



**Key consumption drivers of vape in the Irish market:  
An analysis of generation Z - consumers aged 18 to 25**

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## ABSTRACT

### *Key consumption drivers of vape in the Irish market: An analysis of generation Z - consumers aged 18 to 25 by Diogo Mainardi Cidade*

Nicotine consumption is millenary in our society, Henningfield et al. (2009) and understanding the vape category is relevant to be able to characterize this consumer and identify opportunities for an industry that has less than 20 years in the market. This work sought to understand in depth the characteristics and preferences of the consumer in relation to the category.

The study was conducted through an extensive literature review on consumer behaviour, and the application of a small number of in-depth interviews through an inductive approach, which allowed the deepening of relevant topics to respond to the research objectives, understanding the habits and preferences of the consumer. Through a thematic analysis of the interviews, it can be seen that the diversity of flavours and the ease to obtain the product are relevant factors for this consumer. Convenience in its use is also a relevant factor, demonstrating that this audience prefers the disposable device model. In addition, the product being present in groups of young people has been a factor that contributes to the entry of new users.

This category was initially launched as an alternative to reducing the risks of cigarette consumption (Evans and Hickey, 2020) and some studies point to this reduction, but others indicate that there may be negative effects. However, this subject is little known among young people, who perceive vaping as being healthier, but with limited understanding of the real benefits or risks. The data obtained in this research can contribute to the industry and the understanding of consumer characteristics and preferences, in addition to signalling opportunities and risks to the sector.

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

Vape consumption has become a trend among young people and adults in Ireland, and this can be noticed when walking down the street, going to bars, malls or restaurants. According to a study carried out by ESPAD - European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs, this category of products is increasingly being used by young people, Shannon (2021) which, according to some research, also increases the consumption of cigarettes that had been on the decline for over 25 years, Keena (2021).

Realizing this increase in consumption of e-cigarettes, a relatively new market category, the researcher sought to investigate this consumption trend, reasons why young people - over 18 years old - use it, their preferences and consumption drivers. This study, despite not focusing on the health impacts, sought to understand what is known about the subject in the literature, its alternative as a potential risk reduction, NHS (2019), and what the participant's perception of this topic. The main focus of this research is to understand which factors are relevant and should be considered by the industry as strengths, risks and opportunities in this growing market.

## 1.2. GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Consumer behaviour is a field of extensive marketing studies, having its application in different sectors and consumption moments. For the category of cigarettes, there are several studies evaluating the consumer of this category, their behaviour and the health impacts related to their consumption. However, for the category of e-cigarettes, studies in this field are still limited. Given this, some gaps identified by the author are described below:

### **1.2.1. Consumer behaviour and preferences in Ireland**

E-cigarette consumption in Ireland is rising and reaching a large segment of young people, Shannon (2021). However, studies in this area that indicate consumption preferences, characteristics of this consumer and factors that direct this consumption are limited. It can be seen throughout the research the use of this product as a form of socialization, but this is still restricted

in the current literature. There are some studies of this category in other countries, mainly in the United Kingdom - a country at the forefront of the use of this category, however, an apparent gap is the greater understanding of consumers living in Ireland concerning vape consumption.

### **1.2.2. Health benefits or issues on vape consumption**

The creation of the e-cigarette was made to deliver nicotine to the consumer in a healthier way, Marketline (2012) and some countries use this as an approach including public health, as is the case in the United Kingdom. However, this approach still does not have full knowledge of the consumer, and there is a gap in the literature and communication with society on this topic. People do not know the positive/negative effects, and there is a gap, not only, in health research about these effects, but also research to understand the consumers' knowledge about the relationship of this consumption with benefits or harm to health.

### **1.3. ACADEMIC JUSTIFICATION**

The creation of the e-cigarette category was seen by many as a possible salvation for the tobacco industry, providing consumers with the satisfaction they seek through a product with less impact on the user's health. This product is already in wide use, with consumption growth evidenced in research, Smith, S. (2022) and in everyday life on the streets. However, it is necessary to understand the motivators that lead to consumption, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this category, which can serve as a basis for the development of strategies for companies in the sector.

This area of study is very important for society, especially from the point of view of public health, given that the risks or benefits must be considered in the elaboration of public policies on the subject. As this is a marketing study, it is not intended to understand the impacts on users' health but understanding their perception of this category and its health impacts is important to understand this consumer. The researcher understands that it is relevant for the industry to understand the consumption drivers of users in this category, which can serve for further studies by companies in the sector, thus building the profile of this consumer.



#### 1.4. OVERALL AIMS OF THE STUDY

Through this study, the author seeks to investigate the behaviour of young vape consumers in Ireland, a growing category, which still does not present extensive literature on the subject. This researcher seeks to identify the main motivations of this consumer, evaluating the habits and moments of consumption, their preferences and perceptions of the category, in addition to trying to evaluate the use of this product as a tool for social interaction and belonging to a group. It also seeks to understand, through a literature review, the knowledge available so far on the use of this product as an alternative to reduce the damage caused by cigarette consumption. This topic is later evaluated by the perception of the interviewees, also seeking to assess their knowledge concerning the risks or benefits to health. The purpose of this research seeks to be achieved by answering the research questions described below:

#### 1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Seeking to understand the characteristics of this consumer in a relatively new market, in addition to bringing some information not yet covered in the literature, as described in section 1.2, some research questions were applied to the study, described below:

1. What are the external factors that serve as a stimulus and driver of vape consumption by generation Z?
2. How is the consumption habit, frequency and social behaviour of vape consumers?
3. What is the understanding regarding the health risks/benefits of vaping?
4. What are the preferences regarding products, brands, models and what are the main attractions for the vape consumer?

The research questions described above are illustrated in the research methodology section in chapter 3.2. Likewise, the methodology applied to conduct this study is briefly explained in the section below, and in detail throughout Chapter 3.

#### 1.6. METHODS AND SCOPE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Seeking to understand and deepen the subjectivity of human interactions, the feelings and perceptions that serve as drivers for attitudes, is an important way to acquire and develop new knowledge (Bryman and Bell, 2015). For this, using an interpretive inductive approach, through

qualitative research - which allows for interpretation and gives voice to different interpretations of reality (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), the study is applied to respond to the objectives of this research.

Six in-depth interviews were carried out in a semi-structured way - a model that allows the interviewer to use a basic structure, but which can be adapted throughout the process to bring greater richness to the study, Saunders et al. (2016). This strategy can obtain insights from the interviewee through open-ended questions, which allow for a deeper understanding and interpretation of each individual on the subject. Participants in this survey are aged between 18-25, residents of Ireland, regular or occasional vape users.

Through this qualitative method of data collection, this study seeks to understand the main drivers of consumption in this category, the characteristics and preferences of this consumer, and cover perceptions regarding the impacts on health through its use. By using only a qualitative method of data collection, and by the small number of interviewees, this project cannot be extrapolated as the total reality of this population, but it manages to interpret some patterns of behaviour of this category and some preferences that can serve the industry.

## 1.7. STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

### ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

The initial chapter of this study provides background and justification that makes the discussion on the topic relevant. The main objectives of this research are presented in addition to the central question that seeks to be answered, in addition to briefly presenting the scope and method used to conduct this research.

### ***Chapter 2: Literature Review***

This chapter comprises two main research topics that will be critically analysed. The first refers to a literature review on the topic of consumer behaviour, and how the consumer's purchase decision process is built. The second major topic brings information about the tobacco category, analysing the consumption of cigarettes, vapes and the structure of this category, going through a review about the impacts and/or health benefits inherent to the consumption of these products.

### ***Chapter 3: Research Methodology***

Throughout this chapter, the methods used for the theoretical and practical construction of primary data collection in conducting this study are presented, seeking to respond to the proposed objectives that will be presented in this chapter. Using the “Research Onion” methodological model, the author analyses and describes the main steps necessary for conducting and analysing the research, discussing philosophical issues, approach and strategy that best apply to this study, also signalling limitations and ethical considerations in carrying out the research.

### ***Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion***

In this chapter, the main insights obtained during the collection of primary data are presented, where the author makes a critical analysis of this information seeking to respond to the research objectives.

