



**The role of national identity in the consumer's buying process of
national designers - a case study in the Irish fashion industry**

Daniela Cristina de Andrade Rodrigues

Student Number: X19127383

ID: 1368574431

National College of Ireland

School of Business

MSc. Marketing

Supervisor: Fabián Armendáriz

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Abstract

The fashion industry in Ireland is facing a scenario increasingly in both competitive and demanding customers. In this sense, understanding consumer behaviour and possible stimuli and influences are essential.

This study intends to expand comprehension about the role of national identity in the consumer's buying process of national designers. It focuses on analysing the shopping experience of women from generation X and baby boomers in Ireland.

As this project seeks to observe, analyse, understand factors, ideas, feelings, associations and subliminal messages that can impact the purchase process, a qualitative simple case study was defined, with two units of analysis. The first unit of analysis involves the retailers, and the second takes into account the consumers of national designers. The study was performed through in-depth interviews and an observational process. The interviews contemplated retailers and consumers and sought to assess if national identity impacts the purchase process and raise conceivable associations made by customers between national designers with this element. The results revealed that national identity influences the purchase process and can stimulate the search for a national brand.

Additionally, this element influences consumers establishing associations with the brand and the physical variables, a crucial factor in the clothes purchase process of generation X and baby boomers. It alludes that, through efficient use of this element, they can develop growth and awareness strategies in the local market without compromising their international operations, mainly in a post-pandemic scenario.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	I
Submission of Thesis and Dissertation	II
Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland.	III
Acknowledgements	IV
Table of Contents	V
Table of Figures	VII
Chapter 1 - Introduction	8
1.1 Background	8
1.2 Research Justification	9
1.3 Research Question and Outcomes.....	9
1.4 The Ambit of the Research.....	10
Chapter 2 - Theoretical background	11
2.1 Outline	11
2.2 Consumer behaviour	11
2.3 Decision- Making Process.....	13
2.4 Segmentation	18
2.4.1 Baby Boomers and Generation X.....	19
2.4.2 PIL Model	20
2.5 Culture.....	21
2.6 National Identity.....	23
2.7 Fashion.....	27
2.8 Theoretical Background Conclusion	30
Chapter 3 - Methodology	32
3.1 Outline	32
3.2 Research Question.....	32
3.3 Research Methods	33
3.4 Research Purpose.....	34
3.5 Research Philosophy.....	35
3.6 Research Approaches	37
3.7 Research Strategies	37

3.8	Research Times Horizons	41
3.9	Sampling	42
3.10	Data Collection	43
3.11	Data Analysis	45
Chapter 4	- Findings.....	48
4.1	Outline	48
4.2	Demographics	48
4.3	Context- Fashion Industry in Ireland.....	48
4.4	Embedded Unit of Analysis 1 - Retailers	50
4.5	Embedded Unit of Analysis 2 - Consumers	52
4.5.1	Fashion Consumption - Consumers.....	53
4.5.2	Irish Designers Consumption - Consumers.....	56
Chapter 5	- Discussion	60
5.1	Outline	60
5.2	Physical	60
5.3	Identity	62
5.4	Lifestyle	65
Chapter 6	- Conclusion	68
6.1	Outline	68
6.2	Main Conclusions	68
6.3	Future Recommendations	69
6.4	Limitations	70
6.5	Ethics.....	70
Appendix	72
	Appendix I - Questions – Unit of Analysis 1	73
	Appendix II - Questions – Unit of Analysis 2	74
References	75

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Solving-problem Process – Five steps.....	14
Figure 2 Research Onion.....	34
Figure 3 Design for Case Study.....	40
Figure 4 Casy Study Design Adapted.....	48
Figure 5 Participants Unit of Analysis 1	50
Figure 6 Participants Unit of Analysis 2	53

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Background

Facing international competition, Ireland has been restructuring and adapting its market since the late 1980s. Despite the fact that the Irish fashion industry has several retail chains, the consumption has been decreasing, resulting and also not generated significant revenue (Statista, 2020; De Cléir, 2011).

In this context, understanding consumer behaviour and the decision-making process is crucial. Consumer behaviour is considered the way which aspects of the exchange are conducted by human beings and the connection between dynamics of affection and cognition, behaviour and environment. It involves all the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of the exchange process. The exchange presupposes a transfer of tangibles and intangibles factors between individuals or organisations (Peter and Olson, 2010; Solomon et al., 2016; Foxall, 2015). Besides, through the acquisition of products, individuals position themselves in a social context (McCracken, 1986; Solomon, 2018; Veblen; 2007; Feinberg, Mataro and Burroughs, 1992). "We are what we have and possess." (Tuan, 1980, pg.480).

The topic defined for this research came from a process of observation of the researcher, through her professional experience in marketing and sales in the Irish fashion industry. During two years, customers depicted a feasible association between the designer's ethnicity and the demand for outfits, mainly for special occasions.

As prior mentioned, intangible factors could influence consumer behaviour, and one of these factors is the national identity. The researcher defined it since consumers exhibited the pride of belonging to a group, characteristic of this element. National identity is part of the individual's identity, and it is formed through the social interactions, or interactions with the "other" and against the "other", culture and can be stimulated daily through subliminal messages and at different levels. Despite the national identity influencing the purchasing process, companies

tend to not consider the element as relevant (Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Fischer and Zeugner-Roth 2016; Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith 2019, Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar and Diamantopoulos 2015; Verlegh, 2007).

1.2 Research Justification

There is a need to expand knowledge about the role of national identity in the decision-making process. This project aims to contribute with new comprehension about it focusing on women of generation X and baby boomers, consumers of clothes designed by national designers. Recent studies show that this target audience feels dissatisfied with the clothing designer, which does not often contemplate the bodily changes that have occurred over the years (Rocha, Hammond, Hawkins, 2005; Neves, Brigatto and Paschoarelli, 2015; Littrell, Jin Ma, and Halepete, 2005; Rahman and Yu, 2018).

The fashion industry is a system used for transferring meaning to objects and also a way in which people express their identity. Additionally, objects and clothing generally represent the lifestyle or how individuals wish to be seen (McCracken, 1986; Evans, 1989; McNeill, 2016; Feinberg, Mataro and Burroughs, 1992).

The national identity influences the manners individuals perceive, interpret and react to the situations impacting on their consumption behaviour. It is inherent to each individual and has different levels of impact (Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar and Diamantopoulos 2015; Brewer 1999). The theories of social identity, intergroup relations, self-concept, and identity salience are related to national identity, and it can be considered its base (Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith 2019; Evans, 1989).

1.3 Research Question and Outcomes

In this context, the question for this project arose and aimed to examine the role of national identity in the consumer's buying process of national designers, considering the fashion industry in Ireland.

To address this topic is crucial to scrutinise how companies evaluate this element. What factors would be relevant to the purchase of these products? Moreover, what are the possible associations made by customers between national identity, the ethnicity of the designer and fashion as an expression of personal identity?

The outcome of this research came up with significant insights into marketing strategies focused on women of generation x and baby boomers towards clothes designed by national designers.

Regarding the fashion industry, product ethnicity could moderate the influence of national identity if attempt the physical variables demanded by consumers. Besides, this element can stimulate the search for national designers. With a post-pandemic scenario, these insights can provide new approaches for national designers, aiming to emphasise the positive association with the brand.

1.4 The Ambit of the Research

The study was undertaken through a qualitative case study, once it aimed to expand comprehension about a phenomenon. The data was collected by an in-depth interview and observational process in a cross-section time horizon.

In order to develop the prominence of the role of national identity in the purchase process will be presented, existing theoretical background analysing relevant theory and studies that will endorse this project. The methodology will cover the discussion about the most suitable approach used to explain the research question. Subsequently, the findings will denote the insight gathered from the data collected. The following section will address the findings in the light of the literature review presented, and finally, all the conclusion, limitations and ethics aspects will close this study.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical background

2.1 Outline

Over the years, marketing has developed to adapt to constant changes and the challenges of new eras. However, in all ages, marketing has always sought and still seeks to understand, detail and develop methods that allow understanding consumer behaviour. Moreover, more than ever understanding who is buying is crucial. This study seeks to assess consumer behaviour and the preference of consumers towards products designed by national designers.

From this standpoint; this chapter introduces the literature review of consumer behaviour, buying process, decision-making and the element of national identity as a possible drive to purchase decisions. In addition, this project aims to study a specific group and industry, and it is crucial to depict the importance of market segmentation and information about the fashion industry.

2.2 Consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour involves studying the process where individuals search, select, evaluate and buy products or services to satisfy their needs and desires. Understanding this process and the factors which influence and drive purchasing decisions are crucial to the organisation's success (Belch and Belch 2003).

Consumer behaviour presupposes that there must be a stimulus for the individual to have the motivation to act and seek information about the desired object (Piaget, 1969; Pachauri, 2001; Foxall, 2015). The stimulus is influenced by the unique individual biases, experiences, environment, among others. Piaget (1969), stated that the action for the learning process occurs from the stimulus, which is usually external. Thus, the individual seeks to accommodate the information (it is considered that there is already a previous basis) or assimilates (new knowledge).

Not all the stimuli are attempted. To be noticed it has to follow three stages: sensation or exposure (the act of sensory reception), attention and interpretation "which depends on the socio-psychological meanings the individual attaches to the object perceived (the stimulus)" (Foxall, 2015). The stimuli have to activate the consumer's involvement, which is about the relevance given by the customer to an activity, object, product or event. It is a state of a motivational process involving cognitive and affective processes, behaviours that impact the make decisions process (Solomon et al., 2016; Peter and Olson, 2010). The customer must be exposed to constant information, and this involves developing processes that attract customer's attention; and it consists of exposing individuals to information that triggers a state of affective, involvement and stimuli available in the environment (Solomon et al., 2016, Peter and Olson, 2010, Foxall, 2015). This factor explains why in the face of so many daily stimuli, individuals select only a few.

Peter and Olson (2010), pointed out three components to be observed in consumer analyses: (a) environment, (b) behaviour and (c) affect and cognition system (mental responses). The marketing strategy consists of defining the best stimuli to be applied in a customer's environment aiming to influence the cognitive and affective mental process and consequent behaviour.

The environment is what is external to consumers and affect their feelings and thoughts. It consists of social aspects (social classes, cultures, subcultures, families, social groups, among others) and physical aspects (products, package, advertisements, signs, technology, among others) (Peter and Olson 2010; Belch and Belch, 2003, Foxall, 2015; Pachauri, 2001).

Behaviour involves an individual's physical actions that can be analysed, observed and measured (Foxall, 2015). The behaviour contemplates four elements: (a) the action executed; (b) the target the action seeks to reach; (c) the context in which an action is performed and (d) the time when it is executed. In addition, social behaviour presupposes not only one action but a sequence of actions (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

Affect, and cognition systems are "different types of psychological responses" (Peter and Olson, 2010, p.39). The affective system consists of feeling, emotional, moods states and usually can be experienced in the body when individuals are living the experience (Katz, 1960). Individual's decisions are made based on their emotions. The greater degree of experience's intensity, the higher the degree of emotional involvement.

The cognition is a rational and thinking response, and it is not felt in the individuals' body (Pieters and Raaji, 1988). The cognitive system is responsible for thinking, understanding, evaluating, deciding the situations, and considers the mental process in the purchase decision. It is the act of processing information, interpreting it, evaluating it, planning and deciding some actions (Pachauri, 2001; Peter and Olson, 2010).

The stimulus and the external factors are pivotal and exert influence in consumer behaviour and consequently, the decision-making process. Additionally, this experience happens physically, and everyone in the environment and everything that is part of it influences this exchange (Foxall, 2015; Peter and Olson, 2010; Solomon et al., 2016). The choice made is linked with individuals' life, and the motivations for it vary from each person (Solomon et al., 2016; Pachauri, 2002). It denotes the importance of the on-going process to understand it. Moreover, the focus is often on buyer behaviour, acquisition phase and in the factors that influence the choice during the decision-making process of product or service (Linehan, 2008). In this sense, it is crucial to comprehend how the buying process works and how the individuals tend to make their decisions during this process.

2.3 Decision- Making Process

The decision-making process contemplates several decisions and involves choosing between more than two options of actions or behaviour (Peter and Olson 2010). The consumer can be seen as an individual who identifies a desire or need and carries out the purchase process (Solomon et al., 2016).

