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MASTER THESIS

EVALUATION OF ONLINE SOURCE AND INFORMATION CREDIBILITY

- The Case of American Consumers of Luxury Furniture

Luxury furniture

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HARBOUR®
— 1976 —

ABSTRACT

Technological and cultural developments have resulted in consumers searching through large amounts of online data prior to purchasing goods and before engaging in interaction with brands. Based on research carried out by consumers at the prepurchase stage of the customer journey, modern consumers are now utilizing online sources, which are controlled not only by companies and professional gatekeeper but also other users. Consumers of luxury furniture does not deviate from this development, and within this industry social networking sites, reviews and blogs are among sources that help consumers make more sophisticated purchase decisions. Furthermore, both consumers and companies have evolved to become dependent on interacting with each other online.

Moreover, as households in the United States become wealthier, luxury furniture companies, such as Harbour Outdoor, with which I interned in the Spring of 2017, should communicate to a still broader audience. The mentioned internship paved the way for the selection of the case, luxury furniture consumers' online evaluation of information. Because of the ever-changing technological and cultural developments, Harbour Outdoor's marketing strategy, should be formed on the basis of insights into the consumers behavior at the prepurchase stage.

This master thesis therefore takes point of departure in credibility evaluation of information and sources, which arguably are vital aspects influencing consumer purchase decisions and attitudes towards companies and products. Thus, this thesis aims to develop an understanding of credibility evaluation of information and sources in the context of American consumers of luxury furniture to gain knowledge useful for the planning of Harbour Outdoor's future online marketing strategies.

By gaining insights from American luxury furniture consumers through the application of qualitative interviews, this research study focuses on analyzing findings and comparing them to theoretical samples related to credibility evaluation. As the purpose is to gain a deep and detailed understanding of the contexts, the research study adopts a Constructivist approach and emphasize subjectivity and relativism to a large extent. Moreover, in order for the analysis to true to the qualitative and comprehensive nature of the thesis, it applies Grounded theory as a method to deeply analyze the collected data.

Especially, the coding tool of Grounded theory proves to be a procedure capable of identifying categories derived from the data and revised based om comparisons of categories and the theoretical samples. The results of the analysis reveal a duality in the strategies applied by the consumers in the credibility evaluation of information, and this duality affects the overall

presentation of the results. A part of the consumers is likely to include multiple sources in the process of finding and evaluating information. In addition, these consumers tend to incorporate content controlled not only by companies and professional gatekeepers but also by other users. In a rather comprehensive and systematic way, this group of consumers social information pooling, as it is inferred that they appreciate the honesty that they believe other users convey, whereas companies and gatekeepers might be biased.

On the other hand, another group of consumers can be identified, for whom few memorized sources tend to be applied in the research process. These consumers utilize a rather heuristic approach appreciating enthusiast and opinion leader endorsement as, in some cases, the only aspect that is determining for the credibility assessment of luxury furniture related information. Moreover, based on the analysis, it can be argued that American Luxury luxury furniture consumers measures source credibility in ways that can be explained by using already existing theories on source credibility. However, the presented results in this thesis furthermore suggests a measuring of source credibility that are somewhat accustomed to the context in which this thesis operates.

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INTRODUCTION

Today consumers search through large amounts of data on the internet prior to purchasing goods and before they decide whether to engage in interaction with brands. (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017, p. 219). Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini (2017) states that the digital research involve searching for product information, recommendations and ratings posted on social networking sites and blogs, amongst others. Accordingly, the progress in the use of numerous and diverse sources of information is a result partly of digitalization and of consumers' and brands' need for interaction with each other. (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017, p. 220).

The online research carried out by the consumers results in them being able to make more intelligent purchase decisions, whether it be regarding a lounge chair or a dinner at a restaurant, to name some examples. The average consumer understands the value of his resources and is not interested in disappointments, and thereby, witness the downfalls of a non-researched product. (Jiménez, 2013, p. 226). Liberman (2015) points out that the luxury industry does not deviate from this development. (Liberman, 2015, p. 5).

Luxury furniture consumers are becoming more aware of fragmented online content and likely to utilize a variety of online sources in the research process. Liberman, amongst others, suggests that the development from a luxury company perspective calls for a thorough understanding of how consumers evaluate the information they find online. By analyzing the use of different sources of information and the use of evaluation strategies, researchers can arguably generate important knowledge for marketers to clarify which aspects of the evaluation potentially affect the consumers' attitudes and behavior. (Liberman, 2015, p. 5). (Wu & Lee, 2012, pp. 265-266)

Moreover, the demand for luxury goods has increased globally, as the average income rises and households become wealthier. In Jaz Fredirick's article "Consumers driving luxury ecommerce trends", he highlights that in the United States, for instance, the growth of wealthy households (defined by Frederick as an average income of $200,000 or more by eMarketer) has been steady, rising from 59 million in 2011 to over 68 million today. Taking this into account, over 23% of the nation's families are classified as fiscally affluent. (Frederick, 2015). Accordingly, these affluent households follow the mainstream trend of utilizing digital research to support product discovery. Approximately 74% of U.S. millionaires used the web for shopping last year. (Fredbchberick, 2015)

According to Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2013), in the luxury sector, consumers are likewise becoming more demanding, informed and sophisticated actors with still more intensified expectations of quality innovation and efficient ever-personalized customer service and environmental protection, among others. (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2013, p. 14). The online research on companies and products carried out by consumers, are according to Lemon and Verhoef (2016), taking place at the prepurchase stage of the consumers' customer journey. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Accordingly, online information is being evaluated at this stage, which involves the use of reviews, social networking, blogging and company websites as sources that potentially have an influence on the assessment of credibility of the information.

Several studies highlight the importance of credibility in information evaluation research. Wu & Lee (2012), for instance, suggest that this credibility evaluation of sources and information have an impact on the consumers' purchase decision. (Wu & Lee, 2012, pp. 265-266). The prepurchase stage and the credibility evaluation

are, in this thesis, considered highly interesting for investigation, since their importance recently have been recognized and since this arguably can provide valuable insights about consumption for a luxury furniture company, for instance. (Liberman, 2015)

The increasing importance of the concepts online ratings and online reviews have lately become recognized by many companies. (Jiménez, 2013). That is why businesses increased the quality of the online services provided for the consumers and began to control and be aware of streams of information coming from new platforms and created about consumers, among others. (Liberman, 2015). Consumers are increasingly utilizing opportunities for information collection through social network sites, blogs and review and rating sites. Through these sources the consumers create an opinion of a brand or a product. According to Petrescu & Korgaonkar (2011), it is beneficial to analyze how viral advertising works, the contexts in which it performs best and how it influences the formation of attitude towards brands and messages. (Petrescu & Korgaonkar, 2011, p. 210).

Social networking sites are examples of sources that have evolved to become key aspects of the consumers' search for information online prior to purchasing goods. (Li & Sun, 2014). As marketers and consumers become more and more involved with social media and other forms of online marketing, the consumers experience an overload of information in that they are presented to more data than they can handle. (Li & Sun, 2014). According to Kotler (2010), this have resulted in a situation where consumers somehow become immune towards marketing messages online, which causes marketers to put an effort in differentiating their strategies in their online communication. (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan., 2010).

A multitude of social networking sites are used by both marketers and users to create content that informs other consumers about products and companies. Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Twitter are examples of popular social networks sites, where comprehensive amount of information on products and companies can be found. (Li & Sun, 2014). Twitter, for instance, had 328 million active users In January 2017. (Statista, 2017).

In order for Luxury companies to become successful, they must conform to the fact that consumption processes are driven by comprehensive information flows of data in different formats and on different platforms. Furthermore, as mentioned, consumers are becoming wealthier, which means that company products potentially appeal to a broadened audience. Assumedly this suggests that companies should direct their online marketing to a still increasing audience. (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2013, p. 12)

Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie argue that it can be profitable to appeal to the masses, however, in doing so luxury good companies can also run the risk of overexposing themselves to populations and disturbing their narrative meaning of status for instance. (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2013, p. 12). Therefore, a sensitive balancing is required from the luxury companies, when they market their products to the defined but increasingly larger audience.

Thus, the luxury companies must adapt to the ever-changing economic dimension, and at the same time they should become accustomed to technological and cultural developments. For instance, today, it has become common that products appears in reviews and are displayed in one way or another by users or people working for companies such as online magazines. This means that the company cannot fully control this process. Both content that the company control and the content it does not control can potentially have a great impact on the consumers' behavior and attitudes towards a brand. (Liberman, 2015).

Liberman (2015) and Metzger (2014) suggest that source credibility and information credibility are good indicators that online marketing material generate a positive outcome. Moreover, more traditional research conducted by MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) cites credibility as an antecedent to attitude toward an ad or a message. (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Taking these theories into account, the importance credibility in marketing material

is established. Thereby, knowledge of the level of credibility that a consumer assign to specific messages or platforms is crucial in terms of understanding luxury consumers', among others, initial development an attitude towards a brand or products. When consumers search for online information on products and brands, they evaluate, whether the information is credible, and this is an essential touch point at the prepurchasestage. Thus, the credisbility evaluation of information are determining, when consumers decide if the product or brand is worth purchasing or creating a relationship with. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 421)

According to Liberman, several studies are related to the topic of credibility evaluation of consumers, but none of these, prior to her own study, are linked specifically to the luxury goods industry. (Liberman, 2015, p. 1). Therefore, the luxury furniture industry is an interesting area to investigate, as it would provide knowledge that potentially can be used by luxury furniture companies to get insights into the use of different platforms and the credibility assessment of the consumers.

By examining consumer insights on credibility evaluation, companies can get an understanding of how to provide credible information and increase their involvement with the brand. Liberman states that credible information and sources can intensify the purchase intention of consumers. (Liberman, 2015, p. 3). Liberman focus on comparing credibility of website marketing with blog marketing related to a variety of luxury good. This leaves a lack of knowledge related to the evaluation processes related to multiple sources of information done by consumers within the specific luxury industry of furniture. This thesis therefore focuses on the luxury furniture industry and the prepurchase stage of the customer journey, and more specifically, the credibility evaluation of information and online sources in general done by the consumers.

AN INTEREST IN THE AREA WAS ACQUIRED

The interest in consumers' evaluation of online information on brands and products is derived from my internship with the luxury furniture company, Harbour Outdoor. Here, the daily tasks were related to Public Relations and Marketing. This internship took place in Spring 2017 at Harbour Outdoor's head office in Manhattan, New York, where it both has a showroom open to clients and an office space. Besides Manhattan, the high-end furniture company operates internationally from its offices in Sydney, Los Angeles and Hong Kong.

I was delighted to become a part of the team, which all together managed tasks related to administration, logistics and marketing. During this stay, I acquired personal experience with the company's communication practises and thereby the use of online communication services to reach out to the audience. Furthermore, the tasks were related to the creation of marketing messages and the analysis of online traffic. It was during the process of creating marketing content that I wondered, how the consumers evaluated such marketing material. For instance, much of the daily work involved the company's online presence, where the activation of users on social networking sites were one of the top priorities of the marketing initiatives. This made me wonder if it was possible to gain knowledge about how consumers evaluate the online information sources and the content it contains.

Moreover, some of the daily duties were related to analyzing the effectiveness of the use social networking sites to reach out to consumers. The effectiveness represented the reach and interactions generated through these sources. Since increasingly more people interacted with the brand from week to week, made me wonder why the consumers appreciated the information on social networking sites, and how this source potentially could be used to make the consumers want to engage with the brand.

Also, I wondered what characterizes the information that was favored among the audience. I experienced how

the company makes a virtue of being differentiated and associated with exclusiveness, but I was still uncertain about how to write the information and which sources to use. Lastly, during this internship, I questioned the importance of reviews and ratings of products online, which I acknowledged was widely exposed on the internet.

These speculations formed the basis for initializing an investigation on the topic. In the following the problem statement of the thesis will be presented.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

On the basis of the wonderment outlined in the introduction regarding consumption of luxury furniture in a digital era, the following problem statement has been formed and will function as a guideline for this thesis:

Problem Statement: *How do American consumers of luxury furniture evaluate the credibility of online information and sources controlled by both companies and users? The purpose is to produce knowledge on the consumer behavior at the prepurchase stage of the customer journey that can be used as valuable insights in the planning of Harbour Outdoor's future online marketing strategies*

RESEARCH AIM

In this thesis, the aim is to investigate the initial phase of luxury furniture consumer's customer journey, namely the prepurchase stage. More precisely, the aim is to gain knowledge about the processes of information research and information credibility evaluation that takes place at this stage. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). (Wu & Lee, 2012, p. 265). This research study applies qualitative interviews as a method to collect data that can explain how consumers evaluate the credibility of online information and sources. Furthermore, a theoretical framework comprising of theories on source credibility and information credibility will be utilized as tools to analyze the interviews.

CONCEPT CLARIFICATIONS

In the following, the definitions of some basic concepts will be clarified. These are concepts that are used throughout the thesis, and therefore it is at this stage to explain what is meant, when the concepts are used.

Luxury furniture: According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary, the concept "luxury" originates from the word "luxus," and by definition it covers "extravagant living, opulence, or anything unneeded". Furthermore, it shares a root with the term "luxuria", which means extravagance, riot and so on. (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017, p. 3). This thesis adopts the definition of luxury that includes "anything that adds to pleasure or comfort, is not absolutely necessary, and is usually expensive". (Merriam-Webster, 2017). This definition has been used by Liberman (2015), among others, whose work and influence on this thesis will be explained on page 30 in the theoretical framework.

Content produced by **users**, **professional gatekeepers** and **companies**: This thesis utilizes the separation between online information produced by three existing parties.

    ①   User-generated content UGC): This thesis adopts Daugherty's (2008) definiton of user-generated content as refering to media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the Internet. (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008)

    ②   Professional gatekeeper content (PGC): In this thesis, this concept it used to refer to content that is produced by people, who work for third-party companies or organizations. Online magazines can be mentioned as an example of a professional gatekeeper. (Dou, Walden, Lee, & Lee, 2012).

    ③   Company content (CC): Lastly, this thesis makes use of the concept company content, which con stitutes representatives of companies and organizations who produce content for the purposes or promoting a product. (Dou, Walden, Lee, & Lee, 2012).

Online sources: The concept, online sources, in this thesis, refers to a broad understanding of the term including both a general idea of sources and a more specific one. What is meant by this is that a source can be social networking sites in general but also a specific person's Facebook site profile depending on the context it is being used. (Tech, n.d.)

Cues: In this thesis, a cue is used to describe that a specific feature of some information signals if the information is credible or not. A credibility cue, in this sense, could be that some content is consistent with information provided elsewhere, and this becomes a credibility cue. (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014, p. 74)

Heuristics: According to Metzger and Flanagin (2011), the concept heuristics can be used to explain the way internet users process the establishment of the credibility of information they encounter online. Accordingly, heuristics are knowledge that is stored in consumers' memories. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 416). More specifically, they argue that heuristics are guidelines of how to think and act regarding credibility evaluation. Moreover, this thesis adopts that understanding that "information seekers are likely to cope with the perceived costs of information search and overload by seeking strategies that minimize their cognitive effort and time, through the use of cognitive heuristics." (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 417)

COMPANY DESCRIPTION OF HARBOUR OUTDOOR

It has been decided that a company description would be appropriate here, as it is intended to present the reader of the context that paved the way for the creation of this thesis. Furthermore, to confirm the relevance, it must be established that Harbour Outdoor in fact are a luxury furniture company that continuously revise their online marketing strategy.

Harbour Outdoor is a young and growing United States-based furniture company, which is founded by the two brothers Nicholas and Harrison Condos in 2008. (www.Linkedin.com, 2017). The company started as a Sydney-based workshop in 1976, and today it offers over 30 high-end furniture collections, all of which includes a variety of high quality modern and classic design pieces. The products are differentiated in that they are

designed with an inspiration of Australian design, craftmanship and manufacturing techniques. Furthermore, they make a virtue of working with stainless steel, aluminum and teak tree, among others, to produce durable and unique products. According to the company, the materials are the backbone of their furniture, and are very much like their company: strong, sturdy, solid and reliable. (www.Linkedin.com, 2017)

The furniture is designed in New York and sold through their own retail locations in New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong and Sydney as well as through their website to the American, Asian and Australian markets. The majority of the collections are outdoor furniture, but their assortment also includes a great deal of indoor collections and accessories. (Harbour Outdoor, n.d.)

It appears from Harbour Outdoor's Linkedin profile that the business employs between 51 and 200 employees, which, according to international standards, classifies it as a medium-sized business. (www.Linkedin.com, 2017) (Merritt, n.d.). Besides selling their products to residents around the world, they also operate on the business to business market, where they offer furniture decoration solutions for hoteliers, resorts and corporate clients.

HARBOUR OUTDOOR'S ONLINE PRESENSE

On Harbour Outdoor's website, the company presents its history, collections, products as well as company news. Furthermore, the website includes an integrated blog system on the company website, which interested users can follow, and where it is possible to like and share the posts. It classifies as a blog, as blogs are easily updatable online journals that can combine global reach, links and multimedia and exchange of information. (Outdoor, Harbourlife, n.d., p. 194)

Furthermore, Harbour Outdoor has incorporated the use of several popular social networking sites to interact with consumers. On the company profiles on respectively Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, and Twitter, Harbour Outdoor posts updates about news, products and lifestyle on a weekly basis. (Outdoor, Harbour Outdoor Facebook Profile, 2017). On the social networking sites, the company is performing microblogging, which is a type of blogging in which messages are restricted to specific character counts. (Outdoor, Harbourlife, n.d., p. 199)

In general, the company incorporates a range of online sources communication systems, and also, to some extent, they actively contribute to interaction with other private and corporate profiles on social network sites. For instance, they interact with users and companies and like other users and companies' posts on Instagram. (Outdoor, Instagram Interaction, 2017).

THESIS STRUCTURE

As it appears from Figure one below, this thesis comprises six chapters, all of which purposes will be explained below the illustration. This is done both to introduce the reader to the structure, and also to make it easier for the author of the thesis to get an overview of the main components of the thesis as a whole.

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        │           INTRODUCTION              │
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        │           METHODOLOGY               │
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        │       THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK         │
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        │             ANALYSIS                │
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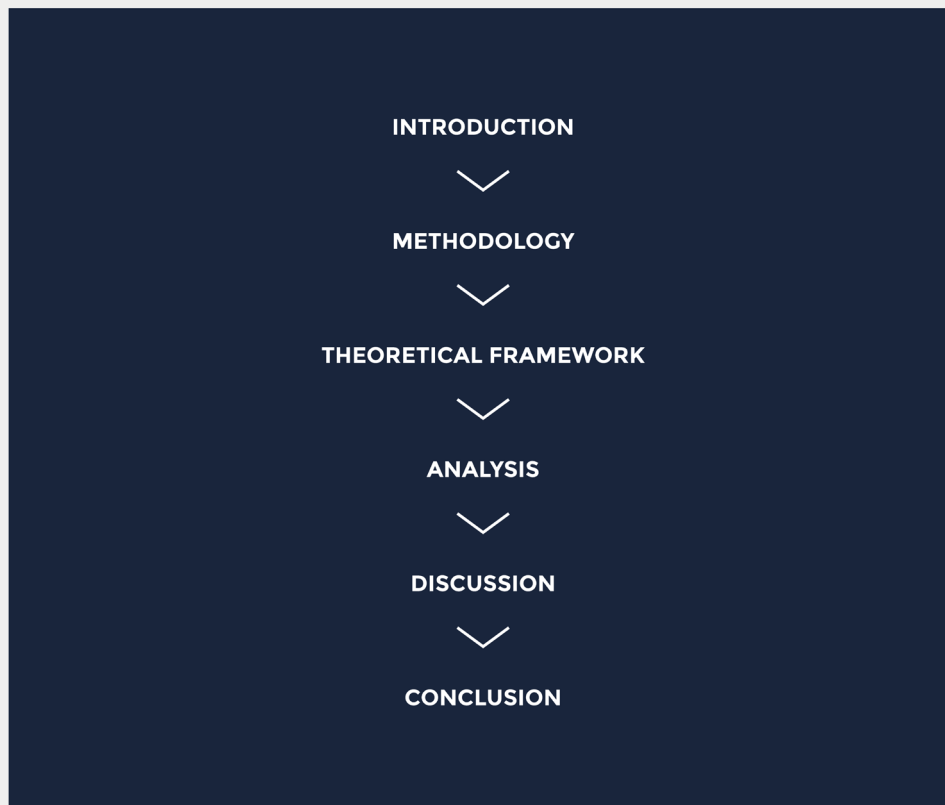
(Figure illustrating the thesis structure)

Chapter One – The introduction is initiated by a presentation of the area of interest of the study, which is done to narrow down the topic of the study. This involves a brief review of how the interest in the areas was acquired by the author. Then, the problem statement of the thesis is presented, which is followed by an explanation of the aim of the research study. Lastly, the introduction covers relevant concepts of the research study as well as a company description of Harbour Outdoor.

Chapter Two – Firstly, the methodology chapter covers the presentation of the scientific stance of this thesis, which is followed by an explanation of the research design and strategy of the research study. In addition, the purpose of this chapter is to outline the method that will be used to collect data and pointing out important ethical issues of the chosen methods. Lastly, the method of analysis is discussed and visualized in a model. For both the choice of method of data collection and the method of analysis, a critical review of its utility is carried out.

Chapter Three – The theoretical framework is initiated by a clarification of theoretical perspectives on the luxury industry today as well as an explanation of how the prepurchase stage of the customer jouney is in focus in this thesis. Furthermore, this chapter includes accounting for tools, which is utilized as potential theoretical explanations and guidelines for understanding the findings in the data. These theories are structured according to which areas of the data that it assumedly can explain.

Chapter Four – In the analysis chapter, the open coding constitutes the opening part, where specifc concepts are being identified in the data and discussed and compared. What follows this, is a categorization, where categories are identified based on the comparing of concepts and theoretical samples presented in the theoretical framework. In the axial and selective coding procedure the categories are revised based on discussion and comparison of prominent findings and presented in a structure that highlights patterns and understanding of the credibility evaluation of online information and sources.

Chapter Five - The discussion chapter aims to discuss the categories identified in the analysis chapter as well as the relationships between the categories. At this stage, core categories have been selected and this chapter can be classified as a presentation and discussion of the theories that are produced on the basis the data samples and the theoretical samples

Chaper Six – In the conclusion, the thesis' overall processes of knowledge production will be outlined. Even more importantly, the main findings of the research study will be narrowed down to the most promenent results as a means to answer the problem statement of the thesis.

METHODOLOGY

Before presenting the methods that will be applied to carry out the research, it is important to reflect over the overall scientific stance of the study that is the conceptual framework of the thesis. (Køppe, 2012, pp. 104-105). This is essential as it influences, why the thesis reach the conclusions it does. In other words, this study's conceptual framework, which Thomas Kuhn famously termed the 'paradigm', will now be explained, and also, it will be discussed how this influences this study. Kuhn developed this framework for natural science, but later the paradigm concept has been widely used within human and social sciences, which this study is related to. (Køppe, 2012, pp. 115-116). Thus, the overall paradigm will guide how the author views the social world, what can be characterized as knowledge and how to acquire this knowledge. (Køppe, 2012, p. 116). In this thesis, as mentioned, qualitative interviews are conducted to collect data on luxury furniture consumers' credibility evaluation of information and sources. Before it is possible to carry out the research study, it must be discussed how knowledge can be derived from the interviews, how expressions of the interviewees and the understanding of the author should be treated, and what can be characterized as being the truth about luxury furniture consumers' credibility evaluation of information.

In this thesis, the overall paradigm is constructivism, which, among others, emphasize that argumentation is central in the process of generating knowledge. (Guba E. G., 1990, p. 25). By contrast, the positivistic and post positivistic paradigms are concerned with a reality that is 'out there' independent of the human meaning of it. In this way, Positivism aims to control and predict knowledge, so that no matter who investigates an area, the findings will ultimately be the same. (Guba E. G., 1990, pp. 19-20). Constructivism, on the other hand, demonstrates how constructions of individual authors and their mind set contribute to the creation of knowledge, and therefore, findings of inquiries are therefore ever changing. Thus, Constructivism varies from Positivism, as it emphasize that inquiries are somehow value laden, because they are based on different theories and individual beliefs. In the following, it is explained how ontology, epistemology and methodology together constitutes the Constructivist paradigm and how these stances influence the research study.

ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

According to Guba, an author's 'ontological' stance is defined by being how one views the nature of the 'the knowable' or views the nature of 'reality'. (Guba E. G., 1990). This means, that to reflect on the ontological stance is to discuss whether one views the world as having multiple realities or not, and furthermore, what characterizes this reality. In constructivism, the truth is found in individuals' meaning systems and beliefs, and thereby 'relativism' is the ontological stance in constructivism and in this thesis. (Guba E. G., 1990, p. 26). This means that mental constructions of the luxury furniture consumers, for instance, are parts of the reality that the study aims to shed a light on. Furthermore, the mental constructions of the author of the thesis are parts of "the knowable", and different people's meanings cannot be said to be more or less true than others'. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this thesis, all expressions of luxury furniture consumers, theorists and the author are perceived to hold a part of reality and is potentially valid for investigation.

Now that it is determined what knowledge is, it is vital to reflect on how an author, for instance, "know" some-

thing, and as it is about to be demonstrated, this has been widely discussed, even within the paradigm of constructivism. In terms of 'epistemology', Guba defines this as the author's view of the nature of the relationship between 'the knower' and the 'knowable'. (Guba E. G., 1990). According to Gadamer, whose thoughts has been incorporated in this thesis, "the act of knowing entails that being is revealed". This means that the reality is being revealed through mental constructions and conversations among individuals, for instance. (Outhwaite W. , 1985). As mentioned, in the context of this research study, there are multiple realities that is depended on human revealing it through linguistics. (Hekman, 1983, p. 212). In this sense, Gadamer's epistemological stance is related to "subjectivity", as he explains that humans are knowing when they consider "subjective" constructions of individuals and among individuals. This thesis adopts subjectivity as the epistemological stance, which means that, in order to understand credibility evaluation of information and sources performed by consumers, the focus must be on mental constructions and conversations with the consumers must be revealed.

Gadamer's view is contrasted by former Constructivists' such as Dilthey, for whom objectivity was more apparent in the relationship between the knowable and the knower. (Køppe, 2012, p. 144). He argued that a sensuous world has been objectified between individuals that controls every act and saying. Gadamer and Giddens are among 'Hermeneutic' constructivist philosophers, who have criticized this view, and Gadamer argue that language, for instance, guide conversations, but these conversations are depended on the horizons of individuals. This view is adopted in the research study by emphasizing that world views, acts and sayings differ because of the difference in individuals' horizon. (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 29). Individuals do not have to "get access" to the social reality, since they are already a part of it as human beings. (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 29). For Gadamer and for this thesis, it is impossible, in an objective or value-free way, to formulate the practices and beliefs of others. The understanding is made up partly from the personal belief of the author of the thesis and the practices and beliefs of the consumers in a fusion. (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 29).

Now that the ontological and epistemological stances are outlined, the last constituent of the holistic constructivist paradigm will be explained, namely the 'methodology' of the research. (Guba E. G., 1990). Methodology, according to Guba, is concerned with 'how' the researcher will obtain knowledge and has to do with the approach of how to understand the reality in the context of the prepurchase stage of luxury furniture consumption. The approach adopted in this thesis should provide a framework that can support the aim of analyzing and understanding constructions done by the consumers in focus providing insights about their credibility evaluation of information. The understanding of the social phenomenon in focus, can be obtained by approaching the research by using Hermeneutics as an overall methodological stance.

HERMENEUTICS

The Hermeneutic view adopted in this thesis implies interpreting something that has meaning. In that sense, consumption processes as a human activity is perceived to have meaning, and is done by humans with meaning and who want something. (Køppe, 2012, p. 140). This means that all actions taken by individuals are intentional and pave the way for aiming at understanding this. Hermeneutics are a suitable overall methodology for this thesis, as it is possible to interpret meanings behind actions, and based on this explain how American consumers of luxury furniture evaluate the credibility of online information and sources related to luxury furniture.

Hans-Georg Gadamer is recognized as a highly influential grand theorist, whose thoughts both can be utilized as a guide to understand the social world and as a guide to actively encounter and reconstruct the social world. (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 23). Gadamer embraces the conceptualization that Hermeneutics can be used

to "understanding and unfamiliar text or way of life as a holistic process, operating within a Hermeneutic circle in which we move back and forth between specific parts of the 'text' and our conception of it as a totality". (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 23)

In this way, small parts of the consumers meanings and beliefs are being studied in this thesis, and the obtained knowledge from this procedure contribute to a new overall understanding of the total picture of how consumers evaluate online information. This process, which in principle is infinite, is called the Hermeneutic circle. (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 23). It is practically infinite in the sense that new parts are included and are affecting the overall picture also before and after the research study is carried out. Moreover, the interpretation process is of a dual nature. In addition, the Hermeneutic approach of this thesis reflects moving back and forth between contexts relevant to the study. For instance, firstly, an individual action done by a person has a meaning that is related to the specific action's concrete purpose and secondly, it has a meaning that is related to the established or to the context it appears in. (Køppe, 2012, p. 145).

Bryman adds that the dialectic interaction between the smaller parts and the whole makes it possible to reveal the true meaning of behavior within a context such as luxury furniture consumption. The Hermeneutic circle is illustrated in the figure below and is inspired by Målqvist (2015). It exemplifies how experiences of consumers' credibility evaluation are elaborated as parts and whole by integrating different contexts.

The Hermeneutic Circle

Experience → WHOLE

Integration

Contextualization

PARTS

← Experience
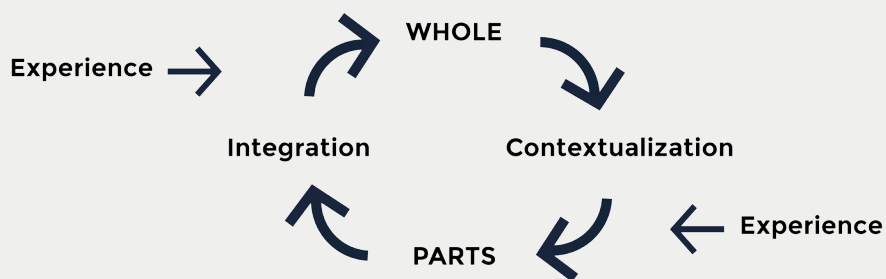
(Målqvist, 2015)

However, it is important to point out that it does not explain the concrete method of data collection and method of analyzing. These are explained on page 13 and 17 in this chapter. Instead, the Hermeneutics can support the understanding of how to generate knowledge by including participant meanings and own understanding. (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 24). This view, Outhwaite (1985) argues, is shared by Gadamer and by philosopher Dilthey, who pointed out that "A person expressing himself and the person who understands him are connected by something they have in common; the individual always experiences, thinks, acts and also understands in this common sphere" (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 24). Moreover, Gadamer points out that prejudices are not obstacles to knowledge so much as a condition of knowledge, since they up the fundamental structure of our relationship with our historical tradition. (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 26). This point has been adopted in this thesis, and thereby a theoretical understanding can be used as a baseline for knowledge production.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGY

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The research strategy of this thesis is qualitative in that the reasoning is based on thorough analyses of specific meanings expressed and explained by consumers of luxury furniture. According to Bryman qualitative research is concerned with the conduction of in-depth research that cannot be generalized to whole populations, but instead is useful, when researchers want to uncover detailed insights in patterns of meaning and behavior among a limited number of people (Bryman, 2012, 380) (Guba, 1990). In contrast, Quantitative research most often deal with numbers and statistics, and do so to make generalizations based on that. According to Bryman the quantitative strategy can be argued to lack detailed understanding, and therefore, qualitative strategy has been chosen to frame this thesis, as it aims to explain in detail how consumers evaluate information. (Bryman, 2012, 380)

CASE STUDY DESIGN

A specific research design is considered suitable for this research, namely the case study research. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), the case study design aids in-depth exploration and insight into the research phenomenon, which in this thesis is the credibility evaluation of consumers of luxury furniture in New York. (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 66). The case study is qualitative, as it emphasizes depth in the data and the findings. In the context of this research study, the depth of the findings is obtained by conducting a detailed investigation of meanings of selected consumers as well as an interpretation of these. Flyvbjerg's definition of a case study design is similar to Richie & Lewis's, and he explains that case studies revolve around the examination of an example of a class of phenomena. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 220). In the context of this thesis, the example is the focus on luxury furniture consumers in New York. Moreover, the phenomenon is credibility evaluation at the prepurchase stage of the costumer journey. According to Flyvbjerg, case studies reveal context-based knowledge, which he argues is an important fundament to meaningfully understand human behavior. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 223)

The context specific case is furthermore examined by including multiple perspectives, because several consumers with different accounts are participating in the study. Each consumer has different preconceptions in that they assumedly have different perspectives of how important online marketing is, have different ages, interests and views of what characterizes credible information.

However, besides the perspectives distinguishes from each other. They are also consistent. This is the case, as all perspectives have had experiences with examining online information regarding luxury furniture at the prepurchase stage. These differences and similarities pave the way for a comparison of the different perspectives to take place in the analysis of the data. (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 67)

By interpreting and comparing the findings in the data, it is possible, according to Thomas Kuhn (1987), to make generalizations, when a case study such as this research study is carried out. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, pp. 226-227). Flyvbjerg distinguish between formal generalizations and softer theoretical generalizations. Formal generalizations are arguably likely to conclude in numbers and in a broader sense, which this thesis is not concerned with. The value of the scientific knowledge gained in this thesis, is based softer generalizations, where the results can be theoretically generalized to ways consumers of luxury furniture evaluate information at the prepurchase stage of the customer journey. Hereby, the theories that are produced based on the data of this

thesis can enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in luxury furniture consumption in the United States. Here, it is important to note that the generalization can only be done within consumption of luxury furniture, and not within consumption of other goods, for instance. This limitation is important to keep in mind later in the analysis, when theories are identified and their utility is explained.

The case of focusing specifically on luxury furniture consumption in the United States have been selected based on an acquired interest in the area derived from the internship with the marketing department of Harbour Outdoor. Furthermore, the focus on credibility evaluation of online information and multiple online sources is derived from the daily tasks related to communication on a multitude of platforms. However, the idea of focusing on different sources is also grounded in theoretical understanding developed during the time of the Internship. An example is Liberman's (2015) theories, which are explained on page 30 in the theoretical framework, proposing that consumers and marketers within the luxury industry often use multiple sources to find and provide information. In this sense, the selection of case is stratified, because it have been chosen to generalize for a specifically selected consumer group, namely American luxury furniture consumers.

Furthermore, It can be argued that the selection of the samples in this thesis' case is stratified, because it is emphasized to ensure consumers' representation in the population. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). As it will be further explained on page 14 regarding the data collection, the stratified samples are ensured by asking participating consumers to confirm their experience in the subject. Moreover, the stratified approach reflects the research study in that an emphasis is put on identifying each sample as unique, and therefore, in the analysis, they are referred to in specific numbers.

CRITICAL VIEW ON THE CASE STUDY

In a critical respect, it would be obvious to question, whether a research study is biased, which authors such as Diamond (1996) have criticized case study designs for being. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 234). Diamond criticized the design for being likely to confirm researchers' pre-conceived notions. However, Campbell (1975) and Flyvbjerg (1998) are researchers out of many, who have reported that their pre-conceived conceptualizations were falsified, and that these had to be revised based on the empirical findings. Campbell explains that the case study is rigorous, which makes its mark on the research being able to "close in on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 235). This is also the case in this study, since the proximity between the researcher and the consumers of luxury furniture involves opportunities for both parts to make specifications about practices and control the outcome of the study to a relatively large degree.

METHOD

The selection of the method used to collect data has been done based on which method assumedly would cover a deep qualitative understanding of American consumers credibility evaluation of online information and sources. Semi-structured interviews proved to be a method with such a capability, as it is being explained in the following.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The data collection will be conducted by interviewing consumers of luxury furniture on the United states

market, which currently is Harbour Outdoor's biggest market. According to Steiner Kvale, "through conversations we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings and hopes and the world they live in". (Kvale, Doing Interviews, 2011, p. 2). Since the actual purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the world consumers of luxury furniture live in, interviewing them is a suitable method to collect the data. In this way, their subjective views and attitudes are told in the consumers' own words, and is also derived from the interaction with the interviewer, where the preunderstanding supports the generation of knowledge. This is in line with Gadamer's Hermeneutic orientation, where small parts, such as specific answers of the consumers, are being interpreted and understood. (Outhwaite W. , 1985, p. 24).

Qualitative interviews have been chosen over questionnaires. This is partly because interviews pave the way for a deeper explanation of complicated opinions of the consumers being revealed, which matches the qualitative nature of this thesis and its aim to gain in-depth understanding of the area in focus. Furthermore, interviews have been favored based on the circumstance that I was interning with Harbour Outdoor, which is located in Manhattan, New York, close to huge exclusive furniture stores and showrooms, and close to the many consumers of luxury furniture.

The interviews in this thesis qualify as semi-structured interviews, which basically means that the questions for the interview are prepared to some degree, but at the same time, there is freedom for the interviewee to control the direction of the conversation. Kvale explains that "when spontaneous stories appear during a common semi-structured interview, the interviewer can encourage the subjects to let their stories unfold, and also assist the subjects to structure their stories". (Kvale, Interview Variations, 2011, p. 9). This reflects the approach of this research study and is important because it is of interest to let the interviewees choose what topics they feel are relevant when discussing online information search and evaluation of information on products and companies. A more structured interview will assumedly result in the findings being biased, as the interview would unfold without the interviewee revealing what he or she finds essential in relation to credibility evaluation. It is argued that the interview in this thesis is unbiased, as interviewees are allowed to control the conversation and furthermore, because space is given to the interviewee to elaborate on answers.

In the sampling process, which involves the selection of interviewees some specific criteria were used in order to ensure that the relevance of the data is maximized. These criteria have partly been defined based on insights gained by examining relevant literature, such as Liberman (2015), who is one of several authors that have investigated consumers' credibility evaluation of online information. Moreover, the following criteria are defined to match the stratified sampling and to avoid initiating an interview, which turns out not to provide data directly related to the specifications of this thesis.

Criteria 1) The interviewee had to confirm that he or she has used the internet to search for information on companies and products prior to a luxury furniture purchase. Here, it is important to note that the interviewee is presented with the following definition of luxury: "Anything that adds pleasure or comfort to your life, is not absolutely necessary, and is usually expensive". (Liberman, 2015, p. 13).

Criteria 2) The interviewee should proclaim him or herself to have interest and opportunity of buying a furniture piece that falls under the definition of luxury in the former criteria.

Criteria 3) The interviewees should live in America, since this is the market that this research study revolves around.

Besides making sure that the interviewees matched the above criteria, the strategy for selection of samples classifies as a random selection. It is random, as it has been prioritized to avoid bias and to be able to generalize the findings to some extent to American consumers of luxury furniture and to avoid getting results that

reflects specially selected cases. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230).

During the internship at Harbour Outdoor, I worked closely together with the team of 7 employees, and this network helped me find people that matched the criteria outlined in the above passage. Despite this, I came to know an 8-floor furniture store called ABC Carpet and Home, which functions as a retailer of furniture and accessories from over 100 exclusive brands. (www.abchome.com, n.d.). I visited ABC Home and Carpet in Manhattan several times and noted that they had many customers who spent a long time browsing through the exhibitions. Therefore, it was obvious to me to get in contact with consumers suitable for interviewing. However, in order to find out whether I would run into ethical complications, I asked the manager of the building, if it was ok that I interviewed people in the store, and unfortunately, they could not let me do that, as they pointed out the it could interrupt the customers in the process of browsing. Therefore, the interviews were carried out partly outside the ABC Carpet and Home building, where it was possible to get in contact with the consumers, and partly in Harbour Outdoor's showroom.

Seven interviews were conducted with an average duration of 11.7 minutes and which span from 7.30 to 23.07 minutes. In the process of interviewing, I kept asking question and listening to the answers both as long as I felt that the interviewee wanted to state his or her points and as long as there were relevant areas that should be covered. In the meantime, in principle, there is an issue related to determining, when you got it all covered, as the Hermeneutical circle is a never-ending process, where new insights always will result in an even more detailed understanding. (Højberg, 2004, p. 312). Those of the interviews that were carried out outside the ABC Carpet and Home building was in general a little shorter in duration, assumedly because the quite populous setting made it harder for the interviewee and the interviewer to stay focused. Furthermore, in this setting, the interviews were not scheduled, which meant that some of the interviewees had plans and therefore, the duration of the interviews were somewhat restricted.

The interviews conducted at the quiet showroom, on the other hand, was in general a little easier to carry out, because of the calm setting and because the interviewees had taken time of to sit down and talk. (Kvale, Doing Interviews, 2011).

It was decided that the interviews should be done face-to-face, as this provides circumstances, where the interviewee potentially feel more comfortable, as it is possible to establish close contact. (Kvale, Transcribing Interviews, 2011, p. 3). When the interviewer and the interviewee do not know each other personally, a face-to-face conversation is preferred, as it is possible to interact with body-language and facial expressions besides using the language. The conversations were recorded using my cellphone as a digital voice recorder, as it is impossible to remember in detail what are being said during an interview. Furthermore, it offers a unique opportunity for the interviewer to concentrate on the topic of the conversation and the dynamics of the interview without having to take notes. (Kvale, Transcribing Interviews, 2011, p. 3). Then the researcher can return and re-listen to specific parts again and again and analyze pauses and the tone of voice, for instance, which contribute to the meaning expressed.

Kvale points out that "the main role of the interviewer is to remain a listener, abstaining from interruptions, occasionally posing questions for clarification, and assisting the interviewee in continuing to tell his story." (Kvale, Interview Variations, 2011, p. 9). These were the exact challenges I faced, when I was interviewing, and therefore, I teamed up with my girlfriend, who assisted me in the process of making sure everything was recorded, assisting the interviewee in continuing the story and making sure that relevant topics were covered.

INTERVIEW GUIDE AND INTERVIEW NOTES

On the basis of especially research done by Liberman (2015) and Metzger and Flanagin (2013) regarding credibility evaluation of information and source, an interview guide was prepared and used as a script to conduct the interviews. (Appendix 1, page 63). These studies are, as mentioned, examined in the theoretical framework from page 24. As mentioned, the interviews did not necessarily follow the interview guide in a strict way to avoid the investigation to be biased. Therefore, a lot of effort was put in preparing how to deal with different scenarios of directions the conversations could go in. Even though the script was not strict, there was quite many questions that was crucial to clarify, and therefore it was necessary to get back on track in several cases during the process of interviewing. Such a framework furthermore made it possible to cover some of the same areas in the different interviews and get data that could be compared. (Knox & Burkard, 2009)

In this interview guide and in the interview in general, luxury furniture consumption was, of cause, the overall topic, as the interviewees are luxury furniture consumers and are asked about their online research on luxury furniture companies and products at the prepurchase stage. Furthermore, online research related to this area and evaluation processes are main topics in the interview guide.

Source credibility and information credibility are important terms in the interview guide and the interviews as well. This is based on a theoretical pre-understanding developed based mainly on Metzger and Flanagin and Liberman. In the interview guide, however, they are included indirectly in that the questions are related to the evaluation of different sources and information and are asked to explain how the evaluation process has to do with trustworthiness, if this is the case.

In the theoretical framework, it is explained how trustworthiness is understood as a constituent to credibility, which allows trustworthiness to describe credibility. Credibility is a more complex and academic term, which may require thorough explanation for researcher and interviewees to agree on a clear understanding. The closely related concept, trustworthiness, is one of other terms to cover credibility in interviews, as Kvale suggests an interview guide to devoid of academic and complex language. (Kvale, Conducting Interviews, 2011, p. 9). Thus, trustworthiness is a widely discussed term throughout the interviews.

THE INTERVIEW NOTES

As mentioned, the data collection comprises 7 interviews, which have been transcribed and comprise 22,5 standard pages of text in total. All of the text in the transcripts is analyzed in this thesis, but because of the relatively large amount of text, the attached notes from the transcripts have been narrowed down to passages of significant importance and is to be found in Appendix Two to Nine. (Appendix 2-9, page 64). There will be accounted for the process of transcribing the interviews in analysis section of this thesis on page 36.

CRITICISM AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO THE DATA COLLECTION

Kvale (2007) argues that ethical questions can arise, when interviewees are asked to explain specific areas of their private lives. (Kvale, Ethical Issues of Interviewing, p. 3). Therefore, on the advisement of Kvale, an ethical protocol, has been formed. More specifically, a preunderstanding of common ethical issues related to the research study have been developed, and these are outlined in the following.

Different ethical issues are taken into account in the application of interviews, and one area, where it has been decided to make adjustments in the interview guide because of ethical issues, is the incorporation of

the interviewee criteria. Here, as mentioned, one of the criteria is concerned with the interviewee having the interest and opportunity to buy luxury furniture in the furniture. Originally, the intention was to ask the interviewee's, whether they have the resources necessary to purchase luxury furniture in the future and use the internet to do research, in this regard. However, this question has not been included in the interview guide, as it could potentially be a sensitive area to talk about, as it is related to the financial circumstances of the interviewee. It has been excluded on the basis of Kvale's statement that the interviewer should conform with the demand of ethical sensitivity, which is required to avoid implications. (Kvale, Ethical Issues of Interviewing, p. 8)

Another ethical matter occurred in the process of transcribing the interviews, where the accuracy of the transcribed version of the interview were questioned. In the process of transcribing, a specific emphasis has been put on being loyal to oral statements of the interviewee to avoid ethical issues. (Kvale, Ethical Issues of Interviewing, p. 3). Therefore, the process of transcribing is carried out by listening and adjusting based on details and pauses that are being highlighted with dots. The use of digital programs to transcribing proved to be unsatisfying, as the content was highly misinterpreted and as details and pauses was not conveyed. As mentioned, the scientific stances of this thesis are focused around subjective views of the luxury furniture consumers, where small parts should be analyzed and included in the overall understanding. Therefore, it has been prioritized to include as many precise details from the interviews as possible.

Furthermore, in order to avoid ethical implications, the interviewee was introduced to the purpose and the procedure of the research study, to secure that all parts agrees on the conditions and publication of the thesis. Since the topic of the interview is not considered to be a controversial one, more information on confidentiality and access to the study has not been presented to the interviewee. (Kvale, Ethical Issues of Interviewing, p. 6)

In addition, during the process of conducting interviews, it was experienced that the setting, in which the interviewing took place, preferably should be in a context, where both the interviewer and the interviewee were not disturbed by noisy and hectic surroundings. Therefore, after conducting three of the interviews at the location of the design center ABC Carpet and Home, an alternative approach was needed. The contacts and facilities, which the internship host provided, made it possible to conduct the rest of the interviews in more calm and quiet settings.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Alan Bryman (2012) states that one of the main difficulties with qualitative research is grasping the large amounts of complex data that usually is the outcome of doing detailed interviews. (Bryman, 2015, p. 565). The data of this thesis is rich because of explanations expressed, however, it has proved hard to find analytical paths through that richness. Bryman points out that it is crucial to guard against not being able to carry out a 'true' analysis. In terms of the procedure of analyzing qualitative data in general, there is a lack of clear rules of how to carry it out. In opposition to this, quantitative analysis are practices have more clear and well-established rules to incorporate. However, a few guidelines are being explained in Bryman's book "Social Research Methods". In the following, these guidelines will be discussed, and it will be disclosed, how this thesis makes use of specific guidelines in the analysis. (Bryman, 2015, p. 565).

