Visual web design elements

A tool to increase consumers trust in e-commerce websites

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Abstract

E-commerce has become popular over the years with millions of people using this way of shopping. However e-commerce has also brought forth issues of fraud with consumers getting their identities stolen or being tricked into spending their money on products they don’t look the same in real life as on their mobile devices. There are current methods to try and prevent e-commerce fraud however the problem is still present. Consumers need to be able to identify credible websites. Studies have brought forward that there is a connection between the visuals of a website and it’s credibility. The purpose of this study is to discover how the visuals of a website affect consumers assessment of credibility. It is also the purpose to use this discovery to strengthen the credibility of e-commerce websites. A qualitative method, focus group interview, has been used to interview four females corresponding the e-commerce market’s current majority consumer. During the interview the visual content of four websites were navigated through and analysed. The results showed that for there to be credibility trust between the consumer and e-commerce website needs to be established. This is done by visually prioritizing consumer’s needs as consumers.

Keywords

E-commerce, trust, e-commerce credibility, visual web-design, web design elements, e-commerce fraud
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1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the background, research questions and purpose of this study.

1.1 Background

The E-commerce market has grown tremendously over the years as more and more consumers all over the world have access to the Internet and prefer to use their technologically advanced devices to shop online (Xu & Quaddus, 2010). E-Commerce can be a valuable thing for both consumers and e-businesses. To consumers e-commerce means being able to conveniently shop at whatever time of the day wherever in the world and whenever they want to (Xu & Quaddus, 2010). To e-businesses it means more business opportunities, more consumers and less cost (Xu & Quaddus, 2010).

However with positivity comes challenges and e-commerce is no exception to this rule (Xu & Quaddus, 2010). With the evolvement of technology, fraud has become a common issue in e-commerce (Zandian & Keyvanpour, 2017). According to Lonergan (2016) there are several types of fraudulent activities in e-commerce that many consumers unfortunately come across and suffer from, with the most popular being identity theft. Identity theft is committed when e-commerce websites steal a consumer’s personal information, for example the name, address and / or social security number, with the intention of impersonating them online for different purposes (Saleh, 2013). Victims of identity theft can end up losing their financial means, gaining bad credit or getting in debt (Saleh, 2013). Another type of e-commerce fraud is merchant fraud. With this method fraudulent e-commerce websites sell cheap items but never ship them to the buyers (Lonergan, 2016). E-commerce websites may even deceive consumers by selling items as something different then they actually are in real life (Foley, 2017).

The on-going frauds have created and built up a lack of trust towards e-commerce websites. Consumers tend to be wary of shopping online as they have difficulties telling credible websites from non-credible ones (KPMG, 2017). The Macmillan Dictionary (2017) defines credibility as someone having qualities that makes people believe and trust them. The Merriam-Webster (2017) defines it as the quality or power of inspiring belief. Both definitions emphasise to the fact that for there to be credibility it is important to first and foremost build and create trustworthiness. In other words e-commerce consumers need to trust in e-commerce website for them to find credibility. Unfortunately with issues such as fraud, it is difficult for consumers to put their trust in e-commerce websites.
Many businesses have come up with different methods to reassure their consumers of their credibility. These methods are often either technical or involve the consumer having to look for specific things that ensure the safety of the website. Javelosa (2015) writes that current solutions consumers use to identify credible websites are secure badges, customer reviews and payment options. Walker (2017) adds more solutions such as better security methods when creating the websites. However, the problem concerning e-commerce fraud is still present. In 2016, the number of consumers that fell victim to e-commerce fraud reached 15.4 million, which was a 16% increase from 2015 (Grant, 2017). In a study where 2510 American e-commerce consumer’s trust in security badges was investigated it was found that 49% of the participants either didn’t know or care for these solutions meaning that these consumers had a high risk of being victims of fraud (The baymard institute, 2013). A survey in New Delhi with 18,000 responses where e-commerce consumers’ trust of product reviews was explored found that consumers didn’t trust product reviews (Local circles, 2017). The current security methods during transactions are also found to not be fast enough to help against on-going fraudulent activities (Jisha & Dakshata, 2017). These statistics show that the existing methods haven’t done much to help consumers identify credible websites, which in return has lowered their trust. Are there other means for e-commerce sites to increase their trustworthiness and thereby strengthen their credibility?

When it comes to websites, first impressions matter. It only takes seconds for consumers to make up their minds about a website based on its visuals. Laja (2012) Robins and Holmes (2008) studied the connection between the design of a website and user’s judgement of it’s credibility. To analyse their hypotheses they used 21 websites and duplicated a version for each of these websites without much visual aesthetics. They then randomised the 42 webpages and let the respondents make their decisions by quickly looking at the webpage’s and choosing whether they saw them as credible or non credible. Their result showed that users found webpages with more use of aesthetic visual elements as being more credible then those with less.

However, the visuals of a website are not the only thing that matter to consumers. Humans process things in three ways: visceral processing, behavioural processing and reflective processing (Norman, 2004). Visceral processing is when we make judgment of an object based on its look. This only takes seconds. Once this object appeals to us, we immediately follow up by trying to understand its usability, so called behavioural processing. We later focus on the information that the object presents, reflective processing. (Norman, 2004)
A research done by Fogg et al. (2003) were they studied how consumers evaluated the credibility of websites supports Norman’s (2004) theory. The study involved 2 684 people and 46.1% of the comments were of consumers who stated the visuals as an important factor, pinpointing it as the most important. 28.5% stated information design and structure as also important. Only 8.6% designated usability design of the site as useful.

As the current solutions to prevent e-commerce fraud fail and the number of e-commerce fraud victim grows, it is apparent that consumers need an easier way to identify credible, i.e. trustworthy, e-commerce websites. Research (Laja, 2012; Fogg et al., 2003) suggests the visuals of a website is a key tool for many consumers in forming their opinions regarding a website. Maybe the visuals are so important it could be used as a solution to consumers’ problems regarding the credibility of e-commerce websites?

1.2 Research question

By identifying the different elements that make web design and those that affect the visuals of e-commerce websites, the aim is to investigate and uncover how consumers use these elements to evaluate and identify credible e-commerce websites from non-credible ones.

• How does the visual web design elements affect consumers’ assessment of e-commerce websites credibility?

• What visual web design element made the most impact?

• How can the visual web design elements be used to strengthen the credibility in e-commerce websites?

1.3 Research purpose

E-commerce consumers could use the results of this study to identify trustworthy e-commerce websites. The result of this study could also be used by e-commerce websites to make it easier for their consumers to tell that they are credible and trustworthy. It could even be used as a solution and aid for e-commerce websites to increase their credibility online by understanding and meeting the aesthetic needs of their consumers.
1.4 Target group

The primary target group of this thesis are e-commerce businesses that may need a solution in increasing the credibility of their websites. The secondary target audience are e-commerce consumers who are interested in how to use web design to tell credible e-commerce websites from non-credible ones. A tertiary target audience is researchers that are interested in developing the research further. The thesis could also be of interest for fellow students at the Media production program of Malmö University.

1.5 Limitations

The aim of this research is to find out an easier way for e-commerce businesses to increase their credibility and for consumers to identify e-commerce businesses they can trust. The results that emerged in this study can for this reason not be used as a solution against fraud. This research was conducted with one focus group and thus the results may not be suitable to use for purpose of generalisation. The method used to analyse the collected data further needs the results to be verified however this final step was not deemed necessary in this research.
2 Theory

This chapter provides theoretical frame for the study. It will delve in the different web design elements and further into those that make the visuals.

2.1 Visual web design elements

The visuals of a website is often linked to attraction and first impressions but it is much more than how something looks. Based on the type of webpage a consumer is visiting, web-design visuals can help with the presentation of a brand, company or person (Thorlacius, 2007). It can give the consumer a sense of who is behind the website and what type of person or brand they are (Thorlacius, 2007). The visuals in web-design can also give meaning, convey messages or a certain type of feeling in several ways (Thorlacius, 2007).

While visually appealing web design matters a lot, it is equally important for designers to focus their design on the consumer. A website needs to reach out to a specific consumer group with a design that specifically appeals to them (Thorlacius, 2007). A website with a target audience of 40-50 year olds is not advised to have the same design aesthetics as a website targeted to a much younger audience. The same goes for website genre. As websites can be put in different categories such as fashion, sports, news, etc., the design should even reflect the category the website belongs to (Thorlacius, 2007). This makes it easier for the consumer to identify the type of website they are visiting.

To identify the consumers, it is first advised to identify the main purpose of the website (Sundström, 2013). Is the website going to be a forum where people can gather to discuss different things? Is it going to be a portfolio that can help a company find potential costumers? Maybe the website is going to act as a blog with the main topic being art reviews? Or it could be an e-commerce site that sells books? By asking these questions and answering them properly, it should then be easier to move on to understanding who the primary consumer group is and what they want (Sundström, 2013).

When it comes to design itself, a distinction should be made between design aesthetics online and offline. An example of offline aesthetics is graphic design and an example of online aesthetics is the visuals of web-design (Sundström, 2013). In graphic design, the visuals are used to awaken a potential consumers interest in something, whether that is an event promoted by a visually appealing poster or a cd with an attractive cover (Sundström, 2013). This is somewhat different in web-design. When visiting a website, the consumer already has a goal.
and interest (Sundström, 2013). The role the visuals play in this case has to do with how to keep that interest and let the consumer easily reach his/her goal. This is done by the use of different web design elements that can either make good or bad visual aesthetics of a website (Sundström, 2013).

The common web design elements are known as Typography, Colour, Image, Multimedia and Layout. (Sundström, 2013) According to Boulton (2009) there are three of those elements that should be particularly valued when it comes to visually enhancing the design of a website. These are: Typography, Colour and Layout. However, when designing for e-commerce websites there is one more web design elements that should be added (White, 2017). E-commerce consumers are not physically able to see the products they are buying. They need product pictures to shop online (White, 2017). Thus making Typography, Colour, Layout and Image the four visually valuable web design elements. These elements will be discussed in detail in the following headlines.

