, and Wood 1997; Kalakota and Whinston, 1997; Klein, 1998). So, on one hand, online shopping reduces transaction costs and brings advantages for both consumers and vendors. On the other hand, this shopping format may have some drawbacks compared to brick-and-mortar stores: consumers can not see, touch, taste or smell the products they are buying, which can lead them to develop low trust and high levels of risk due to the lack of face-to-face communication (Javadi et al., 2012).

The exponential growth that online shopping presents year after year, has triggered the interest of many researchers to examine what factors affect consumers to shop online (e.g. Perea y Monsuwé, Dellaert & De Ruyter, 2004; To, Liao and Lin, 2007). Consumers' motivation towards online shopping have been quoted for time efficiency, avoidance of crowds, and 24 hour shopping availability (Karayanni, 2003). The two most common factors mentioned in the literature are price and convenience. In 1999, Ernst and Young (apud Chiang and Dholakia, 2003) conducted an Internet shopping study that revealed that the two main reasons for consumers to shop online are related with increased convenience and greater savings. It is known that Internet distinctive characteristics empowers the consumers to perform a complete and low cost search, facilitating them to compare prices and other features with reduced effort. The existing literature, also suggests that there are a number of variables that influence the consumers' intention to shop online, namely: product categories, price and convenience (Burke, 1997; Peterson, Balasubramanian and Bronnenberg, 1997). In 2003, Chiang and Dholakia concluded that convenience and product type are the main factors influencing consumer intention to engage in online shopping. At the same time, their study revealed that when the consumers perceive offline shopping as inconvenient, their intention to shop online is greater. Additionally, when consumers perceive the product as a search good rather than experience good, their intention to shop online is also superior.

Chen and Chang (2003) highlight three common components of the online shopping process: interactivity (e.g., Internet connection and the design of the website), transaction (e.g., shopping value, convenience, assurance, entertainment and evaluation) and fulfilment (e.g., order processing, delivery and post-sales service). The participants of their study referred that price and convenience were the two main reasons justifying why they chose to shop online. In addition, respondents also mentioned that it was fun to shop and browse on the Internet. Constantinides's study (2004) examines how e-marketers can stimulate the outcome of the virtual interaction and buying process by focusing their marketing efforts on elements that influence the customer's virtual experience - the Web experience. The author states that online shopping experiences can be viewed as the outcome of website functionality, user characteristics, online signs and incentives, available information and product offers. In order to improve the consumers' shopping experience, a well-design website that is easy to navigate is of great importance (Chen and Chang, 2003). These web features also enhance the recreation aspect of online shopping. Likewise, Swinyard and Smith (2003) affirm that online shoppers are more entertainment-oriented.

Convenience and recreational consumers' orientations relate positively to online shopping preferences concerning experience goods, such as clothing or shoes, according to Girard, Korgaonkar and Silverblatt (2003). Therefore, deriving from the literature reviewed so far, it is possible to say that convenience and recreation are extremely important factors regarding the motivations that drive consumers to shop experience goods online, namely shoes.

The following table summarizes the major factors that influence online shopping studied previously by several authors and gives a brief explanation of the key findings of each research.

Factors Studied	Authors	Major Findings
Convenience, Product Type and Perceived Price	Chiang & Dholakia (2003)	Convenience and product type influence consumer intention to engage in online shopping.
Interactivity, Transaction and Fulfilemnt	Chen & Chang (2003)	Online shopping experience is found to be influenced by various factors related to interactivity, transaction, and fulfilment.
Price, Convenience, Recreation, Variety Seeking, Impulsiveness, Demographics & Product Categories	Girard, Korgaonkar & Silverblatt (2003)	Shopping orientations such as convenience and recreational shopper and demographic variables such as gender, education, and household income were significantly related to consumer's online purchase preference; Relationships of shopping orientation and demographic variables with purchase preference for shopping online significantly differ by product category - convenience and recreational orientations were positively related to preference for shopping online for experience good
Demographics, Computer Literacy and Use, Intemet Lifestyles	Swinyard & Smith (2003)	Compared with online non-shoppers, online shoppers are younger, wealthier, better educated, have higher computer literacy, spend more time on their computer, spend more time on the Internet, find online shopping to be easier and more entertaining and are more fearful of financial loss from online shopping
Shopping convenience, Information Seeking, Immediate Possession, Social Interaction, Retail Shopping Experience, Variety Seeking	Rohm & Swaminathan (2004)	Four types of online shoppers: convenience shoppers, variety seekers, balanced buyers, and store-oriented shoppers.
Financial Risk, Product Risk, Convenience Risk, Non-delivery Risk, Return Policy, Service & Intrastructure Variables	Javadi, Dolatabadi, Nourbakhsh, Poursaeedi & Asadollahi (2012)	Financial risks and non-delivery risk negatively affected attitude toward online shopping; Attitude towards online shopping positively affects online shopping behaviour of consumers; E-retailers should make their website safer and assure customers for delivery of their products.
Privacy, Risk, Time, Convenience, Ease of Use, Vendor Reputation, Delivery Time and Cost, Product Quality and Variety, Product Returns	Raman (2014)	Convenience is considered the most important factor for female consumers to shop online; Risk of doing transactions, preference towards traditional shopping and reliability issues were the biggest setbacks.
Convenience, Recreation and Price	Chen & Hung (2015)	Males have higher convenience orientation than females; Recreation relates positively and price negatively to purchase behaviour; When people experience more enjoyment shopping, they are more likely to purchase online.

Table 1 - Major factors influencing online shopping (Source: Own Systematization)

2.2 Gender differences in online shopping: women motivations

In the traditional shopping environment, it is known that women predominate and do most of the shopping activities. However, in the online world this is different: more men than women seem to be engaged in online shopping activities and make more online purchases (Kwak, Fox, and Zinkhan, 2002; Rodgers and Harris, 2003). Although the studies regarding gender differences in online shopping are quite inconsistent (Chang, Cheung and Lai, 2005; Zhou, Dai and Zhang, 2007), Zhou et al. (2007) suggest that men tend to favour convenience over social contact, in opposite to women that are more motivated by emotional and social interaction. So, the convenience orientation that online shopping offers seems to be more appealing to men and the social interaction and face-to-face communication that women appreciate, is not present in online shopping, possible explaining why more men are engaging in online shopping activities. In line with this, Dittmar et al. (2004) support that women's attitude suffers a considerably change when comparing offline with online shopping, having a less favourable attitude towards the second one, while men's attitude remains almost the same in both shopping atmospheres. These factors contribute to the fact that men are spending more money and time in online purchases than women (Cyr and Bonanni, 2005).

The characteristics of the products that are available in the online shopping format also contribute to the male dominance (Van Slyke, Belanger and Hightower, 2005). Products like food, home décor or clothing – typically female products – are not widely available online (Hasan, 2010), given the impression to women that online shopping is not as compatible or accommodating as conventional shopping. Furthermore, physical evaluation of products is a preference for women, they prefer to see and feel the products before buying them (Dittmar et al., 2004). Especially when we are talking about products with

a high NFT characteristic like shoes. It is also important to highlight the fact that footwear is viewed more than a simple means of foot protection, it is accepted as an aesthetic and cultural symbol by our society (Seferin and Van Der Linden, 2012). Shoes are an appealing piece of clothing that reflect a message about who people are (Curwen and Park, 2013). Particularly, women's footwear is considered a symbol of power and social status as well as of comfort and personal preferences (Seferin and Van Der Linden, 2012).

It is possible to conclude that the social interaction inherent to shopping and the need for touch in experience goods are factors that highly influence the women consumers' predisposition to shop shoes online. So, it's very important to understand how companies are diminishing these setbacks and enhancing other features of the online world that can overcome these limitations.