GROUNDED THEORY

Firstly, according to Bryman, one should assess, what overall strategy of analysis is the appropriate choice for the specific investigation. (Bryman, 2015, p. 566). He distinguishes between two main strategies related to analyzing qualitative data, namely Grounded theory and induction, which both can be seen as frameworks that should guide an analysis of data. This thesis adopts one of these, namely the strategy called Grounded theory as a framework for analyzing the interviews. Grounded theory is stated by Bryman to be by far the most used framework used in qualitative studies. (Bryman, 2015, p. 567). Grounded theory is not necessarily a straight forward matter though. Accordingly, one of the main discussions related to Grounded theory was initiated by Glaser and Strauss in 1992, and today the Straussian approach have gained more support than Glaser's. Glaser's work is not as much concerned will the development of concepts as for the case of Strauss, who emphasize that concepts derives from data. (Bryman, 2015, p. 658). This thesis focuses on the Straussian approach.

Bryman argues that grounded theory can be argued to be induction, however, deviates from induction in that it revolves around specific complex procedures, whereas induction is more of a straight forward term, where theories are simply being derived from data. Grounded theory, in the context of this thesis, is considered a strategy useful to divide the analysis approach into different phases, as it will be explained in this section.

However, before explaining the procedures of Grounded theory, it is important to note that this thesis emphasize subjectivity over objectivity. This is important as the original Straussian approach to some extent is objective in that, in some cases, it suggests a world existing independent on human action. (Bryman, 2015, p. 575). In this thesis, as mentioned, subjectivity is important, because it is in the interaction between the researcher and the consumers, where theory is being developed. Therefore, in that sense, the Grounded theory is a revised version of the Straussian, even though the central terms of the Grounded theory in this thesis is in line with Strauss' work. (Bryman, 2015, p. 575).

Grounded theory is related to this thesis' overall methodology Hermeneutics, as it implies procedures where specific small parts of the transcribed interviews are being analyzed and included in the whole understanding.

Grounded theory is based on tools and the outcomes of using these tools, and is related to the methodological hermeneutical approach and the qualitative approach. It is so, because aspects related to subjective meaning are being included in order to shape a new whole, a new theory. (Bryman, 2015, p. 575).

The tools in Grounded theory includes theoretical sampling, which implies selecting concepts and research participants based on theoretical insights. (Bryman, 2015, p. 568). The choice of interviewees, which has already been explained, falls under the category of theoretical sampling. Also, the theoretical concepts of this thesis are results of the theoretical sampling, and these are thoroughly explained in the theoretical framework on page 24.

Furthermore, Grounded theory tools includes coding, which involves different coding procedures that are central to both the execution of the analysis and the presentation of findings in this thesis. Coding basically means labelling specific parts of the transcribed interviews, and the outcomes of this procedure is to be found throughout the analysis chapter of this thesis. The process of coding, at the same time, reflects the Hermeneutic approach, where the author of the theses interprets and labels parts of significant importance in the transcribed interviews, which affects the overall understanding. Different types of coding will be further explained after this outlining of the tools and outcomes in Grounded theory.

The next tool, which like the others also is a procedure, is referred by Bryman to as the theoretical saturation, which implies continuously looking for emerging concepts and categories in the data - both concepts and cat-

egories already described in the theoretical framework but also new concepts that are derived from the data. (Bryman, 2015, p. 568).

The last tool of Grounded theory involves constant comparison and is stated by both Strauss and Glaser to be a crucial part of the analysis. In the context of this thesis, this procedure is carried out by explicitly connecting the data with the concepts identified throughout the coding process. In this way, Bryman argues, the correspondence between concepts and categories with their indicators is not lost, and a comparison of the phenomena being coded can take place. (Bryman, 2015, p. 568)

Besides the use of tools, Grounded theory is concerned with formulating outcomes of the analysis. (Bryman, 2015, p. 570). In this thesis, as mentioned, different phenomena are being labelled, and thereby, theories are being developed by systemizing concepts. According to Bryman concepts are one of five outcomes, which are products of actions in Grounded theory. (Bryman, 2015, p. 570). Other outcomes, which are being revealed in the analysis, are the so-called categories. These categories are based on the concepts and are elaborated in correlation with the findings in the data. Furthermore, these categories are explained through properties that are aspects of the category. Even more importantly, theories are being developed based on categories that are related to each other through explanation of their relationship. (Bryman, 2015, p. 570). These theories are developed to answer the problem statement: How do American consumers of luxury furniture evaluate the credibility of online information and sources related to luxury furniture? – The theories are explaining different social phenomena that constitutes the problem statement.

Moreover, the outcomes of the analysis draw on the process of coding the data, which Charmaz (1986) points out implies the labelling of specific component parts and in general to separate, compile and organize the data. (Bryman, 2015, p. 569). This is the purpose of the coding in the context of this thesis, where the researcher with an open mind look for salient elements in the conversations between the researcher and the interviewees. Here, a significant emphasis is put on the analysis being in a constant state of potential revision in order to letting the empirical data being in focus in the production of theories. For instance, in some cases in the analysis in this thesis, indicators are find that specific theories from the theoretical framework are verified, and in other cases, codes reveal that new theories are evident in the data. An important aspect of the coding process in this thesis is Strauss' (1990) division between three types of coding practice, which are all used in the analysis of data. These processes are respectively open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

In the process of doing open coding of the transcribed interviews, the texts will be examined in a way, where specific sayings are being compared and conceptualized in preparation to a categorization. The process follows Strauss' suggestion that parts of the transcribed data belongs to, represents or is an example of a general "phenomena" (Strauss). In the context of information evaluation, an open approach is taken, because all aspects are considered and conceptualized. (Bryman, 2015, p. 569).

After the open coding, categories formed on the basis of the identified concepts and the theoretical framework of this thesis. These categories are then the groundwork in the axial coding, which involves making connections between the categories from the first phase of the coding. (Strauss Corbin 1990 in Dey 1999, 97)

More specifically, in the context of this thesis, if "expertise" turns out to be a category in the search for an understanding of what touch points the users exercise, when evaluating information. Categories interpreted from the data will then be linked to different contexts, consequences or patterns of interaction to further investigate it. "expertise" in credibility assessment could then be a potential category, if so, the aim is to view the category in the context of user-generated content or company websites, to clarify, how this category is used, and this might end up with a new category being identified. (Bryman, 2015, p. 569). In correlation with the Hermeneutic circle, the transcript can then be examined again, by detecting, how the new category can be utilized.

The third process of coding is called the selective coding, which in this thesis involves the selection of salient categories, which together comprises the core meanings expressed by the consumers. (Strauss corbin, 1998, 237). These core categories are related to the other categories, and in the process of analyzing, the validation of the relationship will be explained. According to Strauss, these core categories can be seen as the overall storylines of the analyzed texts, and should be a broken-down expression that covers a set of meanings expressed. (Bryman, 2015, p. 569).

In the following figure, the framework for analysis is presented. Firstly, the theoretical samples are presented, followed by the illustration of specific identified categories in the data by applying open coding. Then, the categories are compared to theoretical samples and to each other to revise them. Lastly, they are presented in a structured way.

COMPANY CONTROLLED CONTENT

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes

PROFESSIONAL GATE KEEPERS

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes

USER GENERATED CONTENT

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes
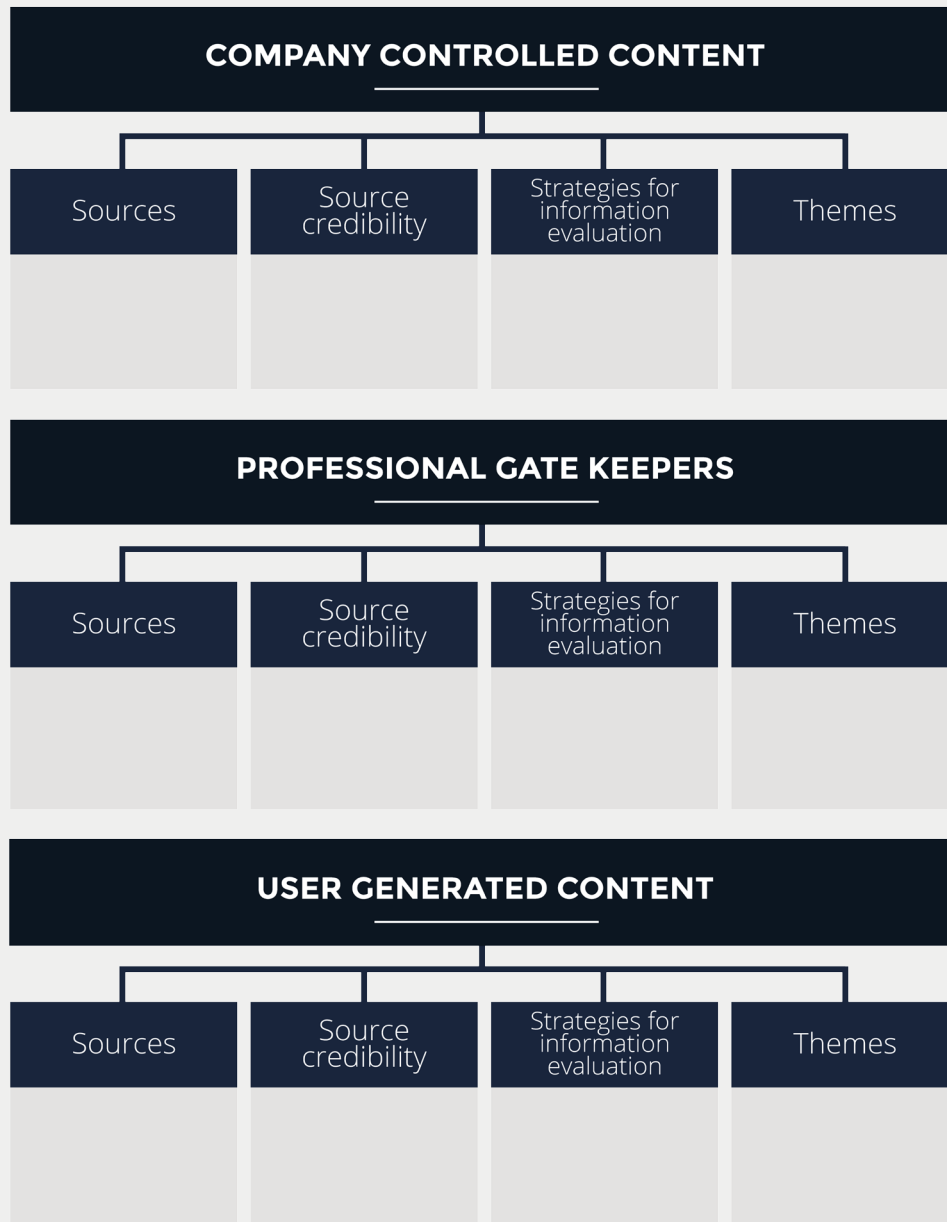
Analysis framework

THE QUALITY OF THE FINDINGS

In this project, before the process of analysis was initiated, specific points of criticism were identified that potentially could have an impact on the results of the study. The first point has to do with the use of the theoretical pre-understanding that will be explained before analyzing the data. According to Bryman more authors, such as Bulmer (1979) have questioned, whether there is a risk of become biased, when an author includes

theoretical concepts in the analysis at a late stage. (Bryman, 2015, p. 574). Firstly, in order to deal with this question, the notion of Bryman is included stating that an analysis will be "conditioned by many factors, such as what we already know about the social world being studied ". (Bryman, 2015, p. 574). This match Gadamer's hermeneutic stance, discussed earlier in the methodology section, that knowledge is produced when pre-understanding and insights in empirical data is fused. Bryman points out that it is widely agreed that researchers should be sensitive to existing conceptualizations, and base their theoretical understanding on works of others. In this sense, the pre-understanding is discussed and the researcher are open to adjustments, and this will arguably enhance the quality of the findings.

Another point of criticism stated by Bryman, which in this thesis is seen more as a delimitation, is the question whether the outcomes of the analysis really is theory. As already mentioned, this thesis bases its production of knowledge from the constructionist and Hermeneutic tradition, where subjects, or in this case consumers, express themselves and that knowledge is the interpretation of this. However, Bryman's point will be used to explain that this thesis operates within specific boundaries. It is interpreting meanings of consumers of luxury furniture, and can therefore not be used to generalize to other settings, such as explaining meanings of consumers of groceries in general. (Bryman, 2015, p. 574). As mentioned on page 12 regarding generalizations in this study, it is emphasized to ensure that samples and theories are closely related to the area of focus, and this is done to make sure the quality of the findings are enhanced.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will be initiated by further explaining what theoretical aspects are prominent in current research related to the area of interest in this thesis. This is done by discussing the luxury industry today in the light of relevant theoretical insights, followed by a development of a deeper understanding of the prepurchase stage, which is a delimitation of the research study. What follows this, is an explanation of the theoretical tools, which will be used as a drafted framework to initiate the process of analyzing the transcripts. Here, it is important to point out that this theoretical framework has been revised according to the empirical insights from the interviews, and that is why this chapter will be concluded by presenting the revised version of the theoretical framework.

THE LUXURY INDUSTRY TODAY

Research done by Twitchell (2001) and Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2006) points out that the luxury industry has undergone major changes the last few centuries, since the average income in western societies, to name an example, has increased. This has paved the way for luxury goods to become more popular among the masses, which is why Twitchell and Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie have termed the situation the luxurification of the commonplace. (Twitchell, 2012) (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2013, p. 13)

Whereas luxury originally was associated with royalty and later on with a delimited audience of elite people, Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie points out that luxury today is more associated with a broader audience of consumers, who want to somehow improve their lives through consumption of luxury goods. (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2013, pp. 13-14)

Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini (2017) agree with Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie that the modern luxury industry is characterized by an increasingly larger group of consumers, who want "something enjoyable or comfortable beyond the necessities of life". Accordingly, the second industrial revolution at the end of the nineteenth century triggered this new meaning, which can also be defined as the "habit of indulgence in what is choice or costly". (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017, p. 4)

Arguably, more recent trends are that the image of the luxury brands has become one of the most important aspects of positioning strategies among companies, and also, emotional factors in the shopping experience have become more relevant. (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017, p. 5). Moreover, in the 1980 "massification" of the luxury industry was enhanced as demand grew and luxury companies' product range was extended to more accessible luxury items. (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017, p. 5)

In the last decades, because of the widespread personal prosperity, consumers in general and including consumers of luxury goods have not only become more demanding but also more informed and sophisticated and conscious of quality, service and environmental protection. This, of course, is further enhanced by technological opportunities, where new media constantly are introduced and evolving. (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2013, p. 14). This have giving rise to consumers doing online research on waste-consciousness and concerned, deal-hunting, product/price comparisons, among others, prior to purchasing luxury goods.

Petrescu & Korgaonkar (2011) confirm that technological and cultural factors that have had significantly changed the way consumers search for information and favoring rapid and efficient information exchange and interactivity. (Petrescu & Korgaonkar, 2011, p. 209). Furthermore, these authors highlight how companies in a global context have adapted to these changes, taking advantage of the opportunities of the web to distribute marketing material with a high capacity of reach and interactivity at a low cost. Accordingly, consumers value these non-commercial, non-imposed, personal sources of advertising and peer-to-peer communication much better than the paid ads. (Petrescu & Korgaonkar, 2011, p. 209). This assumption will be investigated in the analysis chapter.

THE PREPURCHASE STAGE

As mentioned in the introduction, the prepurchase stage, defined by Lemon and Verhoef, involves consumers searching for and evaluating comprehensive amounts of online information. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Liberman points out that the information that is being evaluated by consumers of luxury furniture largely revolves around companies, products, types of furniture, reviews, social media interactions among others. (Liberman, 2015, p. 1). As it appears from the following figure, which is inspired by Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) Process Model for Customer Journey, the prepurchase stage is one of three stages in the journey. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, pp. 76-78). Accordingly, the prepurchase stage involves four touch points that the consumers might interact with and which might control, whether consumers are willing to enter next stage. This research study is concerned with the prepurchase procedures related to information and source evaluation. In other words, the research study focus on the evaluation of interactions between consumers and companies. Such understanding can arguably be used by luxury furniture companies to get insights into consumer behavior. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 77)

CUSTOMER JOURNEY

STAGES

Prepurchase	Purchase	Postpurchase
Touchpoints: • Brand owned • Partner owned • Customer owned • Social/external Behaviors: Need recognition, consideration, search	Touchpoints: • Brand owned • Partner owned • Customer owned • Social/external Behaviors: Choice, ordering, payment	Touchpoints: • Brand owned • Partner owned • Customer owned • Social/external Behaviors: Consumption, usage, engagement, service request

As mentioned, online Information regarding luxury furniture companies and its products can be delivered by three types of sources. (Dou, Walden, Lee, & Lee, 2012). This thesis focuses on these primary sources, as it the interviews included conversations about users, professional gatekeepers and companies as sources.

Recent research, such as the work of Metzger and Flanagin (2013), suggests that the evaluation of online information controls, whether a consumer wants to engage with a company. Moreover, they suggest that the evaluation process both involves credibility assessment of information and the source of information. (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013, pp. 1-4). Sources in this sense can be professional gatekeepers for instance, however, in a more specific way, sources can also be magazines or social networking sites. Accordingly, sources are a part of the information that the consumers search through, and as they overlap each other, the credibility of a source affects the credibility of information and vice versa. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 415). Therefore, these terms will be examined both together and separately to both emphasize the dialectic relationship and the theoretical distinctiveness of the terms.

In the following the main theoretical aspects of online information and source evaluation of credibility carried out by consumers will be defined. Moreover, Liberman's and Metzger and Flanagin's findings of measures of source and information will be explained and functions as potential tools to explain processes related to credibility evaluation of information done by consumers of luxury furniture.

EVALUATION OF SOURCE AND INFORMATION CREDIBILITY

In the following, the preconceptions, which will be used as a baseline of theoretical knowledge in the analysis, will be outlined. These draw on the theoretical insights that has been developed through the examination of relevant literature. These following preconceptions are the so called theoretical samples, which was mentioned in the account of Grounded theory on page 18.

Thus, these theoretical samples are utilized in the search for answering the problem statement and gain understanding about the credibility evaluation of information and sources done by consumers of luxury furniture to get insights to how American consumers of luxury furniture evaluate the credibility of online information and sources. This is done to clarify consumer behavior of Harbour Outdoor's audience and to gain knowledge that can be used for future marketing planning.

Liberman and Metzger and Flanagin's theories are used as an overall framework including theoretical samples, which will be compared and used to explain certain findings in the data. By applying Grounded theory these theoretical samples are used in the coding process to compare and explain codes that was find in the initial open coding process of the data. The aim is to revise these theories based on the interviews and form a framework to understand evaluation processes of luxury furniture consumers.

In order to clearly account for the theoretical samples, it is important to point out that these are divided into two sections of theory, which will be investigated separately as a starting point. So far in this thesis, it has already been indicated that the evaluation of credibility of online information both can be done in terms of the information itself and in terms of the source of the information. Metzger's article "Social and Heuristic Approaches to Credibility Evaluation Online" mainly revolves around the information aspect of the credibility evaluation, and his findings will be the primary reference to the theoretical samples regarding information or

content. Liberman's "Marketing is a Battle of Perceptions: A Study of Source Credibility and Purchase Intentions in Online Luxury Marketing," in contrast focus on the credibility evaluation of the source. Source, in this respect, is defined as being the media channel, who provides the information, and could for instance be a news site, a social network site, a blog or a company website. (Liberman, 2015, p. 5). Furthermore, a source can be used to refer to the producer of the content and whether he or she is a user, professional gatekeeper or company. In the following, Metzger and Flanagin's work on online information credibility will be explained and the theoretical samples will be explained. Afterwards, Liberman's theory on source credibility will be explained and the theoretical samples related to it will be outlined.

EVALUATION OF INFORMATION CREDIBILITY

Firstly, different examples of studies of credibility evaluation of online information will be discussed. Afterwards, specific findings of Metzger and Flanagin's (2010) qualitative research study "Social and Heuristic Approaches to Credibility Evaluation Online" will be presented as a preconception understanding of information credibility assessment. Lastly, this section is intended to revise these theories to the context of this thesis' interviews, as it, as noted, is the aim of this study to develop contextual theories that draw on both preconception and interpretation of the empirical data. In the process of collecting the data and transcribing it, an insight into the context and concepts was developed, which influences the theoretical framework for the analysis

Metzger and Flanagin's theories have been selected as samples because of their qualitative approach and depth of insight into modern process of credibility evaluation. It is up-to-date in the sense that it suggests that the social dimension is important for consumers, which recently have become a prominent focus point, though still lacking in context based investigations. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, pp. 434-436) (Cheong & Margaret A. Morrison, 2008, p. 20). A main conclusion in the mentioned investigation is that the factors affecting the evaluation are both social and heuristic. These theoretical samples are described first separately and then together, in line with Metzger and Flanagin's notion in their discussion that heuristic and social processes should be considered together, in order to provide the most holistic, and accurate, view of credibility evaluation today. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 436)

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF INFORMATION CREDIBILITY

Metzger and Flanagin's work suggests that judgement on credibility of online information are done in a social context, and this focus is still a relatively rare one in research. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 414). Rather, according to Metzger and Flanagin, many researchers suggest that credibility evaluation of information is done in isolation from one another. However, another author that agrees that the social dimension is important is Kelley O'Reilly and Sherry Marx (2011), whose research study exemplifies the importance of the social aspect of online credibility evaluation.

Metzger an Flanagin advocate that the social dimension is becoming increasingly significant in line with the Web environment becoming more facilitated with a bottom-up approach in contrast to an original more top-down approach. What this means is that new forms of interactive media channels on the web gains popularity and the original understanding of information credibility that was based around seeking single authorities such as organizations and doctors to assess credibility. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 414) .

Metzger and Flanagin explain that new sociotechnical developments, where abundance and diversity of information sources are widespread, have caused in the development of opportunities to use social and group

based strategies for credibility evaluation. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 414). This stands in opposition to original conditions that was characterized by more central authorities such as doctors, experts and organizations being the influential cues to the credibility assessment. Accordingly, in these environments, people are relying on external sources of information to assess if some information found on the internet is credible.

THE HEURISTIC DIMENSION OF INFORMATION CREDIBILITY

Metzger and Flanagin suggest that an additional overall pattern in the credibility evaluation of online information was found in their study. This dimension is concerned with the evaluation process being carried out by using so-called heuristics, which, as mentioned in the concept clarification section, means guidelines of how to think and act in the credibility evaluation process. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 413). As it is about to be acknowledged, theories related to heuristics are to a large degree related to the social dimension. The overall explanation for the use of heuristics is that consumers experience information overload on the internet and are uncertain about information they find online. Arguably, this causes consumers to develop coping strategies, which are related to the use of specific heuristics to assess the credibility. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 413).

This, in the meantime, is not the only instance of research that suggests identifying heuristics in the information evaluation. Hilligoss and Rieh (2007) applied interviews to do research on online credibility evaluation of online information. In this study, they argue that heuristics can be understood as general rules of thumb that consumers utilize in the evaluation process. (Rieh, 2007, p. 1482).

In the following, there will be accounted for the systematic-heuristic model, which arguably can be used to distinguish between two the two strategies that consumers apply in their evaluation. Afterwards, specific heuristics used in these strategies will be discussed.

Metzger and Flanagin's qualitative study revealed that consumers make use of these relatively new opportunities to develop verification strategies and that these often are chosen to cut down on time and effort to perform the evaluation. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 416). Moreover, they argue that this strategy varies in relation to the degree they are motivated, that is, how important it is to them to verify the information. Also, the strategy varies in relation to their ability to use strategies to assess whether the information is credible. What is important here is that when motivation is high and consumers are able to use strategic methods, they are likely to use systematical and comprehensive processing. As opposed to this, when consumers' motivation is lower and they are not able to do comprehensive processing, they are likely to use heuristic strategies, which are more based on few heuristics that is stored in their memories. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 416).

The systematic-heuristic model has been chosen as a tool in this thesis as several authors, such as Metzger and Flanagin as well as Ferran and Watts, who found that this model was suitable for investigating credibility evaluation in contexts. (Ferran & Watts, 2008)

Thus, when consumers research on matters that is important to them, they are likely to put an effort in identifying information quality cues and be rigorous in the evaluation process. When they want to minimize effort, they make use heuristic strategies. However, Metzger and Flanagin highlights that consumers both make use of so called cognitive heuristics when motivation is high and when it is low, but that they might make use of more different heuristics in a systematic way when the motivation is high. (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013, p. 217).