2.2 Typography

Typography is the use of fonts to compose words and texts with visual attractiveness either online or offline (Johansson et al., 2014). When it comes to typography and designing for the web it is important to remember that the font needs to be readable (Lazar, 2005). Readability can be achieved by choosing the right font-size. Font-sizes should be consistent and hierarchical as the consumer should be able to tell titles, subheadings, content and lists apart (Lazar, 2005). For example big font-sizes and bold font-weights can be used to emphasise titles and smaller sizes or thinner fonts to emphasise content. However this does not mean that smaller text cannot be bold or that titles cannot be thin. Creating a hierarchy is essential for the consumer to make sense of the text but how it is done is entirely individual (Boulton, 2009).

Font-sizes may even differ depending on the target audience of the website (Redish, 2007). As stated before, a site for an older consumer should not be designed the same as a site for a younger consumer. This can be said about font-size. Younger consumers fare better with reading small text (Redish, 2007). A website for an older consumer should therefore use bigger font sizes than it would for a younger consumer. However, this does not mean that a bigger font-size should be too big and a smaller font-size too small. Very small text can be just as difficult to read as bigger text (Redish, 2007). Sundström (2013) writes that a good rule to go by is that text should be big enough so it’s comfortable to read but at the same time since screen
sizes can be limited, the text should be small enough so the consumer can easily see the entirety of it.

Space is a big factor in typography. When reading, whether it be a short descriptive text or a long informative one it is important to use space correctly. Space can be put in two boxes, active and passive space (Redish, 2007). Active space belongs to the main content and passive space to the outer part of it. Active space is used to divide text usefully and structure the information presented. It should be used for headings, paragraphs, point lists with lots of text and more. A rule to follow when using active space is that the space between the lines of a text should be less than the space between a point-list (Sundström, 2013).

Active space can bring about misleading results if not used properly. It can create a false illusion called floating where it looks like a title is on its own and does not belong to the bottom text (Redish, 2007). When using passive space it is good to not use too much, but just enough. For example passive space around text, or the marginalisation of a text should be there to make it easier to read (Sundström, 2013). The text should not go from corner to corner without any space to box it in. It is also not wanted to add so much space that the text is overpowered (Redish, 2007).

Figure 1. Active space. Cynthia M. Dao. (Based on Redish, 2007; Sundström 2017)
The alignment of text is also part of making visually pleasing typography. In print, it is recommended that text should be aligned from the left to the right (Fedders, 2014). The same goes for web-design. Centring and right-aligning text should be avoided as it makes it difficult for the eye to follow along by allowing no standard alignment from the left, which is the way we normally read (Sundström, 2013). When text is aligned to the left our eye movement is way more fluid as we know exactly where the next line starts (Jonhson, 2010). The form of the text becomes connected; more united and follows ground of what the eye is used to. However these exceptions only apply to longer text contents. For shorter text centring and right aligning could work (Sundström, 2013).

2.3 Colour

Colour is a very fluid spectrum that is interpreted individually, meaning a colour can look different depending on who’s seeing it (Johansson et al., 2014). Some people can also suffer from colour-blindness, with some not being able to see colour at all and others only have difficulties with some colours containing red and green hues. This is a problem when it comes to web-design as the colour space used online consists of the primary colours that create the others. These colours are Red, Green and Blue – better known as RGB (Johansson et al., 2014)

Colour is also known to have a psychological affect on us (O’grady, 2015). We associate colour with different things based on their cultural upbringing. That is, we use colour to give meaning to something, display an emotion or even affect a mood. For example in some places in the world red might represent anger or danger, while in other places it might represent love (O’grady, 2015). That is why when it comes to web design it is good to carefully pick a colour to convey the right message. Different colours bring forward different emotions and that should be used to an advantage. For example, orange and yellow can mean warmth whereas blue can mean coldness (O’grady, 2015). However it can be quite hard to know when to use which. (Lazar, 2005)

When it comes to adding coloured text on different types of background colours, using contrast as a tool can be beneficial. Bright coloured text on bright backgrounds or dark coloured text on dark backgrounds should be avoided as they decrease the readability (Cao, 2015). Bright coloured text should instead be used on darker backgrounds and vice-versa (Cao, 2015).
Colour is an important part of branding. Like colour can be associated with different meanings and feelings, it can also be associated with different brands and companies (Boulton, 2009). A company can use the representative colours in their logo on their websites to increase the recognition factor of their brand. When doing so, it is good to make sure that the colour use is consistent and that the colour used is the same everywhere on the website.

2.4 Image

In web-design using image has its beneficial tendencies. Like colour, it can affect our minds and emotions either positively or negatively (Sundström, 2013). Compared to descriptive text, images can much more faster give as much information, if not more, to a consumer on what type of website he is browsing (Eccher, 2015). That is how quickly a consumer can make up his mind up about whether or not to stay on the website he is visiting and on whether to trust or not to trust that website. Although efficient, images can be deceptive and misleading, as they sometimes do not provide enough information (Sundström, 2013). To counteract this problem a combination of text, whether short, long or simply a title, and images is said to be ideal to use (Sundström, 2013).
An eye tracking study by Nielsen & Pernice (2010) documenting web usability conducted that the need for images in e-commerce is crucial. When shopping online, consumers have to depend on the product pictures presented to them; if their expectations regarding the look of the product are not met, chances are they will not be satisfied (Nielsen & Pernice, 2010). In the study it was found that e-commerce consumers thought of images as a product-differentiating tool to help them chose the right product item. The study showed that consumers had a preference for personalised pictures that were rich in detail and related to the webpage’s content.

Consumers were also more drawn to high contrasting and high quality images. Advertisements, low quality images and stock pictures were not as popular and were mostly overlooked. Regarding image-sizes, consumers did not mind smaller images and only wanted big product images when requested (Nielsen, 2010).

2.5 Layout

The placement of the above-mentioned elements of aesthetic web-design is important. When designing a website, it is good for a consumer to be able to quickly locate what they are looking for (Eccher, 2015). Sundström (2013) explains that the three ways to help with this is:
1. By creating a visual hierarchy

2. By keeping together what belongs together

3. By being consistent.

Figure 4. A structured and gridded layout on a desktop. Cynthia M. Dao. (Based on Eccher, 2015; Sundström, 2013; Redish 2007; Lazar, 2005.)

Visual hierarchy and keeping together what belongs together can be attained by a standardised content layout (Eccher, 2015). Making titles the same font-size, giving a specific colour to links, using space or lines to keep content apart or together and having text aligned a certain way can create a standardised layout. Internet usage over the years has also contributed to this by giving many a standard knowledge of where certain items on web pages can be found (Eccher, 2015). A header is typically placed on the top of the web page, and a menu either in the header or in the left column. Changing or removing these expected placements could be done either for purposes of design aesthetics, or to stick out from the mass (Sundström, 2013). But as this can
cause disorder and confuse the consumer, if it can be avoided it is advised to do so (Sundström, 2013).

Redish (2007) gives a good example of consistency with a search bar. She explains that if a search bar is in one position on the homepage, it is expected to be seen on the same position throughout the rest of the website. It is better to give a consumer structure by positioning different content in a similar manner throughout the webpage. It gives value to the web-design. Another way to give a web-page layout consistency and visual hierarchy is by using a grid system to place content. Grids as a layout template can bring a sense of visual order to the consumer’s eye. Humans are conditioned to understand and recognise structure therefore having a clear, recognisable and organised layout pattern is good practice. Grids can be used to divide a web page in horizontal and vertical columns with different widths and height. It can be used to create either easy or more complicated design layout. Nevertheless, even complicated design layouts can have a sense of order if designed with the element of consistency. (Lazar, 2005)
3 Method

This chapter provides information surrounding the methods used for this study. It will first go into the different research methods. Secondly, it will go through the data collection procedure. Thirdly, it will go through the data analysis procedure. Finally, there will a discussion surrounding the methods chosen to gain the results.

3.1 Research Method

The two most common methods to collect data are known as qualitative and quantitative research. The difference in these two research methods lies in the intention behind the study and in the way data is collected. A qualitative method is used when one wants to know an opinion, thought or view others have on something, a specific subject (Savin-baden & Major, 2013). It is a beneficial method to use when analysing processes. Allen et al. (2009) explains that the main purpose of a quantitative method is to test whether a theory is actually true or false. This is done by firstly applying scientific theories directly to human actions and later by verifying the accuracy.

The purposes of this study is to find out how consumers use visual web design elements to identify credible e-commerce websites, what elements impacted consumers the most and how these elements can be used to increase the credibility of e-commerce shops. A qualitative method will therefore be suitable to answer the research questions as it leaves a much more personal tone and understanding to a study (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

The chosen qualitative approach retrieve data for this study is a focus group interview. Focus group interviews can be structured, semi-structured or completely unstructured (Stuckey, 20013). Structured interviews have predetermined questions, which the interviewer strictly follows (Stuckey, 20013). Semi-structured interviews are more easy-going. The interviewer has an idea about the topic they want to discuss and asks questions according to that (Stuckey, 20013). The unstructured interview method is the opposite of the other two. The interviewer lets the participant guide the interview by giving them a complete free hand (Stuckey, 2013).

3.1.1 Participants

There are two ways of choosing the right sample for a study: Probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Neuendorf, 2002). Probability sampling means choosing participants at
the random. It is a method used for matters of generalisation and to ensure that everyone that can be chosen to participate in the study has a chance to do so (Neuendorf, 2002). Non-probability sampling however is the opposite and the collected data cannot be used to generalise a population. With this method, the researcher makes an active choice as to which types of participants to chose (Neuendorf, 2002).

To answer the questions of this thesis it was of importance that the participants corresponded to the target audience of e-commerce businesses. The first step in choosing participants was by first identifying the primary group of e-commerce consumers. Smith (2015) writes that e-commerce is a popular online activity for both males and females in the USA. In his study it was found that in 2013 57% of American females have shopped online compared to 52% of American males. In other words women were slightly more active e-commerce consumers than men. In Smith’s (2015) study it was also found that the dominating age of the target group was between 18 and 34 years.