In line with the literature reviewed so far and given the main purpose of this thesis – understanding the factors that drive women consumers to shop shoes online – it is possible to highlight some of the main elements regarding this topic. We will study the most relevant ones and investigate if they have an influence on women's predisposition to shop shoes online. This thesis will study the following factors that seem to influence female consumers to shop shoes online and try to understand its effect: convenience, recreation, need for touch and social e-shopping (social networking sites and fashion bloggers influence).

Convenience

Time is one of the most valuable assets people have nowadays. Thus, maximizing it is a top priority for everyone. The consumers are busy enough in their daily activities, leaving less time for shopping. As compared to traditional shopping, online shopping has a lot of advantages to offer regarding this matter. A study conducted by Qinghe, Wenyuan and Kaiming (2014) revealed that online shopping took less time when compared to traditional shopping and consumers pointed out that the time factor was the most important one for them. Online shopping is alleged to be a time saving opportunity for consumers (Bellman, Lohse and Johnson, 1999). It reduces not only the travel time to the physical store but also the time spent in lines (Donthu and Garcia, 1999). It also increases search efficiency through the ability to shop at home. It eliminates the frustrations linked with the traditional shopping formats, such as fighting traffic, looking for a parking space, and at the same time it eliminates the trouble of having to travel to a variety of stores (Childers, Carr, Peck and Carson, 2001). Consumers' primary motivation when engaging in online shopping activities is to save time, money and complications related with the traditional shopping atmosphere (Stell and Paden, 1999).

Closely related to the notion that online shopping is a time saver is the convenience characteristic. Although many studies explore the factors of convenience and time separately (e.g. Raman, 2014; Qinghe et al., 2014), in this study, time will be integrated as a part of the concept of convenience. Copland first introduced this concept in the marketing literature in 1923 as an approach to classify goods - convenience, shopping or specialty goods. Over the time, the concept changed from a descriptor of products into its own unique conception – one with emphasis on time buying or time savings – shifting the perception from a product attributes-oriented methodology to a service attributes-oriented

direction (Berry, Seiders and Grewal, 2002). When the barriers of undertaking an activity are reduced or eliminated, convenience occurs - these barriers are denoted as costs (Bell, Ho and Tang, 1998). The effort-saving aspect of convenience is of major significance as convenience is described as the minimization of the cognitive, physical and emotional activities that consumers must bear to purchase goods and services (Berry et al, 2002). Hence, convenience offers the consumers the possibility to shop online anytime from anywhere, giving the chance to simultaneously work on other activities, therefore saving a lot of precious time.

Shopping convenience has been pointed as one of the principal motivation regarding consumers' intention to shop online (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010; Colwell, Aung, Kanetkar and Holden, 2008). According to Childers et al. (2001), a person who perceives the online environment as more convenient is more likely to consider the new media as both "useful" and "easy to use", facilitating the execution of the shopping task and making it more appealing to the consumer. At the same time, it reduces the frustration allied with the shopping process by decreasing the psychological costs, which in turn makes the shopping experience a more enjoyable one (Childers et al., 2001).

Given this, it is expected that convenience is a factor that influences women consumers' predisposition to shop shoes online.

Recreation

Recreational consumers' orientations relate positively to online shopping preferences concerning experience goods (Girard et al., 2003). Likewise, the results of a research regarding online shopping orientation towards high-touch products, indicates that when people experience more enjoyment in their

shopping activity, they are more likely to purchase the product online (Chen and Hung, 2015). Therefore, turning online shopping into a more interactive activity, can increase customers' recreational value and purchase behaviours (Chen and Hung, 2015). Interactivity is defined as the ''extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time" (Steuer, 1992,p. 84). A website's interactivity characteristic improves a fluid communication, customization of information, image manipulation and entertainment (Fiore, Jin and Kim, 2005). Furthermore, the interactive nature of websites has been recognised as a positive factor influencing consumers' responses, such as increasing the desire to browse and purchase online (Gehrke and Turban, 1999; Mathwick, 2002; Fiore and Jin, 2003; Fiore et al., 2005;). So, in terms of website design, it is crucial to foster hedonic pleasure in site design by motivating consumers to participate, promoting customer excitement and concentration, including charming features to attract customers and to help them enjoy the visit. These features will lead to increased customer activities (Liu and Arnett, 2000).

Some studies suggest that enjoyment influences the consumers' intention to return to a retailers' website (Liu and Arnett, 2000; Koufaris, 2002) and that the websites' enjoyment has a positive influence on behaviour towards the e-retailers websites (Fiore et al., 2005; Jayawardhena and Wright, 2009). Enjoyment is described as the degree to which a certain experience is fun or interesting (Moon and Kim, 2001). So, consumers' attitude regarding e-shopping is positively influenced by enjoyment (Childers et al., 2001; Heijden and Verhagen, 2004). Once shopping is considered an enjoyable experience, consumers tend to concern less about the amount of time they spend searching for product information or deals (Jensen, 2012). In the online world, e-retailers should focus on improving the website design and use product virtualization technologies to attract consumers and increase online sales (Kim and Forsythe, 2007; Wang, Minor and

Wei, 2011).

Given this, it is expected that recreation is a factor that influences women consumers' predisposition to shop shoes online.

Need for touch

Online retailing is one of the most promising sectors (Agardi and Dornyei, 2011), but it still faces some limitations: the lack of sensorial elements like scent or touch that can have a powerful influence in the consumers' decision-making process (Weathers and Makienko, 2006; Grewal, Iyer and Levy, 2004; Dholakia and Zhao, 2010). Need for touch (NFT) is described as "a preference for the extraction and utilization of information obtained through the haptic system" (Peck and Childers, 2003, p.431). This is mostly present in high-involvement product categories such as clothing or shoes, in which consumers need to see, try and touch the product in order to evaluate it (Workman, 2010).

Experience goods, such as shoes, are defined as "when full information on dominant attribute can only be known with direct experience and information search for such attribute is more difficult than direct product experience" (Chiang and Dholakia, 2003, p. 179), meaning that these type of products require to be personally experienced. Thus, is possible to say that consumer's intention to shop online is lower for experience goods than search goods (Chiang and Dholakia, 2003), bringing to the table an additional challenge for companies that sell these types of goods online. However, it has been argued that the abundance of information available online is reducing the gap between search and experience products (Huang, Lurie and Mitra, 2009) due to improvements in online shopping technologies, such as description, pictures or video clips. It is very important for companies to provide as much detail and variety of information as

they can in order to reduce the uncertainty that consumers have towards experience goods. This is enhanced in the fashion environment, where fashion consumer behaviour is considered a multi-sensory experience involving a number of senses that allow the consumer to obtain information by evaluating the products, with haptic perception referring to the gathering of information through the sense of touch (Workman, 2010).

Given this, it is expected that NFT represents a factor that influences women consumers' predisposition to shop shoes online.