The most used process to illustrate the consumer's purchase process has five steps, usually. Peter and Olson 2010 defined the decision-making process as a problem-solving process depicted in the image below:

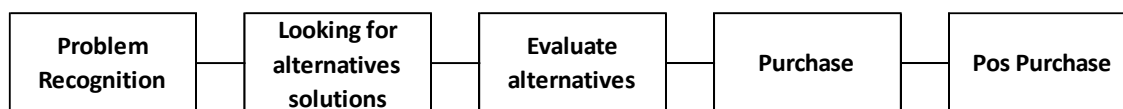


Figure 1 Solving-problem Process – Five steps

Source: Peter and Olson, 2010, p. 163

Foxall 2015 and Peter and Olson 2010 stated that the decision-making process begins before the purchase. It is assumed that there is a need to have a stimulus. Besides, the perception, attention and interpretation that individuals make are grounded on the socio-psychological meanings attached to the object perceived (stimuli) (Piaget, 1969; Foxall, 2015).

The first stage in the purchase process involves identifying the problem. There is an assessment of the current situation and the desired one. The next step is to solve problems and contemplate the search for possible solutions or analysis of options. At that moment, the individual searches for information, and it is collected in the external environment and internal knowledge and possible experiences. The subsequent phase is to evaluate the alternatives, which consists of comparing the alternatives and consequences of the purchase (Olson and Peter, 2010; Solomon, 2018; Foxall, 2015). All the information previously collected and the individual's experiences influence this step. And, the result is product definition and purchase. The last phase involves the experience obtained with the purchase of the product (Olson and Peter, 2010). According to Piaget (1969), the individual attempts to accommodate the information when they have previous knowledge or experience or assimilates a new one. In this phase, the consumer evaluates the purchase made and creates new information and knowledge that may influence other purchases.

A critical point in the buying processes is the linearity, and it presupposes that customers follow a linear decision structure. Nevertheless, this involves

several and continuous interactions between cognitive, affective, behaviours and physical and social environments-reference (Olson and Peter, 2010). This model also does not take into consideration the complexity of multiple problems and multiple internal decisions, considering that each decision is a different choice with several intentions (Olson and Peter, 2010). Individuals subject to different stimuli or influences do not tend to have the same attitude. Besides, each decision is a different choice with several intentions (Kotler, 1965; Peter and Olson, 2010).

In order to comprehend the buying process, it is necessary to understand how individuals make decisions. New studies have shown that most decisions are made automatic and intuitively. Kahneman (2011), describes the mental agents using the expressions 'system one', referring to intuitive, fast and automatic thoughts and 'system two' or "controlled operations" for rational thoughts to explain how individuals make decisions. The author indicated that most decisions made by individuals are based on the use of intuition or 'system one', and it is not rational in most cases. From the moment the individual is exposed to information, there is an automatic process of associations and links based in knowledge, past experiences, contexts, among others that result in the preparation of what is to come. The individual unconsciously creates a story, and this is defended by 'system one' even though it has no logical validity. When there is constant exposure or consistent execution of an action, it becomes automatic and tends to be repeated.

Therefore, "emotions are an important factor in the interaction between environmental conditions and human decision-making processes, with these emotional systems providing valuable implicit or explicit knowledge to make quick and advantageous decisions" (Damasio, 2005, pg.368). For the author, the decision-making process is based on emotions and not on logical process, as proposed by the construction of the homo economicus. In other words, an emotional stimulus is necessary for an effective decision-making process. In this scenario, the way the message is transmitted generates different results.

As highlighted by Kahneman (2011), individuals use both 'systems' to make associations that are often based on prior knowledge and experience. This process

is essential in marketing once can activate the knowledge of a product, and it is crucial since it can trigger the memories of individuals and the meanings connected with the object perceived (Peter and Olson, 2010). Product knowledge involves the attributes or characteristics of products, the consequence or the positive results or benefits acquired from using products or services and the value satisfaction originated with product purchase (Peter and Olson, 2010).

This process reinforces the means-end chain theory that seeks to understand how consumers connect attributes along the purchase journey. The theory strives to comprehend how individuals connect attributes of products or services to a specific result and how this action can fulfil their values. These associations are made by consumers in their minds considering attributes, consequences, and values. This process aims to understand a specific consequence of a particular product, how this pleases consumer's values and how these associations are made. It takes into account that consumers are 'goal-oriented decision-makers' focused on adopting a behaviour to lead to a desired final state, guided by positive outcomes and avoiding negative consequences.

The means-end chain's approach considers that product knowledge is also critical and depicts six levels of abstraction, starting with very concrete to very abstract such as concrete and abstract attributes; psychological and functional benefits and instrumental or end values. The attributes or characteristics perceived in the products represent how individuals aim to make their goals, values material (Gutman, 1982; Reynolds and Oslon, 2008; Peter and Olson, 2010).

Regarding attributes, consumers can know different types of product features. It could be particular attributes which consist of tangible and physical features of a product or abstract attributes which are intangible characteristics as quality, comfort among others (Peter and Olson, 2010).

Referring to consequences or benefits, the authors defined it as the desirable results from using an object, or the identification of consequences generated by using the product in the consumer's view. It also can be called as perceived quality (Steenkamp 1990). Functional benefits are tangible results, and

psychologic benefits are intangible and include psychological in nature (satisfy primary needs), psychological (self-esteem) and social outcomes (social status) (Peter and Olson, 2010; Gutman, 1982). These benefits are interpreted and have an affective response (feeling, emotions, mood) and cognitive knowledge (psychological and functional consequences) arise from this perception.

During the purchase process, customers evaluate the risk that is an undesirable result from the process and could contemplate risks as financial, social and functional (Gutman,1982; Peter and Olson, 2010). The idea is that buyers define actions to reduce undesired consequences and produce desired ones (Gutman,1982) or as stated by Kahneman (2011), with the concept of loss aversion, which considers that the process of avoiding losses outweighs the process of obtaining gains. Gutman 1982, also reported that individuals organise their ideas and thoughts about products. It is labelled categorisation processes and consists of recognising and differentiating objects, ideas, environment and classifying into meaningful sub-groups and "create equivalences among nonidentical stimuli".

The last stage in the means-end chain is value. Consumers have to recognise the process of satisfying personal or symbolic values. Value can be considered a belief that a particular behaviour is more appropriate than an opposite pattern of conduct. The values of an individual can be derived from society, institutions, culture, personalities, among others. Value can be individual life's targets and can be connected to emotions (Peter and Olson, 2010). The comprehension of links done in the means-end chain is essential. The ways buyers differ or find similarities, express and report functionalities are relevant to understand their values and can tell us much about their means-end chains.

In order to identify possible values, benefits and attributes or triggers for consumer engagement and purchase, companies must understand their market and their customers. As each customer responds to stimuli in a personal way, it is pivotal to identify and analyse patterns and similar behaviours in order to create and execute an effective marketing strategy. Following the same principle of the

categorisation process (Gutman, 1982) carried out by individuals, companies must also categorise or segment their target audience, making the analyses and actions more effective.

2.4 Segmentation

The segmentation consists of the determinants of an individual's lifestyle, being crucial to separate it, understand and target a specific market or group (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010). From the marketing perspective, lifestyle considers that individuals form groups based on the way they live, their beliefs, mindset, attitudes, their leisure, work, income and suchlike. Moreover, these aspects impact the purchase decision (Mohiuddin, 2018). The division of customers into groups for companies seeks assertiveness, while in the research process, segmentation is necessary to define the profile of participants before the factors that the researcher wishes to ascertain or validate. In addition, as the vast majority of surveys fail to analyse the entire target audience, once it can be a time-consuming and expensive process, it is necessary to select a part of that population, groups or elements that represent the whole to make the research possible (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). Furthermore, from this is possible generalise about the objective of the study. The segmentation could consider several factors such as:

Demographics – are statistics and variables such as gender, age, income, social class, level of education, family structure, race, ethnicity;

Psychographics – contemplate differences in consumer's personalities and tastes which cannot be measured objectively. It involves target audience values, opinions, traits, personality, lifestyle, among others.

Geographic – selecting the target audience on geographical boundaries. It involves the analyses of time, lighting, weather among others, once it impacts the products to be offered as its strategy and can vary by geographical segmentation (Solomon et al., 2016; Peter and Olson, 2010 and McDonald and Dunbar, 2012).

This project focuses on examining the purchasing behaviour towards products designed by national designers which contemplate psychographics characteristics once it is connected with subjective elements, values and individual identity. Geographical characteristics, once it is focused on Ireland. Moreover, demographics since the segmentation was defined by age and contemplates baby boomers and generation X or women over 49 years old.

Mature consumers are affected by the ageing factor and changes in the body. The human body undergoes variation over time; after the 30s, the body tends to retain more body fat. After 40, the abdomen can become prominent. After this phase, muscle weakness involving breasts and buttocks occurs. In this sense, it can be challenging to find a suitable piece of clothing, making fitting garments a crucial aspect of the purchase process. They look for comfortable fabrics and shapes that value or express their identity. In several surveys carried out, this target audience showed dissatisfaction with the clothes options offered for not considering the different shapes of mature women's bodies. Besides, it was identified that attributes like size, colours, shapes, product's and designer ethnicity, production methods, style and garment fit are crucial in the buying process (Rocha, Hammond, Hawkins, 2005; Neves, Brigatto and Paschoarelli, 2015; Littrell, Jin Ma, and Halepete, 2005; Rahman and Yu, 2018).

2.4.1 Baby Boomers and Generation X

Baby Boomers contemplate individuals born between 1943 and 1964 (Peter and Olson, 2010; Abrams and Von, 2014). A generation created to be independent, entrepreneurs are generally individualists. Currently, part of this generation is retired, and they tend to look for new opportunities for self-expression and personal growth. This generation has a more pragmatic approach to quality, comfort, value, product ethnicity and these factors influence future clothing purchase intentions. Also, these individuals tend to prefer the elegant appearance and look for products traded fairly, demonstrating that price and negotiation are also essential factors in the purchase process (Rahman and Yu, 2018; Littrell, Jin Ma, and Halepete, 2005; by Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins, 2005).

Generation X contemplates individuals born from 1965 to 1979 (Peter and Olson, 2010; Abrams and Von, 2014). This generation features individuals who have confidence in the power of education, are well-educated, social media-friendly, and generally sceptical of authority. They are self-confident and focused based on knowledge experiences. This generation considers aspects like comfort, value, quality; but not as vital; they tend to seek for fashionable attributes. Albeit, factors such as product authenticity and service offered are more likely to be noticed and lead to future purchases (Rahman and Yu, 2018; Littrell, Jin Ma, and Halepete, 2005).

Researches have reported that mature consumers look through high-quality clothing to express individual taste, personality, and lifestyle. They look for options that promote the status and positive self-image for others (Rocha, Hammond, and Hawkins, 2005). In the authors' views, the appearance of mature consumers has to be connected with the psychological notion of their lifestyle. Furthermore, considering fashion consumption, physical status and psychological attributes impact the mature people's lifestyle significantly.

2.4.2 PIL Model

In order to examine the participant's consumption values, will be introduced to the PIL model that details clothes consumption preferences considering gender, age, and nationality. The authors focused on the mature consumer market and proposed a model with three variables: physical, identity, and lifestyle (PIL) (Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins, 2005; Rocha, 2016).

The physical involves all the aspects connected with the ergonomic aspects and body shapes. Faced with these and other changes, women tend to look for clothes that emphasise their body positively, and this factor becomes decisive in the decision process (Rocha, 2016). The physical indicator contemplates "health, fabric, comfort, body shape, fit, functionality, climate, image judgment, seasonality." (Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins, 2005, pg. 382).

The identity attribute is a factor that affects the purchase and emphasises the function of the product and not only the fashion aspects. This factor is connected with elegance and the fact that the age does not modify the individual's identity, in the authors' view. This indicator takes into consideration "mood, taste, beauty, sensuality, colour, boldness, beauty, detachment, attraction to particular clothes, personal style, elegance, celebrity influence." (Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins, 2005, pg. 382).

The lifestyle contemplates older consumers, emphasising a new concept with the complexities of these consumers. It can be seen as the link between body and mind. Lifestyle consists of the social environment and impacts the purchase decision of older consumers. The author stated that aspects such as social class, income, education, set up priorities in the lifestyle. For the authors, lifestyle tends to be impacted with age. Society has undergone significant changes over the years, and this affects the values and lifestyle and consequently, the consumption process. This indicator involves "exclusivity, fashion, ease of care, durability, same gender, opposite gender, profession, moral conventions, welfare, quality, versatility, brand, price, age appearance, ethnicity, religion, ideology." (pg. 382).