As probability sampling is a generalising sample method, the number of participants needs to be large which contradicts the purpose of qualitative methods. In qualitative methods smaller sample groups are preferred to the larger sized sampling for reasons of deepening understanding (Creswell & Park, 2007). For example, the average amount of participants in focus group studies usually ranges from six to ten people (Skärvad & Lundahl, 2016). This however depends on the researcher. Some may prefer to go down to only three people for their interviews with the purpose of gaining more depth (Mayhew, 2017).

Due to the reasons above, convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method was used. With convenience sampling participants were chosen based on their proximity to the research (Jager et al., 2017). As the target groups of e-commerce business only equated to age and gender, the participants were able to come from diverse backgrounds. However one important criteria besides being a part of the e-commerce target groups was that participants needed to be recurrent e-commerce shoppers, meaning they had to at least shop online once or more per month as these experiences were deemed relevant to the research questions. Out of all acquaintances that matched these criteria’s and were asked to be a part of this study only five females between the ages 18 and 34, corresponding to the main group of e-commerce consumers, were willing to participate. However due to the lack of time, only four of them were able to join at the given time and place. For these reasons only one focus group could be used to collect data.

The participants will be known as Sara, Crystal, Laura and Hailey.
3.1.2 Selection of websites

The main purpose of this study is to understand how the different visual web design elements affect consumers’ assessment of e-commerce websites credibility and to identify which elements users deem more important than others. To do this the material that is going to be analysed needs to be chosen carefully. As discussed in previous a chapter, there are several factors that make the visuals of web design. These elements were taken into account when choosing the e-commerce websites the participants of this study will be discussing and analysing.

To cater to all participants as they may have different interests, it was of importance that the chosen categories where chosen without partiality that could be based on gender or individual likes. Thus to pick the websites, two randomly selected e-commerce categories were firstly chosen. To ensure that participants focused on the subject of fraud and credibility it was important for the categories to sell higher priced items. The chosen categories were automobile and technology; for each category two websites were chosen. One important factor when choosing the four websites was the design. The design of the all four websites had to contain all four of the identified visual web elements.

Other things were also taken into account when choosing these websites. All websites also had to at least been updated once in the last 10 months. This is to ensure that the collected data for this thesis is unbiased and that all the web-designers of the chosen e-commerce sites are aware of the current web-design trends. This was done by locating the copyright logo at the footer of each page and making sure the last written updated year was. Finally, it was very important that the two first websites differed from each other and that the last two were similar to create more of a challenge to the participants.

The websites of the category automobile will be further known as Website A and website B. Website A was chosen by a random Google search and website B was chosen from a blog list regarding websites with bad design. The websites of the category technology will be further known as Website C and Website D. In comparison to the two firstly chosen websites, Website C and D were chosen due to the researcher previously knowing the company names. Of course all websites had to meet the above-mentioned criteria.

Website A
Figure 5. Screenshot. Cars for sale. (2017)

Cars for sale is an American website that sells auto-vehicles. They are similar to e-commerce sites such as eBay as they allow customers to not only buy cars but also to sell it themselves. (Cars for sale, 2017; see appendix)

Website B

Figure 6. Screenshot. Ling’s car. (2017)

Ling’s car is a website that leases, rents and sells auto-vehicles in the UK. Compared to Cars for sale, customers on this website are only able to buy vehicles and not sell them. (Ling’s car, 2017; see appendix)
Website C

![Webhallen Website Screenshot](image1)

**Figure 7.** Screenshot. Webhallen. (2017)

Webhallen is a Scandinavian website that sells different types of items for the home. They are very popular for their gaming and technology products, among others. (Webhallen, 2017; see appendix)

Website D

![eGlobal Central Website Screenshot](image2)

**Figure 8.** Screenshot. eGlobal central. (2017)

eGlobal central is an e-commerce site that sells technology products. The majority of their consumers reside in Europe and Australia. (eGlobal central, 2017; see appendix)
3.2 Data collection procedure

A focus group interview was the chosen method to collect data. One group, consisting of four females between the ages 18 and 34 participated in the study. Participants were gathered in a computer’s room for during of three to four hours. As only one person conducted the interview there was no possibility to take notes, thus the interview was audio recorded on two audio recorders placed in separate parts of the room to ensure all sound was properly recorded.

The focus group interview was divided in three different moments: the opening, the middle and the end. In the opening, participants were seated in a circle and asked to present themselves and answer questions about their e-commerce habits. This was to familiarise the participants with each other and make a comfortable environment for them later on in the interview process.

The middle, consisted of a much more practical interview form in which participants answered questions regarding websites A, B, C and D. All the participants were put in a semi-circle with two computer screens each showing one website. The first presented websites were Website A vs. Website B. Participants were asked to answer questions verbally based on the different web-design elements while viewing and browsing the website. Both open-ended and closed ended questions where used during this part. The same process was repeated for website C vs. website D. In part 3, the summary, all websites where presented on four separate screens and participants were asked a few similar questions to those in part 2. The interview finished with summarising questions about the interview itself and the subject of discussion.

At first, a directive approach with a structure method and predetermined questions to act as a guideline was used for this interview. The directive style means that the interviewer is the one in control of the flow of the discussion (Stewart et al., 2007). This approach is ideal when wanting to keep the conversation on the specific topics, in this case web design elements. However as the interview was going on, a much more semi-structured and non-directive approach was adopted. The non-directive approach implies that the interviewer is not as important as participants directly discuss with each other (Stewart et al., 2007). This allows for new findings but at the loss of data concerning specific topics (Stewart et al., 2007).

Both open-ended and closed ended questions were used during the interview (see appendix for interview questions). This due to the first and second research questions that are heavily based on the different design elements presented in chapter 2. Open-ended questions are often used in focus group interviews, however close-ended questions can also be used with this method (Stewart et. al., 2007). Open-ended questions were mostly used in the opening and ending parts
of the interview. During the middle part, both open and closed ended questions were used. When using both types, the open-ended questions acted as a primary question to open a topic. The close-ended questions were in this case secondary, follow up questions to increase the detail in the answers received.

### 3.3 Data analysis procedure

The collected data was audio recorded and then transcribed in a pages document in preparations for the data analyses. When analysing qualitative data it is of importance to code, or in other words categorise it. Separating the data into different categories or concepts makes it easier to analyse with any chosen analysis approach in the later part of the analysing process (Ryen, 2004). The categories are usually descriptive and can even be divided in subcategories.

Common practice when dividing the data in categories is having them correspond to related subjects in the data (Ryen, 2004). This is to avoid unrelated data being put together, meaning the transcribed parts that are about the same subjects are put together (Ryen, 2004). Categories can be anything from people, to places and to feelings.

There are various ways to analyse qualitative data by category. For this study the grounded theory approach was used. With grounded theory the collected data is analysed to create a new theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This means that the data is analysed impartially from the theory. The new theory that arises from the data analyses is only linked to existing theory after the presentation of the data analyses, during the discussion (Gibbs, 2007).

The process of coding with grounded theory is divided in three stages (Charmaz, 2006). During the first stage, open coding, the transcript was read multiples times to identify categories and then finally those categories where turned into codes. In the second stage, axial coding, the relationships between the different categories was compared to define and develop new codes containing different but related concepts. The open codes became subcategories to the axial codes. During this process it is important to explore how the concepts came to be, their relation to each other and the problem related to them. In the final stage the interpretation of the axial codes where used create a main theme, the selective code.
**Figure 9.** Coding. Cynthia Dao. (Based on Charmaz, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open code</th>
<th>Axial code</th>
<th>Selective code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeking reliability; Feeling like they want to hide information; Feeling like they’re being lied to; Wanting detailed product images; Getting a sense of control; Seeking legitimacy;</td>
<td>Wishing for honesty and transparency</td>
<td>Wanting their needs to be first priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishing for clean and professional design; Showcasing they are serious; Having the means to do something; Putting effort in what they are doing; Showing that they know what they are doing; Being wary of amateur design; Paying attention to design; Wanting modern design; Desiring readability</td>
<td>Wanting them to show that they care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving site a personal feel to it; Adapting real life experiences to the web; Being personally affected; Having an impact; Valuing colour; Finding comfort in familiarity; Making judgment based on other experiences;</td>
<td>Cherishing what they are used to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting job to be done; Getting what they want; Putting focus on the right element; Sticking out; Being distracted; Wanting little variation; Looking put together</td>
<td>Believing that doing less is doing more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting availability; Liking ability to compare products; Depending on the product; Having the option; Being used to a design;</td>
<td>Being given choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting confused; Thinking of others; Being mislead</td>
<td>Needing clarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting things to belong together; Wanting things to compliment each other; Looking for a red thread; Seeking connection between elements; Fitting in with the rest of site; Wanting design choices to work; Needing design to adhere to the type of product being sold; Focusing on the whole package; Seeking consistency</td>
<td>Wishing for a concept</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing boredom; Looking for ways to be creative; Wanting things to stand out; Wanting a mix of</td>
<td>Having an urge to be entertained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 10.** Open, axial and selective codes. Cynthia Michel Dao.
All three stages were coded and analysed using Microsoft word. All three stages of coding was done by using tables. When open coding two columns were created; the left column and it’s rows contained each line of the transcript, whereas the right column contained the different categories that summarized each line of transcript. During the final stage of open coding, categories were turned into codes by highlighting certain parts of the transcript into comments.

When axial coding, each open code was summarised to bring forwards their concepts. Concepts that related to each other where then put together to create head categories, axial codes. The individual axial codes were then finally analysed to bring forward the main concept. To make it easier to understand the relation between codes, a final table was created.

### 3.4 Method discussion

The quality of a research is important, especially in qualitative researches were the goal is to either create new theory or disprove older theory. A qualitative research’s quality relies on its validity and reliability (Plummer-D'Amato, 2008). Validity is the idea that the content of the study, for example the chosen methods or the collected data, is relevant to the research questions. Reliability is the idea that the data is trustworthy enough that anyone can gain similar results as the researcher by replicating the process of the study. (Leung, 2015)

The main purpose of using grounded theory for this research was to generate new theories to answer the research questions. However grounded theory not only comprises of generating new theory but it also involves a final step, verifying the new theory out in the field (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As this step was not done in this research it could affect the reliability and transferability of the study.