Social E-shopping

Shopping is social activity that overcomes the simple act of obtaining products, it is about the whole experience, enjoyment and entertainment (Martineau, 1958; Tauber, 1972). Especially for women, shopping is considered a leisure and social activity in which they can express love for families and their social network (Miller, 1998). There is evidence in the literature that women perceive the social aspect of shopping as a crucial element (Dholakia, 1999). Dennis, Morgan, Wright and Jayawardhena (2010) suggest that e-retailers have a major opportunity to combine social networking with e-shopping, giving the fact that the internet is the new social space for young women. Thus, social e-shopping can be a valuable strategy for e-retailers, especially for those whose main target is the female audience (Dennis et al., 2010)

Social networking has become a part of people's daily lives (Boyd and Ellison, 2007) and young females are over-represented as users of social networking sites (Social Networks, 2007). It has been reported by Lenhart and Madden (2007) that 70% of young women use social networking sites (SNS's). Moreover, DEI Worldwide (2008), reported that 60% of social networking users

are likely to pass along information they receive online and two-thirds of these users see online recommendations from other users as a credible source, representing a big influence on brand perceptions and possible on the consumers' purchase decisions (DEI Worldwide, 2008). As part of this phenomenon, we have the presence of blogs. Blogs are considered a social media form according to the classification of social media groups developed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2012). Kaye's study (2005) explored the six motivations for internet users to connect with blogs, namely: Information seeking, convenience, personal fulfilment, political surveillance, social surveillance and necessity of affiliation. Given the influence that blogs have on people, bloggers can be seen as opinion leaders. Opinion leaders embody a persuasive group in the marketplace because they are able to influence consumers through word of mouth (Stokberger-Sauer and Hoyer, 2009). According to JupiterResearch (2008), blogs represent a positive role in the process of ad messages, creation of conversations and are able to provide a trusted source that influences the consumers' purchase decision intention. Thus, bloggers are a key factor in the marketing strategies since they provide reliable information via brand messages that are directed to the consumers (Schertler, Kreunen and Brinkmann, 2014).

Given this, social networking sites (SNS's) and bloggers influence will be explored in this study as part of the social e-shopping factor, since this concept embraces both the notion of SNS's and bloggers influence.

Social Networking Sites (SNS's)

Social media is recognized as a powerful manner to spread ideas and it demands companies to rethink their marketing strategies – "new ways of thinking" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012). The Internet suffered a big change over the last decades: instead of being used as a simple search tool, it became a whole new network where everyone is a part of it. A clear example of this interactivity

are the SNS's used by millions of people, such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, which the main purpose is the interaction among its users. The leading social networks worldwide as of September 2016, ranked by number of active users are: Facebook (it was the first social network to surpass 1 billion registered accounts) at 1.71 billion, the photo-sharing app Instagram that had over 500 million monthly active accounts and blogging service Tumblr with more than 555 million active blog users on their site (Statista, 2016)

Boyd and Elison (2007) defined the social networking sites (SNS's) as online platforms that allow individuals to create a profile, connect with people and interact through links with other social network users. These personal profiles can include any type of information, such as photos, videos, audio files or blogs (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012). SNS's act as a technological platform that allows people to connect, generate and share online content. Since its appearance in the 90's, SNS's have been developing and adapting themselves to the evolution of the internet, creating new functionalities and applications that are able to fulfil its users' needs (Boyd and Elison, 2007) and, at the same time, captivating the attention of companies and organizations to recognise its business potential. They can be described as networks of friends for social or professional interaction (Trusov, Buckling, and Pauwels, 2009). SNS's have become an additional marketing channel for companies that can be integrated with the traditional channels as a part of their marketing mix strategy. It is very important that companies use it to establish a solid brand presence, to project their products and services, to get feedback from their customers and to observe its clients' perceptions of their brand (Bolotaeva and Cata, 2011). On top of that, it also allows companies to develop a trustful relationship with their customers, better understand their needs or even perform market research, so the use of these platforms has to be well planned and cautious (Bolotaeva and Cata, 2011).

Fashion Bloggers Influence

The main factors that influence individuals to engage in blog activities (Kaye 2005) are emotional needs such as entertainment, relaxation, excitement, involvement and having the opportunity to express personal viewpoints. The author states that social needs that individuals seek to fulfil are the foundation of these motivations. Fashion brands are aware of the fact that blogs are a new marketing power (Hsu and Tsou, 2011). They are an effective means for searching information, sharing diaries, completing business deals, and allowing consumers to collectively comment on issues regarding products and services. So, brands are investing in this method as a communication-marketing tool that can be used as a form of user-generated content (Kulmala, Mesiranta and Tuominen, 2013).

When blogging is used as a solid B2C communication technique, it can become a lucrative business especially for the fashion industry. Companies must be aware of the wide range of opportunities that advent from this phenomenon and understand the influence that a certain blogger can have towards their target audience (Kulmala et al., 2013). One of the most frequently recognised subcategories of blogging is fashion. The fashion industry suffered an enormous change in last years when the world entered in the internet era, giving space for new types of business models to appear in order for brands to reach more demanding and digitalized consumers (Doherty and Alexander, 2004). There is a tendency for fashion brands to ally themselves with fashion blogs to provide sponsorship posts that try to captivate their audience, once individuals lean towards following the suggestions and references of bloggers they trust. Fashion bloggers are becoming an influential force within the fashion industry, which has been facilitated by the growth of new media. They are considered key players in the fashion field (Rocamora, 2011). Constance White, an executive at eBay told Women's Wear Daily, "The impact blogs are having is the idea that the whole population is taking control and ownership of fashion" (apud Vineyard, 2014).

Highly related with the bloggers phenomenon, we have the concept of word-of-mouth (WOM). WOM is a consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication where the sender is independent of the market (Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007). With the progressive dominance of the web, this concept evolved into e-WOM (Bataineh, 2015) which is described as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet." (Hennig-Thurau, Qwinner, Walsh and Gremler, 2004, p. 38). E-WOM allows consumers to express their reviews, comments and opinions concerning products and services across multiple channels like web forums, blogs, social network or websites (Bataineh, 2015). So, when this phenomenon occurs by the intermediation of blogs, it either can be considered consumer to consumer (C2C) or business to consumer (B2C) communication form. The first one occurs when the information shared by the blogger has a genuine purpose and is a true reflexion of the blogger's experience and opinion, it is also called organic e-WOM (Kulmala et al., 2013). The second one, happens when the information comes to the blogger through marketers' influence and has a financial incentive from brands and retailers behind the bloggers' post, its purpose is to reach a specific target that matches the bloggers' main audience. It's also called amplified e-WOM (Kulmala et al., 2013).

Given this, it is expected that social e-shopping (SNS's and bloggers influence) represents a factor that influences women consumers' predisposition to shop shoes online.

2.3 Proposed Model

Based on literature review, we propose the following theoretical model that aims to analyse the factors driving women consumers to shop shoes online