CATEGORIES IN INFORMATION CREDIBILITY

The outcome of Metzger and Flanagin's research study includes the definition of four specific categories that

was prominent in their qualitative data analysis. As suggested by the authors of this theory, identifying these heuristics and mechanisms is an important first step in developing parsimonious explanations of information evaluation behavior online. These categories constitute potential guidelines of how to think and act in relation to credibility evaluation of online information. According to Metzger and Flanagin, the following categories are increasingly privileged mechanisms invoked by individuals to evaluate the credibility of information found online. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 433). These theoretical explanations are used as a framework for understanding parts of the transcribed interviews. These read as follows:

- **Social information pooling**
- **Personal opinion confirmation**
- **Enthusiast endorsement**
- **Interpersonal research sharing**

SOCIAL INFORMATION POOLING

This first category, in short, covers the use of user-generated content to help navigate and evaluate information online. Examples of such means of information sharing via feedback systems and reputation systems. According to Metzger and Flanagin (2011), consumers are frequently relying on the number of reviews and looking for positive reviews, and assess whether claims are reliable. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 420). The interpretation of ratings and reviews, however, can vary a lot, and some consumers might think that some negative reviews represent honesty, as opposed to exclusively positive ones. Here, potential bias is evaluated and positive and negative reviews are being examined.

Even though, review and rating information are anonymous, and as this can weaken to credibility of the information, Metzger and Flanagin argue that the opinion of individuals usually are considered more credible that information provided by a company, which in some cases are interpreted as biased. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 421).

Sundar (2008) described a similar tendency, which he termed "bandwagon heuristic", and which implies that people tend to have a positive opinion on something because other people think it is good. The endorsement or bandwagon heuristic, can of cause also unfold, when people views negative comments or reviews and based on this reject a specific offer, for instance. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, pp. 427-428)

Forums are an arena that is used by consumers prior to purchases to establish whether information is credible or not. However, arguably, some consumers might to some extent to show more skepticism towards forums, blogs and social networking sites. This could for instance be older people, who tend to rely on authority in information, which can be hard to identify, since users might not be who they say they are and that comments on products on social networking sites could be done by one that is affiliated with the company.

Lastly, pooled information found on company websites, social networking sites and blogs, is evaluated in terms of the subjectivity and tivity of the information. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 422). It is, arguably, easier for consumers to assess the credibility of objective information, as for instance product descriptions than subjective information, which for example could be about the attractiveness of the product. The credibility assessment of subjective information if more likely to be carefully examined and it is done in accordance with the consumers' personal preferences.

SOCIAL CONFIRMATION OF PERSONAL OPINION

In the evaluation process carried out by consumers, Metzger and Flanagin found that a popular category is focused around finding like-minded individuals that can support them in their search for credible information. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 423). An example of such is the use of websites of people they trust to either confirm that other information is credible or to find credibly information. Like-minded people are those with similar personalities and shared interest and viewpoints, which guide consumers' evaluation.

Metzger and Flanagin's study suggest that consumers tend to be consistent in their search for credible information, in that, they favor information that supports specific attitudes. When consumers find some information on a social network site, for instance, it is likely that the consumers can find the characteristics of the one, who posted or commented and evaluate if he or she have similar believes, opinions or perspectives, and if that is the case, this is likely to be a good indicator of credibility. Moreover, such confirmation might even result in the search being stopped at that point, as the information evaluation has been concluded.

Users have opportunities to select between content they want to expose, as they can follow people or organizations online and thereby sort between the endless amount of information viewpoints online. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 424)

Social confirmation of personal opinion is especially prominent, when consumers are restricted by their time and motivation when gathering information. Thereby, the social confirmation can be defined as a heuristic in some way, since it is seen in cases, where consumers want to minimize the effort of evaluation processing.

RESOURCE SHARING VIA INTERPERSONAL EXCHANGE

Another prominent category in information evaluation is resource sharing via interpersonal exchange. Metzger and Flanagin explains that this can be characterized by being consumers use of their social network both in an online and in an offline context. For instance, consumers would get recommendations of what information to trust and what websites to visit from friends and family on social networking sites, where it is possible to tag, text or invite friends to prove a point. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 425). These interpersonal recommendations from consumers' social network are likely to be perceived as highly reliable.

In relation to resource sharing, it is furthermore common that especially when a consumer receives more recommendations from friends of the same matter is likely to affect the consumer's credibility assessment. In addition, this is an example of how social computing tools pave the way for the consumers to using evaluation that does not require much effort.

So far, at this stage in the outlining of the theoretical framework of the thesis, it is possible to establish a figure showing the information related part of credibility evaluation. The arrows represent that the categories can overlap and influence each other.

At the early stage of the analysis, where the interviews were transcribed and an interpretation was developed, it seemed necessary to revise one of the categories from above. In some instances, in the interviews, the factor in credibility evaluation, where the opinion of an influential person is included. So far, the enthusiast endorsement has covered this area, by explaining that the more expertise within a specific area a person demonstrates in terms of topic mastery, the more that person is likely to be influential in the evaluation. However, it seems as if this point about influential people does not explain instances, where consumers rely on persons that is not necessarily experts within luxury furniture, but is influential because he or she is known by populations to have a specific social position. The following category is used in this thesis to extent the enthusiasm

endorsement category.

The following opinion leader aspect is included based on interviewee 7 and his explanation of an instance, where he had relied on a person's information because of his image as influential within the luxury furniture industry. (Appendix 8, page 73)

ENTHUSIAST ENDORSEMENT

Another heuristic, which the participants in Metzger and Flanagin's study concluded to be a prominent category, was enthusiast endorsement. In short, this factor demonstrate that consumers tend to assign credibility to sources because presumed experts find it trustworthy. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 426). In some cases, Metzger and Flanagin argues, content becomes redundant to evaluate, when consumers become more interested in assessing the credibility based on these enthusiasts' recommending and trusting the source. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 427).
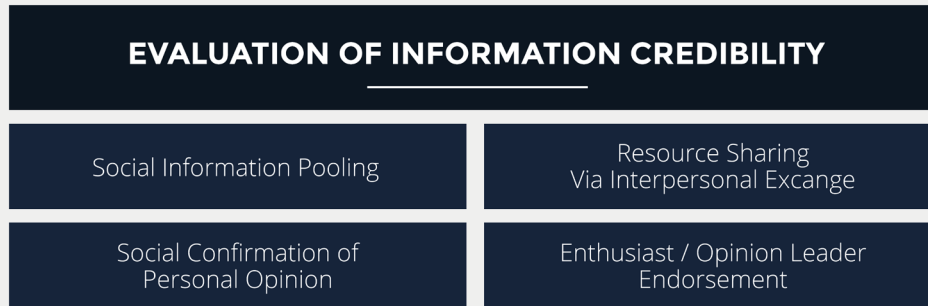
Accordingly, consumers will begin trusting an enthusiast after a while, where the consumers have tested that enthusiast's statements and attitude, by comparing these to information elsewhere. Expertise and intelligence are two important touch point that consumers will rely on when evaluating credibility and usefulness of information. In this process, different cues are being used to determine expertise and among them are, topic mastery, writing style, spelling and grammar, and the extent of details offered. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 424). Especially, enthusiast would prove trustworthy, when they demonstrate that they use their technical knowledge to mater the topic of the information. Moreover, when experts post and interact online, this is being archived over time, and users can use the number of posts and appreciation of the enthusiast to determine the expertise.

OPINION LEADER ENDORSEMENT

Communication brought about by so called opinion leaders are information that originates from the mass media to these opinion leaders, who spread it to their followers on social network sites or blogs. (Cheong & Margaret A. Morrison, 2008, p. 7). The power of these opinion leaders is not only grounded in the expertise and intelligence in luxury furniture as for enthusiasts, but are further grounded in that they have a strategic social position and are the personification of certain values. For instance, this could be a celebrity who values sustainability and, for instance, mentions on a blog that he or she have bought a new piece of furniture from a specific brand. (Liebold, n.d.)

Cheong and Morrison use Merton's (1968) definition of opinion leaders, which covers those people who are interested in new issues and usually express their opinions about them. Opinion leader communication often falls under the category of user-generated content, and Cheong and Morrison point out the importance of this group in relation to marketing is rooted in that consumer opinions found online often are long-lasting and far reaching and can potentially affect purchase choice. (Cheong & Margaret A. Morrison, 2008, p. 9).

Based on the outlining of Metzger and Flanagin's suggestions as wiell as the revision in the above section, the following figure illustrates the theoretical framework for understanding the evaluation of information credibility:

EVALUATION OF INFORMATION CREDIBILITY

Social Information Pooling	Resource Sharing Via Interpersonal Excange
Social Confirmation of Personal Opinion	Enthusiast / Opinion Leader Endorsement

EVALUATION OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Source credibility has been defined as "judgments made by a perceiver…concerning the believability of a communicator". (O'Keefe, 1990, p. 181). However, Liberman (2015) would argue that this definition is more useful to explain credibility assessment of more traditional sources, and that there is a need for redefining source credibility in terms of modern online source credibility.

Now that the framework for understanding information credibility has been presented, the source credibility evaluation will be explained to complete the theoretical framework. According to Liberman, who wrote "Marketing is a Battle of Perceptions: A Study of Source Credibility and Purchase Intentions in Online Luxury Marketing," credibility of the sources, is crucial, when the consumers are to decide whether to get involved with the company.

where consumers find user-generated content, content made by professional gatekeepers and the company itself. (Liberman, 2015)

Several authors explain how credibility or trust of a source are crucial factors in the process of doing research online – and the information evaluation process, where consumers decide, whether they should purchase or engage in a relationship with a brand. (Wu & Lee, 2012, p. 265). For instance, Reichelt (2014) explains that consumers evaluate channels including electronic word-of-mouth, which can occur on social network sites, blogs and online forums have the potential to determine consumer behavior. (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014)

According to Liberman, knowledge on consumer attitudes towards sources is valuable for manufacturers and retailers of luxury goods, for instance, to increase its audience's purchase intention. (Liberman, 2015). This, as mentioned, suggests that this theory is valuable for knowledge for Harbour Outdoor that can be used to achieve to provide credible online information and marketing, leading to an increased purchase intention among consumers (Liberman, 2015).

Furthermore, the importance of source credibility in the consumer journey is mentioned by MacKenzie and Lutz, who refer to source credibility as an antecedent to attitude toward an ad or a message. (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Purchase intention is highly depended on the content and source being credible, and therefore, this theoretical concept will be discussed and the attributes of this concept will be used to explain consumers' evaluation of online information.

In the following it will be explained, which categories exist in source credibility according to Liberman. These will be used as indication to what the transcripts potentially could reveal. This means that the categories are

compared to the findings of the data and are revised based on this.

MEASURES OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Source credibility research is not a recent phenomenon, however, the measurement of source credibility in communication has changed over the years. (Liberman, 2015, p. 4). In 1966 McCroskey investigated source credibility in communication and used ethos and the quality of evidence usage. (Mccroskey, 1966, p. 118). Dynamism, trustworthiness and competence constitutes ethos in McCroskey's study, and he discover that authoritativeness reflected the competence factor and that character was similar to trustworthiness. (Mccroskey, 1966).

Since then, the concept of source credibility has been widely discussed in communications and marketing research. Olga Liberman (2015) incorporates user-generated content in her study of consumer perceptions the source credibility of online luxury marketing messages. (Liberman, 2015, p. 1). More precisely, she investigates how two sources, namely blog post format and company website format are perceived differently in terms of source credibility by consumers of luxury goods. This thesis adopts Liberman's conception of source credibility as including six categories, which in total represent the credibility of a message's source. (Liberman, 2015, p. 6). These measures of source credibility are evaluated to be suitable for developing a theoretical framework for understanding factors influencing source credibility.

These six categories read as follows: Trustworthiness, Depth, Believability, accuracy, expertise and bias. The study found that blogs, which can be defined as a form of social media, where people share their personal opinions, is more credible than company websites. The six categoreis of source credibility from Liberman's research study will be explained in the following sections, and in order to create a nuanced idea of the six concepts, different authors' conception of the terms will be included.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Investigations of how to communicate efficiently to an audience have been linked to trustworthiness by several authors. (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953) (Liberman, 2015) (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014). In 1953 Hovland defined trustworthiness as "the degree to which the audience perceives that the communicator intends to convey valid assertions". (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953).

According to Reichelt, whose measures of trustworthiness have been selected for this theory, trustworthiness of the source is both important, when consumers want to solve an issue online, often in social terms. More specifically, this means that the trustworthiness is important to users when they want to find information on a specific product, for example, and also, when consumers want to socialize with a brand community. (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014, pp. 73-74). He highlights five different aspects, which revolves around respectively appearance, transparency, connections, detailed information and consistency.

Reichelt argues that the appearance of the website or post can affect the trustworthiness of a source. (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014, p. 74). For instance, he mentioned how the surface characteristics of websites, the usability and interface design are examples of how the source appears to users.

He also states how transparency has proven to be vital in order to be trustworthy. (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014, p. 74). This is apparent in electronic word-of-mouth in that profile information, for instance, will increase the level of transparency, as it becomes less anonymous. Also, Location, names and interests are among fea-

tures that potentially can lead to more trustworthiness.

Furthermore, Reichelt argues that connections between marketers, gatekeepers and consumers can prove to be important to credibility of a source. This is often the case as bonds between the actors are revealing some commonness between them, and channels that have this function is in some cases favored. (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014, p. 74).

Also, the amount of detailed information about the communicators that is available on the site, where the information is provided, can have an impact on the level of credibility of the source. This could potentially be information regarding former activities, the time of membership on the site.

Lastly, Reichelt points out that consistency in the provided content is a cue to trustworthiness. (Man Yee Cheung, 2014, p. 29). Information provided on websites or in posts should therefore not be ambiguous or too complex if the source is to be deemed trustworthy.

Category one: Trustworthiness

- Appearance

- Transparency

- Connections

- Detailed information

- Consistency

DEPTH

Gaziano and McGrath (1986) explored credibility in news and found that depth was a significant measure of credibility. (Gaziano, 1985). They explain that the perceived credibility of a source relies on the ability to provide comprehensive information, which basically means that it should not lack details, it should be up-to-date, it should provide all the sides of the issue. (Gaziano, 1985, p. 63). Liberman agrees and argues that depth is easier for the consumer to detect, as it is measured by the completeness of the information provided. (Liberman, 2015, p. 7).

Category two: Depth

BELIEVABILITY

Devling and Ennew investigated how believability affected behavioral tendencies in the context of comparative price advertising. (Devlin & Ennew, 2013, p. 794). They refined the rather simple definition of believability stated by Grewal (1998) as being the degree to which the consumer "believes that the price offer is truthful". They extended the definition to be "the degree to which consumers feel that a source's information is truthful and reasonable in reference to its pre-existing notions" (Devlin & Ennew, 2013, p. 796). In their paper, they state that the perceived believability of a source's information is likely to have an influence on the behavior of the consumer. (Devlin & Ennew, 2013, p. 797). Therefore, the consumers' believability of a source will be

considered in this study and used to explain behavioral changes in the process of searching for information.

According to Grewal and Compeau (1992), one way a source can enhance the believability of advertisements, for instance, is to provide large amounts of information. (Grewal & Compeau, 1992). Arguably examples of information that can lead to an increased level of believability could be additional promotional phrases and semantic cues. They explain that promotional phrases preferably should be objective as subjective statement such as "save up to 50%" connotates uncertainty.

Category Three: Believability

- Truthfulness

- Reasonability

- Comprehensiveness

- Objectivity

ACCURACY

Gunter and Campell investigated how inaccuracy in some cases had devastating consequences for communicators. (Gunter, Campbell, Touri, & Gibson, 2009, p. 186). Accordingly, inaccurate information provided on a source can be caused by pressures or temptations to take short-cuts in a modern world, where expectations to the communicators are high.

One of the main points in Gunter and Campell's study is that the credibility of a source, such as a brand website, can suffer if the quality of information is considered bad in terms of accuracy. If bloggers, for instance, fact check and refer to their sources, consumers arguably are more likely to consider the bloggers brand and the source credible. (Gunter, Campbell, Touri, & Gibson, 2009, pp. 190-196). This means that the perceived accuracy, which affects the overall credibility, may be dependent on efforts a communicator put in conveying accurate information.

Category Four: Accuracy

- Quality

EXPERTISE

As mentioned, much research on source credibility have been conducted the past decades, and the two most prominent components of credibility are trustworthiness, which has already been outlined, and expertise. (Hung, Li, & Tse, 2011, p. 100). According to Hung, Li and Tse, expertise refers to the extent the receiver of a message perceives the source to be valid. The audience then evaluate the message in relation to the logical and factual soundness of it, which together constitute the validity. (Oxford, 2017)

An example, where expertise is a crucial aspect in relation to determining the source's credibility, is the situation, where users read others' opinion online as for instance in a product review. Metzger identifies different indicators to evaluations of expertise of a source, such as topic mastery, writing style, spelling and grammar

and the extent of details provided. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 424)

Moreover, Reichelt points out that a communicator is perceived to have expertise, when he or she provides extensive knowledge and experience with the topic. (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014, p. 69).

The importance of expertise is widely discussed, however, a great deal of research highlights expertise as one of the main components of credibility and attitudes. Feick and Higle (1992), for example, found that "a source's experience and knowledge about a topic shaped customers' attitudes" experience and knowledge about a topic shaped customers' attitudes. (Liberman, 2015, p. 8)

Category Five: Expertise

- Validity

- Topic mastery

- Spelling, Grammar and Writing style

- Reputation of source

BIAS

Baron argues that "bias could result from an absence of balance resulting in one side of a story receiving unwarranted attention". (Baron, 2004, p. 4). In this way, the information provided does not pay attention to relevant perspectives, and the receiver of a message miss out the whole picture. The receiver of a message could potentially sense this underlying agenda and therefore perceive it as not being credible information. (Baron, 2004, p. 4).

Furthermore, the bias in information could also be duo to fabrication, which means that the information is constructed rather than a reflection of reality. (Baron, 2004, p. 4)

Reichelt, in the meantime, agrees that bias is an important aspect in the evaluation process of sources done by users, and he points out that brand enthusiasts, who deliver messages, for instance, should be aware of this. This is duo to that consumers are likely to deem information less credible, when brand enthusiasts only talk in favor of one brand. (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014)

Metzger talks in favor of user-generated content being perceived as more reliable than producer-generated content, which potentially could affect the credibility of a source. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 421). In his study, he found that consumers were likely to view information provided by companies to be more biased than individuals' experience with products, for instance. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 430)

Category six: Bias

- Selective coverage

- Fabrication

It has now been conceptualized how consumers assumedly evaluate a source's credibility and what categories are mostly used, and thereby a theoretical framework for the understanding of source credibility is developed

and can be used as theoretical samples in the analysis. Moreover, it can be concluded that the above measures of theoretical samples, based on relevant literature, can be further divided into concepts that assumedly constitute each main category.

The figure below presents the main categories and their constituents at this stage in the thesis:

SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Trustworthiness:	Expertise:	Believability:
• Appearance	• Validity	• Truthfulness
• Transparency	• Topic Mastery	• Reasonability
• Detailed Information	• Spelling, Grammar &	• Comprehensiveness
• Connections	Writing Style	• Objectivity
• Consistency	• Reputation of Source	

| Depth:	Accuracy:	Bias:
• Comprehensiviness	• Quality of Information	• Selective Coverage
		• Ideological
		• Fabrication

ANALYSIS

As mentioned in the theoretical framework on page 28 the analysis has already been initiated at this stage in the thesis. The reason for this is firstly that the Hermeneutic tradition, which is related to the methodological framework, incorporates the assumption that the process of understanding relevant parts of the process of online information evaluation already was commenced before writing this thesis. Moreover, the first tools of the Grounded theory, theoretical sampling, has already been used as a practice to identify theoretical concepts and interviewee that are relevant for further investigation. Thus, the understanding of relevant theories on source credibility and information credibility assessment amongst online users combined with a basic understanding of the interviewees' touch points was formed. This resulted in a preliminary understanding outlined in the theoretical framework chapter.

In the following, the analysis proceeds and important procedures in the analysis will be carried out, which, as mentioned in the outlining of Grounded theory, includes different tools as well as outcomes. However, the tool "coding", and its different processes functions as an overall structure of the analysis, whereas the rest of the tools and the outcomes are integrated throughout the analysis. In the initial stage of the analysis of the transcribed interviews, open coding is the tool, which will be applied to systematically indexing the data. In appendix 2-8, the findings from the open coding can be found, which draws on the identification of passages that is interesting. Passages are interesting when they are related to the theoretical framework. Furthermore, they are interesting when the subjects repeatedly or clearly point out that specific concepts are essential to the credibility evaluation of information and sources in the prepurchase stage of luxury furniture consumption.

The analysis follows Strauss' rules of carrying out 'true' qualitative data analysis by rigorously applying the tools and outcomes that he recommends for the best results. This is done based on the author of this thesis' personal experience with qualitative data analyses combined with Alan Bryman's statement and recommendation that one must guard against not being able to grasp the richness of the data.

The Analysis chapter is structured in the following manner based on procedures of the analysis as well as the results from these procedures. The relatively rigorous separation of processes and results have been chosen, since it provides structure of the analysis and makes it easier for the reader and the author of the thesis to manage. However, it does not necessarily match the actual analysis process, as this involves moving back and forth between procedures and as the processes overlap each other in some cases. The following figure have already been presented in the section concerning Grounded theory. At this stage in the analysis, the open coding is about to be initiated.
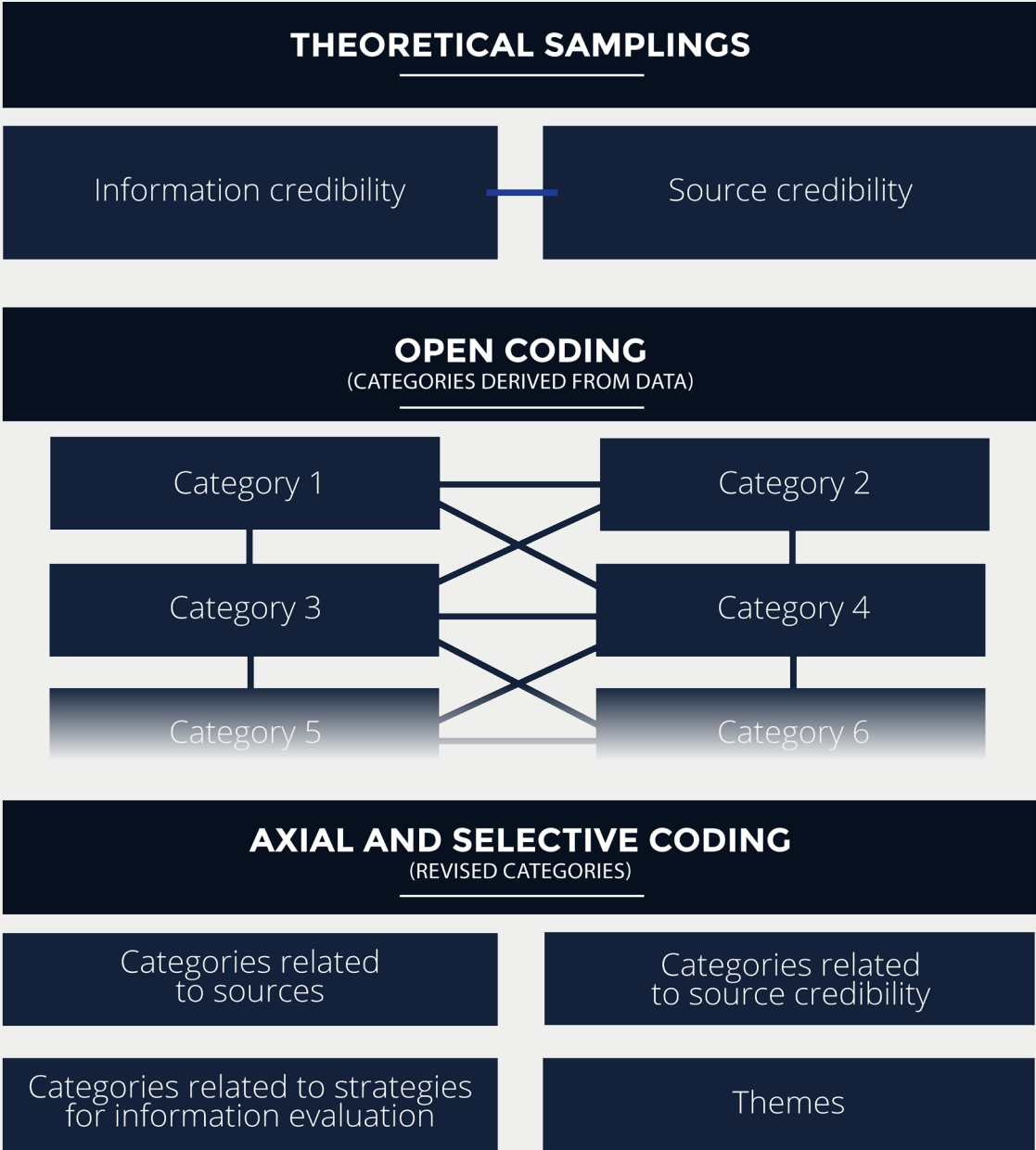
RESULTS FROM THE PROCESS OF OPEN CODING

As it is about to be clarified, the results from the open coding represents 5 clusters of concepts, each of them having a headline that covers the overall topics in the interview in which specific concepts was mentioned. These clusters of concepts are not categories, but instead they form the basis for the cateogries to be identified. After presenting and discussing the concepts found in the data, the categories, which draw on the concepts, will be presented. The five clusters of concepts read as follows:

Communication of Established Companies and New Companies:

Consumers Deal with Uncertainty Before Visiting Showroom or Purchasing Online

Comprehensive Information

Company Websites, Magazines and Blogs are Widely Used Sources

Social Responsibility

These clusters are the result from the open coding, which followed the procedure of labeling relevant concepts in the preparation of identifying categories, which according to Strauss (1990) is the main goal of the open coding. In the following it will be explained how the clusters was formed based on an approach that is opened-minded towards the data.