### ***Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations***

The conclusions and recommendations of the study provide an overview and critique of the main themes of the research, directing the gaps found in the literature and options for new studies that can look at the theme in more depth. Likewise, opportunities for the sector are highlighted, which can be applied in their marketing strategies.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the author seeks to address the literature available regarding the topic of this study. Initially, a review is made about *Consumer Behaviour*, a topic widely discussed and studied in the Marketing area, which the author uses as a basis for understanding the consumers of this category. Topics such as the purchase decision-making process and the main determinants that influence the consumer decision are addressed, as well as an approach to consumer behaviour in relation to the *Sociological Model* - understanding how social groups influence people in their attitudes as consumers. Furthermore, the author addresses the *Tobacco Category*, its history and consumption over time, finally arriving at the latest product in this category, *Electronic cigarettes/Vapes*. Throughout this part, information about its creation and a brief global scenario of the category are provided, in addition to looking into this product as a possible risk-reducing alternative for cigarette consumption.

### 2.2. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

We live in a consumer society, where many of the characteristics that each individual develops about themselves and their application in relation to the society or group to which they belong, are directly related to those products or services consumed by that individual, Solomon et al. (2019). More than just a Marketing discipline, *Consumer Behaviour* is in almost every aspect of life, in every daily encounter with brands, companies, products and interactions that each individual establishes, Blackwell et al. (2006). Money is exchanged for goods and services daily, and this exchange is related to the choice that will affect people's lives in different ways, Blythe (2008). Truly understanding this consumer, their behaviour and characteristics are essential for any type of company that seeks to develop better products and services that meet the needs of the market and each type of consumer. Given this, the field of studies on Consumer Behaviour studied for at least 6 decades, (Tetteh, 2021) gains importance, relevance and scope over time.

Within a marketing context, consumer behaviour is the field of study that analyses the entire process of acquiring a product or service, from a more positivist or rational analysis of the decision process – “Why people buy?”, Blackwell et al. (2006), to the most interpretive or subjective analysis of the process, Solomon et al. (2019). Within that, this field analyses the stages before, during and after the acquisition of a good or service. Try to understand how and why the

consumer obtains that good or service; the selection process among various options before purchase; its use and the satisfaction of needs through it, Solomon et al. (2019); the evaluation of post-consumption use; and its subsequent disposal (Tetteh, 2021). A definition from 1974 by Walter (cited in Santos, 2021) characterizes consumer behaviour as “the process whereby individuals decide whether, what, when, where, how and from whom to purchase goods and services”.

This field of study aims to analyse why decisions are made, what are the triggers or drivers that make consumers choose a product or service, and what they are seeking to satisfy. We try to understand the reasons for the purchase, and how people use that good they obtained, Blackwell et al. (2006). This understanding of the consumer, their needs and how to meet them is one of the roles of the marketing professional, and only by understanding consumer behaviour properly will companies be able to deliver products that satisfy the consumer and the market, Solomon et al. (2019). As described by East et.al (2009), when knowing how to answer why people buy goods and services, and how they react to the stimuli presented to them, the better the decisions made by these professionals will be.

However, consumer behaviour is not seen only from the simplistic perspective of the consumer and the process of obtaining a product or service. It is analysed in a broader way, understanding the objectives and reflexes that the consumer seeks with the acquisition, from the point of view of the product's impact on him/her as individual, but also in relation to the effect on him/her as part of a society, Solomon et al. (2019). Also, how having or not having that product affects the social relationship and influences to the society in general, Perner (2003). Therefore, studying consumer behaviour becomes multidisciplinary, and is necessary to understand the demographic, psychographics, and personality characteristics of the individuals (Tetteh, 2021), encompassing fields like anthropology, psychology, economics, and history, among others, Solomon et al. (2019), trying to understand how different individuals interact with the market.

Within this complex and dynamic context, the marketer needs to understand and identify the different roles that groups of individuals play in society, Solomon et al. (2019). They need to know how they think, feel and act in relation to the different alternatives available, (Tetteh, 2021) understand the benefits that consumers seek when looking for a product in the market (Silva, 2021) and draw up effective plans, delivering different products to different types of consumers, who have different desires and needs. Understanding why consumers buy products or brands makes it easier for companies to develop strategies, Blackwell et al. (2006), and with this, it will be possible to understand the different factors acting as influencers of consumer behaviour, to achieve them more effectively, Perner (2003). In this way, the company will have a greater

capacity to attract, satisfy and retain consumers, ensuring profitability and sustainability for the corporation, Blackwell et al. (2006).

### **2.2.1. Motivations and determinants of consumer behaviour**

Consumer behaviour and the way that consumers act and consume in the society is influenced by *Individual* characteristics and needs, and by *Environmental* influences, Blackwell et al. (2006). These factors shape their behaviour and attitudes, directly influencing their motivations concerning what they consume and do. Likewise, it drives the companies' strategies, which need to segment, analyse and understand these motivations, as each consumer acts in a certain way, seeking to meet their desires and needs, Solomon et al. (2019).

#### ***2.2.1.1. Individual determinants of consumer behaviour***

In a more basic and individual way, each individual can be characterized by *Demographic* determinants like gender, age, income, and nationality, which include them into similar group structures, Blackwell et al. (2006). These superficial characteristics can explain the behaviours and attitudes of certain groups, and can be used by companies to segment their strategies and products. The individual can also be characterized by *Psychographics* and *Personality* determinants, which characterize the individualities of each person, their values, beliefs, feelings, lifestyles and how they respond to environmental stimuli, Blackwell et al. (2006), thus shaping their behaviour as a consumer.

Another individual determinant is *Consumer Motivation*, which seeks to understand why a consumer tries to satisfy its needs, whether physiological or psychological, through the purchase or consumption of a particular product, Blackwell et al. (2006). It is characterized by a basic psychological desire of the human being to want something different from the real state of things, Blythe (2008). Motivation is what drives behaviour and directs the search to solve a problem or to search for something better (Antonides and Raaij, 1998). These needs range from the most basic and necessary for its survival, such as food, housing and security, as well as the needs for self-esteem, belonging, and social status. The consumer also has pleasure needs, looking for something to provide a distraction, satisfaction or fun, such as consuming something that gives him something different, which he does not need, but which will give him pleasure, Blackwell et al. (2006).

Still seeking to understand the individual motivators that shape consumer behaviour, and the consumer's interest and tendency to process information (Antonides and Raaij, 1998), we need to analyse *Consumer Beliefs* and *Feelings*, which shape and direct consumer attitudes and intentions concerning the purchase of a product or service, Blackwell et al. (2006). A consumer may or may not choose to purchase something due to the belief in its positive or negative impact, usually subjectively, evaluating both sides of the choice from a comparative perspective, Blackwell et al. (2006). This individual evaluation begins the molding of the consumer in relation to his/her attitude towards that product. It also creates feelings with that product consumed or the advertisement that reached it and generates a positive or negative reaction in the consumer, affecting their mood in relation to the product or brand.

A consumer can have a positive or negative *Attitude* toward a product. These attitudes are judgments created by the consumer about what is presented to him/her, and it's directly linked to the form and quality of the connection, whether the product or its communication with the consumer, Blackwell et al. (2006). Attitudes consist of a consistent way of behaving in relation to a given stimulus according to the knowledge and feelings created about some product or brand, Blythe (2008). Even as described by (Antonides and Raaij, 1998) attitudes are characterized by the predisposition of each individual to positively or negatively evaluate an object or aspect of the world. The more positive the attitude of the consumer, who has positive feelings and beliefs about that product, the greater and better the consumer's intentions to that brand, product or service.

### ***2.2.1.2. Environmental determinants of consumer behaviour***

Each individual is influenced from its birth, regardless of their choice or not, by the *Environment* - people, places and moments throughout their life, Blackwell et al. (2006). These influences characterize and shape this individual as a person and as a consumer, including everything around them, such as objects and places, but also the behaviour of other people within the environment, Blythe (2008). These influences become crucial to understanding the ways, preferences, reasons and motives why the individual consumer is influenced by the environment in which he/she lives, and how this shapes the way they act in relation to the moments of consumption.