A phenomenon that occurs with grounded theory is so called theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is reached when the collected data has been compared and interpreted enough times no new codes can emerge. If not reached, the theoretical saturation can affect the validity and reliability of a research. A way to ensure that theoretical saturation is reached is by memoing. Memoing consists of pre-interpreting the codes to further develop their concepts and ease the comparative process (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). This was done several times during the first stage of coding to pave the process of axial coding. Each line of transcribed data was first categorised, and as similar codes emerged the concepts were interpreted. Memoing continued during axial coding.
Another way to ensure theoretical saturation is by choosing the right data collection method. Theoretical saturation can be reached through focus group interviews among other methods (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Here it is also important to ensure the quality of its validity and reliability. A problem that can jeopardise the quality of focus group interviews has to do with the group dynamics. When making group-based decisions dominant participants can easily pressure participants in focus groups. To avoid this problem and ensure the quality of the interview, the interview was done using both a directive and non-directive method. With the non-directive method participants were able to discuss with each other and with the directive method participants had more freedom to give their individual opinions without external pressure.

As participants were Scandinavian and Website C is a Scandinavian website, a problem of familiarity occurred during the interview. One of the participants recognised the company name of Website C, which could have created bias. However as the test was solely based on how the design of the websites affected the participants’ assessment of credibility, not on the companies.

The reliability of this research could have been affected by the timeframe in which the interview was complete. The interview for this study took around three hours to complete, but according to Skärvard & Lundahl (2016) this should take between one and two hours. The long interview time may have led the participants to be tired and caused them to give repetitive answers. To avoid this, participants were given a break during the middle of the interview to refresh their minds. A better solution to achieve maximum quality and get even more nuanced answers would have been to split the interview in two parts and complete them on separate days with a short interval.

Validity can also be found in the interview questions are relevant to the thesis problem (Harboe, 2013). An external person was consulted about this when writing down the interview questions. The questions where rewritten according to add relevancy and broaden understanding. Although participants were avid e-commerce shoppers, they were not all knowledgeable in the field of web design. A validity problem can occur concerning the sampling method. In qualitative researches, participants should have some kind of knowledge or experience in the particular field they are being interviewed in (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). This brings up the validity as the collected data then becomes of relevancy to the thesis problem. Choosing a randomising sample method lowers the validity, as there are risks of the participants’ answers being irrelevant to the subject, too generalising or broad.
To strengthen the validity of this study, all participants had to have prior habit of e-commerce shopping with some doing it more often then others. The method used to choose participants also implies that the result cannot be used to voice the general opinion of e-commerce shoppers. As qualitative studies cannot be generalised, it is important the result can be replicated in same scenarios to ensure its quality (Skärvad & Lundahl, 2016). Due to the short amount of time only four people where able to participate in the study. The transferability of the collected data could be affected if a similar study is done with more participants as only one focus group was used in this study. It could also be affected if the participants include the secondary target audience of e-commerce, male participants. Had there been more time and asked acquaintances had been more willing to participate there could have been a possibility of another focus groups which would have increased the transferability.

The participants can also affect the reliability of the collected data as they can withhold information, their opinions on something and sometimes even not give frank opinions (Harboe, 2013). Choosing acquaintances as participants can prevent this from happening as participants may feel enough trust, comfort and safety during the interview to freely give their opinions. Before the interview commenced, participants were also told that any types of answers was expected of them and welcomed. This was to make sure that participants were not afraid of disagreeing with each other as interviews can really flourish and bloom on discussions concerning disagreements (Liamputtong, 2011).

The reliability of the collected data can be also be affected by the researcher (Harboe, 2013). The researcher may miss some valuable information while registering the participants’ answer. The risk of this is high in this research as one person did the interview. Due to the lack of assistance, it was also audio recorded which could have affected the transcription of the data. The reliability could have been higher if the interview had been videotaped (Skärvad & Lundahl, 2016). A video could have made up for the low interpretation factor by making it easier to tell whom of the participant had said what. It would have also allowed an observation of the participants’ behaviour, which could have deepened the analysis. What was done instead during the interview to secure reliability and make it easier when transcribing was calling participants by individual names. To further make sure the data was reliable, every word said during the interview including pauses were written down. This was to reduce the loss of information that occurred due to only audio taping the interview. According to Skärvad & Lundahl (2016) this is the most thorough transcription method.

Beyond validity and reliability, the data collecting method should be ethical. Participants should be given truthful information about the study they are partaking in and the risks surrounding it.
They also have a free will when it comes to participating in a study or not and giving their consent as to what can be done to them. A participant has the right to protect their privacy, meaning if they chose to be anonymous the researcher must respect their choice and any information regarding them should be kept in confidentiality (Silverman, 2010). Due to ethics, participants were all given detailed information regarding the study and its purpose. They were all asked for consent regarding the tape recording of the interview and given reassurance that they would be reported anonymously in the study. The participants are presented with fictional names.
4 Results

In this chapter, only the result of the data collected for this research through a focus group interview will be reported. As the data was coded through grounded theory to create a main theme, the results will be presented under each concept that developed this theme. These results will be discussed at a later chapter.

4.1 Honesty and transparency

There was a need for all the participants to be able to view the product pictures of each website (Sara et al., 2017). Laura for example, explained that she once visited an e-commerce shop whose products were not displayed. She could not find herself shopping on that website as she was not able to see the product images. While browsing Website A and Website B, Hailey found the product images used on website A to be more reliable than those used on website B. Compared to Website B, Website A had more images per product which made it possible for her to closely review the products being sold. She found Website B, which had no more than two images per product unreliable because she did not know exactly what type of product she would receive if she had purchased an item.

The only two images displayed per product were very different from each other and participants wondered if the car presented in both pictures were the same. On the first image the colours where highly saturated, and the quality was high which made the product look almost surreal, whereas on the second image the quality was lower and the colour less saturated. Laura (2017) urged that e-commerce shop should take pictures of the actual products that are being sold.

There was a united agreement that the bigger the number of pictures per product the more detail they were able to see in the product (Sara et al., 2017). When on website C and D the participants had a high preference for the images on website C, they found the various angles the product images were taken from to be informative. The images on website C looked three dimensional and realistic (Laura, 2017).

The bigger product images on website A were seen as more credible than the smaller ones used on website B (Sara et al., 2017). To them, bigger pictures meant being able to zoom in and really see what they were buying. Although bigger pictures were preferred to smaller pictures, Crystal and Laura (2017) voiced that bigger pictures should not take over the entire webpage. The pictures should only be big enough for them to see everything. Clickability of the product images to zoom in and look more closely was positively welcomed (Sara et al., 2017).
The size was a big factor when it came to the typography. The majority of font-sizes used on website B were found as being too big (Sara et al., 2017). Upon seeing product information text in an alarmingly small font-size compared to other body text on the website, Sara (2017) felt like Website B was trying to hide information. To Sara using the same font-size of body text implies that all information in the body text is equally as important.

### 4.2 Show care

Participants wanted the visuals of an e-commerce webpage to look clean and professional (Sara et al., 2017), as in not look like an amateur did it (Laura, 2017). A visually professional e-commerce webpage meant first of all that the owners took their businesses seriously. Second, it meant that the owners have the money to hire someone, hopefully a professional, to make their website look visually appealing. Professionalism can even be shown by the design adapting to the type of product being sold (Laura). By that she meant that a website that sells cars should have a serious design since buying cars is a very serious deal.

When asked about the typography of website A and B, participants thought website A’s use of typography was more credible as it was highly professional compared to website B (Sara et al., 2017). The typography on A was much more consistent and well put together than they were on website B that continuously used different fonts, font-styles and font-sizes. Website A’s use of typography looked clean in the way it was composed (Sara et al., 2017). The webpage had a more structural typography with body texts and titles being aligned the same way throughout the website. Website B on the other hand was randomly composed. Crystal (2017) thought that the entire design of website B would look more clean if the same fonts, font-sizes and text-alignment had been used. Compared to website B whose typography was everywhere, it looked like website A knew what they were doing. (Laura, 2017)

When comparing serifs to sans serifs, there was a higher response to sans-serif fonts on both sites. They believed the non-existent serifs of san-serifs fonts made it easier to focus on the text (Sara et al., 2017). Simplicity was a key element in identifying readability. Crystal (2017) found the text on website A looked simple and readable as the font-size was neither too big nor too small. Hailey (2017) felt like the bigger the text, the less credibility, meaning website A was seen as more credible to her than website B due to the font-size. The ideal body text font-size for all participants was around 12-13 pixel. There was a slight preference for bolder text in navigation bars as bolder navigation text was found to be clear and readable (Sara et al., 2017).
The colours used on website A were considered professional and clean compared to website B (Sara et. al, 2017). Website A used very little colour on the entirety of their webpage whereas website B used a wide variety of colours. Website A used a grey background colour and website B used different patterns with different colours. The participants disliked both backgrounds but the colour used on Website A was highly preferred. One colour the participants wished was used on both websites background was white. To them, white was a clean and professional colour that would bring the credibility value in both sites higher (Sara et al., 2017).

When using colour on both text and background the response frequently pointed to the need of contrast. The preference when comparing website A to B was website A who used the classic black text on white background. When on website B, participants were met will all types of issues. They thought the light coloured text on light coloured background used on website B was difficult to read however sometimes they would find it to work when a dark shadow surrounding the bright letters was used to elevate contrast between background and foreground. When it comes to website C and D, they were fine with both. Like website A, website D used a more classic approach to text and colour but website C used light text on dark background. At one point website C also used the same colour I both text and background but in different shades: light blue background with dark blue text. Laura and Hailey (2017) reacted positively to this due to the use of contrast.