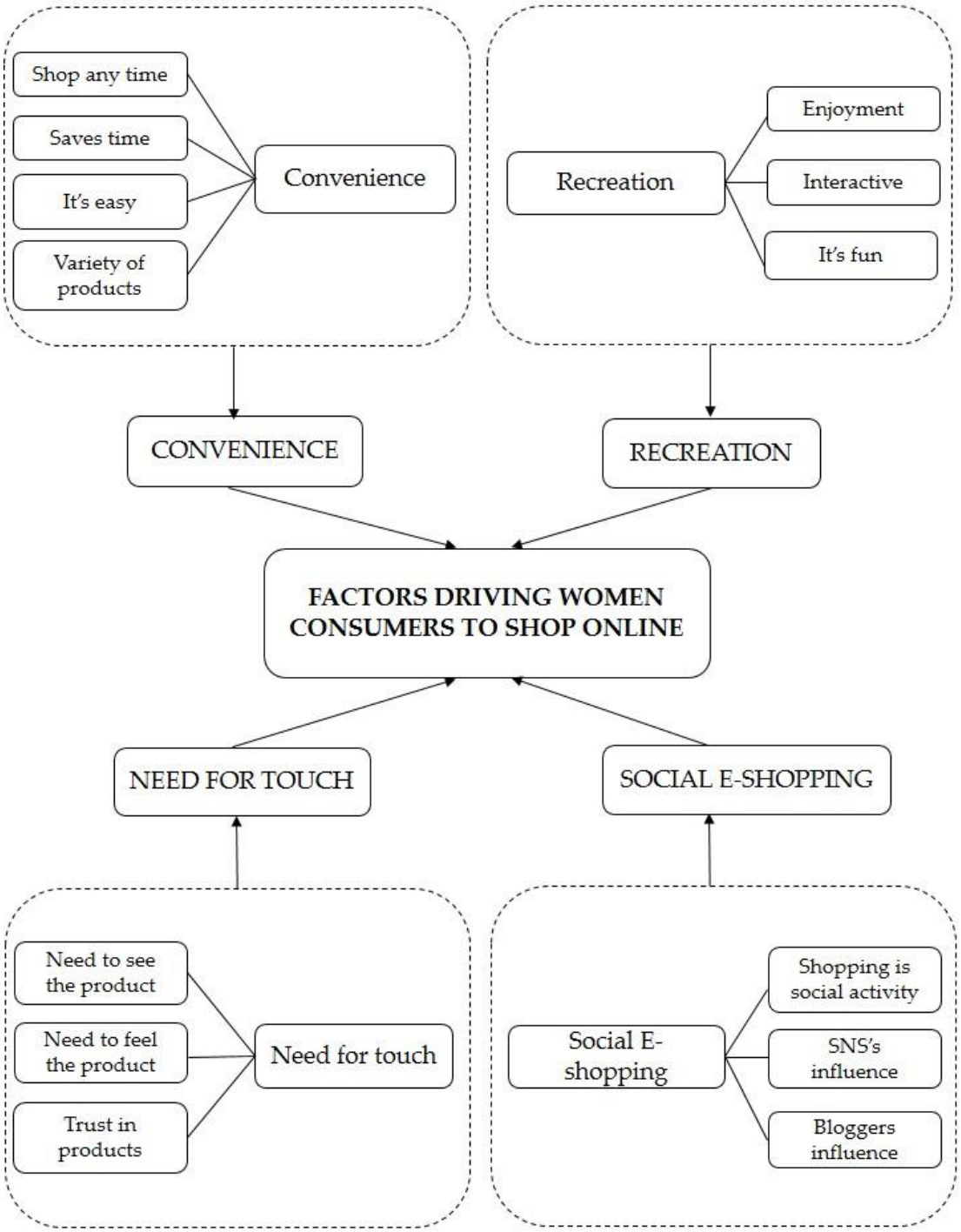

Figure 1 - conceptual model (source: own systematization)

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology applied in this study which was developed in line with the research questions formerly stated. Thus, the course of action of the process is hereby explained, as well as the data collection techniques and the reliability of the main outcomes.

3.1 Research Scope and Design

This study aims to explore the factors that impact women consumers to shop online, specifically shoes. Given this, a qualitative research method was selected once these methods are usually used to explain and obtain in-depth understanding of a given phenomenon or event, rather than confirming or quantifying (Kumar, 2011). They are descriptive and inductive methods (Bryman and Bell, 2011), that provide concrete and real-life results. In the specific case of this thesis, many of the concepts covered are not easily quantified, so a flexible approach is the most suitable one. Therefore, a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews was applied in attempt to corroborate the constructs of the proposed model.

Given this, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted - ten of these interviews were focused on the demand side to understand the female consumers' perception and the other were made to two managers of a women's shoes company to represent the suppliers' viewpoint.

The objective of this dissertation is, therefore, to contribute to the existing literature by accessing the factors that influence the female shoppers' intention towards online shopping in the shoe market context and provide two different views on this matter – the demand and supply side – consumers and companies.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection is described as "the process of gathering information required to infer valid and credible conclusions" (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It is possible to distinguish the sources of data into primary or secondary, in which the first one refers to the collection of data obtained from a first-hand experience of the researcher and the second one as the data collected from third parties. In this situation, the central source of primary data are semi-structured interviews (see appendix 8, 9 and10), which are complemented with secondary data such as research articles, books and press releases.

3.2.1 Interviews

Interviews enable the researcher to perform a broader perspective on the subject that is being studied (Yin, 2009). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted during the month of September (each one lasted approximately 30 minutes) based on a guideline previously developed that contained a list of questions in a logical sequential order. These interviews were made to ten female consumers that have already bought shoes online and to two managers of a women's shoes company, in order to corroborate the motivations addressed in the "Literature Review & Proposed Model" chapter. The semi-structured interviews ensure that the key issues of this study are addressed through a list of questions to explore and permit a certain level of flexibility by the presence of

open-ended questions with the possibility to ask follow-up questions (Bryman and Bell, 2011). After gathering all the information, the interviews were synthesized into a written document to facilitate the validation of the constructs.

A brief description of each informant is here provided, to ensure the transparency and credibility of this study.

Female consumers interviewed:

NAME	AGE	PROFESSION	NATIONALITY
Rachel Baker	20	Student	British
Rute Marinho	22	Planning Intern	Portuguese
Claudia Santamarta	23	Journalist	Spanish
Lola Cayatte	23	Fundraising Intern	Franco-American
Maria Borges	23	Audit Analyst	Portuguese
Sofia Miranda	24	Medical Doctor	Portuguese
Catarina Vieira	24	Pharmaceutical Intern	Portuguese
Bárbara Abraul	25	Digital Marketing	Portuguese
Marta Cruz	26	Commercial Manager	Portuguese
Catarina Meaud	26	Sales Assistant	Portuguese

Table 2 - Female Consumers Interviewed Profile (Source: Own Systematization)

Josefinas's Managers interviewed:

Maria Cunha | *CEO at Josefinas Portugal and Digital Marketing Expert*

António Paraíso | *International and Luxury Marketing Consultant, part of the Josefinas Project as an external advisor*

Chapter 4

Research Findings: Factors Driving Women Consumers to Shop Shoes Online

This thesis intended to study the factors influencing women consumers' predisposition to shop shoes online. Derived from the literature reviewed, we accessed four relevant factors: convenience, recreation, need for touch and social e-shopping. Therefore, the following chapter aims to address all these factors and try to provide corroboration for each one of them, validating the constructs developed in the model conceptualized in Chapter 2.

4.1 Convenience

The "convenience" factor was mentioned by all the ten participants as the main motivation to shop shoes online. Women consumers think that online shopping it's easy and it saves them a lot of time. They also appreciate the fact that they can shop at any time and from any location and the 24h availability of the online store. Another aspect mentioned by a lot of the participants was the wide variety of products available online and the possibility to find all the sizes and shoes' models they want that sometimes are not available at the physical stores.

It's easy and convenient. When you already know the style and the size that fits you, online shopping saves you a trip to the store.

It gives me the facility to see several stores in less lime, it's 24h opened and I have the possibility to do all of this without leaving the house, so it's more comfortable and convenient than going to a physical store.

The facility to see all the models and sizes that the physical store has, organized by sizes and types to shoes, without all the mess you see in real life. Also, the fact that I can buy them at home is super convenient and saves me a lot of time.

I think it's a matter of diversity, so many options and models to buy. Also it's very comfortable to receive them directly at home.

It is easier to buy shoes online because usually there is more stock, so I can easily find my size. Moreover, I can have a better experience while shopping online because I can see the whole catalogue without going into the physical store, where sometimes the products can be sold out.

Women are becoming busier everyday so it actually saves time not having to go to a proper shop, parking the car, trying different sizes, and choose one that, in the end, may be sold out and will oblige us to return to the store once again.

These responses confirm the "convenience" construct developed in the proposed model. It is noticeable that convenience is a crucial aspect that motivates women consumers to shop shoes online. The women consumers in this study are aware of the fact that online shopping takes less time than going to a physical store, because the travel time to the store is eliminated and the time spent in lines too. Additionally, the trouble of having to travel to a variety of stores is erased – they can see all the products they want from one single location. Consumers also find online shopping to be an easy task, enhancing the convenience aspect of this shopping format. All of these support previous

researches regarding online shopping convenience (e.g. Donthu and Garcia, 1999; Childers et al. 2001; Qinghe et al., 2014).