Macro-environmental characteristics, such as cultural, economic and religious differences, as well as social, political, and environmental problems, play a role in influencing the way consumers behave, Blythe (2008). Patterns of behaviour and language are examples of

cultural characteristics that are transmitted within different groups of people, Blackwell et al. (2006), and contribute to the behavioural shaping of those individuals as consumers. The understanding of these similarities influenced by the environment, in which the individual is inserted, makes companies able to segment their target audience, Blackwell et al. (2006). It is becoming an increasing challenge as the plurality of society increases, but it manages to understand groups with similar determinants of behaviour. As a result, different values, cultures, environments and social classes make the patterns of consumption different among these different groups, Blackwell et al. (2006), and thus justified by the different interpretations of desires, needs and importance applied to each one of them.

Another determinant that influences and shapes people as individuals and consumers is family influences and/or people who share the same house, and how purchase and consumption decisions are defined individually or by that group of people belonging to that family unit or house, (Antonides and Raaij, 1998). Purchase of basic hygiene items for the house may have little or no participation from the children, being decided and chosen only by the parents, however, the choice of the breakfast cereal or the colours for the new painting of the house can be influenced by all family members, Blackwell et al. (2006). With this, the way a product is communicated has to be developed to reach the different members of the group, who assume different roles in their consumption moment, Blackwell et al. (2006).

This context of family influence characterizes the traditional family environment, with a father, mother and children. However, this structure has been changing for some years, and contemporary family and housing structures are changing. People are marrying older and having fewer children; homo-affective relationships are increasingly naturalized and present; people share a house with friends, and women play a much more active role in family decisions, among other examples that show the structural evolution of society over the years, Blackwell et al. (2006). The purchase decision is not centred on just one person, and the total family plays a role in the purchase decision process (Antonides and Raaij, 1998). In this context, marketers had to understand how these changes affect the purchase decision process.

Finally, a very influential behavioural determinant in the purchase decision process is the influence of the *Reference Groups*. They are people or groups that establish behaviours, habits, and attitudes that are evaluated by other individuals as relevant and make their behaviours, habits and consumption followed by those who identify themselves with, Blackwell et al. (2006). As (Antonides and Raaij, 1998) describe, the social learning process also occurs through imitation, where an individual absorbs a new behaviour when seeing a person that he/she understands as a reference behaving in a certain way. This is even more relevant among young people, who tend to behave and consume in a way that has greater approval among their peers and groups.



According to Blackwell et al. (2006), this happens because it increases the level of confidence and reduces the risk when they resemble and feel part of a group. Thus, that individual will be behaving following the social norms of that group, determined by perceptions, opinions, attitudes and behaviours developed within that social context (Antonides and Raaij, 1998).

In the age of social media, where people are sharing all the moments of everyday life, and also their consumption habits, digital influencers are a new way of reaching consumers and driving behaviour consumption. Companies associate themselves with influencers and people who can represent that brand, which can affect the decision-making of their followers as already evidenced by research (Zhang and Choi, 2022), reaching people who identify with that influencer, acquiring habits and similar consumption. In this way, young people, in the need to assert themselves, belong to a group and follow trends, are more likely to behave in a similar way, and with that, acquire products and brands that insert them within that context and environment, Blackwell et al. . (2006).

### **2.2.2.Sociological Model of the Consumer Behaviour**

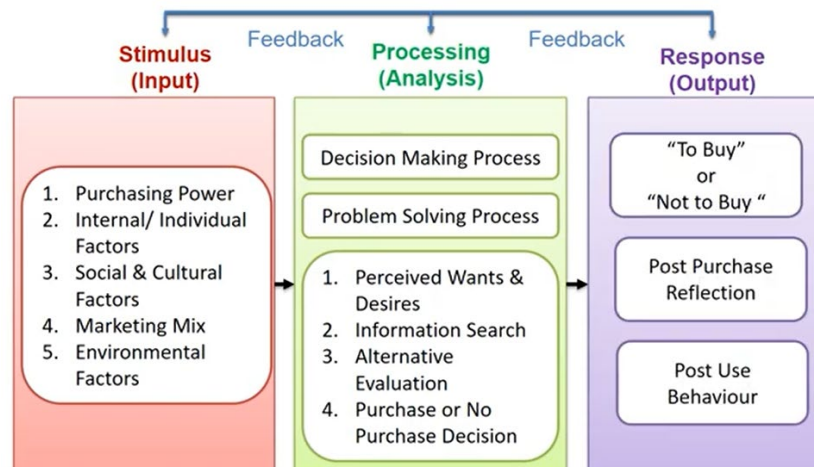
Understanding consumer behaviour is not a simple task, people are different, with different needs, desires, and consumption interests. Some theoretical models of consumer behaviour were developed seeking to contribute to the understanding of why and how customers make their purchase decisions, Hubspot (2021). This understanding of consumer behaviour, associating their willingness to behave in relation to the company's product, service or brand, is necessary for companies to position themselves correctly in the market, sending the right message that will satisfy this consumer.

There are a few models that describe consumer behaviour. Some of them are called *Traditional Models*, like the Learning Model, and Sociological Model, and others called *Contemporary models*, such Black Box Model, and Hawkins Stern Model, among others, Hubspot (2021). Seeking to understand the characteristics that make young people in Ireland consume electronic cigarettes, the author seeks to understand within the *Sociological Model* the relationships between different social groups in consumer behaviour.

The *Sociological Model* understands that the social groups in which the individual is inserted, be it a group of friends, family, or gym class, among others, exert an influencing factor on their purchasing behaviour, Hubspot (2021). As described by Jisana (2015), the role and influence of each individual in society becomes the basis for their purchasing behaviour and influences the behaviour of others. Thus, because they are members of different groups in society,

individuals are influenced by these groups, which can create a need unnoticed until that moment by the individual, according to that environment that is involved, influencing their buying attitude, Neostrom (2021). This is often associated with the need to feel part of and seek to assert oneself within that group. Understanding how these groups act, behave and consume must be understood by brands so that they create experiences that fit the way these groups act.

## Sociological Model



**Figure 1: Sociological model. Source: Kumar (2014)**

The diagram above demonstrates the rationale of consumer behaviour following this model. Initially, the consumer is stimulated by various inputs, whether from society or products. As an example, a young person may not be a smoker and may not have the money to buy the product, however, the group of friends to which he/she belongs exerts an influence on that young person, who, to try to be a part of it, seeks to find resources to obtain the product, Kumar (2014). In the second part, after the environmental stimuli, the consumer goes through the processing, evaluating the need, available alternatives, and benefits with the acquisition or not of the product, occurring in the presence of constant social feedback, which helps the consumer to build his decision, understanding how other members are behaving and evaluating that product or service. Finally, the output is, to purchase or not the product, and its evaluation and behaviour after the purchase. The consumer can buy the product and not use it because understands that it has not generated a benefit, or uses and like it, evaluating and understanding the benefit generated by the product, Kumar (2014). This model builds an idea of how consumers consume and are influenced by the society in their purchasing decision-making process.

### 2.2.3. Consumer Decision Process

There are several steps taken by a consumer when purchasing a good or service as showed in the diagram below (Tetteh, 2021). These steps are sometimes quick and almost irrational, but sometimes more detailed and deeply analysed, depending on the product, and amount invested, among others. A model developed by Engel, Kollar, Blackwell and Miniard, Blackwell et al. (2006) called CDP – Consumer Decision Process establishes the 7 stages below covered by a consumer at the time of purchase of a good or service.