As demonstrated by the literature review, consumer behaviour and the buying process is highly influenced by the way people live, information acquired with learning and social processes (often unconscious) and environment. Products can be perceived and bought to satisfy psychological and functional benefits. In this context, it is necessary to understand the importance of culture in the purchasing process, once national identity is a subjective element connected with an individual's identity.

2.5 Culture

Culture is a society's personality, and it affects an individual's decisions directly. Culture constitutes the phenomenal world since it is the "lens" through which the individual perceives, assimilates and interprets the phenomena. "As a

lens, culture determines how the world is seen. As a blueprint, it determines how the world will be formed by human effort." (McCracken, 1986, pg. 72).

The human being is born in a society that already has a culture. This culture, society, norms, values, shape and influence the formation of the individual (Solomon et al., 2016; Solomon, 2018; Linehan, 2008). Culture can be represented in simple gestures, words, behaviours, lifestyle, the way of dressing among others, and it is hugely connected with the human being learning process and evolution (Solomon et al., 2016; Solomon, 2018, Linehan, 2008). It is continuous learning through social interactions and information shared by members of society, and transferred from generation to generation. Culture is an essential factor and influences needs, attitudes, preferences and behaviours (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Kotler, 1965). Besides, it can promote the development of an individual's identity, attributes, values and meanings to their possessions (McCracken, 1986).

As mentioned previously and with the postmodern consumption theories, individuals buy products not only pondering physical, functional or tangible benefits. They buy goods in accordance with psychological benefits and the symbolic meanings hidden in it (Foxall, 2015; Unal, Dirlik and Otamis, 2012; McCracken, 1986). In this context, culture is fundamental in the perception of the value and meaning of objects since it has a meaning that moves continuously from one point to another. It usually starts from the cultural world to products and then to the individual consumer. The movement is diffused by some instruments such as the fashion system, advertisements and the consumption rituals. Goods have more than functional meaning or benefits. Cultural meaning is embedded in everything, even in consumer's goods; and it is built around the world, in this universe of experiences and the phenomena of daily life (McCracken, 1986).

Culture shapes the world and determines a meaning that can be cultural categories and cultural principles (McCracken, 1986). An example, clothing can communicate ideas, values and can be connected with categories such as gender, occasion, time, and suchlike. Through clothing, individuals can express their self, their values and reinforce their identity and group identity (McCracken, 1986).

Each culture defines its version of the world, meanings and understanding depending on the context (McCracken, 1986; Solomon et al., 2016; Solomon, 2018; Linehan, 2008). McCracken 1986, focused on three instruments to transfer cultural meanings. The first is through advertising, that seeks to represent the cultural meaning in the objects making the viewer perceive the similarity.

The second is the fashion system (companies, groups, and individuals) that develop symbolic meanings and transfer them to cultural goods (Solomon, 2018). The fashion system can be a modest way to create a new cultural meaning and even engage in the reform of it. In this process, opinion leaders can be significant.

The third instrument of transferring cultural meaning is the rituals. Through it, individuals can reinforce, evoke, redefine, assign the conventional cultural meanings and symbols. Summarising the meaning resides in "the culturally constituted world, products, and the consumer." (McCracken, 1986, pg. 71). Through advertising and fashion systems, the meanings can be drawn out and transferred from the culture to the products and rituals has the purpose of moving the meaning from the goods to the consumer (McCracken, 1986).

It alludes that individuals are influenced by culture, and through objects, they communicate, position themselves and demonstrate their identities, their ideas and values, their beliefs, among others. Each person perceives and interprets the information acquired uniquely. Additionally, each country has a specific culture, and the individual assimilates this national information throughout their life.

The national identity is formed by social coexistence and is part of the individual's daily life. The next chapter will clarify this element and how it could influence purchase decisions.

2.6 National Identity

National identity is a complex series of concepts, ideas, common perceptions related to emotional attitudes generally shared within a group. It can

represent similar behaviours that have been internalised through the 'national' socialisation process (De Cilla, Reisingl and Wodak 1999). It is a social and psychological factor that affects the decision-making process since it stems from cultural and social elements that affect consumer behaviour (Foxall, 2015). The national identification is shaped by culture and also built by individuals in a subjective way (Rosenberg and Beattie, 2018).

National identity is founded on daily life, "on the mundane details of social interaction, habits, routines and practical knowledge" (Edensor, 2002, pg. 17) and contemplates that individuals have a feeling of belonging to a group that represents culture, language, tradition, or in this case nation (McCracken, 1986; Solomon et al., 2016; Solomon, 2018; Linehan, 2008). National identity is inherent to the individual and is connected with the theory of social identity.

The distinction between the behaviour of a person considering the in-group and external groups is presented in the social theory of identity (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner 2004). "Social identity is the aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he considers himself." (Tajfel and Turner, 2004, pg. 283). Social groups provide individuals with the identification of themselves in a social scenario. This identification can be relational (different or similar) and comparative (worse or better) (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 2004).

Through the social identity theory, individuals seek to maintain or improve their self-esteem. Social identity can be negative or positive and depends on how the individual evaluates the in-group compared to the out-group. These assessments can be made through social comparisons in terms of characteristics, values and attributes. Greater prestige is generated when there is a favourable discrepancy comparison between in-group and out-group. On the other hand, low prestige is produced when there is an unfavourable discrepancy between in-group and out-group in the individual's mind. When there is a negative or unsatisfactory assessment, the individual tries to reinforce the importance of his group or leave the group to join another one with a positive evaluation (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 2004). The social identity theory reinforces the theories depicted by several

authors (Kahneman, 2011; Damasio, 2005; Peter and Olson, 2010) that demonstrate individuals tend to avoid situations of pain and seek to reinforce positive situations emphasising self-esteem.

According to Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith (2019), consumer behaviour is shaped by the sense of national identity, and it can be stimulated at different levels. The authors highlighted that products should be connected with the national symbol and companies should create a stimulus to resonate with consumers' identity (Piaget, 1969); Foxall, 2015, Solomon et al., 2016). There are different stimuli's levels. Low levels of association can result in a national identity salience that leads to a feeling closer to the nation and a positive attitude towards the product. The moderated level usually results from special events emphasising the national identity. Consumers tend to buy and wear the national symbols to express their national love and pride. This level can raise feelings of antipathy to different nations or groups. A high level could be caused by external threats which reinforce the theory of the group, and the individual tends to protect the group and emphasise the group's importance. In this level, negative feelings to out-groups can rise.

Additionally, some authors defend the idea that national identity tends to influence consumer decisions, and it is moderated by product ethnicity (Fischer and Zeugner-Roth 2016). The ethnicity of the product is when a stereotyped product concept is created related to its country of origin. Therefore, assessments of a country's reputation regarding design, manufacturing processes, brand and product are made and shared globally, thus creating the product's ethnicity definition (Usunier and Cestre, 2007). Meanwhile, if the foreign product ethnicity exceeds the domestic products, it tends to stimulate the feeling of national identity, once this could be understood as threatened by the group. When it is not so expressive, this does not provide any threats, and the individual can make their decisions based on different criteria (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel e Turner 2004; Fischer and Zeugner-Roth, 2016).

It reinforces the assumptions of the social identity theory, which states that individuals form their (positive) self-identity by making comparisons between the internal groups (which he is part of) and external groups. Besides, they seek to defend their image and self-esteem (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 2004). If the comparisons are not favourable to the in-group, or in this case, if they see the product ethnicity as a threat (self-image, self-concept) it can generate behaviour that favours national products. When the ethnicity of the product is lower, this process does not occur (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner 2004; Fischer and Zeugner-Roth, 2016). It indicates that the product's ethnicity moderates the national identity (Fischer and Zeugner-Roth, 2016).

Authors like Zhang and Khare (2009), Westjohn, Singh and Magnusson (2011) and Arnett (2002), also pointed out that a consumer's inclination to buy local products versus global products is due to their identity. Individuals can present traits of global, local or a mix between global and local identity. Understanding identity is relevant once it can impact a consumer's attitude and behaviours towards a product to reinforce their identities. Local identity is a mental representation that individuals have about traditions, local habits, local customs and a tendency to value local communities and local products positively (Zhang and Khare, 2009; Westjohn, Singh and Magnusson, 2011).

On the other hand, global identity is a mindset focused on the positive results of globalisation, identifying with the common points of the global community. The global-identity individual has identification with people from all over the world while the local identity individual identifies themselves with the local community (Zhang and Khare, 2009). Individuals can also have both local and global identities but tend to have one identity stronger than another (Zhang and Khare, 2009; Arnett, 2002).

Researches carried out on social identities suggest that the individual tends to respond positively to stimuli that are consistent with their prominent (accessible) identities (Zhang and Khare, 2009). According to Swan (2012), through the theory of self-verification, individuals tend to defend their self-views. Besides, they seek to

reinforce themselves as members of the social group and try to be seen as a unique individual (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner 2004). Looking for uniqueness, and differentiate themselves from the group, they can make decisions for products less popular (McCracken, 1986; Ariely and Levav, 2000). These decisions often involve an identity-relevant category such as clothing (Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith 2019). The national identity stems from the feeling of identification of the individual with the country of origin, connected with a whole emotional framework associated with this process (Tajfel and Turner 2004; Fischer and Zeugner-Roth, 2016).

As can be seen, there are several studies relating and showing the impact of national identity on the decision-making process. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the customer is averse to foreign products and does not evaluate and is subject to other influences such as quality, price, availability, benefits, among others. In that regard, this project concentrates on verifying if consumers perceive the national influences and the role of national identity toward the purchase of clothes designed by national designers and the next chapter aims to give an overview about fashion consumption.

2.7 Fashion

Fashion can be understood as a generalised behavioural phenomenon of the consumer, a style or form of expression that is culturally accepted. Fashion is shaped by culture and can influence and even develop new cultural meaning, once both changes continuously (McCracken, 1986).

Fashion consumption is a form of self-expression or a social symbol since it is used in everyday life, it is a demonstration of public image, and it is a symbol that could be manipulated quickly (McNeill, 2016; Feinberg, Mataro and Burroughs, 1992). The self contemplates the idea about how an individual would like to express their image, and the social self involves how they can reveal their image to others. The self is dynamic and is always adapting to changes in the social environment. "Self-concept is a combination of physical and mental self." (Evans,

1989, pg, 9). It alludes that social recognition or the process of improving self-concept can be considered as a driving force behind an individual's conscience that affects people's purchasing decisions (McNeill, 2016). As clothes and adornments are physically and emotionally, it has more than functional reasons and can be used for emotional improvement (Evans, 1989). According to Veblen (2007), individuals seek to make purchases that reinforce their image in society. He described the 'conspicuous consumption' as a way to buy services or goods to show social status. It corroborates the theory presented through the literature, which presents the importance of the values perceived by customers and the benefits arising from this process. These values and benefits could be functional, social, personal, experimental, psychological and reinforce the individual's identity (Churchill and Peter, 1998; Gutman, 1982; McNeill, 2016; Evans, 1989, Tajfel and Turner, 2004).

Individuals believe that clothes can communicate their identities and social identities (McNeill, 2016; Evans, 1989). An individual's identity is determined considering his position on the social system, and they can adapt it to social norms by changing their image (McNeill, 2016). Identity is a social phenomenon. Its formation is based on the interaction with the 'other' or against the 'other', and the individual seeks to assimilate, practice and share a society's behaviours, norms and values, aiming to achieve physical and psychological security (İnaç and Ünal, 2013). Besides, it is also part of the social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 2004).

Clothing could partially represent an individual's identity, but not all aspects of it, and in this case, it is essential to analyse what aspects are connected with this process. Additionally, it is suggested that all clothes represent the traits of an individual's identity. However, it could not represent something relevant or should not be linked to personality (Feinberg, Mataro and Burroughs, 1992).