4.2 Recreation

Participants agreed that online shopping is a recreational activity. They find it to be a fun experience that provides them an enjoyable time due to the interactive features they can find in the retailers' website. Some of the participants said that when they found the website design more appealing, they tended to spend more time exploring it, finding more products available and consequently buying more.

> *If you don't know the brand/size/how the shoes look and you're a risk taker as I am, it's fun to shop and then see if they look good (as long as it's possible to return them).*

> *I love exploring websites looking for new shoes' models, especially when I enjoy its design, it's really exciting. I also like to read reviews from other customers, it gives me a better vision of the products I'm buying.*

> *When I'm navigating a website that has an interesting design and lot of cool features like photos or videos, I tend to forget about time and start to get lost in the whole online experience.*

The responses confirm the "recreation" construct developed in the model. Women consumers of this sample find online shopping to be an enjoyable experience and consider that to be a factor that highly motivates them to shop shoes online. The interactivity and design of the website are considered very

important factors. They appreciate retailers' websites that have a lot of images, charming features, solid descriptions of the products and a space for feedback and reviews from other customers. These outcomes are in line with the reviewed literature regarding recreational consumers' orientations (e.g Girard et al., 2003; Fiore et al., 2005; Chen and Hung, 2015).

4.3 Need for touch

All the participants agreed that touching and seeing the product was very important for them, especially because they were talking about shoes. Most of them mentioned that they were a bit concern with the fact that the shoe size might not be the right one and the pictures might not correspond to the reality. Some of them said that whenever they had the chance, they preferred to go the physical store, try the shoe first, and then order it online.

> *Online I don't buy as impulsively as I do in-store because I don't try the shoes and it's always risky to purchase something you don't see.*

> *I get a bit concerned that the photos I saw on the website, don't really correspond to the reality. It's always different to see and try the shoes in real life.*

> *Especially when we are talking about shoes, it's a bit complicated not to try them because the sizes change from one brand to another, so the best would be to try the shoes in real life.*

> *You can't really try the product, and sometimes is not like in the pictures, or it might not fit you properly, but usually this can be fix with a good return system.*

Not knowing how the product will fit or look like without trying is always a concern, but that can be solved by returning what I bought, which is a safety for me. Also, since we are talking about something to wear, it can be hard to order the correct shoe size because they can vary depending on the type of shoes.

The responses confirm the "need for touch" construct as a major factor influencing the predisposition of women to shop shoes online. Women consumers tend to trust more in products they touch, see and try beforehand. Even with all the pictures available at the retailers' website, a lot of them go to the store first to try the product, especially to be sure of the right size, and then order it comfortably and easily online. So, on top of providing several pictures of the product and video clips, detailed information and description can also reduce the gap between the virtual and the real world. Likewise, some consumers mentioned the importance of a good product return system as a way to overcome this setback. It is believed that product returns can lead to an opportunity for the online retailer to enhance customer loyalty and relationship (Raman, 2014) - by offering free shipping and generous return policies, consumers are more likely to engage in online shopping activities (Kunz, 1997). So, as seen before in the literature review, high-involvement and experience goods (like shoes), tend to have a higher need for touch characteristic (Workman, 2010) that needs to be surpassed by online retailers with some of the resolutions previously stated.

4.4 Social E-shopping (SNS's and Bloggers Influence)

This factor was not as mentioned as the previous ones. All of them admitted they did spend a lot of time navigating through SNS's (Facebook and Instagram were the most mentioned ones) and that they followed bloggers on

these platforms, but many of them do not acknowledge the fact that this is a motivating factor that drives them to shop shoes online. Some admitted that unconsciously it might influence their search for some products, but they do not recognize the direct influence this factor has on their online shopping predisposition.

A typical comment that refers to the influence of social e-shopping (SNS's and bloggers influence):

> *I follow some bloggers on social media and what they wear tends to be similar to the style that I like. These bloggers also show where the product is available, how it looks like and which outfits will match that type of shoes. This gives me an extra motivation to buy those products. I think that for women, bloggers tends to be an inspiration that attracts them to the brands' websites and instantly buy those products without much thinking.*

> *Nowadays, I think that both social media and bloggers influence our buying decision. Most of the clothes they wear are available online, and it is tempting not to buy them as soon as we see someone wearing it and nailing it. It becomes almost like a mechanism of buying without the necessity of trying because someone already tried and proved us that it will work.*

> *I spend a lot of time online, especially on Instagram, and I follow a lot of bloggers. Most of the time I click on the tags labelled in their photos and that redirects me to the brands' pages, giving me the opportunity to search for different kinds of products and eventually buying some of them.*

Women consumers interviewed in this sample are not as aware of the influence this factor as it was expected from the literature reviewed. They

admitted that social networking has become a part of their daily lives but they use it more as a social platform to express their individual beliefs and day-to-day moments with friends and family, rather than using it as a shopping lever. So, women consumers see SNS's more as a communication platform for brands, than they see it as a factor motivating them to shop online. This can be a medium for companies to develop a trustful relationship with their customers, better understand their needs or even perform market research (Bolotaeva and Cata, 2011). Female consumers also admitted that bloggers are an inspiration for them and that seeing them with the shoes on and matching it with the whole outfit, influences them to buy products more impulsively. So, bloggers are a key factor to be considered in the marketing strategies of e-retailers, especially for brands that sell fashion products online (Schertler, et al., 2014).

Chapter 5

The Suppliers' Overview: A Company's Perspective

To provide the suppliers' perspective regarding the factors that drive women consumers to shop shoes online, we will present in this chapter two managers' opinion over these factors and see how their company incorporates them into their online strategy. The company in question is Josefinas, a Portuguese digital-born brand of women's shoes.

5.1 Company Overview

Josefinas is a digital Portuguese brand for women's shoes created in 2013 by Maria Cunha and Filipa Júlio. Filipa Júlia had one idea: to create a Portuguese brand of ballet flats. But to turn this idea into a tangible business, a lot had to be done. It took one year for this to happen. Meanwhile, the strategy was being designed and developed by Maria Cunha and its partners at BloomIdea (a digital marketing company based in Braga, Portugal). It was a natural step to start in the digital world – "we are a company that works globally and sells to the entire world, so the online strategy was the most natural one to pursue and start this business". Given this, FIlipa Júlia was in charge of the creation of the products and Maria Cunha responsible for the whole business strategy.

The international strategy that the company pursues started from day one – "as soon as you enter the online world, you're selling to the entire world". It was just a matter of understanding the logistics of the business and turning this operationally, so they closed a deal with DHL (the global market leader in the logistics industry). Maria Cunha stated that there are very few countries where

they haven't sold to, but the most relevant markets they operate in are Portugal and USA. She also mentioned the fact that they have many Asian customers, although most of them do not necessarily live in Asia. In terms of acquired customers, they have more than 4.000 clients all over the world.

The brand expanded digitally through social media and influencers that gave the brand the credibility for its Portuguese quality. Josefinas follows a premium strategy because they wanted to be considered a top quality brand known for its Portuguese shoes excellence – "when we are talking about top quality, the price is not the decisive factor, that goes to the background". They have a differentiated product in terms of quality, so it's expected that the price is also differentiated.

Josefinas' first physical store opened in June 2016 in New York City. "Consumers do not buy strictly online or offline, so this was the natural next move". They chose this location because USA is their biggest market and the majority of their frequent customers are American. Also, NYC is the fashion capital of the world – "We want to be at the centre where everything is happening and become a reference in the fashion world. It was all about the marketing strategy and the relationship we wanted to build with our customers".