This initial stage of open coding was a complicated matter as 22 pages of data was processed. Beforehand, these pages have been interpreted by the author to be relevant to information and source credibility evaluation of online material regarding luxury furniture. This coding process involves identifying different touch points in the data, such as repetitions across the data and passages, where specific points and concepts are highlighted by the interviewees. This results in the interview notes being narrowed down further to the mentioned list of clusters of concepts, which is to be found in appendix 9. (Appendix 9, page 74). The following section "Conceptualization", presents the procedure of identifying these clusters, which forms the baseline for the identification of categories.

CONCEPTUALIZATION:

The following coding process is done to explore the salient concepts of the data across the 7 interviews by comparing them and interpreting their meaning in the context. Each of the 5 clusters will be examined separately in the following.

Communication of Established Companies and New Companies:

A dimension that appeared throughout the data, or more precisely indicated by five of the interviewees, is the tendency to distinguish between communication of established companies and new companies. For instance, interviewee number 2 states:

"Especially new brands should show why you can trust them, and why they are worth the money... what materials are they using to manufacture this, how are they making it, what makes this product better than others that is existing already, since it is a new brand then" (Appendix 3, page 65).

As indicated in the above, new companies, especially, should provide deep online information to satisfy the consumers. The information that the interviewees demand is related to explaining the company's mechanisms of production and sourcing and how its products are worth the money. It is interpreted that the concepts of communicating values and transparency are of significant importance to the interviewees in terms of what kind of information they embrace in the evaluation process.

Furthermore, another interviewee explains how new brands should provide information that conveys status and quality. In this example, the conversation revolves around the question of how companies can appear trustworthy in their communication.

"I think, especially if it is things sold through a brand that is not well-known, it needs to have some kind of merit behind it - For quality like Ralph Lauren bedding and stuff like that you know the quality is good" (Appendix 4, page 67).

The two furniture consumers point out that an extra effort is required from new companies to become trust-

ed. The term "merit", on Oxford Dictionaries, is defined by being "the quality of being particularly good or worthy, especially so as to deserve praise". (Dictionaries, n.d.). More interviewees express how the trustworthiness depends on comprehensive information, such as descriptions of, why the product is worth the money and how they provide quality, will make them trust the companies. In the following, an interviewee is asked to mention some companies that she thinks provides trustworthy information and why that is:

"There is Holly Hunt… there is BMB Italian. I like Italian brands… They have a big presence and make an effort to serve consumers and be transparent at what they do. They invest a lot of money in their marketing so that they can be present everywhere and provide useful information. The companies that I mention are well established.". (Appendix 3, page 65)

It is interpreted that some brands have already proven that their information is trustworthy and thereby credible. At this stage a preunderstanding is developed, where trustworthiness constitutes at least a part of the credibility. The term "trust" was widely used both by the interviewer and the interviewees throughout the data. Trust is linked to credibility, since credible information, according to oxford dictionaries and Liberman means that the receiver of the information trusts it. (Liberman, 2015, p. 4) (Dictionaries, Credibility, n.d.). An instance in the interview indicated the importance of trust, where one of the interviewees state that based on research and experiences, she "knows which brands she likes and she can now shop them online, because she trusts them".

To gain a deeper understanding of how information is found and evaluated in terms of credibility, it is necessary to dig deeper into the Interviewees' clarification of the research process at the prepurchase stage of the consumption.

Consumers Deal with Uncertainty Before Visiting Showroom or Purchasing Online

The same interviewee that indicated that she memorizes some brands and trusts them continues by explaining that online magazines are sources, where brands potentially can build trust, so that she would engage with that brand. Moreover, she argues that "they have to be able to show their products ultimately on different platforms to spread out", which sums up her opinion on trust building and the importance of information online. (Appendix 3, page 65)

It is inferred that consumers attempt to cope with uncertainty at the prepurchase stage, and it is this uncertainty that the consumers seek to cope with by evaluating the credibility of information from different online sources.

The interviewees were asked which sources and type of information that is trustworthy to them. The conversations that followed this question contained both agreement across the data and diverse meanings being expressed.

It emerged from the data that online review sites and integrated review systems both concerning products and companies was generally trusted and used as a means to evaluate information. Only one interviewee did not mention review systems as an important aspects. Also, it varied, to which degree the consumers find reviews trustworhy and, whether reviews are seen as one of the main contributors to the credibility asssessment of online information. Especially one participant dwelled over review systems, as a means to assess the credibility of qualities of a product or a brand. When he was asked, whether he searched for information online prior to purchasing luxury furniture pieces, he immediately directed the conversation to review systems:

"I usually go to Macys or Bath and Beyond (the websites of these retailers). And I read the reviews… I probably

wouldn't buy it, if there were no reviews" (Appendix 4, page 67)

He was also asked which review sites he usually would use to research on luxury furniture and he replied:

"just the store that's selling it, so If I'm buying something on Macy's and looking for a bed frame I like to see reviews on the site and comments on Amazon, I see what people have said about that product…" (Appendix 4, page 67)

Furthermore, he confirmed that it definitely added trustworthiness to the information on a product that others have reviewed it. The 26-year-old consumer seemed to appreciate others' recommendations, even in cases, where these are done by people he do not know personally or follows online.

In relation to the importance of reviews, the interviewees were divided, which was acknowledged during a conversation with an interviewee, who is 50 years old. She pointed out that she to some degree used the internet to do research at the prepurchase stage. She was asked if it was important to her that a company is present on the internet in all sorts of reviews, and she replied:

"Not really actually.. I think I am too old… it is more based on what designers recommend. For people in my age, once you look for luxury furniture, going to showrooms are the way forward…"

"But I look at (online) magazines…. I did look at Houzz.com (online magazine) and their website.. My husband is better at that (doing research online). He would look online and then, when we see it in real life, I would pick the colors…" (Appendix 7, page 72)

Even though the interviewee did not do a lot of research online to deal with uncertainties, she explained how her husband and she made use of an online magazine called www.houzz.com, which she classed alongside with the social notworking side Pinterest. She explained that one can see what modern kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms look like and then get directed to interior designers' reviewing the brands. Thus, this is an example of a consumer, for whom others' reviews should be done by people with expertise within interior design the area, as opposed to other users. This becomes even more apparent in the following extraction of the same interview:

"That is a very good way of becoming familiar with new design.. like.. this is for people who know what they are talking about you know…" (Appendix 7, page 72)

The procedures explained in the above are two contradictory ways of assessing, whether claims on products or brands are trustworthy and two different views on, what characterizes trustworthy information and sources. At this point these contradictory approaches are some of the main findings, and a further examination of them is required in the categorization process in this analysis on page 45.

In this context, it would prove difficult to determine, which of the approaches is supported the most across the 7 interviews. This is because each of the two opinions are, particularly, supported by one other consumer each. The first view examined, where reviews done by anonymous but assumedly likeminded consumers, gets support from interviewee 1, who states that she sees "amateur bloggers" views as being more "honest". This is opposed to independent experts or paid bloggers. Furthermore, she highlights that she would not feel comfortable about a company or product that has only received a few user-generated reviews, as it is suspicious that "not a lot of people have bothered going there". (Appendix 2, page 64)

The other view of emphasizing reviews done by interior designers and experts are particularly supported by interviewee 5, for whom review sites becomes redundant, as "she already knows which brands she like" and mostly use specific online magazines such as "Houzz" and "All Modern" and make use of their recommenda-

tions, as she preferred "established sites".

"People younger than me would probably say differently. What is it called.. they do on their phone.. Instagram.. and following each other and using preview sites..." (Appendix 5, page 68)

It is clear that there are a division between the interviewees, as to which degree the embrace experts and professional gatekeepers or they embrace user-generated content. In the context of the data, the two interviewees appreciating user-generated content was 26 and 29 years old, whereas the other group was 50 and 54. This age aspect is a pattern that emerges, where younger generations are more likely to rely and user-generated content. However, for now it remains open whether this pattern could be even more prominent, when analyzing further.

Systematic and Comprehensive Evaluation or Heuristic Evaluation

Under this headline different concepts and meanings in the data suggest that consumers use more or less systematic strategies to assess, whether marketing claims are credible and to find credible information. As it will be exemplified further in the following, some interviewees express that they are more likely to use comprehensive and in-depth evaluation, whereas others were more likely to stick to simpler evaluation procedures.

Even though it varies how systematic they are, all of the interviewees did use diverse and rich opportunities for making sure that product and company information is credible. For instance, interviewee 2 states how she has been using an alternative strategy:

"For new brands, they have to have a presence... they have to be able to show their products ultimately on different platforms to spread out... Requesting samples so that I could see the quality... Finish samples and catalogues and stuff... I purchase that way - to make sure they are legitimate". (Appendix 3, page 65)

According to interviewee 2, the process of assessing credibility is related with the question if a company is legitimate. Therefore, the online presence and responsiveness of the company important to the consumer and conveys legitimacy. This extraction exemplifies a consumer, who use a wide spectrum of channels when evaluating information online.

However, to approach the credibility evaluation by getting into personal dialogue with the company, is not an unambiguous tendency. Interviewee 3, who is a 26-year-old New Yorker, seemed to be more dragged by information that he encountered when using diverse sources and techniques. In the following, the interviewee explains how a trust is build based on visual illustration.

"videos showing how it works, showing the function and stability and somehow testing of the materials to its highest function... But not overly repetitive. If you only have a certain amount of time to see something just say all of it, and keep it concise... not just say, this will last you five years... Show some give it a wear and tear of a normal day within a maybe four-minute video." (Appendix 4, page 67)

In this discussion of what characterizes credible information on luxury furniture, the interviewee interestingly includes video-blogging, which has not been mentioned in the relevant literature studied during the preparation of this thesis. According to the interviewee, this is the way forward, if he were to become convinced that quality and function claims could be trusted. Furthermore, he describes how a delivery of messages should be finely balanced between comprehensiveness and consistency, which are touch points in the following cluster of concepts.

Moreover, the conversation with interviewee 3 revolved around user-generated content arguably being highly

credible to him.

"I would probably trust an amateur video more though. My boss showed me this washing machine, she was buying, and she showed me this amateur guy doing it for you and doing a testing of it. And I would believe that more than the actual company, unless the company is well-known... I think IKEA does videos, but if IKEA did videos to show, I would still be able to trust it, because IKEA wouldn't lie, because there's also this whole legal thing where you can't lie about your products.". (Appendix 4, page 67)

This consumer clearly relies on information provided by amateurs, as long as it is delivered in a specific comprehensive and concise way. Such amateur videos arguably represent believability, where companies and professional gatekeepers seem more biased to him. This example shows how more diverse sources and types of information are appreciated by some luxury furniture consumers. However, the concept of comprehensiveness appears as an important dimension across the data, and this calls for a further examination of its importance.

Comprehensive Information

The comprehensiveness of information is an aspect that was mentioned by all of the interviewees to be a contributing factor influencing the credibility of the source of information. Different concepts were mentioned to represent the characteristics of credible sources, including "trustworthy, honest, comfortable, believable, connective and authentic" the information is. The listed concepts are mentioned directly by the interviewees to be attributes of the credibility assessment.

Interviewee 3, for instance, points out that truthful, believable and honest information are information that explains and discusses how and why specific products lasts longer or functions well. (Appendix 4, page 67). According to him, when "they are being honest about it, on their connotation", then he would believe it, also if the information was provided by a paid blogger or a company, which he emphasizes would be biased. Appendix 4, page 67).

Truthfulness and honesty can according to several of the interviewees be generated through thorough explanation from the communicator, especially about why a company's products have extra values.

Interviewee 2 explains that she has concrete expectations that should be met, when evaluating online information of both companies and users. She has "developed strategies to identify" whether the "products are handmade/mass-produced", and whether the "products are made of durable or not durable materials", because products can look high-end, without having the qualities to be it. (Appendix 3, page 65). Interviewee 4 agrees that credible information is rich in content and point out that the internet is a perfect medium to demonstrate how a company and their products distinguish from others. This is accordingly because of photographs, where products can be displayed in different settings, because of the dimensions the internet offers and because of detailed information. Interviewee 4 was asked how a company, in terms of providing online information, could convince her that she can trust its communication, and to that she responded the following:

"There is a lot of companies, particularly in the United States, that are trying to sell "made in US" and then telling their story, telling where it's made, if it's organic, how it source, where the frames are made, where everything comes from, or where they get their fabrics. They are kind of trying to make it a more personal experience when they give you more information about the brand". (Appendix 5, page 68)

Firstly, this passage of the data is related to the already mentioned uncertainty of brands that consumers do not know beforehand. The consumers demand comprehensive information describing in detail the company's

specific areas in the company's value creation process. Furthermore, in the context of providing comprehensive information, the interviewee highlights that it is important to make the consumer experience as personal as possible. In the following, she elaborates on her approach to luxury furniture information evaluation.

"If there is a company and they give information like "we went to Bali and we found this place, and we found these pieces and that's where these are from". Then there's this connection and sort of a relevance to it, so you get a little more information and it feels more authentic. Particularly in the luxury market where you're paying a higher price... It's shouldn't just be arbitrary, like "oh we just make the best sofa!". (Appendix 5, page 68)

The example that interviewee 4 mentions is an instance of how storytelling arguably is an approach to providing information that is comprehensive and personal. Moreover, she states how this conveys some sort of connection between the brand, its products and its sourcing and production. An additional concept that this storytelling supports is "authenticity", which, apparently, should be assessed to the brand through their communication, so that the consumer would assess the information as credible.

Company Websites, Magazines, Reviews and Blogs are Widely Used Sources

As it is about to be examined, it is significantly important for luxury companies to provide information through the use of specific sources. Also, the research study of this thesis reveals that consumers use specific cues to evaluate if these specific sources and their content is credible. Especially, the companies' websites, magazines and blogs are sources that are used to find information on luxury furniture and assess whether it is credible or not.

Most of the interviewees point out that they follow specific onlinemagazines to find information and evaluate whether luxury furniture companies' claims are credible. "Houzz.com", "Allmodern.com" and ""1stdips" are examples of online magazines that the interviewees define as being credible sources providing credible information. (Appendix 2-8, page 64-75). In the data, it is found that both companies and these mentioned magazines have integrated blog systems, which the interviewees largely make use of and see as a helpful tool to assess, whether other information is credible. (Appendix 4, page 67). What characterizes blogs is, as mentioned, that they are easily updatable online journals that can combine the global reach and reference value of conventional websites with the conversational exchanges of email or instant messaging (Bovee & Thill, 2014, p. 194). Interviewee 3 points out the importance of blogs in that he confirms that he could buy a luxury furniture piece based on the information on a blog post by both amateurs and professional bloggers. (Appendix 4, page 67)

Microblogging is a type of blogging, where messages are restricted to specific character counts. (Bovee & Thill, 2014, p. 199). Instagram was mentioned by several interviewees to be a credible social networking sites in the context of luxury furniture, where companies can upload images of products in settings, as an interviewee explains, and provide details on styles and functions. (Appendix 7, page 72).

Moreover, interviewee 3 and 7 significantly emphasized that microblogs do not necessarily have to be created by companies or professional media gatekeepers, who work for companies or organizations, to be credible. According to interviewee 7, for instance, trustworthy communication can also be provided by specific influential users, who use their social networking accounts to do microblogging. In the following he specifies, how he recently was inspired by a blogger in the search for luxury furniture:

"I was searching on Instagram.. there is a boy who works for an auction house...and he is 28.. he is very young, and he has become like the leader of luxury furniture... And he is a visionary and influential innovator. He works in the luxury industry, and he is like the head of luxury goods so he is someone whose opinion I would

trust and especially if you look at his social media accounts is all luxury based and high fashion and jetset travel" (Appendix 8, page 73)

The reason this example is related to user-generated content is that much of the content, which he is posting on his Instagram profile, is not promotions done for his company, but are rather his suggestions for styles and products. Moreover, according to interviewee 4, Instagram is a useful tool to stay connected to people, whose opinion influence his credibility assessment of brands and their offers. To him, the information that this influential person provides is trustworthy information because of his status as a visionary and influencial innovator. Also, it has been interpreted that the interviewee is amazed by this person, since he highlights his ability to be in this position in a young age, and because the interviewee insistently elaborates on this person's actions. Therefore, it is being interpreted that he somehow likes this person.

Once, the consumers become familiar with new brands, whether another person recommends it or they encounter the brand through a google search, several interviewees explain how they typically would go to the company website and look for cues of the company's legitimacy and trustworthiness. Interviewee 4 and 5 points out that they most likely would turn to the website and check out the longevity of the brand, because "they would not buy something that was established yesterday". (Appendix 6, Page 69). The websites are then being evaluated based on its content, in that "it depends on the brand being professional in their communication. in terms of aesthetics and content on the website", as interviewee 5 states. (Appendix 6, Page 69).

Other sources than company websites, magazine websites, blogs and microblogs are, in the context of this thesis's data, less important for the evaluation process of online information on luxury furniture, however can be used as background checks. For instance, independent review and rating sites, forums and other social networking than microblogging are useful tools to do more peripheral checkups on the credibility of companies and marketing claims.

Social Responsibility

Several interviewees emphasize that luxury furniture companies that embrace social responsibility are perceived more trustworthy and thereby credible. Furthermore, the information provided by them are likely to be judged as being credible. A cluster of social aspects, which are advocated by the consumers to be important, constitute the overall category, social responsibility. Where production mechanisms and sourcing is another important category, which the information should be involved with, social responsibility is another area, which should be mentioned as a key finding of this research study. Interviewee 4 is particularly concerned with social responsibility, when she is asked, what characterizes credible information. She states the following:

"They are going to have to show you why you should trust them and why it is worth spending that money on it... what makes this product better than others that existing already, since it is a new brands then. What are the social awareness, social consciousness and social contribution - especially within the luxury industry" (Appendix 3, page 65)

In the first half of the extraction, the interviewee describes that value mediation is important. Then she describes how she appreciate when the value mediation is concerned with social responsibility aspects. The information controlled by the companies should therefore explain how "companies should give back to societies", to quote interviewee 2. Furthermore, she exemplifies this in the following:

"I read about a woman selling furniture, talking about armadillo rugs.. uhm they are all made in India, and they made six schools out of the revenue for these poor kids... this makes me want to buy cuz I know that I am

getting a good product". (Appendix 3, page 65)

FROM OPEN CODING TO AXIAL CODING

In the process of doing open coding, specific concepts and interpretations were clustered together and form a conceptual understanding of areas of interest according to the data. The procedure of this section of the analysis is involved with discussing these findings by comparing the identified concepts and also comparing them to existing categories from the theoretical framework. Based on this the purpose is to define categories that reflect what the meanings expressed are an instance of. As mentioned, at this stage different clusters of concepts have been identified and the evaluation process of information among the consumers appears to be concerned with the following areas. The content of these areas will be compared and categorized in the following.

Clusters of concepts:

①   **Communication of Established Companies and New Companies:**

②   **Consumers Deal with Uncertainty Before Visiting Showroom or Purchasing Online**

③   **Comprehensive Information**

④   **Company websites, Magazines and Blogs are Widely Used Sources**

⑤   **Social Responsibility**

COMPARING AND CATEGORIZING

The following categorization process is the last step in the open coding. Afterwards, the analysis enters the next stage, where the axial coding takes place. In the following the theoretical samples are used as tools that makes it possible to compare and explain the highlighted concepts shown above. Moreover, areas in the data that is important but does not figure in the framework will also form categories, as the analysis aim to be as open to the data as possible.

① Communication of Established Companies and New Companies)

The first point suggests that especially new companies or companies that are unknown to them should merely focus on providing trustworthy information. This could be done by thoroughly explaining why the company provides quality products and are of high brand status. Thereby, the consumers seek comprehensive information, that confirms their idea of what quality and status is.

That especially two of the interviewees indicate that the information of established companies to a large extent is considered more credible is related to the reputation heuristic. Metzger explains that this occurs when users rely significantly on the name recognition of the website when evaluating if the information found on the website. (Metzger. & Flanagin., 2011, p. 426). In the context of this thesis, the consumers rely on the reputation of a furniture company and therefore put more or less effort in examining the information's credibility cues. Moreover, it is interpreted that status and quality could be concepts related to reputation. The reputation heuristic theory would suggest that the merit of status and quality that the consumer seeks is similar to the

reputation heuristic. It is so, because the consumer assesses information from recognized companies to be credible. Hereby, it is interpreted that that the concept of new and established companies could be explained with the existing reputation heuristic. Later on, the importance of the reputation heuristic will be illustrated in the process of selecting prominent categories.

- **Reputation heuristic**

Furthermore, when analyzing the first cluster of concepts an additional category emerges from the data. There is an instance in the data, where consumer makes a link between trustworthiness and transparency. When this is considered, it is worth noting that this also was suggested by Liberman. Apparently, luxury furniture consumption does involve determining whether information is transparent and thereby trustworthy. For now, an additional category which theoretically spoken could be of significant value to this investigation.

- **Trustworthiness - Transparency**

When comparing this first cluster with existing theories, and concepts in the data, the highlighted two categories emerge. On page 52 in the axial coding process, it will be presented how these categories can be used to explain luxury furniture consumers' credibility evaluation of online information. Before this, in the following, categories in the next cluster of concepts will be identified.

② Consumers Deal with Uncertainty Before Visiting Showroom or Purchasing Online

In the second cluster of concepts it was noticed how the interviewees were split in relation to the management of the uncertainties related to doing research on products and companies. The interviewees, however, agreed that they favored doing research through several media channels, and that a brands that are exposed through a variety of sources most likely are perceived more credible in their communication.