Given this scenario, choosing an outfit involves a series of verbal and non-verbal behaviours (conscious and nonconscious) (Belk, 1975). Seeking to express a positive self-image, people tend to control their image or personality in the social context. Some individuals are more focused on maintaining control over their

image by adapting their behaviour to cause a positive image; they were denominated by Snyder (1987), as 'high self-monitors'. Nevertheless, individuals who do not consider important other opinions or do not see the relevance in changing their behaviour to create a positive image were called "low self-monitors". The author also highlighted that this monitoring process shapes behaviour in various areas of the individual's life. The behaviour consists of several elements such as the task itself, the moment or circumstance, the time involving the task or action, the current state and the desired state, experiences, lifestyle determinants, external factors or environment, among others (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010; Foxall, 2015; Solomon et al. 2016). It suggests that the monitoring process can occur at certain times, considering specific situations.

Within the scope of this work, the target audience usually buys their clothes from national designers for various reasons, first communion, graduation, weddings (guests, mothers of bride and groom); for work (TV presenter, members of parliament, ambassadors, wives of Irish ambassadors, or other professions), special occasions (wedding anniversaries, funerals, work events), holidays, and suchlike. Usually, the search for national designers involves purchasing for a special occasion. In this scenario, this purchase may include a high level of monitoring, since individuals try to differentiate themselves from others, even within the same group, looking for something unique, reinforcing their personal, social identity and lifestyle.

As the national identity is relevant to each country, and through fashion, the individual can express his identity, an overview of the country's fashion industry is necessary. Besides, this can impact the behaviour of consumers. "Fashion is discernible at any time" and is continuously changing within the social system (Sproles, 1974). It is a form of imitation or social equalisation, and the history of fashion should be studied and assessing its importance for the social process (Simmel, 1957). Individuals are what they think, "their identities are not a transient and elusive thing; it is fixed in extensive time and space" (Tuan, 1980, pg.480). The individual is able to access the past from an intellectual perspective, validating and reinforcing themselves.

The literature review sought to shed light on possible connections between the role of national identity in the process of making fashion consumption in Ireland. This chapter presented the main points that influence behaviours and decision-making processes, presented the target audience, the importance of culture in the national identity formation and a brief account of the study industry.

2.8 Theoretical Background Conclusion

Throughout the literature review it is noticeable that consumer behaviour involves the study of the way consumers, groups, institutions, choose, buy, use, products, services, even experiences to achieve the desired state or satisfy their needs. The decision-making process is influenced by the stimulus received; the environment (social and physical aspects); the personal elements (identity, personality, self-concept, values, associations); and lifestyle (Peter and Olson 2010; Belch and Belch, 2003, Foxall, 2015; Pachauri, 2001). The decision process consists of a plurality of evaluations, and in the scope of this study involves aspects connected with physical, identity and lifestyle (Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins, 2005; Rocha, 2016).

Furthermore, theories presented portray that several decisions are made in an intuitive or almost automatic way (Kahneman, 2011). The message that resonates with the person's identity is perceived and starts the process of connection and associations. Thus, some decisive factors can be subjective, as they are already part of the intuitive system (system one) generally used for the decision-making process.

One of the subjective elements that can influence consumer behaviour, and which is often overlooked by organisations, is national identity. It consists of a sense of belonging and can be stimulated by national symbols on different levels (Cilla, Reisingl and Wodak 1999; Edensor, 2002; Foxall, 2015; Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith, 2019). Besides, the individual tries to differentiate themselves from others and for that, they can usually make purchases of less popular products to achieve this goal (McCracken, 1986; Ariely and Levav, 2000). In this scenario, the

purchase of products designed by national designers can overcome this demand or need, since these products are produced on a small scale and present an element of uniqueness. In addition, clothes are a form of expression of the individual, validating their identity and addressing the psychological security they tend to seek in relationships (McNeill, 2016; İnaç and Ünal, 2013).

The national identity influenced the consumer's purchase decision and stimulated him to choose local products (Verlegh, 2007; Zeugner-Roth Žabkar and Diamantopoulo, 2015; Fischer and Zeugner-Roth, 2016; Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith, 2019). Another point to reinforce the decision towards domestic products was presented by Zhang and Khare (2009); Westjohn Singh and Magnusson (2011) and Arnett (2002), and stated that individuals could have a global, local or mixed identity, causing the stimuli received to be interpreted differently.

It was possible to observe throughout the literature review that the national identity influences the purchase decision and has different levels of emphasis. The articles studied for this background present research mostly in the USA, a country that makes constant use of the nationalist idea, the feeling of nationalism and to some extent consumerism. Besides, it involved different products and often connected with the product's ethnicity. As national identity is inherent to each individual and country, it is pivotal to assess if this element impacts the purchasing decision of customers, considering their history and identity and their country of origin.

Summing up, this project aims to comprehend the role of national identity towards clothes designed by national designers. As this project involves a subjective element, an explanatory, qualitative case study was defined in order to gather nuances, ideas and feelings that are related to the purchase process. The next topic will clarify the methodology defined for this project.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Outline

The research methodology aims to define the best framework, means and procedures, to sampling, collect and analyse the data, to support the issues addressed (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015; Malhotra, Nunan, and Birks, 2017). This chapter contemplates the discussion of the possible methods to carry out this investigation.

It is necessary to analyse all plausible and possible considerations for the study to be carried out assertively. For this research, it was defined that the reflections and planning will be made based on the research onion described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015).

3.2 Research Question

National identity is formed through the social coexistence and culture of a group or nation. It is a subjective element that can influence the decision-making process (De Cilla, Reisingl and Wodak 1999; Edensor, 2002; Brewer 1999; Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar and Diamantopoulos 2015). This element has different levels of stimulation, as proposed by Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith (2019) and can be moderated by the product's ethnicity (Fischer and Zeugner-Roth, 2016). The purpose of this study is to expand understanding of the role of national identity in the consumer's buying process of national designers, and it is focused on analysing women consumers over 49 years old or generation X and baby boomers in Ireland.

As this project aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the topic, seeking to assess thinking, ideas, subliminal associations and concentrate on the individual's everyday reality; it has proposed a qualitative case study in the Irish fashion industry, embedded with two units of analysis.

The first unit of analysis is the company's view of national identity and the possible reasons why customers buy national designers. The objective is to assess whether the organisation considers this element to be relevant to the purchasing process and analyse possible connections. To achieve this objective, five retailers were interviewed, providing comparisons between the information obtained.

The second unit of analysis comprises consumers and their view's and reasons for buying clothes designed by national designers. This phase also sought to raise possible associations made by customers to purchase these products, pondering the national identity. To reach these goals, four consumers were selected, based on a previously observational process.

3.3 Research Methods

"The research is the process of generating public knowledge through systematic - and often private – processes." (Somekh and Lewin, 2005, pg 15). It has some characteristics such as data are collected and interpreted systematically, and there is a clear objective to find "things".

Designing or planning the research implies a critical analysis of methods, approaches, theories, techniques that will be used to validate the arguments, data researched and collected. In order to elaborate assertive planning for this study, the investigation design was based on the research onion portrayed through Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015). The process makes an analogy to the different layers of the onion representing each phase of the project planning. The first layer or the first step is to define the investigation philosophy; the second focus on the approach. Afterwards, the strategies used will be chosen, followed by the time horizons, and the last topic will address the techniques and procedures.

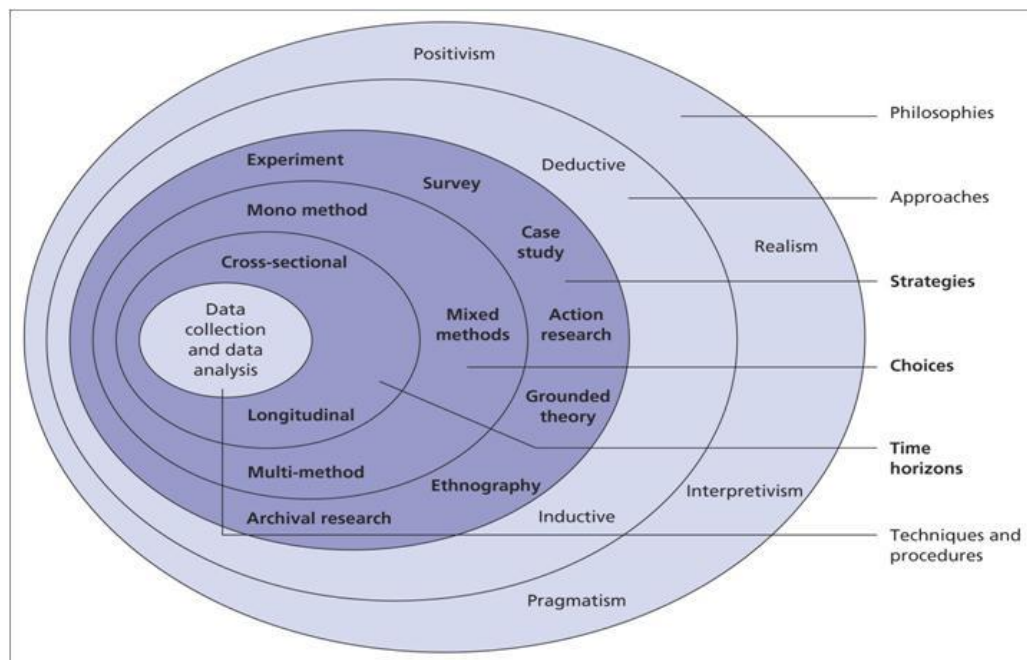


Figure 2 Research Onion

Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015, pg.138

3.4 Research Purpose

Researches have different purposes, and it is related to the way the study will answer the research question, and it could be explanatory, descriptive and exploratory (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

An exploratory study seeks to evaluate what is happening; making inquiries to analyse phenomena from a new perspective, frame problems, elucidate a theory and shape hypotheses but usually create it.

Descriptive aims to detail, to explore more the field, gather data to delineate characteristics of a group, a population or, situations, events or topics.

Explanatory seeks to interpret and respond to a topic based on pre-existing theories and knowledge. It focuses on analysing the reasons why phenomena take place. Thus, it was defined as the most suitable for this project, once it aims to link ideas and understand possible causes and effects (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

3.5 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy comprises the "development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge." (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015, pg. 106). The project could propose and analyse a new theory or answer a specific question, a problem, and, it also can generate new knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015; Yin, 2011).

As the aim of this study is analyse of individuals in their life scenarios it can be defined as the social science research, and it is related to philosophical issues concerning to (a) epistemology, the character of the truth and what is considered a reasonable knowledge; (b) axiology, involves the comprehension of values, or nature of it; and (c) ontology, that endorses the discernment and human activities, or the nature of being (Somekh and Lewin, 2005; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

According to Somekh and Lewin (2005), the research in the social sciences is a way of conceptualising and classifying knowledge and human experience. As it presents a high degree of complexity, the researchers must keep in mind that there is no "one size fits all" form, and the processes must be planned and analysed in a personalised way.

This dissertation was conducted pondering the epistemological view, whereas it focuses on the nature of knowledge in the justification process. It consists of the process interpretation with an appropriate knowledge base in the field of research (Schwandt, 2007). It advocates that knowledge is the result of sensory experience, and it can be justified by observation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

Besides, each topic in the research philosophy can be interpreted from the philosophies: realism, positivism, pragmatism and interpretivism.

Pragmatism is a philosophy that consists of the discovery of practical knowledge in a specific situation. Afterwards, it is analysed, pondering its ability to

solve everyday problems and not focusing on universal applicability (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

Realism addresses through the senses that it is possible to understand reality as it is independently of an individual's perception or mind. Realism opposes idealism which is based on the single principle of the existence of the mind and its content.

Positivism adopts an observable and scientific social reality interpretation, based on reliable facts and information so that the final result can provide generalisations equivalent to those generated by other natural and physical scientific researchers. It presupposes that the truth can be reached and proved (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015; Malhotra, Nunan, and Birks, 2017; Roth and Mehta, 2002).

The relativist perspective can lead to the adoption of a constructivist approach. It aims to raise the views of different individuals and to examine how these different meanings illuminate the topic defined for the study (Yin, 2018).

The interpretive approach seeks to clarify patterns of subjective understanding and does not ponder in one truth. Interpretivism recognises that individual perceptions and their beliefs of the world have an impact on these individuals' version of reality (Roth and Mehta, 2002; Yin, 2011). This paradigm evaluates the situation from the eyes and subjectivity of an individual's experiences, and the nuances, the more profound implications, circumstances about people data (Somekh and Lawin, 2005; Yin, 2011).