This thesis intended to study the main factors driving women consumers to shop shoes online. So, proving a real example of a company that acts in this segment, can bring an additional value to this study since it will give a perspective of the company's overview of these factors and how their online business strategy addresses them. In line with the proposed model developed by the author and the research question defined in Chapter 1 - "How does the supply side acknowledge these factors?" - it will be explored here the factors previously stated: convenience, recreation, need for touch and social e-shopping.

5.1.1 Convenience

It has been proved beforehand, that the possibility of shopping online represents a convenient method for consumers, since they can shop independently of time and place. One dimension that is highlighted in the convenience factor is the variety of products available online – it is possible to find a much higher diversity of products online when compared to the products that consumers can find in a physical store. This is specially appreciated by women, particularly when we are talking about a product category like shoes, since women like exclusivity and online shopping enables them to buy a product that probably other consumers can't find in a physical store near them. Additionally, consumers can buy products from all over the world and visit multiple stores without leaving the place – this is a unique characteristic that every brand that has an online presence can offer to their customers. In terms of convenience features that the e-retailers can offer, like easiness of search and comparison of products and prices, this is quite different in the case of a company like Josefinas since they don't sell a commodity product. People don't buy their products because they are easy to search, they buy it because they are involved with the product. (See appendix 1)

> *We don't even have a search bar. We always have a "storytelling" behind each product, consumers can navigate through special collections and find the products that way. We want people to understand our concept and enter in the "Josefinas world". We're not a commodity product, so people have to be interested in our products. Since we are a luxury product, that easiness of search doesn't exist. People don't think "I'm going to Josefinas' website to search for shoes", they either know the product they want to buy or they want to be a part of a story. Our customers usually do their pre-search on social media.*

Moreover, regarding the variety of products available online, Josefinas acts differently from mass manufacturers. Since their products are handmade, they work with optimized stocks, so they don't have all shoes sizes and models available to order immediately. On the consumers' side, this might be a little inconvenient because they don't receive the product right away, but on the company's perspective, this helps them to manage their stock more efficiently, reducing possible expenses associated with stock accumulation.

> *We don't have all the products available, we work with optimized stock. We only have in warehouse the most frequently sold products since our products are all handmade. Sometimes the clients have to wait a while to get the product delivered to their homes, they don't have that immediate felling of receiving the products, but when the client already has a connection with the brand and understands our concept, that's not an obstacle for them. The time of delivery can go from one week to one month tops, the average is 15 days.*

> *Josefinas want to be seen as an accessible luxury product with a premium market positioning. As so, scarcity creates more appetite for the product. Consumers have to wait longer for the product they want, but when they receive it the pleasure is higher.*

5.1.2 Recreation

Brands like Josefinas need to cultivate the brand desirability in people's mind, so that consumers can understand the added value they are offering. It's imperative for these types of companies to involve customers in their products. So, the recreational side of online shopping needs to be enhanced. Consumers need to understand that they are buying more than a product, they are acquiring

a whole experience. The website is the main tool of communication and interaction that a brand can offer to its consumers, since this is the place where they start and complete the actual purchase, so it needs to captive people through an appealing design and interactive features like videos and images. Another online method for brands to be in contact with their customers are apps – most companies have one nowadays (this is not the case of Josefinas yet). Every person has a smartphone full of apps and this is a great form of interactivity. This also helps companies to build a stronger relationship with their consumers. Additionally, we've seen that consumers value the opinion of others and this helps to improve their perception of trust towards the products they are buying online, so it's very important that companies have a space for customers' reviews and feedback. (See appendix 2 and 3)

> *Our "storytelling" is done through videos that try to captivate the audience, we don't have a lot of written descriptions. Our biggest recreational strategy is definitely the storytelling we put behind every product we sell. Here we want to take the customer into a journey where he can understand where the products came from, who made it, which stories are behind it.*

> *Our website has a space for feedback and reviews from our customers, mostly derived from social media channels. We want to make sure that people know how our customers fell about our products.*

5.1.3 Need for touch

It has been argued that consumers feel the need to touch and see the products before buying them. This necessity tends to be superior in product categories like shoes, especially due to the uncertainty of the size. On top of this,

these sensorial elements are considered even more relevant in the case of fashion goods. Consumers have concerns regarding the mismatch between products they see virtually and on the real world. Companies can overcome these obstacles by providing as much pictures and videos as they can and also by having a good product return policy, such as free shipping. When brands have a physical store, it is common that the consumer goes the store first, tries the product and then orders it online if the size or colour they want is not available. Some brands even encourage their customers to do that while they are still at the physical store. When brands only have an online presence, the best way to reduce the risk associate with this is a return policy well explained at the website (See appendix 4).

> *We are aware of the fact the shoes have a high need for touch characteristic and that people are a bit afraid to order the wrong shoe size or that pictures don't correspond to the reality, so we have a free return policy in Portugal and USA, and in other countries we charge a low fee. Some brands send two or three pairs of shoes to their customers so they can choose the right one for them, but at Josefinas we can't do that because our products are handmade and some are customized for that specific order. Our return rate is not high, but we know that the biggest factor causing it is definitely the size. We try to work with trusted sizes in order to minimize this problem, unlike some French brands that have smaller sizes or American brands that have bigger sizes.*

5.1.4 Social e-shopping´

On the company's perspective, this factor is closely linked with the recreational aspect mentioned before. The product involvement is imperative and through the medium of social networks and bloggers, this can be highly

improved. It is the best way for companies to connect with their customers and improve brand loyalty. This can also reduce the gap between the virtual and real world, because consumers can see day-to-day people wearing the products they want to buy, improving their trust towards it. So, social media and bloggers influence are a key part their overall marketing strategy and it is assumed as one of the most relevant. Another way to increase emotional product involvement is to associate the brand with a cause – this is an increasingly strong trend for premium or luxury brands. In the case of Josefinas is the "women empowerment", for other brands could be an environmental or animal cause for example (See appendix 5 and 6)

Social Networking Sites

We are present in the main SNS's, but the most relevant ones are Instagram and Facebook, especially Instagram. Facebook has more relevance in Portugal than in other countries, in the USA most people don't care about Facebook. Instagram is the social network that reflects better our brand image. It has photos, it tells a story, there is a lot of sharing, and people can see the product in a real-life context, with people walking on the streets with our products in a casual way, so it truly shows our brand's lifestyle. I think it's a very interesting social network. We try to interact as much as we can with our customers though social media by replying to each comment or email they send us, we have a 100% rate of replies.

Fashion Bloggers

The e-WOM around our brand is all organic. We have celebrities asking us to send them our products, and we don't send them unless we believe that person truly identifies herself with our values as a brand. We do "gifting" and send the products to some celebrities that we believe will reflect our brand image. Sometimes it takes us years to reach a person, but that's a very important part

for our marketing strategy. Bloggers and celebrities have millions of brands asking them to share their products, so sometimes it's hard to reach the ones we want. But when they really like our products, they share it organically.
We choose those bloggers or celebrities if we think they are a "Josefinas Woman", the ones that believe in the women empowerment. For example, we don't do gifting to celebrities that are associated with a sexual connotation, none of our communication strategy passes that type message. We believe that's not something necessary to sell a product.

We have a PR that is in permanent contact with bloggers from all over the world, we want to create a personalized relationship with them. We give them the news in first hand and share ideas. One example of the power of these bloggers was the time that Chiara Ferragni (a fashion blogger with almost 7 million followers on Instagram) shared a picture wearing a pair of Josefinas. After a few minutes the sales of that product soared and our website traffic increased significantly. It's definitely a very interesting and rewarding strategy for brands, especially for those whose main target is the female audience.