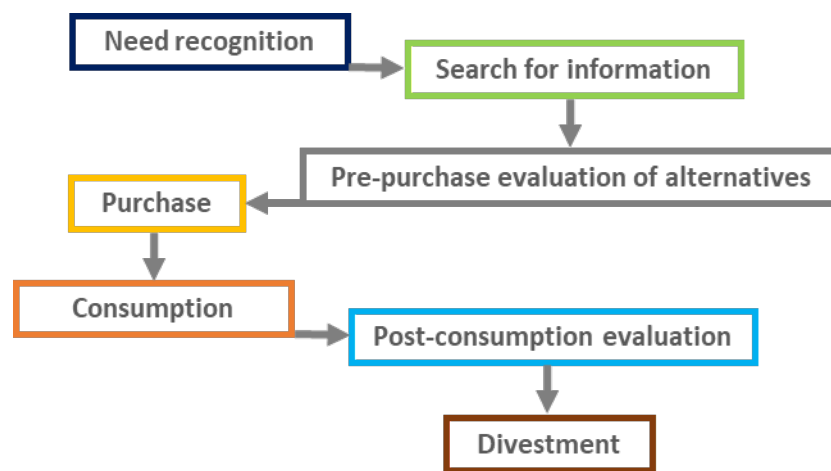


Figure 2: CDP Model

The purchase decision process starts with the *Need Recognition* or problem to be filled by the consumer. At this stage, the consumer recognizes that something is missing in his/her life, Blythe (2008). The consumer seeks to fill a blank space that will meet something not supplied so far, which may be a need or a desire, or sometimes something that the consumer has not realized the need for yet, Blackwell et al. (2006). The second stage is the *Search for Information*, where consumers acquire knowledge about solutions, products, and alternatives available to meet that need, whether internal information, obtained through previous knowledge stored in their memory or external, coming from friends, family or by the market, Blythe (2008). Moving to the next step, the *Pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives*, in possession of the knowledge obtained through the information obtained, consumer evaluates alternatives and compares the different options, understanding which ones best meet their needs, Blackwell et al. (2006).

In the fourth stage of this process, is the main stage for companies, where the effective *Purchase* of the product occurs, the act of final sealing and payment, Blythe (2008). However, the consumer will still decide where to buy. The buyer will choose between one supplier over another, and also at this stage, influences may occur at the time of purchase that can lead to a

change in the decision and even lead to the restart of the purchase decision process. Moving on to the fifth stage, where the actual *Consumption* of the purchased product or service occurs, filling that initial need Blythe (2008). At this point, how the consumer uses the product can affect their willingness to buy that brand or product in the future, Blackwell et al. (2006).

The last stages of this decision process are the *Post-consumption Evaluation*, which is nothing more than the analysis of the consumer concerning the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with that product or service, which may not reach, reach, or exceed the expectations of that consumer, Blackwell et al. al. (2006), evaluating problems that may have arisen during purchase or consumption, Blythe (2008). And finally, the *Divestment* stage, where the consumer can discard the product, recycle or resell it to someone else, Blackwell et al. (2006), both in terms of the product and the packaging that is part of the purchase, Blythe (2008). In some categories, this step is quite important, even more so in a scenario where environmental impacts of consumption are increasingly being evaluated.

Some authors point out that this procedural and rational model of choice is often not applied in practice, as the consumer does not have the time or need to carry out a deep analysis in all these stages of the purchase. Also, the decision will not always be fully rational, sometimes it will be impulsive, out of habit or opportunity East et.al (2009). Although a consumer does not always go through all these steps, understanding this process, how the consumer behaves and how it differs in each product category is important to plan actions more effectively in the market.

### 2.3. THE HISTORY OF TOBACCO

Understanding a little about the history of tobacco products, their use over time and their cultural participation in society, and also the developments that have taken place and the image of this consumer, is an important basis for understanding the evolution of this consumption, which contributes to understanding the consumer behaviour in this category.

Currently widely spread in society, with its use being possible in several ways, and also widely recognized as a product that brings harm to human health, tobacco has a long history in humanity. Originally from the American continent, the story tells about the use of tobacco by the Mayans in Central America over 2,500 years ago, burning the tobacco plant and inhaling the smoke in religious rituals. The plant was also considered to have divine strength, with healing properties by the people of America (Doll, 1999).

During the voyages of exploration and discovery of the Americas, tobacco became known to Europeans, Henningfield et al. (2009) and later disseminated to other continents. Reports of

Americo Vespuccio witnessing Indians on Margarita Island (Central America) consuming tobacco leaves mixed with lemon to quench thirst are reported, as well as reports of use by other explorers to whiten teeth, but also for hallucinogenic purposes, similar to drunkenness, Stewart (1967). After these explorations, tobacco began to be more widely consumed by other societies – at the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, Henningfield et al. (2009).

Jean Nicot, French ambassador to Portugal in the mid-16th century, named nicotine, an organic substance present in tobacco leaves, He promoted the plant and its healing effects, which for some period had its medicinal use applied (Charlton, 2004). The product also became popular among the English aristocracy as a sign of the colonialist ambitions of the expeditions of that period, Henningfield et al. (2009), but it was also associated with atheism and what was not working in modern England. Throughout the 17th century, the product spread across Europe, being seen even in several works of art of the time, where consumption took place through pipes (Doll, 1999). Over the centuries, tobacco has spread around the world, being consumed in different ways and for different purposes by society, including as a way of encouraging American soldiers in wars, Henningfield et al. (2009). At the end of the 20th century, cigarettes became the most traditional form of tobacco consumption, representing more than 86% of tobacco consumption in the USA, Henningfield et al. (2009).

#### 2.4. THE IMAGE OF SMOKER THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY

Over time, the image of the smoker was being built and this image also changed. In the 16th century, it was considered a sign of status and was even present in arts, being used by important people (Doll, 1999). More recently, throughout the 20th century, and the popularization of cigarettes with technological evolution and the creation of cigarette-making machines (Cummings and Proctor, 2014). In addition, the great investment by tobacco companies in advertising built an attractive image for the public. In the mid-1960s, advertisements featuring athletes, doctors and celebrities promoting cigarette brands on the most watched American programs were common (Cummings and Proctor, 2014).

It was in the 20th century that the use of cigarettes had its greatest expansion, with large investments in advertisements. At that time, there were just a few researches related the use of cigarettes to health problems. Thus, in the first half of the century, consumption grew worldwide, and in the USA steadily until 1953 (Cummings and Proctor, 2014). During this period, research relating the use of cigarettes to cancer began to be developed (Tyrrel, I, 2008). In 1964, a report by the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee brought changes to this market, with evidence of

the relationship between cigarette consumption and lung cancer (Cummings and Proctor, 2014). During this period, 42% of adults in the United States were smokers, a number much higher than the current 25.1% in 2022 according to the World Population Review (2022).

From the 1960s, greater restrictions began to be imposed on the category. In 1966, the first health warning was included in the cigarette pack in the USA, signalling that the product could be harmful to health (Cummings and Proctor, 2014). Over the years, these warnings have increased in several countries, always to increase the consumer awareness of the impacts and risks associated with the consumption of the product, adding, phrases and images to demonstrate the risks. In addition, restrictions on places where consumption would be allowed began to be implemented, especially at the beginning of the 21st century (Cummings and Proctor, 2014). As a result, cigarette use began to be associated with inconvenience (Cummings and Proctor, 2014), causing discomfort for both the smoker and those around them.

Although we live in a society that is much more similar globally in terms of consumption, cigarette consumption still varies widely around the world. Some more developed countries show declines in consumption rates, however, low and middle-income countries still show growth in consumption (Cummings and Proctor, 2014), and their consumption is still associated with common behaviour, and their use is still perceived as uncontroversial and a kind of rite of passage to adulthood (Cummings and Proctor, 2014).

## 2.5. E-CIGARETTES, AN ALTERNATIVE – FROM ITS INVENTION UNTIL NOW

With the constant increase in restrictions on cigarette consumption and the scientific evidence on its impact on health, the category began to face difficulties, both in communicating its brands, connecting with the consumer and with the decline in consumption in several countries. In this way, this market segment needed to be constantly reinvented, to ensure its sustainability in a responsible manner with society. In view of this, the creation of e-cigarettes emerged as an excellent alternative for this category of consumption.