The nature of this project is epistemological since it includes the researcher mindset about what constitutes an 'acceptable knowledge' and reflects the process of validating and absorbing knowledge. Furthermore, it is interpretivism since it aims to study a social phenomenon and to contemplate the observation of behaviour in its real-life under the optics of the individuals or participants. It has the objectives to examine the national identity, a subjective element which is part of the individual and how it affects the process of purchasing products designed by

national designers. It is focused on scrutinising the situation and gathers subjective meanings.

3.6 Research Approaches

The investigation can have two approaches. The deductive process is the approach that prior theory to the collection of data (not in all cases, but generally). It tends to start with a hypothesis, presuppose theory examinations and subsequent data collection, is more structured and more formal, ponders scientific principles, and aims to explain causal connections between variables (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

The inductive process is consists of developing the theory post data collection. It is an approach used to gather more details about the nature of the issue, the impacts and vies of how individuals interpret the real-life. Furthermore, this strength takes into account the human views and perceptions as variables, and it was specified as the most suitable for this study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

3.7 Research Strategies

The strategy consists of planning the way the research questions could be answered. The investigation has to define the best strategy to achieve its goals, and it should consider the data collection techniques. Investigations can involve numerical and statistical interpretation, defined as quantitative research. On the other hand, when the objective is to comprehend an individual's nuances and perceptions in an everyday situation, featuring social science research, it is named qualitative research.

The research strategies denoted by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015), reflects in the topics below:

(a) Experimental seeks to detail feasible links, and the relation of cause and effect regards of it, and presupposes a significant control of research aspects, as a sample.

(b) Surveys, usually used for descriptive and explanatory investigation and include collecting numeric data and analysing the statistics.

(c) Action research used to enhance procedures or practice. It presupposes an action, critical for future application

(d) Grounded Theory takes into account an inductive approach generally used to detail behaviour and building theory and usually does not contemplate the previous framework.

These strategies are improper and do not support the objectives of this study. The researcher reflected on two possible strategies to answer the research question: ethnography and case study. Ethnography is based on the inductive approach and aims to understand, explain a social phenomenon, groups, examining them from a cultural context (Creswell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, .2015)

Case study and ethnography have common features and can use the same data collection techniques. Ethnography is an introspective look into a phenomenon. Usually, it requires immersing the researcher into the studied group, in an extended period of analysis. Ethnography describes, interprets and creates a cultural portrait. On the other hand, a case study focuses on detailing a case to present an issue (Creswell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, .2015). The researcher is not part of a group, and also she could not gather information for an extended period. Moreover, as this investigation focused on expanding comprehension through the analysis of an issue, the single case study was selected as the most appropriate.

In this sense, it was defined a qualitative case study research since it is an adaptable and versatile method to face the challenging field conditions and in a particularistic method and aims to study patterns of social behaviour, nuances,

thinking, understanding, about the specific phenomenon. Furthermore, supply information to develop an understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, .2015).

A case is as "an instance, incident, or unit of something and can be anything—a person, an organisation, an event, a decision, an action, a location like a neighbourhood, or a nation-state" (Schwandt and Gates apud Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, pg. 600). A case study is a research investigation which analyses a contemporary phenomenon ("case") in-depth in its real-life context, even if the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident. Besides, it is relevant since the questions demand an "in-depth" description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2011; Yin and Campbell, 2018; Green Camili and Elmore, 2006). It is used generally to answer questions about how and why a specific phenomenon occurs, not requiring control over the behavioural events and focused on contemporary events (Yin, 2011; Green Camili and Elmore, 2006). This strategy is usually adopted in explanatory and exploratory research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

It is argued that case study has some limitations such as: might be insufficient to generate insights, albeit it is an adequate process to explore an existing theory and if it is built effectively this strategy is able to challenge an existing theory, adding new sources of information or a new research questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015; Torrance apud Somekh and Lewin, 2005). It can present the examination of small populations and cannot be used for future generalisations or statistical generalisations. Notwithstanding, case studies seek the expansion and generalisation of theories (analytical generalisations) and not the extrapolation of probabilities (statistical generalisations). The strategy could be time-consuming, mainly in longitudinal. However, no rules are defining that this strategy has to ponder analyses over a period of time (Torrance apud Somekh and Lewin, 2005; Yin and Campbell, 2018).

On the other hand, the case study seeks to report the complexity of the social activity, take into account the meanings, the nuances that individuals have or

adopt in the environment studied. It assumes that "social reality" is the result of social interaction that contains a whole series of stories and individual (particular) contexts, looking to identify and describe and not focused on analysis and theorisation (Torrance and Stark apud Somekh and Lewin, 2005). In this sense, it can gather nuances and information not collected using other methods.

A crucial point in the research is to define the type of case study to be carried out. It can be a single-case and aims to explain a unique case and usually focus on observing a phenomenon deeply and capture conditions and circumstances in an everyday situation, and that requires more emphasis and understanding (Yin, 2011).

Besides, the design can take into account multiple-cases, or more than one case, usually comparing the studies and checking if the findings of the first study occur in the second study. Following is the diagram with the four types of case study, depicted by the author:

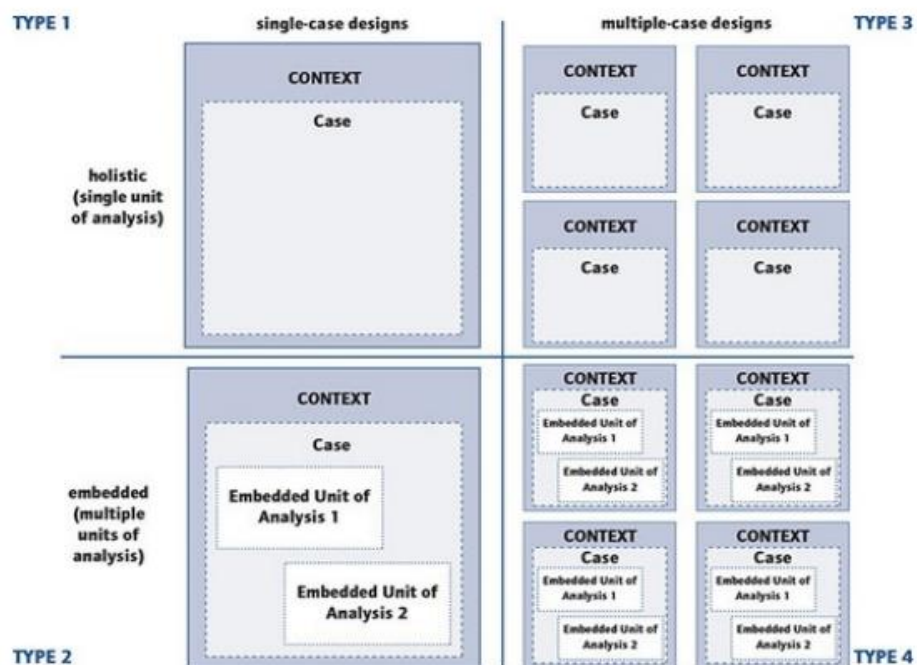


Figure 3 Design for Case Study

Source: Yin, 2011, pg. 83

In the first quadrant, the case study can be a holistic single-case, when the researcher has the purpose of examining a single context; or one unit of analysis. The second quadrant is the embedded single-case that aims to detail one context and different unit of analysis. The third quadrant is the holistic multiple-cases which scrutinise two contexts with their specific unit of analysis. The fourth quadrant is the embedded multiple-case design, a variant of the holistic multiple-cases, that has the purpose of examining the units of analysis in the different contexts (Yin, 2011).

Single cases and multiple cases can be holistic and embedded cases. The holistic examines the global view of an organisation, but if the research wants to study more than a unit of analysis, as departments, a group it is identified as an embedded case study (Yin, 2011).

As the purpose of this project aims to examine an everyday situation and understand nuances, detail conditions, circumstances, differences and similarities in the possible factors that influence customers to choose a national designer it denotes a single-case study with different units of analysis, customers and retailers, respectively.

3.8 Research Times Horizons

A pivotal step in the research process is the definition of the period used to execute the data collection and examinations. For investigations of a specific phenomenon over a period in which the researcher has the opportunity to control variables, considering that they are not affected by the research process itself is called longitudinal. When the investigation consists of collecting and examining data about a phenomenon at a specific time, it is defined as a cross-sectional study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). As this project aims to analyse a phenomenon at a specific moment, the cross-sectional study has been defined.

3.9 Sampling

As the objective of the project is to analyse a specific group, it is essential to define the target population for the accurate and correct collection of information. Sampling consists of reducing a population in groups, elements or cases which have the characteristics that represent a particular population (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

The sample specified for this project is nonprobabilistic. It was defined by the research and not applied random selection. The non-probability sampling consists of four sampling techniques: purposive, convenience, quota and snowball (Hair, Ortinau and Bush, 2010; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). As this research consists of collecting in-depth and detailed information, the technique chosen was the purposive sampling that achieves this purpose.

This investigation aims to comprehend social phenomena and involves a case study of a single culture, direct observation, in-depth interview and analyses of documents. In this context, a sample between three and five participants are able to provide the base to examine the case (Creswell, 2013).

The participants recruited for this project were selected based on their consistent consumption of clothes designed by national designers. The criteria started from the demographic principle, selecting the Republic of Ireland. The target gender is female over 49 years. Besides, were selected four participants based on the process of direct observation done previously, as the researcher works in the industry. Through this process, were determined participants who showed an inclination towards national feelings and participants who did not demonstrate this inclination.

Furthermore, to examine how retailers perceive the drives to purchase national designers and to identify if they recognise the national identity as one of these drives this project contains interviews with two Irish designers, two managers, and a sales consultant, totalling nine respondents.

3.10 Data Collection

If data and information already collected through previous research already exist, this source is named secondary data. It includes the use of reliable sources on the internet, published summaries, raw data, census, articles, government reports and reports from research companies, if available (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). For the execution of this study, secondary data take into account previous studies about the topic, data from the fashion segment and one company studied.

The second option for data collection is called primary data which aims to leverage new data or obtain it in the field. In this case, in-depth interviews since the objectives are to raise ideas, experiences, and perceived values relevant in the purchase process. This project also contemplated the observation process, once it is pivotal to evaluate inductive approaches and explanation of a social phenomenon (Gil and Johnson, 2002)

As this study involves the analyses of thoughts, emotions, nuances, feelings, meanings, and investigates the participant's internal reality and not simple facts and comparative data it is suggested the use of an in-depth interview (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug, 2001). The application of non-standardised interviews is essential because it allows certain flexibility in the exploration of topics (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

A phenomenological interview was defined since it involves the idea of doing interviews focusing on the respondent's reflections and memories, in experiences about the topic, how they judge it, describe it, feeling about it, among others (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug, 2001). This method enables to assess how participants make specific decisions and the consequences generated by those decisions. Participants can talk openly, and the goal is to raise behaviour, thinking, beliefs, feelings, about a given topic. It is called a "non-directive" process and takes into consideration the use of open-ended questions to clarify how and why things happen (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015; Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug, 2001).

A crucial process during interviews is recording and requesting consent for this. It provides evidence of the process and can ensure that researchers access the data collected at any moment, checking it, making notes and producing reliable information (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. Given the isolation rules due to COVID-19, interviews with customers were in most cases conducted by telephone, only one was conducted by Microsoft Teams. In such a scenario, there was no way to assess the participant's behaviour, body reading, among others, nuances.

This research also contemplated the observation process. As mentioned by Gil and Johnson (2002), conducting an inductive approach focused on explaining social phenomena is 'worthless' if it is not based or contemplates observation and experience. It focused on observing and having natural conversations with Irish designers' customers during a year in two stores in Dublin. The observation has the purpose to comprehend the behaviour of the group defined for this study, scrutinising the activity performed in the natural environment, and trying to gather the meaning in their behaviours (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). These observations created the idea and purpose of this investigation.

The observation process carried out considered an open posture, avoiding possible judgments, aiming to learn more about the participants. Additionally, historical and cultural contextualisation was necessary in order to scrutinise the information coherently and without personal judgments (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). In this phase, the researcher sought to focus on observing, listening, studying and looking for information, analysing and later proposing conclusions about it.

Data collection must be carried out in an organised manner and generally takes into account some phases (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). In this project, it involved conducting interviews and direct observation, researcher's notes, contextual information, recording the interviews, scrutinising and interpreting

the data. The next step is the analysis of data, and it will be covered in the next chapter.