Chapter 6

Findings

6.1 Theoretical implications and contributions

This research provided theoretical implications for understanding the main factors that drive women consumers to shop shoes online. This was achieved through a qualitative study in the format of in-depth interviews to ten female consumers and to two managers of a digital-born brand of women's shoes.

Overall, there are not many studies that address the factors influencing online shopping for the female target specifically nor for the shoe market. So, this study attempts to fulfil a gap in the literature by providing important implications regarding this topic.

The main findings of this study indicate that women consumers highly appreciate the convenience feature that shopping shoes online provides them, so in line with the literature reviewed, convenience was found to be the key factor driving women consumers to shop online. Consumers value the easiness and time-saving aspect as well as the variety of products that this shopping format offers them.

The recreational factor of online shopping was also confirmed in this research. Women consumers in this study think that online shopping is a fun activity and enjoy the interactive features they can find online, such as attractive website design, images and videos, reviews and feedback from other customers. This last

factor also helps them to gain more trust towards the products they are buying – this is enhanced in experience goods.

The need for touch was considered a very important factor for all the consumers mainly due to the size issue inherent to this product category, once shoes are a product with a high NFT characteristic. This is mostly present in high-involvement product categories such as clothing or shoes, in which consumers need to see, try and touch the product in order to evaluate it personally. Many of the participants said they preferred to go the physical store first to try the product and then buy it online. Other said that this concern could be overcome with a good return policy.

Lastly, social e-shopping was found not be as significant for women as it was supposed to be given the literature reviewed. The participants didn't acknowledge the direct impact of this factor on their predisposition to shop online. They admitted they have an active presence in the SNS's and that they follow bloggers and media influencers online, but most of them don't consider this to be a motivating factor to buy shoes online.

6.2 Managerial implications

This paper offers some interesting insights for marketers. The author believes that the understanding of the main factors that stimulate women consumers to shop shoes online, can provide relevant cues to best target this audience by presenting strategies that are aligned with their motivations. Additionally, providing two different overviews of these factors – demand and supply - can bring an additional value to the table.

The convenience aspect of online shopping is imperative for consumers and any brand that has an online presence is automatically providing this to their customers – being online is being convenient. Online stores offer the possibility

of having a 24 hour 7 days a week shopping format that is not possible in the physical world. Also, online shopping comprises an infinite number of stores in one "space". Therefore, it is imperative for brands that want to reach a broader audience and give to their customers a more convenient and easy shopping method, to have an online presence nowadays.

Consumers consider online shopping as a recreational activity that can be enhanced by certain features that online brands can offer. It is very important to have an appealing and interactive website design that simulates their audience – a lot of videos and images but also a space for customer's reviews and feedback. This helps consumers to gain more trust towards the products they are buying. It is also very important that brands stimulate their customers' attention by involving them with the products – the "storytelling" strategy is the best way to achieve this.

The need for touch is very present in product categories like shoes. Consumers have the necessity of touching and felling the products before buying them and this is increased in products like shoes especially due to the size issue. Nevertheless, this matter can easily be overcome by a good return policy. Companies must have it very clearly explained in their websites so that the customers can be more secured about their purchases. Also, product returns can be seen as an opportunity for brands to enhance customer loyalty and build a stronger relationship.

Social e-shopping is an imperative strategy for digital brands. Almost every consumer is present in social networking sites and they are constantly being exposed to brands stimulus without even acknowledging it. They follow their favourite celebrities or bloggers online and unconsciously they are being highly influenced by them. On the companies' outlooks, this factor is directly connected with the recreational one. They need to stimulate the enjoyment side of online shopping in every stage of the shopping process and most times this starts in social media. This also helps companies to connect and build a stronger

relationship with their customers. So, companies must recognize the power of social media and have an active presence in the SNS's if they want to improve their customer relationship and eventually increase sales.

6.3 Limitations and future research

Similar to any other study, there are a number of research limitations that should be taken into consideration. First of all, on top of the factors selected, many others should be studied to provide a more complete framework of the factors that drive women consumers to shop shoes online. The author suggests that factors like price, privacy, risk, delivery time and cost, product returns, product quality and variety, among others, should be added to the model presented in this thesis (similar to the conceptual model developed by Raman's study, 2014). Secondly, the sample of the qualitative study is reduced and it should have been more diversified in terms of range of ages to provide a more accurate confirmation of the constructs analysed. Additionally, the empirical part of this study is restricted to a qualitative study with a non-random sample. Regarding the company's perspective, other managers should have been interviewed to give other points of view of the organization and its strategy. Furthermore, only one company's case is not enough to provide a generalization of the results obtained. Other companies should have been included in this study to give a more accurate overview of the suppliers' side. Another limitation was the difficulty to find articles related with the online shoe market, in order to better understand what implications this product characteristics has on the consumers' motivations to shop online and on the companies trying to sell them.

Future research should consider a quantitative approach based on the results of this study to further corroborate the findings and ensure its validity and credibility. The author suggests that the model synthesised should be

employed and that hypothesis should be developed in accordance with the constructs of the model.

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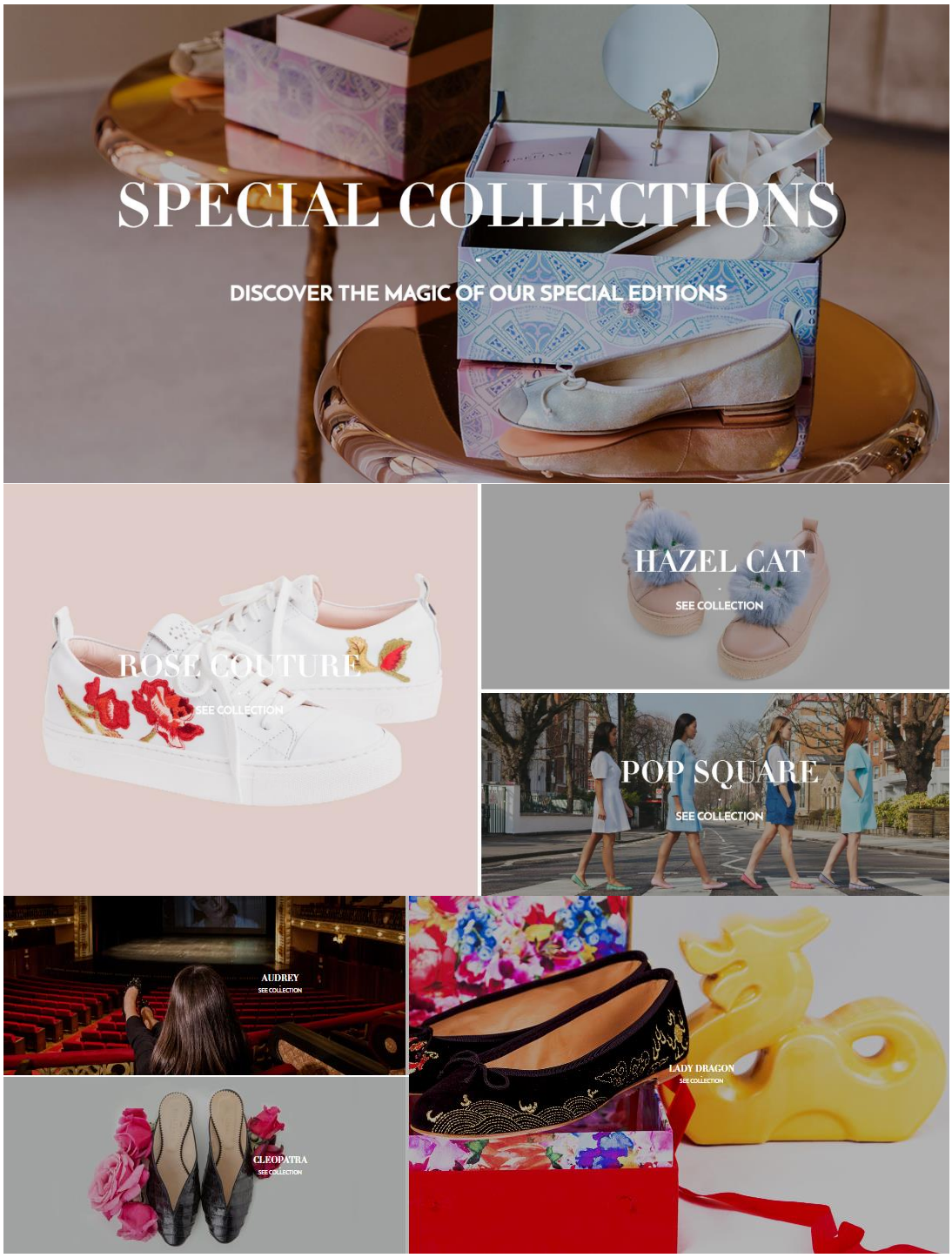
Appendix