The electronic cigarette, also called vape, is a product created in 2003 by the Chinese Hon Lik, to deliver, through an experience similar to cigarettes, the nicotine desired by the consumer, Marketline (2012), in a healthier way than traditional cigarettes (Hanafin and Clancy, 2020). Currently, this category is present in several countries, where the sale and consumption are possible in a regulated way, but in some others, it still faces restrictions by regulatory bodies. As an example, in Ireland, the sale and consumption of this product is allowed and regulated. While Brazil, on the other hand, which already has a large illegal consumer market, the regulatory bodies

prohibit its sale, arguing that the approval would be a setback to the efforts to reduce the health impacts related to cigarette consumption. They also argue that there is still no evidence of its benefit, focusing efforts on monitoring illegal consumption and sale (G1, 2022).

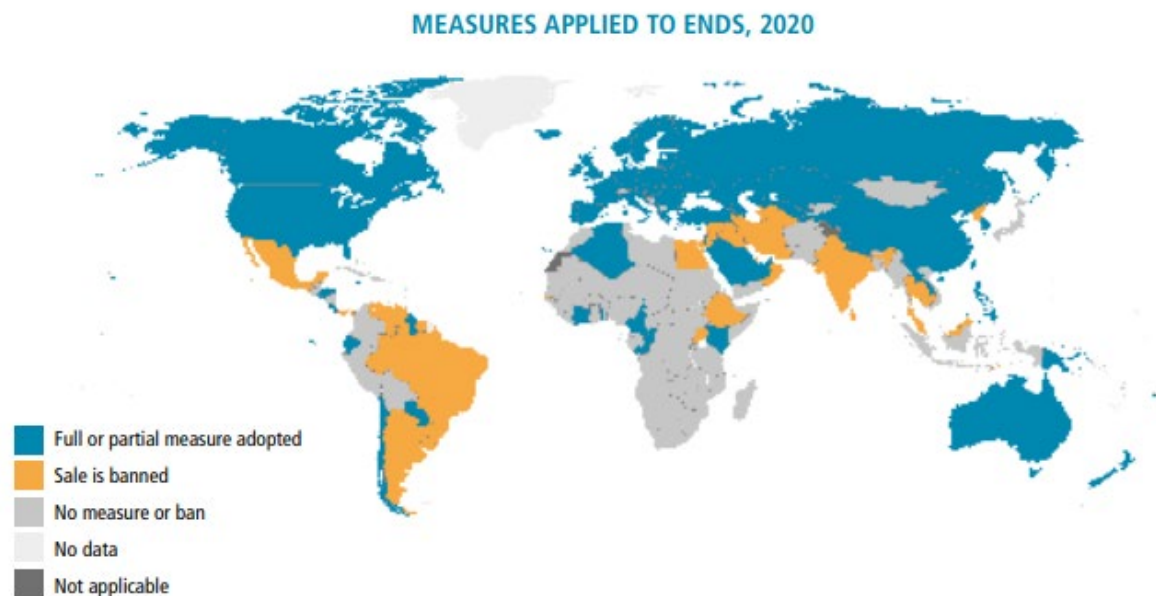
From a product point of view, the category currently contains some variants and diversified models. Among them, Vapour Products are battery-operated devices that heat liquid formulations that normally contain water, propylene glycol and glycerol, flavourings and nicotine, although some e-liquids do not contain any nicotine, British American Tobacco (2022) with various flavours, producing a vapour that is inhaled. In this category of vapour products, there are models where the consumer buys the device and recharges only the liquid, more sophisticated models that allow the regulation of intensity, and content, among others, with a wide variety of prices and different models. There are also some simpler models, that the consumer uses it for a period, and when the liquid runs out, the product is discarded. Another model also available, which varies in popularity by country, is a heated tobacco model, where a cigarette-like stick is added to a device, where the tobacco heats up – rather than burning it as in traditional cigarettes, with nicotine delivery occurring in a slightly different way (G1, 2022). Different models, with different strategies of companies, seeking to reach a consumer market still in development.

## 2.6. GLOBAL VAPE SCENARIO

E-cigarettes currently have quite different scenarios in terms of regulation and use around the world. In some countries, the product is banned both for its sale and use, however other countries have clearer regulations, and the product is allowed. In Europe, the first e-cigarettes were introduced in 2005 (Britton and Bogdanovica, 2014) and have become more popular over time. In the United Kingdom, one of the countries where the product is released, consumption has emerged since 2007, including being strongly recommended as an alternative to smoking cessation (Britton and Bogdanovica, 2014) and the reduction of risks linked to tobacco consumption. These actions were encouraged by the report of the Royal College of Physicians, reinforcing the concept of harm reduction. In Ireland, the sale of e-cigarettes is allowed, as long as the companies meet certain criteria, including but not limited to device requirements, packaging requirements, and maximum nicotine concentration (Tobacco Control Laws, 2022). On the other hand, some countries have not regulated yet, however, the product is present and being used illegally by the population.

Looking at the broader picture, according to the 2021 World Health Organization report, which names e-cigarettes as ENDS – Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems, some different

scenarios are seen in the world. Now, 32 countries have banned the sale of e-cigarettes; 79 countries have regulated the sale but applied one or more measures for its regulation; and the rest – 84 countries, do not have regulations in place for this category of products. This difference is quite clear between high, middle and low-income countries, where 84% of high-income countries have some regulation in place or banning, while three-quarters of low-income countries have no regulation regarding this category of products (World Health Organization, 2021). Among the countries' precursors, the United Kingdom is one of the countries that have encouraged the use of these products as an alternative to reducing risks. This measure includes announcing that it would enter the process of release to be prescribed by the National Health Service, being the first country in the world to prescribe e-cigarettes as a healthier way for those who want to quit smoking (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021).



**Figure 3: ENDS regulations per country (Source: WHO)**

Large tobacco companies identified this potential market and also entered in this category, either because of the opportunity to expand and sustain their business, Marketline (2012) or because of the decline in cigarette consumption in several countries around the world. The entry strategy of these large corporations in this market took place both through the development of their own products and through investment in companies that already exist in the market, Marketline (2012). As an example, Philip Morris International created its heated tobacco product, Marketline (2012), currently called IQOS, with a marketing strategy very focused on migrating the consumption of traditional cigarettes to a product with greater reduction of risks and harm to



the consumer. Another major player in the cigarette market, British American Tobacco created a company called Nicoventures - Marketline (2012), and also acquired some companies with extensive development in the category for the development of their products, such as the American giant Reynolds, acquired by the group in 2017. Currently, its main product is the Vuse brand, a rechargeable device, present in countries where regulation is allowed, in addition to a THP – Tobacco heating products with the Glo brand, British American Tobacco (2022). Likewise, it has a marketing strategy with a discourse on the creation of “A better tomorrow” through its products with potential risk reduction.

Currently, some smaller companies are acting as major players in the vape market. An example is the Elfbar brand, created in 2018 and which has become a highly sought-after brand consumed by young people in Ireland, the United Kingdom and some other European countries, with a huge variety of flavours such as watermelon, strawberry ice, among others, with a discourse of delivering a natural and healthy taste for consumption, (Elfbar, 2022). According to Smith, S. (2022), this brand is everywhere, with more than 600 million views on Tiktok under the hashtag #elfbar, it is also being used as an accessory, matching clothes and looks of young people from the most diverse tribes. Below is an illustrative image of the brand and its variety of flavours.



**Figure 4: Elfbar products (Source: Eflbar.com)**

## 2.7. VAPE AND ITS POSSIBILITY AS A HEALTHIER OPTION FOR CURRENT TOBACCO SMOKERS

Among the main arguments for the expansion and use of vapes is their role as a risk reduction alternative for tobacco users. Within this, the strategy that companies and health institutions used to unlock this category in countries where it is already allowed and in the search

for regulation in others, is based on the idea of a product that delivers a reduction of negative health impacts (Evans and Hickey, 2020), already widely evidenced generated through cigarette consumption. These arguments demonstrate that as tobacco is not burned, tar and carbon monoxide are not produced, elements that are very harmful to health. With this, there is a significant reduction in impacts on the consumer, as described by the National Health Service of the United Kingdom, (NHS, 2019) - one of the countries that has broached the subject from this perspective the most.