3.11 Data Analysis

The role of a researcher conducting an investigation requests more than a simple interest in the topic. It consists of a depth study of previous theories and information, observation, data collection from different sources and the presentation of reliable data analysis. The use of multiple sources of evidence reinforce and validate the data provided. The sources in this project contemplate documents, in-depth interviews and direct observation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015, Creswell, 2013; Gil and Johnson, 2002).

In order to execute an analysis, it is pivotal keeping in mind the organisation during the processes of collecting data. This phase also involves the creation of memos, the process of codification, categorisation and synthesising of the data gathered (Creswell, 2013; Gil and Johnson, 2002).

The organisation must contemplate all the data gathered through secondary and primary sources. This study focused on different sources of information and interviews, and all the documents were organised in folders by topics. Afterwards, the data needs to be read and reread several times, and notes, short sentences, key points or concepts and ideas gathered should be registered; representing the memos (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015, Creswell, 2013; Gil and Johnson, 2002). The interviews, in this study, were transcribed, and the documents and audios were read several times, and notes were made and memos created. The notes were made simultaneously and shortly after the interviews, in order to explore more the participant's answers and behaviour. Besides, the contextual data about each participant was done, contemplating their traits and attitudes during the purchase process (direct observation).

The next step was to organise the sentences, words, ideas and thought reducing it in topics, themes, classifying and using the coding process to condensate the data collected denoting it in an elaborated, simple and assertive

way (Creswell, 2013). “The coding is how you define what the data you are analysing is about” (Gibbs, 2007 pg, 38). It is a process to select relevant topics in the text, identify ideas and concepts, connect with it and look for a link between them. It presupposes to divide the information collected into meaningful topics and define names for it. After the topics are organised, the categorisation is defined. Subsequently, the data is organised in tables, graphs, diagrams, facilitating further analysis. It consists of the core elements of analysing data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Gibbs, 2007; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

The study aimed to examine the role of national identity in purchasing behaviour. In that sense, it looks for possible connections between what customers define as relevant in the clothes purchase products and national identity. From the literature review, it was clear to note that several social and personal factors can reinforce this element, so codes were not previously defined (concept-driven). It was defined during the analysis (data-driven) (Gibbs, 2007).

Throughout the interviews, the participants used expressions to express that the product "suits me", that "service is important", "assistance", "true opinions" among others. An illustration, when participants were asked what they evaluate essential when they are choosing an outfit is reported below:

“I like to wear clothes that are stylish, but not overly formal. I like to wear natural fabrics, like silk.” P2

This answer was coded, resulting in two categories: ‘style’, and ‘fabric’. Other factors, such as ‘service’ and ‘self-identity’, were also mentioned as relevant.

The first screenings were carried out, and the first codes were generated. Initially, the researcher focused on what customers evaluate as vital in the clothing buying process. After, questions were asked to identify the connection with national identity and the second level of codes were defined. The following step in the data analysis is to interpret and categorise these codes and subsequently represent the data condensed, usually in tables, graphs, diagrams, facilitating the comparison process and understanding.

With the data analysed and reverted to useful information, it is time to explain what the research has shown. This chapter sought to demonstrate how this study developed the methods used for the analysis. The findings will be depicted in the following section.

Chapter 4 - Findings

4.1 Outline

The intent of this chapter contextualises the fashion industry in Ireland, present the units of the investigation and provide the primary information, from the study case, out. Recurrent and relevant codes were categorised and provide the result of this study.

4.2 Demographics

In order to reach the objective of this study in understanding the role of national identity in the decision-making process towards clothes designed by national designers, it was necessary to scrutinise several subjective factors and topics as presented in the literature review. The observation was also relevant for future comparison with the interviews carried out.

Furthermore, interviews were conducted considering retailers and consumers to achieve the objectives of this research. In light of keeping the interview`s confidentiality, the participants will be referenced by numbers.

4.3 Context- Fashion Industry in Ireland

As previously mentioned, this probe contemplates a single case study with two units of analysis. As presented in the illustration below:



Figure 4 Case Study Design Adapted

Source: Adapted by Yin, 2011

The fashion industry in Ireland is connected with the history of textiles. The fabrics worn by members of aristocracy denoted the quality, mainly of linen, tweed and wool. After independence, the focus on promoting Irish goods connected with the superior quality of Irish fabrics was crucial for culture. The textiles companies had a substantial role in Ireland's economy. The fashion segment could be linked directly with economic, social and cultural Ireland's development (De Clér, 2011). The author emphasised that fashion, for many years through the aspects of global culture, were interpreted and reinterpreted in a local context. People used to make their clothes, denoting a connection with the tailoring and dressmaking in Ireland history (De Clér, 2011).

The Republic of Ireland became independent in 1922, and the culture of buying national products combined with the quality of Irish fabrics was an essential factor after independence. The golden years were around the '50s making Ireland appear on the international fashion scene. However, around the 1980s the country had to review the manufacturing process, adapting itself to face international competition, mainly after becoming a member of the European Union in 1973. From the end of the 1990s, the country faced new problems. It demanded a new redefinition of manufacturing processes since Ireland was pointed as a high-cost country to manufacture. In 2011, the Council of Irish Fashion Designers was created to promote and represent the interests of the national fashion industry (De Clér, 2011; The history of the European Union, n.d.; Irish Fashion: Textile & Clothing - Second Skin, n.d.).

Even though the Irish fashion industry has a variety of retail chains in the country, the revenue is still not significant (Statista, 2020). In this scenario, designers focus on the global market to maintain their business and leverage their brands.

This topic sought to address the context of the case study. Next, the findings will be presented according to the analysis units.

4.4 Embedded Unit of Analysis 1 - Retailers

This unit includes retailers in Ireland. In this first stage, five participants were interviewed (two managers, one salesperson and two designers) in order to understand their view on why customers buy clothes designed by national designers. The following table shows the profile of the interviewees in this first phase:

Participants	Description	Background
I1	Designer-1	Gender: Female Age: Baby Boomers Nationality: Irish The designer has been working in the Irish fashion industry for over 30 years.
I2	Designer-2	Gender: Female Age: Millennials Nationality: Irish Has worked for 3 years with the designer 1.
I3	Manager-1	Gender: Female Age: Generation X Nationality: Irish More than 20 years working with national designers.
I4	Manager-2	Gender: Female Age: Generation X Nationality: Ukrainian Has worked for 3 years as a manager in a department store with 8 national designers.
I5	Sales consultant	Gender: Female Age: Millennials Nationality: Brazilian Has worked for 1 year as a sales consultant for a national designer

Figure 5 Participants Unit of Analysis 1

Source: Adapted by the researcher

The first question sought to raise the probable reasons why clients seek and buy national designers. Part of the interviewees (I1, I2 and I3) reported that customers look for these brands because it is a national designer, but this is

related to aspects such as exclusivity, versatility, style, silhouettes array, fair price and quality. Customers buy because they like the product, the fact that the brand is national can influence the demand for it, but not in the purchase decision.

" Consumers buy tailoring clothes that have quality. They look for a small scale, and adequate price and the feeling of uniqueness". I1

"...people buy into an aspirational lifestyle. "I don't think they're particularly conscious of buying Irish designers." I2

Surprisingly, participants from other nationalities (I4 and I5) assessed that the demand for the national brands is linked to the national identity, to the feeling of belonging. However, the factors mentioned above are crucial to the sale.

"Irish women, they would love to wear something from Irish design and represent Irish design to family and friends. It is connected to national identity, definitely how they represent themselves.." I4

A collection was mentioned that offered some clothes with colours similar to Ireland's flag, and two points of view were raised. The Irish participant I3 reported that consumers did not accept very well the colours.

"When the colours are associated or too close to the Ireland flag (green and orange), the experience showed customers tend to avoid and think it is to St Patrick's Day." I1

On the other hand, the Brazilian salesperson I5 demonstrated that customers liked the colours and felt comfortable with this.

"It was good; they felt a connection or something like familiarity with the colours. Some of them say it looks like St. Patrick's Day. But most of them like it, the green colours, orange colours. I think they feel comfortable with the colours". I5

It alludes that the use of national symbols can emphasise national identity, as demonstrated by Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith (2019). Furthermore, the

individuals perceive and assimilate the stimuli that resonate with their identities, which could be global, local and even mixed identity (Zhang and Khare, 2009; Westjohn, Singh and Magnusson, 2011, Arnett, 2002)

It was noticed that the participants' nationality impacts the way they analyse the national identity in the purchase process. While Irish participants I1, I2, and I3 did not perceive the element of national identity as relevant in the purchasing process, participants from different nationalities believe that this factor is essential and can be decisive in some cases, especially on special occasions.

In general, all participants believe that this can be a stimulating factor for the brand in terms of consumer demand, but style, versatility, exclusivity, comfort, quality, clothes that include different silhouettes are crucial.

This chapter sought to provide an overview of the company's vision of the influence of national identity in the purchasing process and possible reasons why customers buy Irish designers. The following sub-topics will explore the customers' view of the object of this study.

4.5 Embedded Unit of Analysis 2 - Consumers

The second unit contemplates consumers and investigates the consumption of clothes designed by national designers. Additionally, it will denote the data collected in the interviews about what customers consider necessary when buying clothes and when buying Irish designers.

In this second phase, four women consumers of national designers were interviewed. The illustration below shows the profile of the participants:

Participants	Description	Background
P1	Consumer-1	Gender: Female Age: Generation X Nationality: Irish Buying national designer over 20 years, solicitor living in Cork
P2	Consumer-2	Gender: Female Age: Generation X Nationality: Irish Buying national designer for all her life, works with social corporate communication, living in Dublin
P3	Consumer-3	Gender: Female Age: Baby Boomers Nationality: Irish Buying national designer for all her life, solicitor, living in Dublin
P4	Consumer-4	Gender: Female Age: Baby Boomers Nationality: Irish Buying national designer over 20 years, lecture, living in Mayo

Figure 6 Participants Unit of Analysis 2

Source: Adapted by the researcher

4.5.1 Fashion Consumption - Consumers

The first topic researched was what the participants considered important when shopping for their clothes; in general, no brand or product style was addressed. The values or attributes perceived as relevant in the process were cited and contemplated features (fabrics), style and versatility, price and service.

There is a tendency for the composition of fabrics and a search for natural fabrics, denoting the importance of functional features, or physical aspects.

“I like to wear clothes that are stylish but not overly formal...and - I like to wear natural fabrics like silk.” P2

Furthermore, in general, they have shown that they look for natural fabrics and that they could be willing to pay a little more for that.

"I would be willing to pay the extra bit for the pure cotton and under pure linen." P1

I like to wear natural fabrics like silk." P2

In the observation process, a frequent question is about product composition. As some events attended for women are in hotter countries, fabrics could be considered 'heavy' or 'not appropriated', affecting the purchase decision.

The versatility also was punctuated as an option to wear clothes to work and leisure. It is also linked with functionality, seasonality (Rocha, 2016) and past experiences (Tuan, 1980) showing the importance of subjective elements and associations made by the mind (Gutman, 1982; Kahneman, 2011).

"And particularly, you know, the clothes that I can wear for work and for play. You know I want to be able to wear them. I am from a family of 10 children. So we would have worn a lot of each other's clothes, and they would have gone down from sister to sister, and there would have been a lot of stealing clothes. I buy things that I know I am going to wear. I'll be able to wear them 50 times, you know, and when I am thinking about work that it's something that I could wear at once a week for autumn, winter or once a week for spring-summer, and it might ask for two seasons, you know." P2

"It never seems to go out of fashion. You can match up and wear in different ways." P4

Another point mentioned was the style of the clothes. The style must be appropriate for them. Additionally, it can be seen as a connection between the style and self-identity, emphasizing a vision of the self and the perception of the other (Rocha, 2016).

"I wear a lot of Helen McAlinden clothes for work and weekend. I think they are particularly interesting for mature ladies." Participant 2

"I like her clothes. I find that they suit me, suits work, suits leisure. And I also wear her clothes for work, and they are always admired." P1

In the direct observation, national designers were recognized for characteristics connected with age, such as the details of the clothes, with style offered (classical, not so fancy), comfort and for knowing the body of the Irish woman and for offering versatile outfits that match with customers' identity.

The service offered was also validated as indispensable. The participants look for places that can offer facilities, help them with honest assistance. It is worth noting that in the observation process, this factor was not mentioned.