Appendix 1 – Navigate through especial collections on Josefinas' website



Appendix 2 – Example of the "storyteling" behind a product (video of an authentic Portuguese women making the products by hand – it tells you who designed the product and who made it)

Appendix 3 – Customers' reviews and feedback ("I Bought A Pair Of Josefinas")

JOSEFINAS

PORTUGAL

I BOUGHT A PAIR OF JOSEFINAS

Oh! Stunning!!!!!

Rita Michaela - Lisbon

Beautiful. Without doubt, a must-have!

Teresa Chaves - Lisbon

Honestly, I have had the best experience with Josefinas already! It really has been the most incredible online shopping experience I've ever come across; you really make the customer feel special.

Nikita Le Messurier - Melbourne, Australia

My Dragon Lady Josefinas just arrived. They're beautiful and arrived in the most gorgeous box.

Luisa Matias - Cascais

Appendix 4 – Company's shipping policy explained in detail

JOSEFINAS
PORTUGAL

FREE SHIPPING +
EASY RETURNS USA
ORDERS ABOVE 190€

SHIPPING AND PREFERENCES

We deliver Josefinas all around the world with DHL! See all the shipping costs and methods below.

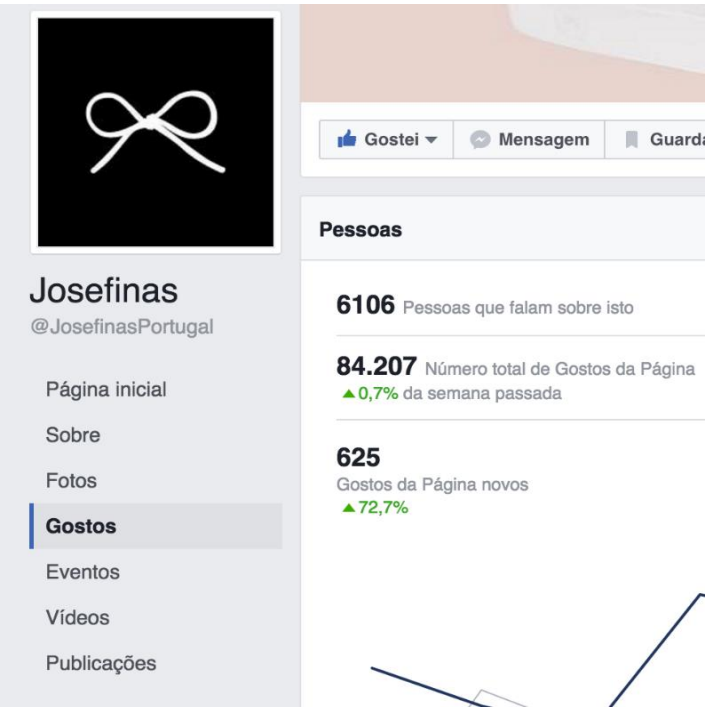
USA SHIPPING
On orders over 260€ - We offer FREE express shipping and you won't pay Import Duties & Taxes
Free express shipping - orders over 190€ (taxes due on delivery, paid to the carrier)
Normal shipping costs - 9€ plus taxes due on delivery, paid to the carrier

ALL EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES
Free express shipping - orders over 190€
Normal shipping costs - 9€

REST OF THE WORLD
Free express shipping - orders over 190€ (taxes due on delivery, paid to the carrier)
Normal shipping costs - 9€ plus taxes due on delivery, paid to the carrier

PORTUGAL
Free express shipping and exchanges/returns

Appendix 5 – SNS's: Facebook and Instagram (numbers of followers/likes - September 2016) and "Women Empowerment" statement



We believe that everything we do must have meaning.
We believe that by helping a woman, we're contributing to a better and more just world.
We believe that a handmade product has unparalleled magic.
We believe that life is an imperfect journey.
We believe that there is no dream that can't be realized.
We believe in the power of women.
We believe that no is never a final answer.
We believe that a more feminine world will be a happier world.
We believe in change, and in the power of change.
We believe that our customers are the best in the world.
We believe in a world where pink can be worn by everyone.
We believe in gratitude.
We believe in defending everything we believe in!

Appendix 6 – Fashion Bloggers and Public Figures endorsing the brand on Instagram: Chiara Ferragni – The Blonde Salad Blog (6,7M followers), Sara Sampaio (4,1M followers), Patricia Chang (90,2K followers) and Sonia Francex (59,7K followers) – September 2016

Appendix 8 - Semi-Structured Interview I

Female consumers that have done at least one online purchase of shoes

1. Name
2. Age
3. Profession
4. Nationality
5. Why did you decide to shop shoes online?
6. What were your main motivations?
7. What is, in your opinion, the main motivations that drive women (in general) to shop shoes online?

Appendix 9 - Semi-Structured Interview II

Maria Cunha – CEO at Josefinas Portugal and Digital Marketing Expert

1. Regarding the company's history, what can you tell me about: mission, date of creation, motivations to start the business, countries it sells for, number of customers acquired, etc ?
2. Why did you choose to start with an online-only strategy? And why a premium strategy?
3. Why did you decide to open the first physical store in New York (main motivations, why that location, etc)?
4. What are, in your opinion, the main motivations that drive women (in general) to shop shoes online?
5. In terms of convenience, what online strategies do you implement to motivate women to shop Josefinas shoes?
6. In terms of recreation, what online strategies do you implement to motivate women to shop Josefinas shoes?
7. Given the fact that shoes are a product with a high need for touch characteristic, what online strategies do you implement to overcame this possible setback for women that want shop Josefinas shoes?
8. In terms of social e-shopping, what are the main strategies pursued?
    a. In terms of Social Media Marketing (SNS's such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc)?
    b. In terms of Fashion Bloggers Influence?

Appendix 10 - Semi-Structured Interview III

António Paraíso - International and Luxury Marketing Consultant, part of the Josefinas Project as an external advisor

1. What are, in your opinion, the main motivations that drive women (in general) to shop shoes online?
2. In terms of convenience, what online strategies should companies pursue to motivate women to shop shoes? And in the case of Josefinas?
3. In terms of recreation, what online strategies should companies pursue to motivate women to shop shoes? And in the case of Josefinas?
4. Given the fact that shoes are a product with a high need for touch characteristic, what online strategies should companies pursue to motivate women to shop shoes? And in the case of Josefinas?
5. In terms of social e-shopping, what are the main strategies pursued?
    a. In terms of Social Media Marketing (SNS's such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc)?
    b. In terms of Fashion Bloggers Influence?