The difference in the research approach among the participants is being understood as a difference in the opinion whether to prefer user-generated content or content produced by professional gatekeepers. Those who favored user-generated content made use of review sites or integrated review systems on company websites, amongst others. According to them user-generated content is more honest. The participants that relied more on professional keepers, were more likely to use a few sources, such as interior designer reviews on magazine websites because of their expertise within luxury furniture.

As the concept "honesty" is not mentioned in the theoretical framework as an important aspect of information credibility. This paves that way for questioning whether the interviewee referred to professional gatekeepers and companies to be somehow biased, when he expressed how amateur bloggers was more honest. At this point the importance of bias as a significant category can be questioned, since the consumer has not directly mentioned something about it. However, it will be mentioned as a category for now and then the importance of the concept will be elaborated in the discussion on page 56. The potentially important category "Honesty", which has been derived from the empirical data, is inferred to be of importance. Interior designer reviews, on the other hand, is being linked to expertise, which is a concept that appears in the in the theoretical framework. In theory, it was induced that expertise was a component to trustworthiness, and this component appear to be an important aspect in the evaluation process. The following two categories has so far been interpreted to be of importance to the understanding of credibility assessment of sources.

- **User-generated content – Honesty**
- **Content produced by professional gatekeepers – Expertise**
- **Bias**

Furthermore, at this stage in the analysis it has been found that most of the meanings expressed supported that the evaluation process included researching comprehensive amounts of information. This means that many of the consumers use multiple sources and use more credibility cues in the evaluation. Interviewee explained how he like to see and evaluate reviews and comments across different sources in a relatively systematic way. (Appendix 4, page 67).

As opposed to the systematic approach, two other interviewees were not as motivated to use systematic and comprehensive information. They would rather rely on a few sources, such as magazines and their integrated review system, where interior designer's comments are included. When these findings are compared to the theoretical frame work, it is obvious to refer to the heuristic-systematic model, which suggests that some people are not as motivated to use multiple sources and search through comprehensive amounts of information. Furthermore, when motivation is low, it is suggested that consumers would make use of a few heuristics such as the reputation heuristic, which is a category that already have been identified. Thereby, the heuristic-systematic model is understood as being relevant for explaining credibility evaluation among luxury furniture consumers.

- **The Heuristic-systematic model**

In the meantime, there is a similarity between consumers relying on multiple sources of user-generated content and Metzger's understanding of social information pooling. Accordingly, social information pooling is precisely defined as been the tendency to use user-generated content, and look at the number of reviews and look further into negative and positive reviews. Therefore, this is also a category that has been formed based on the comparison of findings and theoretical understanding. Some interviewees seemed to embrace unknown people's opinions when they are gathered together. Also, this evaluation process involves comparing statistics, which is inferred based on the instance, where an interviewee says that the information might not be interesting to him if the post or website has received a low number of reviews. This is also mentioned by Metzger as a factor affecting the evaluation.

- **Social information pooling**

The credibility of reviews, however, is also being judged depending on the expertise of the gatekeeper. And when comparing this to the theoretical framework, there are specific similarities between this approach and the preconceived understanding that enthusiast and opinion leader endorsement is a prominent factor in the evaluation of information concerning luxury furniture. It seems that to some interviewees, comprehensive information become redundant because they simplify the process of information evaluation by relying on enthusiast recommendations. This endorsement theory can be utilized to explain that consumers assign credibility to the enthusiast after a longer period, where the enthusiast's opinions and statements have been evaluated to be credible. The interviewees thereby utilize memorized magazines, companies or bloggers to

as cues to assess the credibility.

The last category that has been derived from the data, when analyzing it, is called "the age aspect" and refers to the hypothesis that younger generations are more likely to embrace social information pooling more than older generations. On the other hand, the interviewees belonging to older generations was more hesitant towards social information pooling and relied more on enthusiast endorsement or professional gatekeeper. Therefore, the age aspect has been highlighted as a category that is of importance so far

• **The age aspect**

③ Comprehensive Information

Whether it is information created by users, professional gatekeepers or companies, it is a consistent tendency across the data that the consumers address that comprehensive information contributes to a credible source. The comprehensiveness could in theory represent the attribute depth. According to Gaziano, credible sources are those who provides information that does not lack details, is be up-to-date, and it provides all the sides of the issue. According to the data, thorough explaining why something has extra value is required from the source, and this is an example of how depth is important. Several of the interviewees highlight the mediation of value done by companies, are one way to earn credit among the consumers. Furthermore, another aspect of depth is apparent in the data implies the interviewees embracing the use of images of products in settings, videos, and the dimensions the internet offers in general.

• **Mediation of value**

Moreover, in the context of the data, storytelling appeared to be a contributing factor to the credibility of information and the source. In relation to the source, it has already been understood that the depth was important, and from the data analysis it is now found that storytelling potentially is a good way of providing this depth and thereby a credible source. Also, the information itself is according to several interviewees more credible because this conveys some sort of connection between the communicator and the information provided. Furthermore, information 4 states that storytelling makes the consumer experience more personal and authentic, which was important to her. So far, the concepts personal and authentic is considered being a part of the category storytelling, as this is directly and indirectly mentioned across the data, whereas personal and authentic are concepts that somehow seems to belong to the storytelling category. This is inferred as these two adjectives are used by the interviewee to describe what storytelling contribute to.

• **Storytelling**

An additional category that emerges from the data, when comparing the identified concepts with each other and with categories from the theoretical framework. The measures of source credibility, believability, emerges indirectly, as its components "truthfulness", "reasonability" and "objectivity". The former is interpreted to be a category in the text, when some specific sequences are being analyzed. interviewee 3 emphasize that speaking truthful is vital and that truthful speech includes being reasonable and somehow honest. It appears

from the instance, where he points out that "if they spoke more truthfully like "this is a fine bed, but it will get wear and tear, but it really does function and work and last", then the information and the specific blog, for instance, would be perceived trustworthy. Reasonability and truthfulness, thus, are important categories to this interviewee, which in theory can be categorized under believability. Furthermore, "honesty", which has already been identified as a category, could prove to be prominent in the data to be a component of believability. Moreover, "objectivity" emerges indirectly, as the interviewee states how information should not just state that "this bed is the best". To say "this bed is the best" is highly subjective, as it is an opinion expressed without arguing why it would be that. The objectivity aspect, as stated in the theoretical framework section on page 27 could thereby be implemented by a communicator to get consumers to deal with uncertainty.

Objectivity, in addition, is also mentioned as an important aspect of social information pooling on page 27. Whether the pooled information is found on company websites, blogs or social networking sites, Metzger and Flanagin's theory suggest that it is easier for users to evaluate objective information, which also, at least to some extent, appears in this thesis's data. Moreover, their theory highlights that subjective information in general is more carefully examined.

- **Believability – Truthfulness, Reasonability, Honesty and Objectivity**

Trustworthiness, which in the theoretical framework is highlighted as the a main component of source credibility, emerges as an important aspect of both the credibility assessment of sources, such as a company website, and the information itself. Furthermore, trustworthiness is represented both directly and indirectly. Trustworthiness has, in the meantime, been preconceived to be a main category in credibility assessment, and it has furthermore in the interview guide been replaced with credibility. In the context of conducting interviews, it has been judged a necessity to refer to credibility as trustworthiness, as credibility both in theory and in practice are an abstract English word, which needs considerably explanation in order to use it and understand its detailed meaning. This has been inferred as most theories emphasize credibility's complexity and close relatedness with the concept trustworthiness, which most researchers within the field of source credibility evaluation highlights as a main constituent of credibility.

Moreover, it has been examined, how the category trustworthiness potentially emerges from the data independently of theory. Trust is widely discussed throughout the interviews, also in passages, where the interviewer has not asked the interviewee to elaborate on trust in information. An example of this is expressed by interviewee 1 and interviewee 5 in the following passages:

"It is very important that I trust the company and that is why.. I think.. the company websites have to be the most trustworthy source." (appendix 2, page 64) (Appendix 5, page 68)

"Pinterest, Facebook... maybe Twitter.. These are the easiest way for companies to build trust in my opinion". (Appendix 6, page 69)

 Some additional components of trustworthiness, which are outlined in the theoretical framework, derived from the data during the process of comparing and analyzing it. Transparency has already been identified as a category, and this is further cemented to be of importance in the sequence, where interviewee 4 explains how she trusts communication regarding luxury furniture, when it describes in detail the production process and material sourcing.

Moreover, authenticity is a category that has been identified to be important for a source to be credible. Au-

thenticity is somehow linked to trustworthiness, as interviewee 4 points out that getting more information and personal information makes the experience more authentic and thereby trustworthy. This means that another category is identified and a new component to trustworthiness in source and information evaluation is found.

- **Trustworthiness: Transparency, Authenticity**

4) **Company websites, magazines and blogs very important.**

The findings from the data both reflect the theoretical framework and vary from it in the sense that this study is conducted in another context, namely the context of luxury furniture consumers' online information evaluation at the prepurchase stage. At this stage in the analysis, it is interpreted that many of the categories from the theoretical framework can be used to explain online credibility evaluation among the consumers in focus. Some new categories and some refined categories, however, are also emerging when interpreting and comparing concepts in the data and theoretical framework. This is also the case in the following coding of important categories.

First of all, when analyzing this cluster of concepts, it is found how Metzger and Flanagin's assumption that most credibility evaluation online involves the use of specific favored sources. All interviewees clarify that they usually make use of more sources than a company website to judge if a company and its marketing messages are credible. Most of the interviewees highlighted that they utilized several sources and most of the time specific ones. Company websites are, as mentioned, largely used to find information regarding the value of products. Also, company websites, according to several interviewees, are used to research whether the company is legitimate and to find information on brand longevity. One interviewee specifically explains how she would not trust a company, which information was recently launched and another explains that he would question the legitimacy of a company if not that many have bothered reviewing the products. (Appendix 6 and 4, page 69 and 67). Furthermore, it is interpreted that consumers to a large degree want the company appears well established as this suggest that the brand will exist in the future as well. Brand longetivity and legitimacy would not figure as main categories of importance in this thesis, however. The reason for this is that it is understood as being parts of other categories. For example, the concepts has to do with transparency and depth of the information provided by the source, as the consumers demand comprehensiveness and calrity of imortant aspects.

Moreover, interviewee 5 explains that she often most turns to the company website, once she has encountered a new brand through a google search. Accordingly, the company websites as a source is usually evaluated based on their professionality in their communication, which she assesses based on the content and the aesthetics of the website. Professionality, in the meantime, is not mentioned in the theoretical framework. The category expertise appears from the theoretical framework, and is similar to professionality, as it implies topic mastery and other assessment of the content. However, expertise has already been identified to be a measure of credibility of sources controlled by professional gatekeepers, whereas professionality, according to the data, is more related to company. Therefore, the category expertise is revised in the sense that it has been extended to expertise/professionality. Moreover, according to the data, expertise is measures by the experience that the source has had within the luxury industry.

- **Expertise/Professionality – aesthetics, experience and content.**

Despite using company websites to assess professionality, legitimacy and brand longevity, other sources are being used to judge the information clarifying the value of the companies' products. This is both done by including sources controlled by the company, professional gatekeepers and users. As mentioned, online magazines are other important sources to the interviewees. In several of the interviews it was found that the consumers embraced company websites and magazines with integrated blogs and review systems, since it helped assessing the credibility of information and the source. Integrated blog systems and external microblogs, such as a company's social networking site Instagram, are accordingly very effective. This is so, because of the opportunity to use images that put the products in settings and to be updated on modern lifestyle.

- **Company websites – integrated blog and review systems – microblogging**

- **Online magazines – Integrated blog and review systems**

What is found to be relatively prevalent are user-generated content, which have been indicated in that the integrated review systems on some company websites and in some online magazines also includes reviews of other users. For especially interviewee 3 and 7, user-generated reviews are honest and useful to assess the credibility of information. Moreover, interviewee 7 emphasize how he use user-generated content in the sense that he follows people, whose opinion he trusts, on social networking sites. This can explain by the already identified category enthusiast/opinion leader endorsement in that the consumer relies on the opinion of a person, who is a personification of certain values, such as influential innovation, to use the same words as the interviewee. Therefore, this person has a specific social position, and is being endorsed based on this.

- **Social networking sites**

- **Opinion leader/enthusiast endorsement**

The way the interviewee endorses another person's recommendation could maybe also be explain by comprising an aspect of social confirmation of personal opinion. This is only the case if the consumer from the opinion leader example endorses the information because they are like-minded. This seems possible he is interpreted that he likes this person and have shared interest. However, this is still unclear, and it is understood that the fact that this person is perceived an expert with a specific social position calls for a main understanding that this is an example of opinion leader/enthusiast endorsement.

However, there is another aspect of following an opinion leader, and this is focused around the feature that allows the consumer to choose what he wants to be exposed to on social networking sites. The consumer in the mentioned example exemplifies how he stays connected to credible sources, such as specific Instagram profiles. The connections on the social networking sites are therefore of certain importance.

- **Social networking sites - Connections**

From the data it emerges, that some additional sources are used to some degree, however, it is interpreted by the interviewees' descriptions that these are more peripheral background checks. One interviewee, for instance, describes that "There is yelp and there is few rating services that you can end up looking at". It is understood that these are independent rating services that somehow can have an influence, however, accordingly

this these are not a part of the ordinary research process.

5) Social Responsibility

Social responsibility features as a theme in the data, as for instance when interviewee 2 comments on a company she found out had social contribution as a core value: "... this makes me want to buy cuz I know that I am getting a good product" (Appendix 3, page 65). This is being interpreted to be an instance of storytelling, which has already been identified as a prominent concept. What is interesting here is that the fact that they are involved with a specific instance of social responsibility would convince her that she gets a good product. This suggests that when companies prove that they are occupied with social responsibility and communicate about it, then the company is trusted in its communication. Therefore, social responsibility figures as a category, even though it is more of a theme of the information than it is an approach to information evaluation and a characteristic of a credible source.

• **Social responsibility**

FROM AXIAL CODING TO SELECTIVE CODING

REASSEMBLING AND SELECTION OF CATEGORIES

As categories have been identified, the next step is the axial coding, which distinguishes from the process of doing open coding in that no new aspects from the data emerges. Instead, axial coding revolves around the identified categories and involves gathering the categories, rearranging them based on the comparing of the categories and theoretical samples that is repeatedly done. In the following the identified categories will be presented and is explained how the reassembled categories are structured and defined in the way they are.

Moreover, it is important to note that the discussion chapter that follows this presentation of the findings is a part of the analysis in that it aims to discuss how specific categories are prominent and therefore selected. The discussion thereby both a part of the axial and selective coding process as it explains how some categories are related and explains how specifically prominent categories have been selected in the selective coding process.

The purpose of rearranging the categories in a structured manner is to get overview of significant aspects of the evaluation of credibility of information and sources among luxury furniture consumers in American. Three different aspects of the findings affect the structure of the presented categories, which will be explained in the following.

The following findings in the analysis will be incorporated in the structure to illustrate separate categories.

① The understanding that content is either generated by the luxury furniture companies, by professional gatekeepers and users. This dimension is included, because it reveals which aspects of the communication that the company controls and which it does not.

② Moreover, the findings are presented with a structure that reflect how the categories belong to different overall categories. These are respectively; credibility evaluation related to measures of source credibility, strategies for information evaluation, Specific sources used and the themes that also emerge from the data.

③ Lastly, the structure reflects the persistent pattern that those interviewees who did not use as many sources also were the ones who relied more on content generated by companies and professional gatekeepers rather than users. In opposition, the interviewees who used multiple sources was also those appreciating user-generated content. Therefore, the findings of this

thesis present two overall strategies used by consumers to evaluate credibility of information. Each of the interviewees are more likely to appreciate one of these strategies, although in some cases they tend to appreciate both of the strategies.

There is an additional challenge related to presenting the data, which will affect the structure of the presentation of categories derived from the data and the analysis. It revolves around the finding that the analysis furthermore revealed a relatively widespread agreement across the data, which also should be incorporated in the structured figures. In the following two overall strategies for information evaluation among luxury consumers, many of the categories are mentioned in both of the figures, which reflects that the consumers, besides being contradictory in their expressions, also was somehow consistent. This have resulted in some of the categories matching both of the following presented approaches.

On the following pages the results of the analysis are illustrated in two figures based on the separations and findings outlined in the above section.

EVALUATION OF ONLINE SOURCE AND INFORMATION CREDIBILITY AMONG AMERICAN CON-SUMERS OF LUXURY FURNITURE.

The first model covers the results that are related to luxury furniture consumers, who tend to use **few sources** and **favor company produced content** and **professional gatekeeper produced content**:

COMPANY CONTROLLED CONTENT

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes
Company websites and integrated blog systems widely used.	Expertise/profession-alism Trustworthiness Depth Believability Bias	Reputation heuristic	Mediation of values Storytelling Social responsibility

PROFESSIONAL GATE KEEPERS

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes
Magazines with in-tegrated review and blog systems widely used	Expertise/profession-alism (aesthetics, con-tent and experience)	Enthusiast/opinion leader endorsement heuristic	Mediation of values

USER GENERATED CONTENT

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes
Generally used less frequently. Ratings and reviews used to some degree	Established rating and review systems convey expertise	Heuristic strategy	Does not figure

The Second model covers the results that are related to luxury furniture consumers, who tend to use **multiple sources** and besides using **company produced content** and **professional gatekeeper produced content** also appreciate **user-generated content**:

COMPANY CONTROLLED CONTENT

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes
Company websites and integrated blog systems widely used Microblogging (social media)	Expertise/profession-alism Trustworthiness Depth Believability Bias	Reputation (to some extent)	Mediation of value Storytelling Social responsibility

PROFESSIONAL GATE KEEPERS

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes
Magazines with integrated blog- and review systems	Expertise/profession-alism (to some extent important) Bias	Comprehensive and systematic approach	Mediation of value

USER GENERATED CONTENT

Sources	Source credibility	Strategies for information evaluation	Themes
A Variety of sources related to social net-working sites Reviews, blogs, rat-ings	Depth Believability (honesty)	Social information pooling widely used	Mediation of value

DISCUSSION

In this discussion, the aim is to explain and further discuss the identified and structured categories, the relatio ships between them and why they are selected as core categories. Each of the salient findings related to sourc-es, source credibility, strategies for evaluation and themes are explained as theories in the following.

A major finding in the data, which is featured in the presented figure, suggests that American consumers of luxury furniture are split in the way they evaluate the credibility of online information. This appears as some of the consumers express that they rely on multiple sources of not only professional gatekeepers and compa-nies but also users. Another group of consumers tend to rely more on a few sources that is mostly controlled professional gatekeepers and companies. The research study hereby suggests that two overall strategies for evaluation are applied. A few of the consumers, however, could not be placed as exclusively using one of these strategies, and therefore, it is relative to which extent a consumer belongs to one of the strategies or both.

SOURCES

The results of the analysis furthermore reveal that multiple and relatively varied sources are used to find relevant and credible information. Company websites is used among all of the consumers and integrated blog and review systems on these company websites is appreciated by the several of the consumers. Sources controlled by professional gatekeepers is especially popular among consumers using few and consistently chosen sources. Here, reviews and blogs in online magazine is favored especially by this group. In contrast, the consumers using multiple sources, are more likely to use sources controlled by other users, such as social networking sites and review systems.

SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Moreover, some of the results are related to the way consumers evaluate credibility of the source. In terms of company website, depth of the information provided as well as the expertise and professionalism were among aspects that the majority of consumers appreciated as measures of source credibility. Comprehensive information is required especially from new companies, because they got to prove their value and status. Moreover, trustworthiness aspects, especially those of transparency and authenticity is measures that argu-ably enhance the credibility of company controlled sources. Lastly, believability proved to be important touch point in the evaluation process, where the consumers expressed that honesty and objectivity in the commu-nication constituted the believability.

In relation to sources of professional gatekeepers, an identified group of consumers largely emphasize online magazines that convey expertise. According to these consumers, the magazines that they use are experienced and uses interior designers' opinions that convey expertise and professionalism. On the other hand, the other identified group of consumers, which use multiple sources, also utilize user-generated sources as these argu-ably are more honest in their connotation. Furthermore, this group of consumers might skeptical towards professional gatekeeper sources and company websites as they could be biased in their communication.

The above discussion suggests a duality in the evaluation process of American luxury furniture consumers that potentially could be a result of younger generations finding multiple and diverse sources more credible than the original evaluation approach. This assumption could be prevalent, as the interviewees that uses multiple sources was under 30 years old and because the consumers using few sources was above 45.

STRATEGIES FOR INFORMATION EVALUATION

Furthermore, the results comprised an understanding of strategies applied by the sample of American luxury furniture consumers. The analysis of the collected data reveals that the reputation of the company is used as a heuristic to guide, whether information is credible or if a more thorough evaluation is necessary. This heuristic was defined by several of the consumers, and for new companies especially, a reputation should be build based on communication on values, production, sources and personal history. The results suggest that consumers additionally appreciate building reputation by focusing on aesthetics and use of images and blogs, which potentially can enhance the credibility of the information.

In terms of information provided by professional gatekeepers, one part of consumers that use few sources largely embraces enthusiast endorsement. Based on this, consumers are likely to embrace expertise and assign credibility to the enthusiast after a longer period, where the enthusiast's opinions and statements have been evaluated to be credible. Interior designer opinions are highly prioritized as credible information among some consumers. This heuristic is in instances used ultimately, as other information can become redundant as the enthusiasts' opinions are embraced.

Other consumers, However, are more likely to use multiple heuristics and systematic evaluation. As they tend also to embrace enthusiast and opinion leader recommendations, they also utilize other heuristics, especially social information pooling. This results in a systematic evaluation process, where other users' reviews and ratings are considered. Here, integrated review systems on both company websites, online magazines and social networking sites.

THEMES

The results furthermore reveal that specific themes of the information provided by companies are appreciated by consumers of luxury goods. These themes are supporting the credibility judgement of the information and the source. The communication is likely to be perceived credible when the communication mediated are related to how quality and value of products and brands are guaranteed, when they make the experience more personal and authentic through storytelling and when it is concerned with explaining how the company are involved with social responsibility of some sort.

CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this thesis was to develop a deep understanding of how American consumers of luxury furniture evaluate the credibility of online information and online sources related to luxury furniture. The purpose of the research study was to gain knowledge that is valuable for Harbour Outdoor's marketing management and to clarify which aspects of the procedure of evaluation that potentially affect the consumers attitudes and behavior. The interest in the area was acquired on the basis of an internship with the luxury furniture company, Harbour Outdoor, as well as theories related to source credibility and information credibility. This paved the way for wonderment of how to gain knowledge that can be used as a base line for Harbour Outdoors to achieve that credibility information is provided to its audience through online communication controlled by the company, professional gatekeepers and users

Qualitative interviews were used as a method to collect samples comprising meanings expressed by luxury furniture consumers in New York. The analysis of the data was conducted by applying Grounded theory. Here, different coding processes was used as tools to identify concepts and categories in the data and comparing these findings with each other as well as with theoretical samples. The theoretical preunderstanding proved to be useful in explaining aspects of the consumers' meanings in areas concerning the use of specific sources, source credibility, information credibility and themes.

The outcome of the analysis comprises theories and categories that are structured in two figures, which has been formed based on a division in the findings and to the context in which the categories are significant. These figures reveal the duality in the credibility evaluation among consumers, where some consumers use multiple sources and strategies for evaluation. This group of consumers tend to use both company websites, professional gatekeeper content and user-generated content in the process of evaluating information. This is done in a systematic way, where different heuristics are used, such as enthusiasm endorsement, social information pooling and the use of multiple sources. Social information pooling is widely used among these consumers and user reviews and ratings are often judged to be credible, because of the honesty that user-generated content conveys.

On the other hand, another group of consumers tend to rely on only a few heuristics, especially enthusiasm and opinion leader endorsement. They preferable use company websites and a few professional gatekeeper sources in the evaluation process and favor expertise and professionalism in the content. Magazines that include blogs and interior designer reviews are a heuristic that in cases are used exclusively.