"I suppose it is if I can see them, that I can get some assistance with what suits me or not, and there is a facility to change it. And, where I can get honest few points from the person is helping me." P3

"I do think that the service that you provide is really important so that when you go into a boutique, somebody knows you, they know what you like. They know what you have, they know what suits you..." P2.

Finally, all participants demonstrate that the price is crucial. They are willing to pay more for the service, for the fabrics and the designer, but not a much higher price.

"I think the price point is important". P3

"I think the number one value for money." P4

In addition, one of the participants mentioned that she evaluates the cost per wear. It consists of the relationship between the price paid and the number of times the product has been used. It demonstrates that there is a predisposition to pay for a higher price since the product can be used several times. This participant also presented ideas of sustainability and versatility of the clothes.

“I don't have a very big wardrobe of clothes, but it is important to me that I wear all the clothes that I have and that the clothes that I buy for work and play get worn (a lot) and don't just sit in my wardrobe! P3

Briefly, through the interview and observation process, it was possible to identify that product's characteristics are essential in the purchase decision but alone is not crucial. It has to be associated with the style of the clothes, the appearance and the psychological benefits. Additionally, during the process of observation, customers used to look for national designers because they knew the Irish woman body and what they like presenting an association with the physical variables presented by Rocha (2016). Thus, the next sub-topic seeks to analyse possible connections with this subjective factor, the designer's nationality and the national identity.

4.5.2 Irish Designers Consumption - Consumers

The second topic researched was the choice of Irish designers and the possible reasons for this kind of purchase. During the interviews, when asking for the reasons they buy national designers, it was noticeable that this created a stimulus that reinforced the national identity.

“I think it's important to support Irish, and I think it'll be more important now, you know, as we come through the pandemic.” P2

It could be interpreted as a low level of the stimulus of national identity as presented by Carvalho, Luna, and Goldsmith, (2019). Participants were also inclined to defend the purchase of national products to support the economy, for reasons that may be subconscious and because they believe that these professionals are recognized and demonstrate quality in the service and product offered.

“I like the Irish designer that I am buying from because I like the Irish. The Irish design Society generally is very good in all areas. And I just like to support them”. P1

Three participants expressed a powerful connection with the past in Ireland, remembering the quality of the fabrics, gold years and the difficulties faced by the Irish fashion industry.

“So, if you don't buy they won't last..... Well, you are supporting Irish jobs. I suppose the generation of income, economy and also, help to develop the brand, or fashion as Ireland going back to 60s with very others started with tweed or Ireland sweaters and other national brands.” P3

“My father had a manufacturing company that made ladies coats, suits and jackets. And, you know, most Irish farmers wives would have worn one of my dad's coats to mass on a Sunday, you know they were good quality. They were elegant; they were well made. They were Irish, but he just had to close his business, he had to cease trading. Because, you know, once I think sort of towards the mid to late 80s it became impossible. Again it became impossible to run a manufacturing business in Ireland. But, probably, somewhere in the back of my mind I think it's important to support Irish.” P2

It also raised questions about the need for support from those in the national fashion market.

“And, one of the things I was thinking about was if the national designers need more support. Does it need to be promoted more? Does it need a new platform? Are we reading enough about our design? You know, do we see it enough in fashion magazines? Are we seeing it enough in the Saturday papers and Sunday papers? You know, is the industry getting enough support from the government?” P2

The link between culture, past experiences, psychological factors with national identity is visible, as presented in the literature.

The designer's nationality was considered essential for all participants, as depicted by Rocha (2016). Despite the fact, participants have shown a strong association with the element of national identity, the determining factor for the purchase of Irish designers are connected with style, self-identity and price. The participants informed that they buy it because they like the product; they like the designer style; it suits them and reinforces their identity.

“I buy it because I like the product, but the fact that it's an Irish designer is hugely significant to me.” P1

“And I think I do like Helen McAlinden style. I think you know there is a sort of the French feel to it. Some of it is quite classic like even this top, it is very classic, but it's easy to wear if you feel smart. It's also important to find the right thing, find something that's going to suit your style.” P2

“I think Helen McAlinden is well priced. I think there may be other Irish designers that are too expensive for what they are. Having somebody local with the right price point, with the right designer that suits personally, that will work.” P3

In the previous subtopic, participants highlighted the importance of the fabrics. Interestingly enough that most of the clothes offered by the studied designer and nine others evaluated, are composed of synthetic and mixed fabrics. Few pieces are natural, and the price is higher than synthetic ones. Participants demonstrated knowledge and acceptance due to the cost of these materials. In this context, a connection was also made with the country's fashion history and how designers seek to offer affordable products. In light of the interviews, it became clear that this requirement is not a determining factor in the purchase of national designers, reinforcing the idea that style is crucial.

“I think in fairness to her she was trying to make the product affordable because you know, people are only willing to pay a certain price.” P1

A further comment is about how the lifestyle and the moment lived, or the circumstances affect the participant's choices. They focus several times on product versatility, in the possibility of using it in different ways, for work and leisure and resonate with their lifestyle.

“Now, working in a different place, so I can only wear black clothes, so my casual clothes have become more important. So I start looking elsewhere for more casual clothes because Helen's is more formal.”P3

“I work in communication, but a very big part of my job is corporate social responsibility. So, within that, sustainability is important. And, you know, with fashion it would be really a lot to do with trying to wear both that are made locally or as local as possible...” P2

“I always like to look well and stand out when I go in those occasions, so it should be an Irish designer.” P4

The selection of participants was based on the global view of the market during the observation process and looked for people who had traces of an identity that favoured local brands and an identity that was considered global. All the participants presented in their speeches a link with the fashion history of Ireland, validating participant's experiences, reinforcing their identity and impacting the purchase process, as mentioned by Tuan (1980).

This chapter described a thematic overview of the research results. It covered characteristics (fabrics), style, price, service, and as the national identity can be seen in the purchase process. It also denoted valuable information for understanding consumer behaviour. The next chapter will discuss these results.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

5.1 Outline

This research intends to comprehend consumer behaviour focused on the role of national identity in the purchase process towards clothes designed by national designers. This chapter aims to contextualise the findings from the perspective of the theory presented in the literature review. For a better understanding, the themes were reorganised in physical, identity, and lifestyle or a PIL model presented by Rocha (2016).

5.2 Physical

The physical aspects mentioned in the interviews and the observation process were closely connected with the fabric's composition, versatility (in the first moment connected with functionality and seasonality). As previously referred, the consumer makes several associations and investigations during the different phases of the purchase process (Peter and Olson, 2010, Foxall, 2015). It is primarily connected with the functional benefits of the product, or with the satisfaction of the customer's need (Peter and Olson, 2010; Gutman, 1982). These benefits are tangible aspects connected with the product or service offered. It can be measured, such as practicality, comfort, quality, delivery, among others (Churchill and Peter, 1998). From the perspective of this study, the physical indicators can involve perceptions of "health, fabric, comfort, body shape, fit, functionality, climate, physical appearance, seasonality." (Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins, 2005, pg. 382).

The composition of the product was mentioned in the interviews and observational process as essential. In some occasions, this factor is determinant and can prevent the purchase. Some events attended by customers happen abroad, and the weather in that place makes the fabric aspect decisive.

Nevertheless, it was observed that the style overcomes the fabric. If customers like the style and if it matches with the functionality and the desired state, the purchase is not prevented. It was reinforced when participants said that they prefer natural fabrics. As previously reported, the products offered by national designers are synthetic or mixed, and this does not avoid them from buying the products.

The literature review elucidated some crucial points. First, mature customers are affected by the ageing, which changes their body, driving them to focus on functional aspects of the products, while also not leaving aside the psychological issues that will be presented later. Attributes such as comfort, quality, shape, colours influence the purchasing process. Second, the product's ethnicity impacts the purchase decision (Littrell, Jin Ma, and Halepete, 2005), and as stated by Fischer and Zeugner-Roth (2016), it moderates the influence of national identity.

The nationality of the designer was pivotal by the interviewees. However, the purchase is only made if they 'like' the style, appearance and functionality. The fact that the designer is national is a plus. Fischer and Zeugner-Roth (2016), pointed out in their research that product's ethnicity can be used as a standard of comparison in analysing a product. For the authors, the consumer behaviour tends to be impacted by national identity, selecting a national product when the foreign product's ethnicity is higher than the domestic products, validating the social identity theory when the individuals defend their self-image and in-group from the out-group (Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Tajfel, 1974).

This connection must be scrutinised, considering the type of product and the target audience. The physical variables are vital in the purchase of clothes by women over 49 (baby boomers and generation X). If the national designer does not meet these requirements, the purchase is not made. In the scope of this project, the national identity is a stimulus to look for national brands, and the product's ethnicity is relevant, but physical variables surpass this relevance.

Mature women are impacted by the age issue, which causes changes in the body, which may not be taken into account by designers. It causes a lack of

clothing options that enhance their bodies (Rahman and Yu, 2018; Littrell, Jin Ma, and Halepete, 2005). The connection between physical attributes and product's ethnicity tends to reduce this feeling since national designers can consider the characteristics of national women's bodies, or the brand may be associated with this. There was an association between the product's ethnicity and ergonomic factor of the product when the participants mentioned they buy the product because it is an Irish designer and how they like the style, the fabric, the fair trade, as the Irish designer knows their bodies and how clothes suit a mature woman. Therefore, national identity can be a stimulus for the search for these brands.

Furthermore, it demonstrates that these two elements can reduce the feeling of 'lack of option' of clothes and reinforce their positive image for the out-group (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 2004). The ergonomics aspects of clothing express how individuals want to be seen, how they, through non-verbal aspects, can control their image in the socialization process (Veblen 2007; Evans, 1989, McNeil, 2016; Belk, 1975; Snyder, 1987).

As there is an integration between clothing, skin, the body, this ends up generating value beyond the functional aspects, usability, comfort and primary satisfaction, and it will be explained in the next sub-topics.

5.3 Identity

Individuals are born already belonging to a society, community, group, among others. During their lives, they assimilate rules, believes, norms, information from these group; and adapt to the continuous changes in the world in which they live, thus influencing the environment itself, culture and society (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Kotler, 1965; McCracken, 1986; Solomon et al., 2016; Solomon, 2008; Linehan, 2008; Piaget, 1969). In the PIL model, the identity variable could consist of associations with "mood, taste, beauty, sensuality, colour, boldness, image judgment, ideology, beliefs, detachment, attraction to particular clothes, personal style, elegance, ethnicity." (Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins, 2005, pg. 382).

From this standpoint, national identity is a feeling of belonging to a group that represents culture, language, tradition, or in this case nation. As mentioned earlier, the target audience studied in this project ponders designer ethnicity as vital, and this is linked to the physical variables that satisfy a primary need. In addition to these physical needs, there is a search for the satisfaction of psychological aspects. Fashion is an expression of personal identity (McNeill, 2016; Evan, 1989), and through it, individuals can monitor the way they express themselves and the way they want to be recognized by others (Snyder, 1987). Since fashion is an expression of personal and social identity, it can represent the persons' positioning within the in-group and the out-group, aiming to maintain a positive image and avoiding pain or loss (Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Evans, 1989; Swan, 2012; Kahneman, 2011). These could be seen when the participants revealed thoughts about 'feeling smart' in adapting outfits and wearing the clothes differently, being admired by others (image judgment) and an aspect of uniqueness, friends usually do not buy this product. It could be a form of through differentiating themselves from other members in the in-group (McCracken, 1986).

A further aspect is that companies are currently global or serve national and international audiences. With globalisation, companies face international competitors. Not only do companies go global, but individuals have access to new cultures, new information and may or may not be influenced by that information. Authors like Westjohn & Magnusson (2012), Zhang and Khare (2009) and Arnett (2002) depicted that personality can influence the way the individual interprets social interactions and the result of that. The authors also denoted a study in which they suggest a link between collective identity and personality and how these factors impact the global consumer culture positioning and local consumer culture positioning. Consumers who identify with a global identity tend to have positive or more favourable attitudes into international products and culture. Likewise, consumers who identify with a local identity tend to evaluate positively local products and culture.

The participants showed the style as a representation of their identity and social identity. During the observations, participants 2 and 3 demonstrated that an

Irish brand was their favourite, but also showed an openness to global trends and international brands. During the interviews, they demonstrated that the history of Ireland's fashion industry influences their behaviours. Respondent 2 even mentioned that she probably buys national brands because it is subjective in her mind. The participant 1 in both processes denoted an identity local and the consumption of different Irish designers (accessories). It showed that the national identity could be stimulated during the interview in questions related to Irish designers.