The typography used on website C was said to look more professional than on website D, especially regarding the product titles. Website C used a bold font and the colour black. Website D used a bolder font than website C and the colour of the product titles was blue. The design of the title on website D was seen as old fashioned due to its boldness. Sara (2017) thought titles should be bigger and bolder than the body text but not unnecessarily bold. Product images on both sites were found to be clean but the images on website C were deemed more professional and clean (Sara et al., 2017). The product images on website D were simple of nature and resembled stock photos unlike the product images on website C that looked like there was a lot of thought put behind them (Laura, 2017). The images on website C were well-organised, well set up and well lit (Crystal, 2017).

Photos were also perceived as either professional and clean or unprofessional and not clean (Sara et al., 2017). On some pages, website A used high quality images in the background instead of colour. The background images were deemed clean, well thought out and as if effort had been put behind taking them. The product images however, although seen as credible due to the number of them, were not perceived as looking as such. The participants thought they could have been more professional and presentable (Sara et al., 2017).
Crystal (2017) justified that for an image to look professional, a good camera, lighting and other equipment needed to be used so the product can come alive. She felt like there was no effort put in taking the product images on Website A. Sara and Hailey (2017) agreed. To Hailey (2017) the product images looked like they were taken with an iPhone. Sara (2017) compared the product images to those taken when trying to sell items on Blocket. For the three of them, the product images on website B looked more credible than on website A due to their high quality. Laura (2017) on the other hand, although she did find the images on website B to look professional thought website A’s images looked more credible as they were more realistic.

When it came to choosing the most credible website, Laura (2017) chose website A at first. She later changed her mind and chose website C due to the product images not looking professional or serious enough compared to the other websites. She meant that although Website A looked credible she needed a certain amount of professionalism. Had website A used better product images, she would have chosen it as the most credible website.

Website B was chosen as the least professional and credible out of all websites (Sara et al., 2017). The logo especially was seen as “tackier and more amateurish” than the rest of the site. The combination of colour, font and size used in the logo was not well matched; some letter sizes were smaller than others and the space between letters varied. Crystal (2017) believed no attention or effort was put on the design of the logo.

On website C, the navigation bar would change background colour based on the link the mouse was on. This was seen as amateur and non-clean design. Sara and Hailey (2017) wanted the background colour to be white and stay the same, like it was on website D. The navigation bar colour scheme on website D was seen as clean and non-amateurish. Another design choice seen as being amateur had to do with centred texts. Sara, Laura and Hailey (2017) were fine with short titles being centred but longer body text and titles that was centred was seen as being amateur and not professional with reason that it decreased readability. Crystal (2017) however was accepting of longer titles being centred, as it looked more informative.

4.3 Familiarity

One situation that stood out when it came to images was when browsing website A and website B. While comparing the two websites participants noticed pictures of the owner of website B on the site. This they believed made website B feel more personal as they knew who to turn if ever they were met with a problem (Sara et al., 2017). They meant that the pictures gave website B an identity. Website A on the other hand was seen as confusing and less reliable as there were
no clear indicator of the person behind the business. Sara (2017) found it suspicious that website
A did not have a picture of the owner; it was as if the owner A was hiding.

A similar need of personalisation was seen when discussing the banners used on website C and
website D. On website C the banners consisted of full-bodied people and on website D it was
mostly illustrations with few product images. Sara (2017) saw more value to the banner when a
person was in it, in the manner of website C, compared to illustrations of lollipops and simple
product images, in the manner of website D. She meant that seeing a person made it easier for
her to relate to the product being sold. It gave her a sense of personalisation.

Website A’s use of typography was seen as more credible when it came to the alignment of text.
Website A consistently used left alignments while website B used all three types of alignment
randomly. Laura (2017) explained that as she is used to reading left to right, she would like to
do the same online. The same reason was given to the typography regarding website C and D
with website C’s alignment of text being preferred by her.

Laura (2017) chose the element colour as one of the most important elements when designing a
website due to the different impact and personal affect it can have. When on website A, two
participants reacted strongly to a regular button in the colour red. They disliked the use of the
colour as it reminded them of negative things. Sara (2017) associated the colour with something
being on sales. She was also wary of clicking on the button as the colour reminded her of being
warned of something. Hailey (2017) agreed but her dislike was a little more biased. Other than
associating the colour with warning signs, Hailey (2017) personally did not like the colour red.
She believed any other colour could have worked but red. Sara (2017) suggested using the
colour green on the button instead for it reminded her of positive things in regular life.

The colour used on the typography of website A was more credible than on website B (Sara et
al., 2017). The colour used on website A’s text, black, was seen as simple and comfortable due
to the amount of time participants had seen it used on other sites and in real life. Hailey (2017)
however felt there was still some credibility to website B’s random use of colour on text as she
had seen worse.

### 4.4 Less is more

The font-size of website A gave them what they needed as it was small enough for them to
focus on the content compared to website B that was big and distracting. Website B also used
several fonts, which was found to be cumbersome and distracting with participants not knowing
were to look. Laura (2017) explained she would never shop on website B due to the typography being way too much. The ideal number of fonts to be used on a website was between two and three (Sara et al., 2017).

When comparing website C to D, Sara, Laura and Hailey (2017) were attracted to the simplicity of design of website C. They felt the typography, images, layout and colour was used in a way to put the product in focus. On website D, Sara, Laura and Hailey (2017) found the use of the elements such as text, colour and layout to be distracting as it put focus on everything but the product. Crystal (2017) on the other hand found the colours on website D to be festive. The use of the different elements on website made the other Sara, Laura and Hailey (2017) feel as if everything on the page was just as important as the information regarding the product. They wanted to be able to easily tell apart important information from non-important ones. This was well done on website A (Sara, 2017). An example was given with the menu links that where bigger in size to the regular body text. This she said put focus on the menu.

The use of colour on website A was described as being “mellow” (Crystal, 2017). By that she meant that the colour use was not excessive. She explained that it made it easier to focus on what she was searching for, as there were no other colours to distract her from her task. The use of colour on website B was perceived as distracting (Sara et al., 2017). The background especially which consisted of different patterns and colours was thought to stick out negatively. Laura (2013) expressed that it drew her attention away from were it’s supposed to be, on the content. The colour use was one of the reasons the participants chose website A over website B in terms of credibility. Crystal (2017) suggested changing the background on B to a simple and solid white to put the focus on the main content.

For Crystal (2017) the colour of the text was specifically important. She suggested that website B could look put together if they had used the same type of text colour all over their website. For Sara, Laura and Hailey (2017) everything on website B needed to be used with as little variation as website A and C. For website D who used three different shades of blue against one text on the same page, it was suggested that the same shade of background colour should be used.

4.5 Having choices

Website A and website B had different product display layouts. Website A went for a vertical full width layout that focused on each product per row whereas website B went for a gridded layout with three products being displayed per row.
Sara, Crystal and Laura (2017) preferred the product display structure of website B. Laura (2017) meant that the grid layout allowed for her to focus on the product images and also made it easier to properly view each product by not being distracted by surrounding information. Laura (2017) liked that website B gave her the ability to compare products first. She wanted to click on the image to get information about specific products.

Sara (2017) was used to seeing the gridded structure on others websites. She and Crystal (2017) liked the possibility to see through all the products offered at once without having to click on a next page button to see more products. Hailey (2017) preferred the more open product display layout of website A as she did not have to click on anything to find information regarding the product; it was directly available to her. Although Sara (2017) preferred the layout of website B, she agreed with Hailey. Since both sites were selling cars she found there was no need for her to scroll past the products. The product display layout of website A was deemed relevant to the products they were selling.

During browsing both website C and D, opinions changed concerning the layout of both sites. Website C used a layout similar to website A and website D a similar layout to website D. Laura (2017) who liked the gridded layout of website B was not a big fan of the layout of website D. She thought website C’s product display layout was more structured and easy on the eye compared to website D that seemed cramped and piled up with the different elements. Hailey (2017) liked both but had a slight preference for the layout of website D. Sara and Crystal (2017) found website D’s product display layout to be better. In the end, Crystal and Laura (2017) came to the conclusion that it depended on the product; for example when shopping clothes they both preferred the grid layout. Laura (2017) suggested having the option to individually choose the layout of the product display. By that she meant that as consumers have different taste, it is good that e-commerce companies allow them to make their own choices.

4.6 Clarity

The participants found themselves confused and deceived during some parts of the interview. Laura and Hailey (2017) thought the themed background on website D was confusing. To them constantly changing the design of a webpage made them feel like they were visiting a new website. Design updates should instead be small and alerted at unnoticeable places, like at the bottom of a page were it does not cause distraction (Laura, 2017).
The fonts, and colours used on website A were contrasting enough for consumers with bad eyesight to be able to read and not get confused (Sara). The same feelings were not shared for website B. Website A was thought to make use of the space between their text as it was easy to tell which body text belonged to which title (Sara et al., 2017). On website B however participants were often confused. The majority of text was in various font-sizes over 20px and there was a lack of space between phrases. The font-sizes were misleading as it made every type of text look like it was a headline (Sara, 2017).

The images used on website A were also confusing and misleading (Sara et al., 2017). The background images used on other part of the website looked professional in comparison to the product images that did not look as professional or credible (Hailey, 2017). Sara and Crystal especially felt deceived as they expected the product images to look similar to the background images. To them the background images made a promise that the product images could not live up to.

Laura (2017) expressed the same feelings towards the images on website B. Website B did not have as many images as website A, however the two images used were so different that she felt like she had been lied to. The first product image was high quality and professionally taken which tricked her into thinking that the product was going to be of the same calibre. The credibility value would have been higher on website B if they had used the same type of product images.

4.7 A concept

The participants wanted for the different elements to connect and blend together seamlessly. Website A followed a concept compared to website B (Sara et. al, 2017). They meant that on website B, each block of typography was either aligned, sized, placed or coloured individually. The use of colours did not match and both the typography and the colours were not following a red thread (Crystal, 2017; Laura, 2017). The logotype which used two visual web design elements, colour and typography, was seen as not fitting in the website (Sara, 2017).