However, luxury consumers, according to the results, also have similar strategies for credibility evaluation of information and sources. Trustworthiness, depth, expertise, bias and believability was prominent measures of source credibility across the data. Luxury furniture consumers base their evaluation mainly on transparency, comprehensiveness, honesty and objectivity in the information.

Lastly, different themes are highlighted as important to the credibility assessment. Luxury furniture consumers embrace interests in storytelling, social responsibility and mediation of values. The values that the consumers demand is information regarding sourcing, quality, history and status.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX 1) INTERVIEW GUIDE

The questions:

1) Could you tell me what your age is and where you live?

2) In my research study, I use this definition of luxury furniture: "anything that adds pleasure or comfort to your life, is not absolutely necessary, and is usually expensive"

    Can you recall that you have bought a piece with such qualities and used the internet to find information about it within the last 2 years? When was that, and can you explain the process of searching for information prior to this purchase?

3) Would you say that it is likely that you would buy luxury furniture in the future?

4)   Would you say that it is likely that you would use the internet to find information about the company and the product?

5) Why, if yes, are you interested in owing such furniture?

6) Why is it important to you to own such pieces of furniture ?

7) When you search for information, which of the following platforms would you rather use to find information on a product: Company websites, Social network sites, blogs, rating sites? Which kind of blogs, social network sites.

8) Could you explain what it means to you that these platforms or trustworthy?

9) Would you rather use many platforms to do research on companies and products or only a few?

10) Is a company website alone sufficient to provide information?

11) Why are specific sources more trustworthy than others?

12) Could you explain to me what is important for you, when you search for information on luxury furniture?

13) How can the information convince you that this could be a potential purchase for you?

14) How would it affect your evaluation of information, if a company is not mentioned in any reviews or if they are only mentioned in a few reviews?

15) Bloggers are either paid bloggers, independent experts, amateurs. Is it important to you which of these are reviewing the product or company that you need information on?

16) If trustworthiness is important to you, how could trustworthiness of a source be build?

17) What does it mean to you that a company is trustworthy?

18) Could you mention a few luxury furniture companies that you think is trustworthy in their online commu-

nication?

19) What do the mentioned companies do that increase the level of trustworthiness?

20) If a furniture company that is unknown to you should convince you to buy their products through online communication, what would be a good approach for them?

21) How does it affect your perception of a furniture company if users are very active/very inactive on their social network sites?

22) Would you say that your friends' or other people's perceptions of a company affects your purchase decision?

APPENDIX 2)

NOTES FROM INTERVIEW 1:

Caitlyn, 28 years old, from New York

Ok lets start the interview. Firstly, I would like to ask you what your age is and where you live.

I am 28 and I am living here in new York

I would also like to ask if you have used the internet to search for information on luxury furniture prior to a purchase?

Yes I have done that

Ok, great.

It was half a year ago and since I am living in Brooklyn there is a lot of options. I looked up quality furniture in Manhattan

I went to different sites went through a lot of information and I choices... I limited my search to those sites that were more appealing to me.

I see.. so that is important to you. When you search for information, which of the following platforms would you rather use to find information on products or companies. Company websites, social network sites, blogs or rating sites?

I am not that much on social media, and I would not make a status update to ask people I now. I mostly use of cause company websites, and also blogs.. I mean,, if specific companies or products are mentioned and yeah rating sites when I don't know the company.

I guess it will probably make me more likely to buy a product if I see that bloggers, who know what they are talking about, are writing about it and can recommend it.

In terms of content of the information you find... how can it convince you that the company is trustworthy? How is information on luxury furniture trustworthy?

Uhhh, I guess they would make a thorough description of the design, describe what it is related to. And also, it should describe how it would specifically fit into my apartment. Or any other lifestyle. And how it is.. has to have a good social responsibility. It should definitely mention something about that

Yes I would say so. Trust is important.. I have to trust them when I am considering using my money.

Ok uhm.. how would it have affected your perception of a company, if they are not mentioned in any reviews at all on rating sites or maybe a few reviews

I would probably.. I would not feel comfortable with that.. if it has no reviews.. because it means that not a lot of people have bothered going there, because of a reason obviously. And I would not buy something that..

Would you maybe search for another company if you found that?

Most likely yeah. To be safe

Thank you.. amateurs.. yeah.. is it important to you which of these are reviewing the product or does it matter at all?

Uhhm there is some downsides and upsides to all of them.. I guess the most honest review would come from the amateur bloggers

Yeah so honesty is very important?

Yeah very important

It is very important that I trust the company and that is why.. I think.. the company websites have to be the most trustworthy source.

Yeah.. the amateur websites.. it is ok if they are not trustworthy.. the others I use more as a kind of checking whether the company is mentioned by others. I can make that decision myself if I trust the company. But the company websites definitely have to make an effort to look and feel trustworthy

Ok.. interesting. How does it affect your perception of a furniture company if users are very active on their social network sites?

Uhm.. yeah.. I guess it is good that they are active

Would you say that your friends or other people's perception of a company affects your purchase decision?

Definitely.. if people have had a bad visit to the company of some sort, I will be more hesitant to go, and uhm... if they can recommend me.. give me a good stamp.. then I would be more likely to pay them a visit.

APPENDIX 3)

NOTES FROM INTERVIEW 2:

Priti, 34 years old, From New Jersey

Ok... Of cause... So in my experience, as a consumer, I have always been drawn to luxury products and brands. And i... you know.. it can be a little dangerous because you end up spending more money, but at the same time I know when to stop. I know in the luxury furniture industry, how something is made, if it is handmade, what you get for your money, of cause if it is something that is machine made and mass produced then it may have the same look of a high end brand but it is not going to last and they are not using the durable material.

I personally prefer, if a brand is to sell me products that to have something that I going know is made out of a good material, that it is not going to fall apart. You can find something at a reasonable cost. Maybe if you spend 2000 3000 dollars on a piece... it has to match your budget, right.

Yeah that makes sense. Ok. Great. How can a company, if you don't know the actual brand, how can it convince you that this is something you can trust?

Well if its an established brand it is quiet easy for them.. if it is a new brand then.. they are going to have to show you why you should trust them and why it is worth spending that money on it. The reason would be.. well.. what material are we using to manufacture this. How are we making it. What.. you know.. what makes this product better than others that existing already, since it is a new brands then. What are the social awareness, social consciousness and social contribution. Because now companies should also give back.. so especially within lux industry.. like "rug breeding".. I met a woman selling furniture, talking about armadillo rugs.. uhm they are all made in india, and they made six schools out of the revenue for these poor kids. So there is no child labor involved. It is made.. they are giving back to the community that is making this.

And they.. it makes me want to buy cuz I know that I am getting a good product. And in many cases it is not that expensive. It's the price is mid range but you know it is a good purchase when it does something good. So there are lux brands that do this and others don't. so for a new brand, that is something to think about.

Yeah OK, so they have to show that they are socially responsible through their communication?

Yeah they should explain how they are socially aware. Socially conscious. Uhm involved with some sort of charity.

Giving back

A lot of these brand they have the products made in asia. So.

Is this something you thought about   10 or 20 years ago, or is it a new way of thinking?

This is something new. I want to say newer. Maybe 10 years.

I mean big corporations have been doing this for a long time, like Microsoft. Richard branson. These big companies. They do it. They are doin it the right way. But for luxury it is something you should think about. If you are a new brand.. as a consumer.. uhm I think it has become more important to my decision. Not always but it is likely that it affects my decision. You know. If I am looking at chanel or…. It is because I like those brands and their design. So that is on another level. Omg I have to have it. So nice. But for new brands coming up.. quality.. status..

Oh, so It can be hard for a new brand to show status in their appearance online, or what?

For a new brand. Yeah.

Uhm. I was thinking about… the platforms, where companies are communicating messages, Is it important to you, which platform they are using? Does the company have to use both their website and the social network sites, blogs and rating sites to communicate?

I think is has become more common. I don't know if my answer is the right answer, but I think it has become more common. I think for me to see something like advertised in magazines both online and print form is important. I don't look that much at tweets actually.

Ok, what about blogs for example?

I am not that much into that kind of thing. I don't look at blogs that often. For me I know what brands I like so I go to trade shows for instance, so in relation to social media and blog I might not be the right person to ask. The physical presence is important to me.

So, you don't think blogs necessarily is a good way to become trustworthy. I mean… it is not only the company itself who are using the blogs.. users are also recommending brands on blogs.

Not for me. I need the physical presence. As supposed to blogs. I need to see it. But that is just me. People younger than me would probably say differently. What is it called, they do on their phone.. Instagram.. and following each other and using preview sites.

Yeah, I guess many consumers rely on these different types of media when they make decisions. Its different from person to person.

Excactly. It is different from the way it used to be and people are purchasing online and all that. So you will get varied opinions. This is just mine.

People read blogs and put a lot of time in that, for me it is.. have have to see it in a show or exhibited. Or magazines which I sometimes look at online. Uhm especially for furniture.

Well for my personal shopping, like I told you because I already know which brands I like, because I know which brands I like I can now shop online, because I trust them. So, I don't have to go to shows. But for new brands they have to have a presence.

So, would you mind if, for instance, a company only had their websites to communicate, if they weren't active on other platforms you know.

Yeah yeah they have to be able to show their products ultimately on different platforms to spread out. I mean. I would love to say that… I have shopped I was uhm.. there were times where I was fine looking for products online. Looking for vendors.. requesting samples so that I could see the quality. Finish samples and catalogues and stuff. I purchased that way. But then I've done research on companies to make sure they are legitimate.

But uhm I think it depends.. but for myself if I don't know the brand, I would like to know where I can find it so that I can see.

Great. Uhm. I have to check if that is all I have… Could you name a few brands which you think is good at delivering messages that are trustworthy? And provides trustworthy information in general.

There is Holly Hunt.. uhm.. there is don going (22).. bmb Italian. I like Italian brands.

They have a big presence. They participate in tradeshows and make an effort to serve consumers and be transparent at what they do. They invest a lot of money in their marketing so that they can be present everywhere and provide useful information. The companies that I mention are well established. They have been there for a long

time. One of them has going through many transitional phases.. like don going. 50 years alone.

APPENDIX 4)

NOTES FROM INTERVIEW 3:

Jason, 26 years old, From New York

Just before we start, I would like to ask you if you have used the internet for researching on product information before purchasing luxury furniture?

Here? No. Usually I go to the store to check it out.

So you never search for information before you go out?

Not really. It really depends, but I usually go to Macys or bath and beyond. And I read the reviews. So sometimes I do, but with this store, I don't. I research more brands than these stores.

Okay, that also relevant for my thesis. So, you mentioned the reviews. If you can't find any reviews, would it impact you're purchase intention?

Um, if it's online, I probably wouldn't buy it, if there were no reviews, but if I oculd see it at the store, it would as much. But if I wasn't just trying to gage online, then I wouldn't.

What kind of review sites do you usually research on?

Usually, just the store that's selling it, so if I'm buying something on macys and looking for a bed frame I like to see there what people have commented or if its on Amazon, I see what peple ahave said about that product.

Oh, okay. So an integrated review system. Interesting.

R: So do you think this adds some trustworthiness to the product that others are reviewing it?

Yeah, I do.

And then, in regards to that, it has to be a well-known company, that's important?

I think if it's things sold through a well-known company or if it isn t well known brand it needs to have some kind of merit behind it, if it's not having a good quality like Ralph Lauren bedding and stuff like that you know the quality is good. Or like if youre looking though IKEA you know what youre getting cheap but low function furniture, you know its not going to be crap, but its not high quality as something from ABC, Macys or Bloomingdales. There's a quality the name brand but you know what youre getting based on the reviews.

And you would rather buy luxury like ABC and then go to IKEA? Or would you go to IKEA first?

I think it depends on what im looking fore and how long term im thinking this piece should las. If im lookin for nice bed frame or a nice dresser, sidetable etc. I do prefer something more luxury.

Because of the quality or because it adds something speicific?

I think.. you know.. that its going to be what stand more time more as like IKEA furniture is great 3-4 years, and then you know youre going to out grow it and you should prbaly not be shopping at IKEA. Or you know you can get a sidetable that you know is something you know would last thought the years and get better with the tyears and still be quality and well made. Because you know its been well made whereas IKEA is built yourself. IKEA is just the one brand I mean.

Okay, one last question. If a company were to convince you that this would be something you can trust, how would they do it in a good way in terms of online information?

 Um, I'm a hige fan of people who are doing videos showing a quality. Im not a fan of hthings that compare themselves to other brands. Like toiletpaper commercials, I hate when they hate other brands. Because I don't hinkg it should be a competition in that way, they shouldn't be comparing. They should just be showing why yours Is better. So videos howing how it workds, whosing the function and stability and somehow testing of the materials to its highest function.

Girl: But not overly repetitive. If you only h ave a certain amount of time to see something just say all of it, and keep it consise.

Him: but not just say, this will last you five years. Show some hitting it with a hammer or give it a wear and tear of a normal day within a maybe four miniute video.

Okay, and how would you feel if this video was made, would you rather have that it was an amateur, a videographer or a blogger or if this video blogger was paid. How would you feel, which would you trust more?

I would probably trust an amateur video more. My boss showed me this washing machine she was buying and she showed me this amateur guy doing it for you and doin a testing of it. And I would believe that more than the ectual company unless the company is known for... I thinkg IKEA does videos, but if IKEA did videos to show, I would still be able to trust it, because IKEA wouldn't lie, because theres also this whole legal thing where you cant lie about your products.

Yeah. But if it was an external video blogger, who you knew did reviews of luxury products, and IKEA were to pay him or her. Would you still think iof this as trustworthy, because they are still getting something out of it?

I think it depends. The people who have reviewed them or seen their videos in their past believe theyr are speaking the truth and theyre speaking honestly in stead of "this is the best bed!". But if they spoke more truthfully like "this is a fine bed, but it will get wear and tear, but it really does function and work and last". Then I would believe it more, if they were getting paid. Because they were being honest about it, on their connotation. I would feel comfortable with that.

Okay, so you could pretty much purchase something based on a blog post?

Yeah.

APPENDIX 5)

NOTES FROM INTERVIEW 4:

Justina, 30 years old, From Boston

30 and I live in Swankscott which is in massachussets, which is near Boston.

have you shopped for luxury furniture online?

Um, everywhere. So online, in person and then also designing custom pieces like that.

Great, so are you using different platforms to search for information prior to a purchase or prior to getting to know a company?

Uhm, honestly I guess, yeah. Theres a bunch of ways you can look for furniture so sometimes a client will come to you and they tell which company to look for and then you reach out for them. If youre doing vintage or trying to just live like that then youre going to trying to find antique shops and some companies have a really good reputation. And then obviously online, websites, googling, FIRST DIBS??, are really good, because they do custom and antiue furniture and then larger stores like ABC that represents a lot of different lines. But I would say that the internet is like number 1 because theres photographs, information, dimensions, pricing and all that kind of stuff right there. So the more information you can get imidiately the more likely I am to use you when I have to call or send an email to get more information. You pass it by.

Very interesting. In terms of trustworthiness of a brand, if you're searching for information online, what could a company to convince you that this is something you can trust and this is a great brand?

There is a lot of companies that, particularly in the United States, that are trying to sell "made in US" and then telling their story, telling where it's made, if it's organic, how it's source where the frames are made, where everything comes from, or where they get their fabrics. Theyre kind of trying to make it a more personal experience when they give you more information about the brand rather than just going online. Like say for example restauration haardwaee, they don't really offer much information about ehre things are from, thy will sometimes have antique websites on their websites, but they don't really say "we source this from this and this place". But if theres a company and they give information like "we went to Bali and we found this place, and we found these pieces and that's where these are from". Then there's this connection and sort of a relevenance to it, so you get a little more information and it feels more authentic. Particularr in the luxury market where youre paying a higher price. You want too know why we're payning a higher price. It's shouldn't just be arbitrary, like "oh we just make the best sofa!", but

why is it the best sofa? What's the frame? What is the upholstery? To give me more information.

Alright. To be give a bit more comprehensive information. Okay, but is it enough that the it's the website and the company themselves that say this or is it also important that its also mentioned in reviews and blogs?

Yeah, I think that reviews in interior design and... I do residential design. So a lot of end users, the client, isn't going to go online "oh I love my sofa, or I love my chair. They are not going to give a review, so really worth of mouth and knowing other designers. And then seeing the products used in features. So when you look at architectural digests and you look and yoi see something that you've seen before and you know that

igh end designers are using that products and you know it's a good quality product... If you're knew on the market it's really hard abviously to start a brand and create a trust and all those things. So I thinkg that's where the websites are important and brand longevity, that how you know you can stand by your product, and people are using your product. So having a showroom so people can see it in person, that's really helpful. And then just putting your stuff out there, putting it in settings, because it can be really hard imaging something just by a single photo, but when you can see it with other furniture pieces, that helps.

So, is it important to you what other people thinks about a specific brand or specific pieces?

For my career I have to like the product before. It doesn't really matter if someelse is loving it or saying that this is the greatest. That abviosuly helps or opens my eyes to something and I may go research it more to why people are talking about it. But I think that abviosuly using it, getting to know it, and also when you particularly furniture designers, you work with trade so when you place an order, customer service, that's a huge part of working with companies. If someone has good customer service, theyre attentive, they respond to your email right away, I will use them even if theyre product isn't as nice as other people, because they just care more. That personal relationship is really important... because you coulndt work with someone who makes the most amaxing products, but when you email them 10 times they don't respond and you have to call them, and theyre like "oh well, such and aushc isn't here, can I take a message?" What do they mean by that. I just want oo buy a sofa. So that a real contributing factor.

Can you mention some companies that practice this kind of customer service or recommend?

Oh my goodness, I know so many companies over the years. So I would say Urban Electric Company, it's a lighting company, and they do pretty luxury lighting and theyre customer service is awesome. Theyre super responsive... I don't know what it is about them, they do a really good job. It really depends on the showroom too, like one good example would be Plantation Furniture. It's a custom furniture company bvased in California and they have one showroom that I like to work with because that showroom is responsive, but not all their other people, offices are as good, so I've created a connection with that individual office and that one person at the office. But they have multiple offices so I Cant say as a whole the company is great, because they have one person that is responsive, who I always email with. So hthinkg its that kind of support...

APPENDIX 6)

NOTES FROM INTERVIEW 5:

Marnie, 48 years old, From New York

Before we start I would like to ask you if you have searched for information online prior to a purchase of a luxury furniture piece within the last two years?

Ok. I will definitely consider myself a shopper of luxury furniture.

I live in Manhattan. And New York, New York,

I use this definition of luxury furniture: Anything that adds pleasure or comfort to your life, is not absolutely necessary and is usually more expensive. So could you recall that you have bought such a piece?

I would say that luxury furniture.. all furniture can be luxury furniture. Whether it is needed or not needed. So you can get a sofa that is 99 dollars, you can get a sofa for 90.000 dollars. There is a range in reference to that. But even something that is 2000 dollars can still be considered luxury. Depending on what it is, who is buying it and what you are looking for to achieve.

99 percent of the times where you shop for furniture you can always find a high or medium.. you might be able

to find several, you might only be able to find one. That is very close to, similar, but not exactly as.. but most cases with furniture, that is what you got.. If you are someone that is resilient to that you can get the same look lot cheaper. Or you can get the same for lot more expensive. And you can get the same thing also, with a price range as well.

That makes sense. Cool. I would also like to ask. Um. Why are you interested in owing such pieces that maybe could be bought cheaper, but maybe are a bit more expensive?

Why I would pick a more expensive alternative? For me it depends on how it is going to be used. And what it is and where it is going to be shown. What we are looking to achieve and how long it needs to last. So there is a lot of different things that goes into that sort of. So lets say I would just do something where I.. In New York you usually have a bedroom, or a bed and a sofa and a table in your apartment. And um, and every single piece you have has to be used in several different ways, has to look good the majority of time when you get of and on it, you want it to have a certain aesthetic.

It is a piece of furniture but it is also decoration. Therefore, marketer have to show how specific pieces would decorate your apartment. Because your apartment might be four walls if you are in a studio. Or one bedroom. It is a different feeling. And that aspect, that is where I am making the decision on how much money I am going to spend on it. Traditionally, if you were buying a sofa, your sofa, your dining room table and your bed tend to be where the majority of your money should be spend. Because that is wher you are living on most. Alright. The other stuff are extras.

Those are luxury. A little side chair. That is an extra. A little ottoman, that is an extra. And that would be considered more of a luxury because it is not a necessity for life. You know. You need a place to eat, sleep and lounge when you are at home.

Yeah OK. That makes sense. Also I want to ask – when you search for information on the internet – which of these following platforms would you rather use to find information: company websites, social media sites, blogs or rating sites?

It is a hard question yes. I guess I don't have a preference. But If I have to pick one it would be social media, as supposed to, because I might see something that is displayed on social media, or someone who talks about a brand on the social media, and then I would go and research it. But normally I go.. Lets that that I look for a circular sofa, or circular sectional, I might google that and then look at the images. And then say ok I like the look of this and this. Which brand is it and where can I get it. And then go do my search through the company, or through where it is. And then where can I go and sit on it.

OK So you search for specific pieces and then..?

For me searching for information is to get more knowledge. I am not looking for specific designs. I looking for specific pieces in most cases. The aesthetics has already been formed.

But Someone who just started being a furniture enthusiast, would have to go to Pinterest, For instance, to get an idea of.. I don't like this style.. I like this style.. you know.. just to get a sense of where they want to go with the design. And then go to the visual pieces to go shop and see.

Which social media.. you mentioned the importance of social media. Which sites are good sites for making the a brand trustworthy to you as a consumer?

Pinterest, Facebook... some might do Twitter.. I am a little old for that I think.. or do something else.. These are the easiest way for companies to build trust in my opinion... Instagram

So do you ask your friends if they know about companies or sites who are trustworthy and recommendable for research?

I normally search myself, and then go and do the research on the companies.

OK.. um.. also, if a company only have information about their products on their website, would that be an issue for you that they are not mentioned on social network sites and blogs?

Actually, they don't have to be mentioned elsewhere for me to find an interest in it.

OK. In terms of trustworthiness of the information you find on the internet... How can a company convince you that its something you can trust?

Normally I see for how long the company has been around.. I wouldn't just go with someone that was yesterday.

Also, it depends on the brand being professional in their communication... in terms of aesthetics and content on the website.

OK I see. So, it is not important to you that a company is mentioned in all sorts of blogs and articles... and different kinds of sources?

Not really.. I means.. there is not something at the moment that literally guarantees that the service is good. Not at the moment. There is Yelp and there is a few different rating services that you can totally end up looking at. Most of the time im dealing with brands I already know of.. so..

OK I guess it is a good way to avoid untrustworthy brands.

Yes. Exactly. I try to focus on established sites and not sites that has just been created. And I have probably seen their reference in different ways.. so they might be referenced.. the company might be referenced in House or they might be referenced in All Modern, which are sites, I would go to and look after brands that you can trust and that are recommendable. Maybe I know the manufacturer, and then the question whether they are trustworthy or not would not be such an issue. Then I know that they are warrantied and guaranteed.

What if you have a colleague coming to you and saying oh I have this great underground luxury company that not a lot of people know about. But would you be interested in checking it out? It is very low key.

I would probably look at it, but since it is underground, I don't think I would be that interested. I would rather see it out of rack. I rather see it.. its not the exclusivity.. its not necessary for me. Its more about would they deliver what they say they can deliver. How is it done

How can they convince you that they actually would provide you with what you expect from them?

This is something I wouldn't know for sure until I am there.. where it is displayed... You know what I mean.. like until I was shopping for something specific that was not something I would normally.. If it is a piece of art then I want to see it in person to get that feeling. That might be something I would do.

So you are searching for this feeling of authenticity and like... um.. that it is something that is legit. And how do you know that from the information provided online?

I sort of know in an instinctive way. Not everybody does. They have to have a telephone number of cause and have a real person I can talk to.

So getting to know a person that you feel you can trust, who knows about all this, is a good way to get information about pieces and products.

I need all sorts of things in case I need another way to be in contact with then besides communicating with them online or viewing their website. That they would answer back to me online. It is important that I can have a conversation with them if necessary. That is one way of becoming trustworthy.