The national identity element was also noticed when customers look for these brands for special occasions, demonstrating a desire to buy an outfit from a national stylist, strengthening their ethnicity in a singular event as mentioned by retailers. The element was also perceived when fashion history in Ireland was mentioned. As stated by Tuan (1980), individual identity is not static and considers extended time and space. At any time, individuals access their past, their knowledge, their previous information and this influences their decisions (Foxall, 2015; Peter and Olson, 2010; Kahneman, 2011). During the interviews, it was possible to note that the history of fashion in Ireland is a stimulus to emphasise the national identity and a choice towards products designed by national designers. This industry had the gold years in the 50s and reinforced a culture of tailoring and dressmaking. However, around the 80s, it was facing several challenges that promoted a restructure of this segment. Diverses national designers were out of business, and national companies closed (De Clér, 2011). It promoted an idea of 'supporting them', and the feeling of belonging to the group and proud of 'Irish society, 'it is good', 'I liked them'. It was possible to notice that the element of national identity is embedded in the individual's self and history. This point raises an important question of how national identity can be interpreted by younger generations, who have not lived this experience and who are part of fast and global fashion culture.

This subtopic sought to demonstrate that the national identity is expressed in the taste, attraction to these particular designers styles and elegance once it reinforces the identity and the psychological factors that the target audience

studied to try to supply and also fortify the feeling of belonging to a group. As mentioned previously, the target audience seeks for comfort and for a connection between mind and physical to express themselves as an active generation (Rocha, Hammond, Hawkins, 2005; Neves, Brigatto and Paschoarelli, 2015; Littrell, Jin Ma, and Halepete, 2005; Rahman and Yu, 2018).

5.4 Lifestyle

Identity is a determining factor, and the one that influences the lifestyle adopted by the individual. The lifestyle is crucial, and some authors define it as a tool to comprehend consumer behaviour. It consists of the way individuals live; it involves all moral conventions, beliefs, profession, social class, how to enjoy leisure time, hobbies, that is, a whole social and psychological context. The lifestyle contemplates different aspects of demographics and psychological characteristics and affects the decision-making process (McDonald and Dunbar, 2012; Solomon et al., 2016; Krishnan, 2011; Mohiuddin, 2018). Lifestyle could be connected with the idea of "exclusivity, fashion, ease of care, durability, same gender, opposite gender, profession, moral conventions, welfare, quality, versatility, Brand, price, age appearance, religion, ideology, celebrity influence." (Rocha, 2016).

This project consists of examining the consumer behaviour of women over 49 years in Ireland towards clothes designed by national stylists. Thus far, this target audience showed a tendency to choose their clothes considering the functionality, the ergonomics or the necessary physical prerequisites, the versatility or the fact of being able to use in different ways, to adapt the outfit to different situations and the price, denoting an active woman who wants to be prepared to interpret all the roles that they exert during their day and life.

Individuals express their image in society through the products they buy and use. "We are what we have" (Tuan, 1980, pg. 482). Besides, they act as 'self-monitors' in order to control the image they want to express (Snyder, 1987;

McCracken, 1986). It became clear through the interview that outfits are part of the roles that these women play during their day and life. Clothes are bought for work, for a special occasion, for holidays, and this is also directly linked to their identity. The individuals express themselves through objects, which have meanings and transmit a message (McCracken, 1986). Besides, there is a tendency to display a certain 'status' through them (Veblen, 2007). During the interviews, the participants demonstrated that the clothes represented a 'mature', 'elegant', 'versatile' woman who, through her outfit, can convey a message.

An element that can also demonstrate the lifestyle and status is the price. The price must be 'fair' and 'appropriate' according to the product offered. There was a tendency to pay a little more for national designers and natural fabrics. Generally, the high price can be associated with higher quality or a differentiated product. The perceived price considers the subjective perception of value that is 'sacrificed' to obtain a product (Zeithaml, 1988). The price also could be associated with the idea of quality (Zeithaml, 1988).

The perceived quality can be defined as the functional and psychological gains obtained from a product in the consumer's mind. It can be an individual perception of quality based on the purpose of the product and comparison with other alternatives (Steenkamp 1990). Several factors influence the decision-making process, but as elucidated by the theoretical background, the product's performance must meet customer expectations. In the scope of this study, the outfit has to satisfy the need for the physical variable. One of the associations made is that national designers know the body of Irish women, and this is a determining factor in the purchase process.

People buy products that can represent their lifestyle. It is worth noting that lifestyle changes with time and age and are affected by circumstances. One of the participants who work with social corporate denoted that it is essential to consider sustainability, buy local products and select products manufactured in Europe, in order to reduce impacts. Another participant demonstrated that casual clothes are more important at the moment, but that work clothes were previously essential.

Besides, individuals can depict personality traits that generate a predisposition for the adoption of global or local identities as presented by Westjohn & Magnusson (2012), Zhang and Khare (2009) and Arnett (2002), and with the globalisation, this was emphasised. In a globalised world, people can have a greater connection with global messages and international brands. On the other hand, some people will favour local messages connected with ethnicity. As national identity is part of the individual's identity, companies can develop subliminal associations creating stimuli that enhance the level of national identity and the search for national designers.

During the observation process, many clients reported that they are looking for national designers, as they knew the body of the Irish woman, because they wanted to wear something elegant, versatile and that represented them. The interviews pointed out that some friends wear national designers, but during the observation, these participants showed a feeling of uniqueness. It strengthens the social theory of identity when the individual seeks to create a positive image in the group and for other groups. Both in the interviews and the observation process, a search for something different or unique can be observed. As reported by McCracken (1986), the individual seeks to differentiate himself from the other elements of the group through different, unusual products or in the case of national designers since it is produced in a small scale.

This chapter focused on discussing the findings from the perspective of the theoretical background presented. As presented in the literature review, national identity influences the process, but it is not a determining factor. The next chapter will present the conclusions of this project.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

6.1 Outline

This project set out a better comprehension about the role of national identity in the consumer's purchasing process of national designers focused on women over 49 years old, through a case study taking into account the fashion industry in Ireland. This chapter will depict the main conclusions and future recommendations.

6.2 Main Conclusions

Initially, observations depicted that these women sought for these brands, as they were national and represented them, especially in terms of physical variables. As mentioned previously, the age factor and changes in the body are factors that influence the purchase process of baby boomers and generation X. Through research, it can be seen that the element of national identity is directly linked to the physical variables. In the consumer's mind, the national designers know their body (Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins, 2005).

It was also noticeable that product ethnicity moderates the influence of national identity, as proposed by Fischer and Zeugner-Roth (2016). However, considering women of generation X and baby boomer, national identity impacts consumer behaviour only if the physical variables are attempted.

Furthermore, as McCracken (1986) reported, fashion is one of the systems that transfer meaning to objects. Therefore, fashion can be considered a vector for emphasis, development and updating of national identity. Further to this, national identity related to the scope of this research can be a stimulus to national designers, and brands making effective use of it can promote associations, that if are positive could be repeated automatically as proposed by Kahneman (2011).

An encounter topic during the interviews was the deep association demonstrated by participants with the history of the fashion industry in the country, emphasising the national identity.

Under the light of findings, national identity tends to be overlooked by companies, as they aim at a global market and do not want to have the image associated with the country. However, this element can be a strong stimulus towards national designers and can enhance a positive association with the brand. The study showed that national identity tends to denote different influences depending on the product, demographic, geographic and psychological factors.

6.3 Future Recommendations

Facing a post-pandemic scenario, the national identity can encourage companies to promote the 'buy local' strategy, without compromising the action on the international market. As mentioned by Carvalho, Luna and Goldsmith (2019), a low level of interconnection with national identity can stimulate a feeling of belonging and consequently can lead to a positive attitude towards the product. The national identity can be stimulated at different levels, and companies can do experimental tests and create subliminal messages connecting physical variables, product ethnicity and style in order to analyse these levels of the stimulus and impact towards national designers.

Furthermore, as emerged in the investigation consumers had a deep connection with the fashion industry of the country that presents a culture of tailoring, and this can emphasise the national identity. Taking into consideration that the younger generation does not have the same experience and live in a culture of fast fashion and mass production it is also suggested a study of the element for future generations of baby boomers and generation X (or currently the younger generation). Would it be an essential factor to stimulate identities for future potential customers, or should the companies' strategy be increasingly focused on global action?

6.4 Limitations

The process has to be conducted online due to COVID-19, and the social distance being compulsory and insights, expressions, possible attitudes or behaviour can be lost. Besides, the moment is influenced by COVID-19 and consequences, and the information shared could be affected by social, psychological and economic circumstances.

It is argued that qualitative research, in this case, in-depth interviews do not provide a sample size big enough to generalise. It is also time-consuming once the interviews must be conducted individually.

Issues about reliability can be raised once there is no standardisation in the interview process. As this type of research involves contact (in this case online), reliability can be affected by issues of bias. Some prejudices must be considered. Firstly, the interviewer's bias; it is essential to maintain an adequate posture to avoid possible judgments, induction or prejudice. Secondly, recording the interview can affect the respondent, and they could be uncomfortable and might inhibit them and impact the answers and reduce reliability.

The researcher works in one of the stores that offer clothes by national designers. It could affect results, and customers may not feel comfortable saying what they feel. Besides, they could respond, considering only the brand that the researcher works.

6.5 Ethics

The ethical aspects must be contemplated in each research. Information and explanation about the study, reasons, how the data will be used, confidentiality, data privacy and ethical commitment must be provided. It should contemplate the use of an ordinary language to avoid misinterpretation. Furthermore, participants must have to give their consent. This project contemplated in-depth interviews are done over the phone. First step, the researcher called the potential participants, Helen McAlinden on-base consumers

and explained the study. If the consumer accepted the invitation, a meeting was scheduled. It is pivotal to request an authorization to record, make notes and use the information gathered in the interview before starting the process. Information not authorized should not be used, under no circumstances (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). The second step consisted of the researcher explaining the purpose of the study again, briefly and requesting the consent to record the call. To assure the reliability, the interviewer did not make use of manipulation, induction, cohesion, and guarantee the well-being, security confidentiality, privacy, of the interviewee.

Appendix

This chapter denotes the questions used in the investigation. As the process involves an in-depth interview; new questions may arise, depending on the responses obtained. The interviews were based on the questions described in the appendixes.

How long have you been working with fashion and national designers?

Why do customers look for and buy national designers in your opinion?

What are they looking for?

Do you think they buy national designers from associations with national elements or with national identity or something related to that?

Are customers looking for national designers usually open to trying clothes from international (different) brands?.

How long have you been working with Irish and fashion designers?

Why do customers look for and buy national designers in your opinion?

What are they looking for?

Do you think they buy national designers from associations with national elements or with national identity or something related to that?

Are customers looking for national designers usually open to trying clothes from global brands?

Do you think there is a difference between the old generation and the younger generation about national designers?

How is the demand for national designers for women under 30 years old?

Do you have any young clients looking for Irish Designers?

Appendix I - Questions – Unit of Analysis 1

How long have you been working with fashion and national designers?

Why do customers look for and buy national designers in your opinion?

What are they looking for?

Do you think they buy national designers from associations with national elements or with national identity or something related to that?

Are customers looking for national designers usually open to trying clothes from international (different) brands?.

How long have you been working with Irish and fashion designers?

Why do customers look for and buy national designers in your opinion?

What are they looking for?

Do you think they buy national designers from associations with national elements or with national identity or something related to that?

Are customers looking for national designers usually open to trying clothes from global brands?

Do you think there is a difference between the old generation and the younger generation about national designers?

How is the demand for national designers for women under 30 years old?

Do you have any young clients looking for Irish Designers?

Appendix II - Questions – Unit of Analysis 2

Do you have a favourite brand?

For what kind of occasion you buy this brand?

What do you consider essential when buying your clothes?

How long have you been buying national designers?

Do you remember the first time you bought it?

For what kind of occasion do you buy national designers?

Do you think that buying Irish designers is a way to differentiate yourself?

Why do you buy national designers?

How is the involvement in this kind of purchase?

Is the fact that the clothing is from a national designer essential for you?

Why?

Do you have friends who wear national designers?

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