When discussing website A, Sara and Hailey (2017) were not infatuated with the use of the colour red as a button (see chapter 4.3). However Crystal and Laura (2017) thought the colour matched the logo of website A and that it made sense that the red colour was used on the button. Both meant that it gave the site more of a connection, a red thread.
Website C’s consistent use of typography, colour, and layout was perceived as following a concept (Sara et. al, 2017). Opinions on website D differed. When it came to layout and text Sara et al. (2017) thought there seemed to be a concept followed. However colour was the element participants disagreed on. They all thought the use of the colour green in Website D’s navigation bar matched their logo. For the rest of the colours used on the site however only Crystal (2017) saw a connection. She felt there was a consistent use of the colours red and blue all over the website. Sara, Laura and Hailey (2017) found the red and blue colours used were never similar in shades thus bringing down the credibility of website D.

Concerning the element images, both sites were almost following a concept (Sara et. al, 2017). Both their product images followed the thread of the sites, however the background images on website C and the banner images on website D were not. A lack of connection was found when Website C, a technology gadget shop, featured an advertisement of a living room as a background image (Crystal, 2017). The lack of connection on Website D regarded the slideshow presented on their site. In this slideshow two different styles of advertisement had been used, photo advertisements and illustrative advertisement. When comparing these ads to the other images on the website, Sara, Laura and Crystal (2017) asked for consistency. They meant that since photos had been used on the rest of the site they wanted the slideshow to display photo, not illustrations. Crystal (2017) on the hand thought website D made it work.

Although participants were looking for a concept, they were fine with having a few things standing out as long as that specific design choice worked together with the rest of the design (Sara et. al, 2017). By that, they meant that what stands out in the design of a site should not disrupt the concept of the site. For example, the background colour of the front page of website A dulled down the webpage which participants thought lightly disrupted the site’s concept. They suggested using a white background instead since the header was white, to further push the connection. Even with this suggestion, website A (2017) was still seen as having a red thread as they made the colour use work. Out of all the four websites, the design of website A was chosen as the second most credible; the most credible website was chosen as being Website C.

A connection was also found between the design and the products being sold. On website B, the design was deemed not ideal for a car shop, but rather for a jokes article shop (Laura). She meant that the lack of consistency and red thread made the website seem less serious than it should have been. Sara et al. (2017) felt that website B did not show signs of knowing their craft. The lack of a concept also affected them into choosing website B as having the least credible design.
4.8 Being dull

Although website A looked credible, the similarity in the use of the different elements was found to make the site a bit boring compared to the other websites (Sara et. al, 2017). The grey background on website A was also thought to dull down the website. The most liked background was on website C, which consisted of patterns in different shades of the colour blue. Laura (2017) thought using the colour blue could have been boring but that they had managed to make use of the colour interesting. She found both Website A and website C to look professional and credible overall but website C was more interesting and entertaining than website A. For her, a website did not have to be boring to look credible.

Crystal (2017) agreed with a credible website not having to look boring however she disagreed with website C’s use of colour to be interesting. She wanted website C to be more creative with their choice of colour as she said they reminded her of all other e-commerce sites she shopped on. Sara et al. (2017) all were united in the fact that e-commerce shops should be more original with their design. By that they meant many e-commerce shops have similar visual designs and that for this reason it was important for them to distinguish themselves.

4.9 Awaking their interest

The first sign of needing attraction was made known by Sara & Hailey (2017) who disliked Website A’s use of the colour red on a button. One of Hailey’s (2017) reasons for disliking it was that it did not attract her. The same issue was found in the background colour used on website A. Changing the colour to a background image instead could have made website A more appealing (Laura, 2017).

It was important for the participants that the product images were presented properly; to them the images was supposed to sell the product, not do the opposite. The first set of product images on website B looked clickable due to their appeal (Hailey, 2017). The images also appealed to Sara, Crystal and Laura (2017) with Crystal explaining that the attraction she had to website B’s use of pictures made the site seem more credible. For website A, the background images used brought up the credibility of the site. The images were found to look attractive due to their exclusiveness where as the product images brought down the credibility value (Sara et al., 2017). Those images were seen as unattractive and old-fashioned. The product images on website A would have caught interest if they had looked as presentable and professional as the background images (Crystal, 2017).
There was a disagreement concerning website C and website D. Sara, Laura and Hailey (2017) found website C use of the different elements to look more credible than website D. The images, typography, colour and layout all looked professional to them. Crystal (2017) argued that website C was not as interesting and eye catching as website D who had a colourful theme of festivity. She meant that although website C did well on using all the elements they did not manage to target her.

On the front of website A there was a banner containing multiple family images. Laura (2017) believed the banner was targeting the right audience for the site, ordinary people who needed a car for everyday use. The background images on the other hand were targeting a different type of group, lawyers, young men who where interested in sport cars. The two images did not go together. She meant that the realistic nature of the product images displayed would attract the target audience of the banner who needed a car they could rely on. The target audience of the background images would not be attracted to those images as they have a different purpose for buying a car. If website A wanted to sell to both groups, they could have found something that attracts both groups (Hailey, 2017).

### 4.10 Making sense of the content

Participants often looked for the structure of the typography and layout and at how the available space of the websites was used. On website A, C and D, it was much easier for the participants to find what they were looking for as they felt the design was more organised (Sara et al., 2017). Several times they brought up wanting the design to make it easier to find things. They explained that they wanted to able to shop quickly and not spend their time on finding what they were looking for. They meant that if it took too much time to do their task, they would leave the website.

In contrast to the other websites, Sara et al. (2017) felt they would not be able to locate anything on Website B. Website B had no specific structural use of typography or colour and sometimes-even layout. The layout was only organised when it came to the product display on the front page. The space was also not used to it’s full advantaged. The main content took only 50% of available space, which resulted in the background being the main focus (Laura, 2017). This lack of space made the site look unbalanced.

Website A had a hierarchal and structured use of typography with titles being significantly bigger than body text, etc. The space on the screen was used to it’s fullest as the layout was organised and easy on the eyes (Sara et al., 2017). Website C had the same hierarchal use of
typography. Sara (2017) explained that the space between the different texts on website C was used in a professional manner. Although website D looked visually organised, compared to website C she had more difficulty recognising a title due to the little use of space between title and body text. It also did not help that the title was centred. Laura (2017) thought it was much more important to use as much space as possible when dealing with centred text. She meant that as centred text did not start off on the same line from the left, space could make it easier for the eye to find the next line of text.
5  Discussion

In this chapter the results surrounding the identified codes presented in the previous chapter will be discussed in relation to each visual web design elements identified in the theory.

5.1  Typography

According to Lazar (2005) font-size needs to be consistent throughout the website to not cause confusion and to increase readability. Participants (2017) reaction to larger font-sizes on website B confirmed this as they often found themselves unable to tell titles and body text apart. This lowered website B’s credibility as participants (2017) found it to be distracting. A credible use of typography to them meant that the text should only act as. It should not do more than make them partake of the information they needed to reach their goal when they wanted to. In other words, the typography should only be a supporting character to the displayed products.

The font-size on website B also brought fourth a need of transparency and honesty. Mistrust occurred between participants and website B when the constantly yet random large font-size suddenly changed to a smaller size. Sara (2017) meant that the bigger sized product information text made her focus on and value that information more although the content wasn’t as important as the few parts of the product information that had smaller sized body text. To her the typography on website B wasn’t credible as she felt they were being deceitful by trying to make her focus on non-valuable information instead of important information. The font-size of text, whether a title or body text should therefore be consistent throughout the website to increase the credibility as it assures consumers’ the website is being truthful.

Lazar (2005) pointed out the importance of readability. He meant that text should be used similarly throughout a website to make it easier for consumers to read and identify what they were looking for. Sundström (2013) also nudged at this as he suggested body text should not be so big as it can disrupt consumers’ readability. He also urged of the importance of aligning text properly. Participants (2017) agreed with both. To the participants credible typography not only meant being transparent and honest but it also meant looking clean and professional. Professional and clean in typography equalled text that was readable; as in simple, well-structured and consistent in its use of font-size, font-type, font-weight and alignment. The participants meant that clean and professional typography showcased that there was some thought put behind the design choices; as in the typography didn’t look randomly put together in it’s design as this raises signs of amateurism. Rather the typography is clean and professional.
when it is well planed, meaning the e-commerce shops did their best to make the typography work together all over the website. This also creates a concept, or to be exact a red thread. It increased the credibility value for Websites A and C who had a high use of clean and professional typography as participants felt the e-commerce websites cared about their need of readability. It also lowered the credibility value of websites B and D, who majority felt didn’t properly design their typography. The typography on e-commerce should for this reason be readable and look professional and clean.

Familiarity also affected readability. Fedders (2014), Sundström (2013) and Johnson (2010) explained that compared to right and center aligning text, left aligning is the best way to increase readability on websites as it follows the way we are costumed to read in real life. Laura (2017) shared the same opinion as she wanted the ability to read online the way she was used to offline. As she is the consumer, she felt that she should not have to change her ways to use e-commerce websites. She meant that instead of trying to change consumer’s behaviour, e-commerce websites should adapt to her ways so she easily can reach her goal. This is what Sundström (2007) meant regarding the design of a website keeping consumer’s goals in mind. Websites A and C who had adapted to the needs of their consumer regarding this had higher credibility value than websites B and D who both used center and right aligned text. The majority of text should therefore be left aligned to reach credibility.

Participants sought after clarity in the use of typography. According to Boulton (2009) text can be made clear by creating hierarchy and using font-sizes and font-weight to make visual differences between titles and body text. Using space properly could also aid consumers’ with these differences (Redish, 2007). Participants co-signed to this idea when on website A. The use of text and space on website A and C was hierarchal, for example headlines were bigger than body text, which made it clear for them what belonged with what whereas on website B it was more difficult. The large texts took over the websites and the lack of space between text was found to be misleading (Sara et al., 2017). According to Redish (2007) space could have been used to clear up the confusion surrounding the text on website B. Laura (2017) suggested the same concerning website D who had used centred headlines. She meant that as centred text was much more difficult to read then left aligned text, it was even more important to use space to help consumers make sense of the text. The difficulty in readability this lack of space also lowered the credibility of websites B and D.
5.2 Colour

Participants (2017) also wished for a clean and professional usage of colour on e-commerce websites. They identified this as using colour in a minimal way so it did not distract them or make it difficult for them to read or fulfil their tasks. They meant that e-commerce website should be able to use colour to their advantage however that this should not be over exaggerated like it was on website B and sometimes on website D where individual colours overlapped each other in several ways. To them, a lesser use of colour does more. This need of wanting colour to work together pointed signs to participants wanting a concept in colour usage. Boulton (2009) who suggested using colour consistently throughout the website held the same opinion. Like the participants he meant that a concept in colour could make consumers easily figure out what type of website they are visiting as it would make them focus on quickly gathering the information they needed. An un-unified colour use does the opposite of this which leads to a decrease of credibility.