Within this context, the concept would be a consumption migration, where the current cigarette smoker would switch to a less harmful form of nicotine delivery, and new consumers would have the option of a product with a lower health risk. A 2021 study signals that daily vaping among cigarette smokers can increase the likelihood of quitting cigarettes by eight times, Fletcher (2022). Some researches have already shown a reduction of risks for consumers, but the long-term effect of the consumption of the product is still difficult to be evidenced, given the short period in which the product is on the market, as indicated by the HSE Ireland (2021).

On the other hand, there are arguments and research which indicate that this alternative to quitting smoking through the use of vapes has not been confirmed in many cases, with consumers using both forms of nicotine consumption, Blaha (2021). In addition, arguments that this category can be a gateway for young people to smoke are brought, where these products have become more popular than any other product in this category, Blaha (2021), with a great demand for these products by young people and minors, and part of them were not previous cigarette smokers.

With this, it's necessary to evaluate the benefits and risks, where on the one hand the potential harm reduction for a consumer who migrates from cigarettes to vape, and on the other hand, the risk of the entry of new consumers (non-smokers) and that would be exposing themselves to risk that would not exist if this product were not available. These are the analyses that are carried out both by countries where the sale is not yet allowed, as well as in countries where regulation already exists, and discussions about more aggressive regulation, with greater restrictions and some changes, are underway.

## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The term “research” is constantly related to our daily lives, and the result of this act associated with the way it was collected is all around us, and sometimes influences actions and movements in society according to its results, Saunders et al. (2016). A business survey is no different, it seeks to respond to relevant issues for a business or sector, trying to better understand the consumer, employees, or other agents present in that environment to be researched (Bryman and Bell, 2015). For Saunders et. al (2016), research must have a clear purpose, contributing to the increase of knowledge and our daily life, helping to understand the world and society. Following this same understanding, (Collis and Hussey, 2009) define research as a process of inquiry and investigation that contributes to the construction of knowledge. Both authors point out that research must be conducted in methodologically and systematically so that it can be valid, with data being collected and interpreted in a clear, comprehensive and logical manner, trying as much as possible to move away from beliefs. ESOMAR – European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research characterizes market research as the use of analytical and statistical methods to obtain insights into individuals or organizations through the collection and interpretation of data that contribute to decision-making, Malhotra et. al. (2012).

With this, it becomes important in marketing research, the detailing of the methods applied to collect the data, its understanding, analysis and argumentation about its significance, responding to the objectives defined for this, signalling possible limitations related to it Saunders et. al (2016). Throughout this chapter, the researcher presents and details the methodology applied to carry out this research.

### 3.2. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

According to Saunders *et al.* (2016), it’s essential to make clear what is expected to be understood through the research, and setting clear aims and objectives is important to say what the research is about. They also are essential to give the necessary clarity to underpin the research question. To (Collis and Hussey, 2009), the purpose of research is to generate knowledge on that particular topic, and for McGivern (2013), this is a crucial step in the process, as it will provide the researcher with a framework on which to design the research, so they must be specific and

precise. This author seeks to understand through this study, what are the main drivers of vape consumption in the Irish market, focusing its research on the generation Z, people aged 18 to 25 during the research period. The objectives below have been set to support the author’s aim.

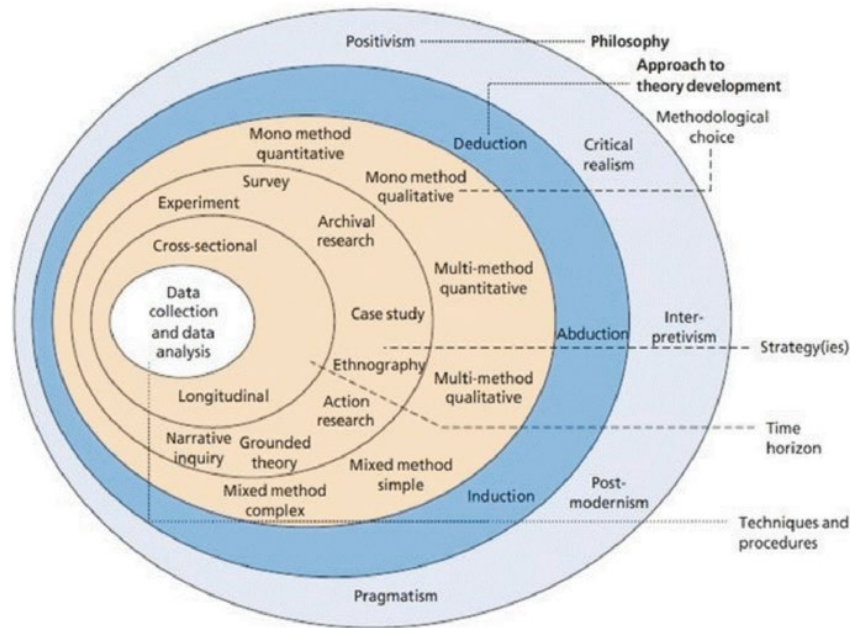
<b>Research Objective 1</b>	To understand which external factors serve as a stimulus and driver of consumption for Vape in the Irish Market of generation Z.
<b>Research Objective 2</b>	To access the consumer's habit in relation to the consumption of e-cigarettes, the ritual of consumption, frequency and social behaviour.
<b>Research Objective 3</b>	To analyse key perceptions about the vaping habit, its relationship with tobacco smoking and the consumer's understanding of health impacts.
<b>Research Objective 4</b>	Identify which factors influence consumption and consumer preferences, which can serve as a tool for the industry in its marketing plans.

**Table 1: Research Objectives**

### 3.3. PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to understand consumer behaviour in relation to the consumption of electronic cigarettes in Ireland, the motivators and characteristics of those who consume this category, and how they evaluate this consumption habit from different angles, serving as an analysis tool for the sector. Defining a methodological process for conducting a study contributes to the research, providing steps that must be evaluated in the process, thus avoiding errors in choosing the research method and others that may compromise the result of the study, Fisher (2007). In addition, the methodological research process brings to the researcher the need to understand and analyse philosophical issues and arguments about the research process (Collis and Hussey, 2009), guiding the researcher in a more analytical and in-depth way.

In carrying out this study, the author used as a theoretical basis for the conceptual development of research methodologies the model called “The research onion” developed by Mark Saunders. This model seeks to contribute to the research development process, which is not just about data collection per se, because according to Saunders et al. (2016) this step is the centre of the onion, but around it, there are important steps to be analysed and built to guarantee credibility of the work. Throughout this chapter, the author will describe and apply all stages of this research methodological process, as shown in the image below.



**Figure 5: The Research Onion Source: Saunders *et al.* (2016)**

The so-called “Research Onion” is composed of 6 layers, where each of them must be analysed, following a flow from the outside to the inside. Each of the steps that contributed to the development of this research project will be described below.

### 3.4. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

On the first layer of the research onion, is the Philosophy that applies to the object of study. When conducting research, the result is the development of new knowledge, Saunders et al. (2016), regardless of the level of relevance of this knowledge to society or business. Understanding the philosophy that applies to the study helps to understand how the research should be conducted, and brings insight and interpretation under the nature of the research and interpretation that the researcher brings to the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Going back a couple of centuries, until the end of the 19th century, research focused on understanding the physical world, things, matters and their interactions, with systematic methods, which resulted in predictions and data strongly anchored by science and rationality, (Collis and Hussey, 2009). It was followed by a philosophy - or paradigm as described by some authors-called positivist, with Comte (1798-1857) as one of the greatest theorists of this model, Fisher (2007). This philosophical understanding left no space for social phenomena, the analysis and understanding of the person, which came later with industrialization and capitalism, called

Interpretivism, with principles associated with idealism, developed by Kant (1724-1804) and later by other philosophers who sought to include the subjective, the human being and their interpretations of reality, Fisher (2007). In between these two extremes are a few more philosophies that will be discussed shortly. Initially, to be prepared to distinguish between different research philosophies, it is important to understand the philosophical assumptions that underpin research philosophies, which will be described below.

### **3.4.1. Philosophical assumptions: Ontology, epistemology and axiology**

The understanding of philosophical assumptions contributes to the research development process and the generation of new knowledge, so it is important to understand these different interpretations, called *Ontology*, *Epistemology* and *Axiology*. In this way, the researcher can understand its interpretations and evaluations of the world, and how he perceives reality from different perspectives.