So I guess the first thing that would make you look further into a brand or something is their exact pieces.. how they look.. it is the most important thing to you that it is what it is supposed to be.

Exactly.

How would you feel if you walked into a furniture store like this and you were cool with the experience, the feel of everything a nice experience. But then you went online afterwards when you got home and you saw that the website was poorly create and short on information.

Actually this is something that happens once in a while. The websites often are not the same as walking into a showroom like this. You can not get the feeling of what it is to be in this store, as what it is to be on a website. So someone who is just shopping on a website has no idea of what the many stores really have to offer. For be personally for furniture in general, I am not one of those who believe that you can really buy a sofa online. So companies would want to convince me to go and see their showroom, by showing pictures and describing how their showroom is special. I know that a lot of people buy online, but I would never suggest any to do it. I myself would not do it unless I physically know the brand. And know exactly how I would sit. Many people do it based on the look. I believe in furniture karma and really knowing that these things last longer than a lot of relationships and making sure that you putting time and value into that. Depends of how you use the furniture. Maybe you could buy a sofa online without seeing it if you did not believe in these things. It depends on how you would use the furniture.

I think some people are missing the link between furniture displayed online and in store. I think they shop online because they do not know better. Other people are used to go to macy, target or sierce and then they come to design buildings and see 20.000 options of sofas. But why is this sofa this expensive when I saw a similar sofa to

1000 dollars. It takes something to explain and give where that value is. This is hard to do online, however, they have to try to do so by presenting it in a differentiated manner. This is information on how it is made, where it comes from. Information about the fabrics and what fabrics that are in it and the materials that are not in it. And what the wood sources are.

OK, but what is a good way of explaining this to you?

This could be done over the telephone but online? Unless the customers are already educated within the field. For them to shop it would be very hard. You have to really educate them about what that is. So someone who might be chemically sensitive have to receive information about that. Therefore information about certifications and allergy friendliness should be provided.

For people who do not know about the use of materials that are not causing allergic reactions to sensitive people, information have to be provided clearly, which can be hard to do online. A website could not do this unless there is literally someone who talks them through it. It does take that person to actually have that information.

Yeah, but you still have to make the link from google, the website or any other online source to the store.

Yeah. Right. They have to introduce you to these implications online and convince you to call them or go to the store. Especially when you talk about the chemically sensitive.. the green furniture.. much of it is rock hard because the only thing that is really chemically sensitive is something that is made out of natural latex, so unless you have a way to soften that up, which some use feather, it is nearly impossible because it is a very firm seat where some want a more relaxed. That would be very hard to come by. So those a the things you.. that's the educated customer or they are educating themselves.

But to buy a dining table online, I don't think that would be a problem. Those are easy. Its really about the things you sit on and lay on.

What about very antique furniture. Lets say a very antique side table, would that be something you could find online?

Yeah for antique furniture I have tried to reach out to companies through Twitter or Instagram to get details. I think many people do so. And many companies get positive publicity on posting things on social media like information about specific antique pieces.

OK Interesting. Thank you so much for participating and for all the great answers. This this definitely useful for my thesis. It was so nice of you

APPENDIX 7)

NOTES FROM INTERVIEW 6:

Shannon and Julia, 50 and 21 years old

Have you bought a piece of luxury furniture within the last two years?

Yes I have

Did you use the internet to search for information prior to that purchase?

Maybe a little, but mostly I used an interior designer to guide me.

Oh, OK, so you would rather talk to someone in person to get information?

I would rather go to a showroom and talk to them.. however I look at magazines.

Magazines? Yes?

Yeah I look at magazines, and actually I did look at Houzz and their website. I did look at the internet... Houzz

But I mostly went the the Merchandise Mart, which is a big showroom in Chicago.. and they gave me a few different choices, that is all I can handle. And I picked between one, two and three, and that is how we did did everything.. that was with my husband

OK interesting.. so for you it is not important that a company is present on the internet in reviews and being active

on the social media?

Not really actually.. I think I am too old

They set the standard for me, yes.. He got to know us.. see what we liked.. then took us to the places at merchandise mart, where we could look at products... my husband did do a lot of searching for smaller pieces..

Yeah?

On the internet.. dealers.. piecers.. small pieces and stuff.

Oh Ok.. so does he search for specific pieces rather than brands?

Styles.. mostly styles

I think once he get to know the brands, then he could look at different pieces online.. like he would look for a table or something.. first the designer... it is based on what designers recommend. For people in my age, once you look for luxury furniture, going to showrooms are a the way forward. I don't have the special perception that he does. My husband is better than that. He would look online and then when we see it in real life I would pick the colors... only houzz.. h o u z z.. I look at that online.

Oh I that like a national thing. Like in all states?

Yeah yeah exactly.. Its almost like Pinterest.. do you know what pinterest is

Yeah I do

(Julia).. For houses.. you see what kitchens look like, bathrooms and bedrooms.. and then they connect you to other sites

So why do you think this exact website provides trustworthy information?.. I assume you think it does

(Julia) Yeah it does.. hmm.. they provide all the information you need.. I mean.. it is very comprehensive in the sense that you can find images of arrangements and new styles.. they are very up-to-date.. And you can also join the forum and discuss design and get recommendations.

I see. That is so cool. So you like the feature where other people recommend brands and styles?

Yes that is a very good way of becoming familiar with new design.. like.. this is for people who know what they talking about you know..

Yeah enthusiasts, right?

Exactly.. so you can just search for pieces or brands and it will lead you to images and interior designers' reviewing the brands

OK.. um.. so how is this more trustworthy than.. for example.. Instagram?

Well first of all because.. you know that these are interior designers.. and that they know what we are dealing with here... Also because it is a lot easier to go to this website where all the information you need is gathered...

APPENDIX 8)

SIGNIFICANT NOTES FROM INTERVIEW 7:

Alexandre, 29 years old, From Manhattan, New York

Actually, before we start I would like to define what luxury furniture means to me and to my project. So, my definition is: Anything that adds pleasure or comfort in your life, is not absolutely necessary and is usually more expensive.

Hehe that's pretty good. That is not the way I would define it but I mean. Because lot of things that are luxurious are not comfortable, especially furniture. Lux furniture is mostly build to look a certain way, and made out of hard material, lot of the time. Like for instance this marble chair behind you (Pointing at a chair in the office where the interview takes place). Does that look very comfortable?

Exactly, and this one is probably worth 10.000 dollars. It is not necessary at all for anybody.

For me, I think luxury is having the option to choose. Cuz you can have anything you want, so.. so when you have the financial means to have anything you want. Then the choices you make say so much more about you than somebody who don't have any money, because they don't have the money to choose. They can only buy what they can afford.

I would say that it is a static comfort to your life, that is what luxury does.

have bought a piece with such qualities within the last two years?

Um.. something that brought comfort to your life and wasn't absolutely necessary? Sure I mean in terms of furniture?

Yes, in terms of furniture.

Yeah actually I have bought I guess a few pieces within the last two years. I have.

I purchased a Calvin Klein chair and an Armani chair. It had a chrome base and it was charcoal grey of fabric and it had a very narrow cushions so it wasn't necessarily comfortable but extremely stylish.

Ok sounds cool. Ok. And did you use the internet to search for information prior to this purchase?

I usually search for information on the internet to find information on different pieces, but actually I ended up purchasing a chair from a person I know who is working in a showroom. He had this chair there. The showroom was going out of business so they were selling all of their pieces.

.. at a low cost, which a lot of the time in the luxury industry, if you are a professional luxury shopper you know you get around retail and you can always get a discount.

So, when you do this research on pieces and maybe on brands, how do you usually do this?

When I shop for luxury goods online?

Yeah.. or not necessarily when you shop but when you browse through information prior to purchasing.

Oh I do research all the time.. uhm if its in terms of buying a specific piece that I have in mind, it is likely that I search through information to see it represented in different ways.

I see. Interesting. Do you also browse around to get to know new companies and new products.. or styles?

Sure yeah. To get to know new companies yeah. To see new lines.

Do you think it is important if the company has both information on websites, social media and also on blogs and all that?

Well you can't deny the fact that the internet has taking over the world. So things like blogs and social media is free and accessible, so definitely yes, it is important that companies provide information through the internet.

Great. Ok um... So you use blogs to search for information about luxury furniture.

Yeah.. I mean there are a few blogs. Especially blogs on style more than actually luxury goods. Because I think you can have a lot of money and have really terrible taste. Most of the time they do.

So. If for instance a company only has information on their website, and is not active on social media and was not present in reviews, what would you think of the company then? Would you trust the company?

Well, most of the time if it is well established luxury company, they have followers, and yeah it is important that a company interact with its fans. But most importantly.. when you know that a brand has fans online you find out where the furniture is made, how it is made and what it is made out of. The internet is a good supporting tool, but the most important thing is visiting showrooms

The internet is good for reviews, to see how people felt about it and to see what end-users. People who bought the product felt. If they say that it is not comfortable or that it did not last very long. I guess in terms of the product quality the internet is a useful tool.

Sure. Great. I'll just have to check what else I want to ask you about... So could you maybe mention.. in terms of online information.. could you mention a company that you think is trustworthy in their online information?

In terms of research for products?

Yeah in terms of.. if a company was to convince you that this is a great company with quality products and in terms of online information.

Actually it is very funny that you brought this up to me because.. I was searching today on Instagram.. there is a boy who works for an auction house and I want to say that it is heritage... I think it is... and he is 28.. he is very young, and he have become like the leader of luxury furniture. I don't know exactly what his name is. Matthew rubinger. And he is a visionary and influencal innovators. He works in the luxury industry, christies and he is like the head of luxury goods so he is someone whose opinion I would trust and especially if you look at his.. uhm.. his social media accounts is all luxury based and high fashion and jetset travel.

Yeah. That is very interesting. So that is a way to become familiar with companies and products?

Yeah. Through social media and connections

Yeah word-of-mouth

I originally saw him on day time news show. It came up and they were talking about how young he was to be in that position

Are other people's opinions important to you.

In some cases, but in most cases I have my own style and preferences. I like what makes me happy and what is beautiful.

APPENDIX 9) CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DATA:

INTERVIEW 1

Google search

Comprehensive information online - Limit the search

Appealing websites

Uncertainty – rating sites

Not social media that much

Company web sites and blogs

Bloggers with experience and expertise – recommendations

Trust in information - Comprehensive descriptions on design and relations – specifications of, why the product is relevant for the individual and for lifestyles

Social responsibility

Trust important when spending much money

Not mentioned on review and rating sites – not feel comfortable – deal breaker – deeper aspects hidden

Amateur bloggers – honest

Most important that company website is trustworthy

Other sources are used to do background checks

Other people's opinion – useful as security

INTERVIEW 2:

Developed strategies to identify - handmade/mass-produced or durable/not durable material

Established/new brand

Especially new brands should show why you can trust them and why they are worth the money

Materials – how is it made – differentiated features – comprehensive information

social awareness, social consciousness and social contribution - especially within the luxury industry.

Now companies should also give back to societies - Especially within the luxury industry - I read about a woman selling furniture, talking about armadillo rugs.. uhm they are all made in india, and they made six schools out of the revenue for these poor kids.

- The above makes me want to buy cuz I know that I am getting a good product.

Different for brands like Chanel - Cuz I like those brands and their design - another level. Display is enough - But for new brands coming up - quality, Status..

Using online information have become more common – Both advertisements in magazines online and print form is important. Not tweets but to some extent Blogs, social media, company website and rating sites.

For me I know what brands I like so I go to trade shows for instance, so in relation to social media and blog I might not be the right person to ask. The physical presence is important to me.

As supposed to blogs. I need to see it physically. But that is just me. People younger than me would probably say differently. Instagram.. and following each other and using preview sites.

show or exhibited. Or magazines which I sometimes look at online

know which brands I like I can now shop online, because I trust them

They have to be able to show their products ultimately on different platforms to spread out.

Requesting samples so that I could see the quality. Finish samples and catalogues and stuff. I purchase that way - to make sure they are legitimate.

Examples of brands with trustworthy communication online - Holly Hunt.. uhm.. there is don going (22).. Bmb Italian, HENRY, BAKER - They have a big presence. Make an effort to serve consumers and be transparent at what they do. They invest a lot of money in their marketing so that they can be present everywhere and provide useful information.

INTERVIEW 3

I read the reviews. So sometimes I research products and companies

I research more brands than stores.

I probably wouldn't buy it, if there were no reviews, but if I could see it at the store, it would contribute positively.

What kind of rating sites? Usually, just the store that's selling it – integrated rating systems.

if I'm buying something on Macy's and looking for a bed frame I like to see reviews on the site and comments on Amazon, I see what people have said about that product.

So do you think this adds some trustworthiness to the product that others are reviewing it?

Yeah, I do.

I think if it's things sold through a well-known company or if it isn't well-known brand it needs to have some kind of merit behind it - For quality like Ralph Lauren bedding and stuff like that you know the quality is good.

If a company were to convince you that this would be something you can trust, how would they do it in a good way in terms of online information?

I'm a huge fan of people who are doing videos showing a quality.

I'm not a fan of things that compare themselves to other brands - I don't think it should be a competition in that way.

The function and stability and somehow testing of the materials to its highest function.

But not overly repetitive. If you only have a certain amount of time to see something just say all of it, and keep it concise.

But not just say, this will last five years. Show some hitting it with a hammer or give it a wear and tear of a normal day within a maybe four minutes video.

I would probably trust an amateur video more though. My boss showed me this washing machine she was buying and she showed me this amateur guy doing it for you and doing a testing of it. And I would believe that more than the actual company unless the company is well-known... I think IKEA does videos, but if IKEA did videos to show, I would still be able to trust it, because IKEA wouldn't lie, because theres also this whole legal thing where you can't lie about your products.

What if they are paid bloggers?

The people who have reviewed them or seen their videos in their past believe they are speaking the truth and they're speaking honestly instead of "this is the best bed!".

But if they spoke more truthfully like "this is a fine bed, but it will get wear and tear, but it really does function and work and last". Then I would believe it more, if they were getting paid. Because they were being honest about it, on their connotation. I would feel comfortable with that.

Okay, so you could pretty much purchase something based on a blog post?

Yeah definitely!

INTERVIEW 4

Multiple ways of doing online research on luxury furniture

Some contact interior designers and others do more research for themselves.

Research online - a widespread phenomenon - websites, googling, 1stdips.com (custom and antique)

The internet is like number 1 because there is photographs, information, dimensions, pricing etc.

In terms of trustworthiness of a brand, if you're searching for information online, what could a company to convince you that this is something you can trust and this is a great brand?

When they are trying to sell "made in US" - telling their story - telling where it's made - if it's organic – sourcing - where the frames are made - where everything comes from - where they get their fabrics.

To make it a more personal experience when they give comprehensive information about the brand rather than just being online.

Trustworthy information and source - "we went to Bali and we found this place, and we found these pieces and that's where these are from" – creates connection and sort of a relevance - A little more information and it feels more authentic

Particularly in the luxury market – because of high price - You want to know why we're paying a higher price. It shouldn't be arbitrary, like "oh we just make the best sofa!", but why is it the best sofa? What's the frame? What is the upholstery? More information!

Okay, but is it enough that the it's the website and the company themselves that say this or is it also important that it is also mentioned in reviews and blogs?

Yeah - reviews in interior design important.

However, a lot of end users isn't going to go online "oh I love my sofa, or I love my chair - Really word of mouth and knowing other designers important - And then seeing the products used in features – Then you might go to Architectual digest (Website for research and shopping) - You look and you see something that you've seen before! High end designers using that - and you know it's a good quality product

New on the market - Really hard to start a brand and create a trust – that is where the websites are important and brands should make consumers believe in a long brand longevity.

The brand and the consumers should stand by the product - having a showroom, vital - Then just putting your stuff out there (Internet) - putting it in settings, make it imaginable.

So, is it important to you what other people thinks about a specific brand or specific pieces?

Doesn't really matter if someone else is loving it - That obviously helps or opens my eyes – Then more research is required

Customer service, a huge part of the experience – When good customer service is provided – Good customer service prevails amazing products - Personal relationships are build, which is important! I would use them even if their product isn't as nice.

Emailing companies 10 times and they don't respond – deal breaker! A real contributing factor to trustworthiness.

Can you mention some companies that practice this kind of customer service or recommend?

I know so many companies - Urban Electric Company - pretty luxury lighting and customer service is awesome – They are responsive

Another good example would be Plantation Furniture – Responsive -creates a connection – they have that one person who I have a great connection to – This is supportive.

INTERVIEW 5

Consider myself an online shopper of luxury furniture.

All furniture can be luxury furniture - Whether it is needed or not needed – Something that is 2000 dollars can still be considered luxury. Depending on what it is, who is buying it and what you are looking for to achieve.

You can always find a high or medium - someone that is resilient to that you can get the same look lot cheaper - Or you can get the same for lot more expensive.

Why are you interested in owing such pieces that maybe could be bought cheaper, but maybe are more expensive?

It depends on how it is going to be used, what it is and where it is going to be shown - What we are looking to achieve and how long it needs to last? In New York you usually have a bedroom and a sofa and a table in your apartment - every single piece is used in several different ways and has to look good - you want it to have a certain aesthetic.

It is a piece of furniture but it is also decoration - Marketers have to show how specific pieces would decorate your apartment.

Your apartment might be a studio - where I am making the decision on how much money I am going to spend on it – Sofas and dining tables are basics - The other stuff are extras.

Luxury is a little side chair, A little ottoman - considered more of a luxury because it is not a necessity for life.

When you search for information on the internet – which of these following platforms would you rather use to find information: company websites, social media sites, blogs or rating sites?

Not really a preference - Maybe social media - I might see something that is displayed on social media, or someone who talks about a brand on the social media, and then I would go and research it.

If I look for a circular sofa, I might google that and then look at the images – I would find the look – See which brand it is and where can I get it - Then go do my search through the company.

Searching for specific pieces because aesthetics is already formed.

New furniture enthusiast, would have to go to Pinterest to get an idea of style.

Pinterest, Facebook - These are the easiest way for companies to build trust in my opinion... maybe Instagram

Companies do not have to be mentioned elsewhere (Besides company websites) for me to find an interest in it.

In terms of trustworthiness of the information you find on the internet... How can a company convince you that you can trust them and their information?

I look at longevity - I wouldn't just go with someone that was yesterday - Also, it depends on the brand being professional in their communication... in terms of aesthetics and content on the website.

OK I see. So, it is not important to you that a company is mentioned in all sorts of blogs and articles... and different kinds of sources?

There is Yelp and there are a few different rating services that you can end up looking at.

Also, the company might be referenced in Houzz (Magazine online) or All Modern (Magazine online).

, which are sites, I would go to and look after brands that you can trust and that are recommendable. Maybe I know the manufacturer, and then the question whether they are trustworthy or not would not be such an issue. Then I know that they are warrantied and guaranteed.

What about friend or colleague recommendations?

I would probably look at it – and checkup if they deliver what they say

I am searching for this feeling of authenticity and like... um.. that it is something that is legit – However, I sort of know in an instinctive way – In some cases I would call them on the number they provide - getting to know a person that you feel you can trust.

I need all sorts of things in case I need another way to be in contact with then besides communicating with them online or viewing their website. That they would answer back to me online. It is important that I can have a conversation with them if necessary. That is one way of becoming trustworthy!

I think some people are missing the link between furniture displayed online and in store. I think they shop online because they do not know better. Other people are used to go to Macy's, Target or Sierce and then they come to design buildings and see 20.000 options of sofas. But why is this sofa this expensive when I saw a similar sofa to 1000 dollars? - It takes something to explain and give where that value is.

OK, but what is a good way of explaining this to you?

This could be done over the telephone but online? – So, someone who might be chemically sensitive have to receive information about that – Hard to provide information online on materials causing allergic reactions.

Yeah, but you still have to make the link from google, the website or any other online source to the store.

Yeah. Right. They have to introduce you to these implications online and convince you to call them or go to the store.

For antique furniture, I have tried to reach out to companies through Twitter or Instagram to get details. I think many people do so. And many companies get positive publicity on posting things on social media like information about specific antique pieces.

INTERVIEW 6:

Have you bought a piece of luxury furniture within the last two years?

Yes I have

Did you use the internet to search for information prior to that purchase?

A little, but mostly I used an interior designer to guide me.

Rather go to Showrooms, However I look at online magazines and social networking

So for you it is not important that a company is present on the internet in reviews and being active on the social media?

Not really actually.. I think I am too old

My husband did do a lot of searching for smaller pieces online though.

Mostly, we search for styles.

Once he gets to know the brands, he would look at different pieces online - First the designer - My husband is better than me at that (Researching online) - He would look online.

Houzz (Houzz.com)is almost like Pinterest - For houses - You see what kitchens look like, for instance - Then they connect you to other sites.

So why do you think this exact website provides trustworthy information?

They provide all the information you need - It is very comprehensive - You can find images of arrangements and new styles - they are very up-to-date - And you can also join the forum and discuss design and get recommendations.

So, you like the feature where other people recommend brands and styles?

Yes that is a very good way of becoming familiar with new designs - This is for people who know what they talking about you know..

Yeah enthusiasts, right?

Exactly.. so you can just search for pieces or brands and it will lead you to images and interior designers' reviewing the brands.

So how is this more trustworthy than.. for example.. Instagram?

First of all, you know that these are interior designers - That they know what we are dealing with here - Also because it is a lot easier to go to this website where all the information you need is gathered.

INTERVIEW 7

Lot of things that are luxurious are not comfortable, especially furniture. Luxury furniture is mostly build to look a certain way - And made out of hard material - Like for instance this marble chair (Pointing at a chair in the office where the interview takes place). Does that look very comfortable?

This one is probably worth 10.000 dollars. It is not necessary at all for anybody.

Luxury is having the option to choose.

have bought a piece with such qualities within the last two years?

Sure, I mean in terms of furniture? Yeah, I purchased a Calvin Klein chair and an Armani chair. It had a chrome base and it was charcoal grey of fabric and it had a very narrow cushion so it wasn't necessarily comfortable but extremely stylish.

And did you use the internet to search for information prior to this purchase?

I usually search for information on the internet to find information on different pieces. But this I bought from a friend who is running a showroom - if you are a professional luxury shopper you know you get around retail and you can always get a discount.

So, when you do this research on pieces and maybe on brands, how do you usually do this?

Oh, I do research all the time! It is likely that I search through information to see it represented in different ways.

I see. Interesting. Do you also browse around to get to know new companies and new products.. or styles?

Sure yeah. To get to know new companies yeah - To see new lines.

Do you think it is important if the company has both information on websites, social media and also on blogs and all that?

Well, you can't deny the fact that the internet has taking over the world - things like blogs and social media are important in the research process. Companies should provide information through a variety of sources.

Are you using blogs to search for information about luxury furniture.

There are a few blogs. Especially blogs on style more than actually luxury goods.

So. If for instance a company only has information on their website, and is not active on social media and was not present in reviews, what would you think of the company then? Would you trust the company?

Well established luxury companies have followers - yeah it is important that a company interacts with its fans. Most important is, once you know the brand has fans online, that you know how the furniture is made, what it is made out of - The internet is a good supporting tool.

The internet is good for reviews - How people felt about it - If they say that it is not comfortable or that it did not last very long – deal breaker! In terms of the product quality, the internet is a useful tool.

Could you mention.. in terms of online information.. a company that you think is trustworthy in their online information?

Actually it is very funny that you brought this up - I was searching on Instagram.. there is a boy who works for an auction house and I want to say that it is heritage - and he is 28, very young - and he have become like the leader of luxury furniture - And he is a visionary and influential innovators - He works in the luxury industry - he is like the head of luxury goods, so he is someone whose opinion I would trust and especially if you look at his social media accounts is all luxury based and high fashion and jetset travel.

So that is a way to become familiar with companies and products?

Yeah. Through social media and connections

I originally saw him on day time news show. It came up and they were talking about how young he was to be in that position

Are other people's opinions important to you?

In some cases, but in most cases I have my own style and preferences. I like what makes me happy and what is beautiful.