To participants the use of un-unified colours could be prevented. According to Cao (2015), when dealing with coloured text, contrast should be used to increase readability. Participants agreed but went one step further with this notion as they meant contrast should also be used to make colour choices work throughout the page and not only with text. They wanted the backgrounds to have a concept throughout the different webpages so it would not confuse them or steal attention away from the main content. They wanted there to be a consistent contrast between content and background. The same idea was shared for text. Participants insinuated that using contrasting colours meant the e-commerce websites had taken time to evaluate which colours worked together, this showed that there was effort put in making the webpages look put together which was one of the key elements regarding professional and clean design. As website A and C managed to do this their credibility value went up.

Boulton (2009) brought up branding. He meant that by using a specific colour consistently on their webpages, consumers could easily identify different e-commerce shops apart by familiarising specific colours with specific brands. The use of branding increases credibility as it creates a concept. Participants’ responses confirmed this. For example, Participants reacted positively to website D using the green colour on their logo in their navigation bar. To them, this small match of colour gave them context. They saw this as website D putting proper thought behind their design choices. However to participants, for the credibility to rise, these small design choices needed to be consistently done throughout. An example of this can also be
done with website D where other colour choices on its webpages were seen as non-coherent thus slightly affecting the credibility negatively.

Familiarity was also found in other colour use. O’grady (2015) explained about colour and how it can be associated with different things. By that he meant that consumers can familiarise themselves with different meanings of colour. This was confirmed when participants all reacted differently to one colour. Familiarity was created as Sara and Hailey associated the colour red on website A to negative things in life, this created a bias as they immediately disliked the colour which decreased the credibility value. Crystal and Laura where more lenient to this as they felt it created a concept with the rest of the website where red had been consistently used.

Familiarity was also confirmed when comparing website A’s text colour to website B’s. There was a preference for website A’s simple use of black as participants familiarised it with other e-commerce websites that used the same design colour in text. As they deemed those websites as credible, website A’s credibility value automatically increased. In other words design choices participants associated with good feelings, experiences, etc… affected their judgment for the positive. This suggests that to increase credibility, e-commerce websites should try to use colours consumers can associate with positive things.

However this is not the case all the time. Hailey (2017) who although agreed website A was more credible in it’s colour choice, felt there was still some credibility to website B as she had seen worse. To her e-commerce websites that she considered having low credibility value due to their design could still be seen as credible when compared to other e-commerce websites that she thought looked visually worse. This suggests that e-commerce websites could use colour in a way that consumers could associate with bad things but get opposite results. Doing this however should be avoided, as it doesn’t actually bring up the credibility level to the maximum.

There was a crave for the design to catch participants interest. Colour being the first element identified to fulfil this task (Sara et. al, 2017). Participants advocated on several occasions for the e-commerce websites to awake their interest with the use of colour. Although they wanted colour use to be coherent and conceptual they meant that this could easily and quickly be boring. To them a conceptual use of colour meant using colours that managed to work well together to attract them. For example, on website A, all participants thought the used background colour worked with the rest of the website but that it did nothing to keep their interest awake. Whereas on website C majority thought the mixture of blues in the background matched and succeeded in doing so. Although e-commerce website’s use of conceptual colours is regarded as credible, this could be increased by the use of not only conceptual but attractive colours, these being colours that are viewed positively.
5.3 Image

Product images played an important role in the participants’ assessment of e-commerce websites credibility. Eccher (2015) made a point about image giving out information to consumers which participants opinions regarding images proved as they had a need for honesty and transparency in the website’s usage of images. For them, knowing exactly what type of product they were going to buy created a sense of security and credibility in knowing they wouldn’t be deceived which created the need of honesty and transparency.

According to Laura (2017) an honest and transparent use of image was e-commerce companies showcasing the images of products they where selling. For her it was important to see the images of the products so she could get a visual idea of what she was going to buy. A simple product description of the product wasn’t enough as it could differ from how the product actually looks like in real life, leading to the consumer being deceived and in return affecting the credibility. In other words, Laura felt that ordering a product that didn’t have a description could lead to fraud, as her expectations might not be met. Nielsen & Bernice’s (2010) study pointed to the same thing. Displaying product images can make e-commerce websites seem honest and transparent as a consumer might feel there are lower risks of being lied to about the visuals of a product. Sundström (2013) agreed to this, however he warned of product images also being deceitful. He meant that as images do not provide with enough information, consumers could misjudge how the product looks which could lead to deception and influence trustworthiness. His counter action to this was using images with other elements such as typography.

The number of product images also brought forward the need of honesty and transparency. When compared to website B, Hailey (2017) felt website A was more credible as there was a bigger number of picture. She meant that a bigger number of images could help her in deciding whether to make a purchase or not as it would allow her to better evaluate the product. Participants also meant that fewer images could help them see whether they are being lied to, especially if the images were not similar. This happened on Website B where participant felt they were being tricked by the use of attractive pictures into clicking on specific items only to be disappointed when the real product images didn’t look anything similar. This relates to and contradicts Nielsen & Pernice’s (2010) study that showed consumers where drawn to high contrasting and high quality images and not to low quality images or stock images. The front
facing product pictures that according to Sara et al, (2017) where appealing where stock images, meaning stock images could attract just the same as other types of images. The problem of attraction only lies in the quality of those stock images. E-commerce shops that use stock pictures should therefore invest in making them of the highest quality to ensure credibility. The sizes and angles of images also played a role in defining the use of honest and transparent images. The participants appreciated bigger product images and in the case product images were small they wanted to have the control to make these product images bigger. To Sara et al. (2017) bigger product images and varying angles increased the credibility as it allowed them to view the different products in all it’s details which gave them better expectations and visual knowledge of the products they wanted to purchase. Nielsen & Bernice’s (2010) study also alluded to consumers having a preference to detailed pictures, however Sara et al. (2017) associated detail with size of image. E-commerce shops should therefore use bigger product images, as those are deemed trustworthier.

According to participants (2017) images on e-commerce sites should be clean and professional to increase credibility. By clean and professional they meant images that were high quality. Crystal and Hailey (2017) meant that professional images had to look like effort, time and money had been used to produce them. To them clean and professional images showed that the e-commerce shops cared about the way they were perceived by consumers as if there was a want to leave a good impression to all types of consumers. In other words clean and professional images were identified as looking presentable and showing signs of seriousness. Laura (2017) had a different view on this when comparing the product images of website A to B. She agreed that professional images looked more trustworthy however she meant that the use of these images should be consistent and not be used in a malicious way like on website B where the professional looking product images lured the participants into clicking on items. For this reason, she found website A’s use of product images, although not professional, more credible due to it’s consistency.

A need for consistency was also found in the using of images, this time on website A. The background pictures looked professional whereas the product images didn’t match this professionalism which participants found confusing. They meant that the different types of images made them feel expect to buy a product that was actually not being sold. The credibility value would have been higher on website A if the product pictures had been just as professional as the background images. To Sara et al. (2017) the images needed to follow a concept, this was created by consistency. The participant meant that the images displayed on e-commerce shops should be related to each other both in look, style, feel and eventually the genre of the website.
For example Sara al., felt there was a disconnect when using illustrations and pictures at the same time as both images were of a different style. They also felt a disconnect when website A’s product images didn’t match the look and feel of the professional background images. On website C they felt a disconnect regarding the advertisement that acted as a background image as it was selling a different type of item compared to the majority of products being sold on the site. They meant that the advertisement was targeting a different type of consumer, which decreased the credibility, which confirmed Thorlacius (2007) reminder of the importance of design that focused on specific consumers groups.

It was important for the participants that the product images attracted them; to them the images was supposed to sell the product, not do the opposite. Attracting them as consumers also meant targeting them. They meant that the images should adhere to and focus on their needs as consumers, once again confirming Thorlacius (2007) reminder. For example, website A’s pictures targeted two different groups with different needs, which lowered the credibility value as participants felt their need wasn’t fully prioritised. Sundström (2013) explained the importance of keeping consumers interest; this is what participants also meant. The background images didn’t serve a purpose other than to try and keep them interested in the product that were being sold, however this failed due to the product images. Participants would have been okay with the background images looking the way they do if at least some of the product images looked the same way. Only then would website A have succeeded in finding something that attracts both groups (Hailey, 2017).

According to Thorlacius (2007), websites should help consumers understand who is behind it. He meant that unlike physical boutiques where participants could know who to turn to, e-commerce websites didn’t have this option. E-commerce consumers need the ability to familiarise themselves with the website’s they shopped on. The participants agreed with this. They quickly found website B more secure, reliable and trustworthy due to the website containing images of the owner. They also wanted to see people in other types of images such as banners as it gave them a sense of personalisation, which they could easily relate to. E-commerce website could use more people in their images to increase the consumer’s assessment of credibility.