The philosophical assumption that studies the nature of human beings and their own reality and structure is called *Ontology*, Rawnsley (1998). In this model, the researcher's assumptions, that is, how he/she sees reality, shape how research objects are seen and studied. The ontology shapes how the researcher sees the organization, and the market, and this determines the choice of what to research, Saunders et al. (2016). On the other hand, *Epistemology* is the study of knowledge that is acquired, valid, acceptable, concerned with answering how we know the truth for what we seek to understand, how we acquire this knowledge and justify it, disconnected from belief and presupposition, but at the evidence of the construction of that knowledge, Saunders et al. (2016). *Axiology*, on the other hand, refers to the role of values and ethics in the research process, and how this exercises an influence and drives the researcher's actions (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Every human being has their beliefs and values, and they direct from the very beginning the choice of research topic, the model that best fits their values and abilities, Saunders et al. (2016).

In an ontological view, social reality can be interpreted as unique and external to the researcher, or more subjectively as multiple realities, according to each person and context (Collis and Hussey, 2009). A more positivist approach under an epistemological analysis understands as valid only what is measurable and observable, while in a more subjective way all knowledge is constructed through beliefs and what the researcher understands as knowledge, and their interaction transforms it into fact or knowledge relevant, (Collis and Hussey, 2009). It can be built through observation, and knowledge and is less grounded in theory and evidence, (Bryman and

Bell, 2015). In the axiological view, under a positivist philosophy, it is understood only as an object to what is researched, and the interaction with the researcher has no influence. However, in a more interpretive way, the values and beliefs of the researcher are directly linked to the way they understand and interpret the most relevant information and facts according to their beliefs and bias. (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

### **3.4.2. Objectivism and Subjectivism**

Once we understood the philosophical assumptions of the research process, it is necessary to know how to distinguish them, and in this model, we have two extreme opposites: *Objectivism* and *Subjectivism*. In Objectivism, social reality is constructed from the outside in, external to the individual being. Social reality is unique and lived equally among all beings, without an individual application and understanding of the reality, Saunders et al. (2016). Unlike Subjectivism, where social reality is made up of the perceptions and actions of each individual, and each one has an interpretation of things in different ways, acting in different ways in the same situations. In Objectivism, rules, regulations and norms apply to everyone in the same way, and agents are understood as objects, where reality is seen objectively (Bryman and Bell, 2015), and in Subjectivism, individuals bring voice and understanding based on their experiences (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

### **3.4.3. The 5 main philosophies**

Following the process for better construction of a research methodology, we proceeded to discuss the definition of the main types of philosophy for the area of business and management. As can be seen in the “Research onion” diagram presented in section 1.3, the five major philosophies are *Positivism*, *Critical realism*, *Interpretivism*, *Postmodernism* and *Pragmatism*.

At one end of the philosophical approaches, we have *Positivism*, a basic model of research in scientific areas, which understands that the reality lived by the being is independent of him/her, and theories are discovered based on empirical research (Collis and Hussey, 2009). For Comte, one of the philosophers of this model, science and rational thought have the power to understand and manipulate the world, Fisher (2007) and reality is what is given, fact and not influenced by human interpretation, Saunders et al. (2016), with directly related cause and effect. In this model, the researcher assumes a neutral position, with facts and data analysed and scientifically justified

or through logical and demonstrable proof, usually quantitative and measurable (Collis and Hussey, 2009). A different view is addressed in the *Interpretivist* philosophy, which understands that human beings are different because they live different realities, and this means that society should not be standardized and follow the same molds because they do not apply to different individuals, Saunders et al. (2016). In this model, individuals interpret the world as they see them, with different interpretations of similar realities, Fisher (2007). For (Bryman and Bell, 2015), this model is empathetic about the understanding of human action and not with the forces that act on it. With this, organizations must look at society understanding that there are different groups of people, who experience different life situations, experiences and sensations. Thus, interpretivism is quite subjective and seeks to understand how different people live and experience a given situation, Saunders et al. (2016).

Among these very contrasting models, there are others such as *Critical Realism* - a model that characterizes reality through sensations at the moment we experience, but also through analysis and interpretation after the experience, interpreting the reasons for that, the underlying causes, context and history that led to that event, Saunders et al. (2016). It is understood in this model that reality may be at a deeper level than the one we experience in our daily lives, and that a deeper analysis is necessary for understanding, Fisher (2007). In this model, the researcher would understand that their sociocultural experiences could influence their interpretation of the world and the way they identify each situation, Saunders et al. (2016).

Another philosophical view is *Postmodernism*, where language has a great value, and the order of the social world is given through it. Any sense of order is provisional, what is considered right or true is collectively defined by the people and groups that lead society, Saunders et al. (2016). In this model there are no eternal values or truths, everything is constantly changing and evolving, Fisher (2007). And finally, in a *Pragmatic* philosophy, research should seek practical action for a problem that needs to be solved. The ultimate goal is for research to serve as a basis for action, Saunders et al. (2016). This model tends not to be fixed by a single research method but try to use the one that best suits the intention of advancing research and action towards what needs to be changed (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), seeking and understanding in the best way, to respond to the need, problem or object of study (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Given the philosophies presented, it is understood that *Interpretivism* is the one that most applies to this research that seeks to understand the interpretation of each individual in the face of consumption behaviour in relation to electronic cigarettes. This subjective analysis seeks to understand groups of people experiencing this consumption habit, and how they interpret and evaluate this moment, seeking to give value to what will be expressed by the participants. Due to the subjective nature of the topic, where each individual may have different motivations, desires



and values, a pragmatic approach becomes invalid for this research, as well as a positivist view, given the researcher's interest in understanding in depth the particularities of the researched group. In the same way, critical realism, despite getting a little closer to what the researcher seeks to analyse, is discarded because it seeks to move away from historical causes and rather to understand the present and current moment of the drivers of this consumption. Finally, postmodernism also does not apply to this research, as it seeks to understand the individual interpretation of a similar group in their vape consumption habits, without bringing a counterpoint or questioning what is established as a habit and mode of consumption for these individuals.

### 3.5. RESEARCH APPROACH

The development of research is related to a theoretical basis and its relationship with what is being evaluated (Bryman and Bell, 2015), thus being applied within the context of research. The way the researcher applies the theory, seeking to validate that theoretical concept, develop it or create a new theory, and the relationship with the data that will be collected through the research project are directly influenced by the approach that will be used, Saunders et al. (2016). With this, three approaches to the development of theory are analysed: The *Deductive approach*, *Inductive approach* and *Abductive approach*.

#### **3.5.1. Deductive versus Inductive or Abductive approach**

For what is sought to be analysed within this research, adopting an *Inductive approach* becomes more appropriate to respond to the objectives outlined since this approach allows the researcher to deepen more subjectively the human interactions with this consumption habit, which permits inferring the implications of research findings into the theory that motivated it (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Furthermore, this approach model allows the researcher to use the findings and observations to contribute to the theory, which becomes a research output. Individuals are different, with different desires and motivations, this approach will allow exploring behaviour, and identifying similar patterns and motivations, Saunders et al. (2016) that allow the construction of an understanding of these consumption drivers, normally directed through qualitative research.

In this way, a *Deductive approach* would eliminate the subjective richness of interaction and the construction of something that does not seek to be evidenced by previously developed theories (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In addition to being more rigid and not allowing alternative

explanations for the situation found, Saunders et al. (2016), this model is usually associated with quantitative research. Finally, an *Abductive* approach is also refuted, which, according to Saunders et al. (2016) would be the collection of data to explore a phenomenon or identify patterns to generate new or modified knowledge, developing hypotheses in relation to theoretical considerations. This knowledge would be confirmed or not through statistical inferences (Bryman and Bell, 2015) to validate or not these hypotheses, and later develop new theories guided by the data collected for testing through subsequent research.