5.4 Layout

For there to be credibility, the layout needs to aid consumers in finding things, i.e. reaching their goal (Eccher, 2015; Sara et al., 2017). Participants meant that the layout had to be simple as to
not distract them. Simple layout could be achieved by structuring the content of the webpage to put focus on the right thing, in participants case this meant putting focus on the products. Eccher (2015) agreed to this as he implied that aligning the content a certain way gives consumer an expectation on where to find things, which in return can make them, focus on the what they want. Participants (2017) also allude to this as they implied that following a concept, which was done on websites A, C and D, could also help with not distracting consumers thus increasing credibility. By this they meant that the layout was consistently used throughout the different websites, which created a visual structure and recognition. An example of this could be done with the product category and display of products on website C. Although the product category layout was different from the layout of the product display, each product category page had the same layout and likewise each product display page had the same layout. According to Eccher (2015) and Redish (2007) this meant that participants who browsed website C immediately got a basic knowledge of where to find things, which seemed to be the case according to the participants (2017). Sundström (2013) explained that changing this layout could cause confusion.

To participants (2017) using space to aid the visual balance was also an important key in making a standardised layout. To them, it implied that the e-commerce shops actually cared enough to use the available space on their websites to ensure the consumers had the best experience. This was done on websites A, C and D. However website B barely used the space they had. The lack of space, a concept, consistency and simplicity were the reasons participants (2017) found the layout of website B brought down it’s credibility. On website B the layout always differed except for the product display which stayed consistently the same. Although the product display on website B followed a concept and was consistent which Sara, Crystal and Laura (2017) thought was credible, the rest of the website was overpowering thus making it difficult for participants’ to find things and at the same time putting focus on other things than the products. Suggestions given about the structure of the product display on the four sites pointed to the fact that the participants wanted to be able to chose for themselves how the products on e-commerce shops should be displayed. Websites A, B, C and D didn’t have these options however this did not affect their credibility value negatively. By wanting choices regarding the product display, participants meant that as they had different tastes regarding product display layout based on the type of products they where buying, it would be good if e-commerce websites could allow them to chose for themselves how the products should be displayed. This would make them feel like the e-commerce website valued each their opinions and tastes as consumers which in turn would increase the credibility.
6 Conclusions

The main question of this thesis investigated how the visual web design elements affect consumers’ assessment of websites credibility. From the results we can see that participants’ assessment of credibility grew high on the evaluated e-commerce websites where the typography acted as an accessory to the products, was readable and had a sense of consistency in size, colour, font-family, alignment and more. This elevated their trust in the e-commerce websites as they felt there was sincerity and that thought had been put behind the design which for them was a reassurance there was lesser of a chance these websites where fraudulent. Likewise, participants assessment of credibility was affected positively when colour was used in a clean and professional manner, meaning the colour use was consistent, non-distracting and didn’t hinder readability. Colours that participants could familiarise with things in their lives also affected the assessment of credibility. Colours that they viewed as positive affected this assessment positively by increasing the credibility value, whereas colours that they familiarised with negative things failed to do this.

Participants’ assessment of credibility was strongly affected by the use of the element image. They were adamant on the evaluated e-commerce websites to have a correct and detailed image display of products as they compared these characteristics use of the element with being honest and transparent. They also wanted the product images to be attractive and wake their interests in the products. Participants had a lack of trust in the evaluated e-commerce websites that did the opposite of the before-mentioned attributes by using unattractive but also inconsistent images both in genre, number and size. This affected their assessment of credibility negatively as they suspected a risk for fraudulent activities.

For there to be a high value of on the evaluated websites, participants wanted the use of the element layout to first and foremost make it easier for them to locate things they were searching for. To do so the layout design had to be simple, structured and consistent, as participants believed this put focus on the rest of the elements without causing unnecessary distraction. Participants’ assessment of credibility peaked high for websites that managed to do this.

The second question of this thesis investigated which visual web design elements made the most impact and from the results we can see that all elements were impactful in the participants’ assessment of e-commerce credibility. Although participants chose colour and layout as making the most impact, it was clear that to meet their needs as consumers all elements had a collaborative impact as several of the different elements where often used or mentioned together. When participants discussed how the different elements affected their assessment of e-
commerce websites credibility, the element layout was often linked to the use of typography and image. Likewise colour and typography were two elements that often crossed paths.

The final question of the thesis investigated how the visual web design elements can be used to strengthen the credibility in e-commerce website. The results tells us that to strengthen the credibility in e-commerce websites, the different visual elements should be used in a way that makes it easier for consumers to reach their goals. When using typography, it is important that the text looks put together to supplement the other elements. The typography should also be readable and consistent. This can be reached by using contrasting colours, consistent text sizing and hierarchy between titles and body text as well as proper text-alignment. Colour should also be used with consistency, meaning there should be a use of few similar or complementing colours that is displayed on the site. As consumers associate some colours with different things, to strengthen the credibility in e-commerce websites it is good to use colours that consumers can associate with positive thoughts, memories and emotions. Although participants’ assessment of the evaluated websites credibility was affected negatively when an inconsistent use of colour was seen, the participants wanted the colours to catch their attention. This could be done by the use of branding which increased participants sense of familiarity with the website.

To strengthen the credibility in e-commerce websites, images should be able to attract the consumers. This is achieved by using high quality and professionally taken that target the right audience. Images should also be large and several in numbers so consumers can easily get an accurate preview of the products they are interested in. Like the other elements, images need consistency in genre as this creates clarity and causes less confusion for consumers. The layout should be used in a manner that creates structure in relation of the other elements as this facilitates the consumers reaching their goals. To achieve structure, space can be used as a tool. Using available space can elevate the consumers’ experience, thus strengthening the credibility of e-commerce websites. Using the different elements in the ways mentioned above strengthens the credibility in e-commerce websites as participants associate these attributes with the different criterias that need to be reached before their need as consumers can be completely prioritised.

In summary, the participants wanted the visual web design elements to visually show that their needs as customers where first priority. This, participants agreed was achieved by the visual web design elements fulfilling different criteria’s. Once the visual web design elements reached these criteria’s, the participants’ assessment of credibility for the evaluated e-commerce websites was either increased or created. The visual design elements that didn’t manage to
prioritise this need by reaching these criteria’s affected participants assessment of credibility regarding the evaluated websites negatively as they were viewed as having a lower credibility.

### 6.1 Proposals for further development

Future research could be done with the same approach however with a sample of consumers including both female and male participants. Another suggestion is to use a quantitative approach with a much larger sample to get a general understanding of the subject and representation of e-commerce consumers. An interesting method to use with this approach could be semantic scales. The research could further be improved with a complete use of the grounded theory method where not only new theory is created but it is also verified.
References


Visual web design elements – a tool to increase consumers trust in e-commerce websites

Appendix 1 – Content of website A
Appendix 2 – Content of website B
Visual web design elements – a tool to increase consumers trust in e-commerce websites
Appendix 3 – Content of C

Visual web design elements – a tool to increase consumers’ trust in e-commerce websites
Visual web design elements – a tool to increase consumers' trust in e-commerce websites
Visual web design elements – a tool to increase consumers' trust in e-commerce websites
Appendix 4 – Content of D

The background seen in D’s pictures are different as the screenshots were unfortunately taken after the focus group interview.
Visual web design elements – a tool to increase consumers trust in e-commerce websites
Visual web design elements – a tool to increase consumers' trust in e-commerce websites
Appendix 5 – Interview questions

Part 1

• Has anyone here ever shopped online?

• How many times would you say you shop online?

• Is online shopping something you prefer to normal shopping?

• Have you ever been a victim of e-commerce fraud?

• How do you chose which website to shop on? For example: You have two e-commerce shops in front of you selling the item you want at the same price. How do you go about picking the website?

• Has the design of a website ever affected your decision of where to shop? / Has the design of a website ever stopped you from shopping?

• If yes, what made you decide against shopping on those sites?

Part 2

• What website looks more credible to you? Website A / C vs B / D

• How is website A / C more credible than website B / D?

• Based on the design of these websites, which of the websites A / C vs. B / D look more credible to you? Which would you shop on?

• What are the deciding factor for choosing website A/C over B/D?

Typography

• What are your opinions regarding the typography used on website A / C vs B / D?

• Based on the shape of the texts, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? Why?

• Based on the size of the different texts, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?
Visual web design elements – a tool to increase consumers trust in e-commerce websites

• Based on the color of the text, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the alignment (center, justified, right) of the text, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the space between the words and letters, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the space between the phrases, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Now think back on everything you said, if given the choice what would you like to change about the typography on these sites? What are your reasons for this choice? Let’s start with website …

**Colours**

• What are your opinions regarding colours used on website A / C vs B / D ?

• Based on the different background colours, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the different background patterns, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the colour of the texts against the colour of the different background, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the different colours seen on these websites, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Which do you prefer, website A or B?

• Now think back on everything you said, if given the choice what would you like to change about the colours on these sites? What are your reasons for this choice? Let’s start with website …

**Images**
• What are your opinions regarding the images used on website A / C vs. B / D?

• Based on the different images showcased, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the different sizes of the images (I mean big or small), which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the number of images (I mean many vs. few), which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the showcased product images, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the different images in the banners, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice??

• Now think back on everything you said, if given the choice what would you like to change about the images on these sites? What are your reasons for this choice? Let’s start with website …

**Layout**

• What are your opinions regarding the layout structure used on website A / C vs. B / D?

• Based on the structure of these websites, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the placement and structure of the texts, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the structure of the navigation bars, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the structure of the product pages, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

• Based on the structure of the product information pages, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?
Based on the structure of the product information itself, which of these two sites make you feel more secure to shop on? What are your reasons for this choice?

Now think back on everything you said, if given the choice what would you like to change about the layout on these sites? What are your reasons for this choice? Let’s start with website …

**Part 3**

Now present all the websites next to each other

What website looks more credible to you? Website A vs. B vs. C vs. D

Which of the following design elements do you think impacted you the most in choosing website A / B / C / D / over the others?

What website looks the least credible to you? Website A / B / C / D

Which of the following design elements do you think impacted you the most in choosing website A / B / C / D over the others?

Now think back on what you said, what changes would you apply to least credible website … that would make you want shop there? Let’s start with website …

Think back on the different elements we’ve analysed / talked about, do you think better design choices could help more e-commerce sites improve their credibility / gain their trust?

If so how should websites go about with their design to gain your trust?

What elements should they put more focus on?

What elements should they put less focus on?

How do you feel about this discussion?

Do you feel like you will focus more on the design of websites on the future when shopping?