### 3.6. RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy or research design is a blueprint for how data will be obtained to answer the research question, Saunders et al. (2016), detailing the procedures necessary to obtain the information necessary to solve the problem of that marketing research, Malhotra et. al. (2012). At this stage, it will be discussed how the data will be analysed and discussed, in addition to ethical considerations that become important to be evaluated and taken into account by the researcher. Within this process of understanding the research strategy, and following the “*Research onion*” model developed by Saunders, we reach the third layer of this onion, the *Method used for data collection*, which can be *Qualitative*, *Quantitative* or *Mixed methods*.

#### **3.6.1. Qualitative versus quantitative or mixed methods design.**

The first decision to be taken by the researcher at this point of the project is to define whether the best model to obtain the answers to the research question will be through qualitative or quantitative research, or whether both models will be used, Saunders et al. (2016). Initially, the researcher, given the short timeframe, refutes a survey using both methods due to the size of the survey, this model is suitable for larger surveys, which seek to bring qualitative insights from the participants, but also numerical evidence for the generation of knowledge. In this way, the researcher sought to evaluate, between the qualitative and quantitative models, which one is best suited to the object of this research.

In a simplistic and restricted way, a quantitative design statistically evaluates data, with restricted hypothesis testing against a previous theory (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Even more simplistically, Saunders et al. (2016) characterize quantitative research as the analysis and interpretation of numerical data. On the other hand, in qualitative research, the researcher seeks

to give meaning to a phenomenon by interpreting the participants' point of view and how each individual interprets lived experiences, (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This model is related to the analysis of non-numerical data, such as images and videos, to present detailed descriptions that cannot be measured in a quantifiable way, Malhotra et. al. (2012), seek to value people's experiences, motivations, attitudes and the way they interpret each situation, McGivern (2013). However, Saunders et al. (2016) indicates that the definition of research design, being qualitative or quantitative is related to the associations and philosophical assumptions, and also to the approach and strategies developed that best apply to answer the research question.

Qualitative method research is associated with the Interpretivist philosophy, according to Saunders et al. (2016), the researcher seeks through it, to make sense of subjective and socially constructed meanings about what is the object of study. Collecting information regarding a specific context and moment (Collis and Hussey, 2009), allows participants to express their point of view and for the researcher, to be able to interpret their behaviour to reach the necessary conclusions and analyses, Malhotra et. al. (2012). On the other hand, quantitative research is more closely linked to the positivist philosophy, as it usually applies data collection in a predetermined and highly structured way, using statistical and graphical techniques for the analysis and interpretation of this data, Saunders et al. (2016). It is a model that emphasizes the quantification of information, testing theories and making a relationship between theory and research, where social reality is usually seen as an external factor (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Given this, adopting a qualitative strategy is the most applied for this research, trying to understand the characteristics of the consumer giving meaning to the perceptions and actions of these consumers, and interpret the drivers of this consumption as a contribution to this area of knowledge.

### **3.6.2. Qualitative Data Primary Collection**

Understanding the best way to answer the question of this research that has an interpretivist paradigm, allows the researcher to understand the attitudes, feelings and perceptions of the participants, Malhotra et. al. (2012), we move on to the next layer of the “Research onion”, where we define the strategy adopted for data collection. In view of this, a case study will be carried out through *in-depth interviews*, an exploratory study model that seeks to understand and obtain insights on a particular topic, through open questions that allow the interviewee to give their vision and point of view to the researcher, Saunders et al. (2016). This model allows exploring a topic in-depth, usually addressed through open questions to participants, McGivern

(2013), in a direct, personal and individual way, based on conversation and interaction between interviewer and interviewee, Malhotra et. al. (2012).

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, this interview model is *Semi-structured*, as it relies on contributions to the process, and new data during the research can lead to a change in the order of the questions and the generation of an unexpected insight when researched, Saunders et al. (2016). This model starts from a previously established session but can be interspersed with questions that suit the nature of the interviewee, Malhotra et. al. (2012), allowing the researcher to include or omit some of the questions between interviews. This also gives the respondent greater freedom to vary on issues that may be more sensitive and relevant to them, Fisher (2007). This model makes it possible to deepen the “Why” of some questions, serving as an investigation for the interviewee to prepare a statement that may be important to provide greater clarity on that topic (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

However, this research model has some associated issues, which need to be considered by the researcher, seeking to minimize the risks to increase the reliability of the obtained content. Among the risks, interviewer bias is one of them, where the interviewer may, involuntarily, want to impose their own belief or understanding on the subject and influence the interviewee's answers, or also make gestures, or expressions in relation to the answers that can influence the behaviour of the interviewee, Saunders et al. (2016). There is also the interviewee bias, where the interviewee's perception of the interviewer can influence their answers, or also an event that occurred close to the interview can influence the interviewee (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Another issue that should be considered is the cultural difference between the interviewer and the research participants. Differences in language and culture can influence how each participant is open to talking about a topic, and how it is understood and interpreted by the interviewer, Saunders et al. (2016). The author of this research sought to prepare himself for possible issues in the process, especially concerning the cultural differences/countries of the participants, and also the language difference, where English is not the interviewer's mother tongue, seeking to ensure the greatest possible reliability to the insights that were generated by the research process.

### 3.7. POPULATION

Defining the sample used for a survey is an important step in the process, whether quantitative or qualitative. The main point that must be taken into account by the researcher is that the chosen population has to be able to answer the research question, translating the problem

definition into the understanding of who should or should not answer it, Malhotra et. al. (2012), avoiding bias and seeking the best possible precision in the selection, which available resources allow, McGivern (2013). Thus, at the time of formulating the research question, the population already begins to be established and limited.

A survey sample can follow *Probability Sampling* criteria, where it must be representative of a specific population or group of people, Saunders et al. (2016), randomly selected from the research base, specifically associated with possessing research, where the researcher does not influence the selection process McGivern (2013). On the other hand, there is a *Non-Probabilistic Sampling*, where the group of people who will participate in the study are chosen following a specific purpose that can provide more insights and important depths for the researcher, Saunders et al. (2016), or in the personal judgment of the interviewer Malhotra et. al. (2012). In this case, the person who will choose a participating sample can voluntary or not, choose specific elements that are understood to contribute to the object of study, McGivern (2013).

In this study, sampling was defined in a non-probabilistic way, using a methodology called *Purposive or judgmental sampling*, where the researcher judges the cases/people that will best answer the research question and objectives, Malhotra et. al. (2012). Also, the research question directs the researcher on which categories or groups of people should be purposefully sought for the study (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This type of sample applies to small studies, where the number of respondents is small, the cases are particularly informative, cannot be considered statistically representative, and do not allow the generalization of data to characterize the entire population, Malhotra et al. al. (2012).

The researcher interviewed 6 people, and according to Saunders et al. (2016), the sample size depends on the research objectives and question, and the researcher must ensure that the quantity is sufficient to identify sufficient answers for the topic, until no new information or new topics are added. For (Bryman and Bell, 2015), the breadth of the scope of the work and the need for comparisons between participants and different views will guide the ideal number of participants, but it also signals that as many people as necessary should be interviewed so that theoretical saturation is reached. In numerical terms, Saunders et al. (2016) suggest that in research like this, using in-depth interviews, a sample of 5-25 respondents may be sufficient, depending on the depth and need for comparisons that the researcher seeks to make.

For this study, all selected participants were regular or occasional e-cigarette/vape users, aged between 18-25 years, residing in Ireland. These were the prerequisites used by the researcher to establish the sample for the research, related to the question that this study seeks to answer. The interviews were conducted online, using Microsoft Teams software, which also allowed recording, so that they could be transcribed and analysed in depth. The participants were informed

and gave their consent to the recording of the content, but they are not identified by name in the analysis of the material to not expose the identity of any participant. The responsibility for the storage, transcription and collection of data rests entirely with the researcher.

### 3.8. ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA

Analyzing the qualitative data of research means that the researcher needs to give meaning to everything that was expressed by the participants, whether through words, gestures or images. This interpretivism philosophy of qualitative research allows the researcher to use this complexity and elasticity of information to make sense of and explore a subject in the most real way possible, Saunders et al. (2016). However, the interviewer's knowledge about a given subject can direct both what will be focused on in the research process, as well as the understanding of the relevance of each stage and its influence on the market reality understood by the researcher, Malhotra et. al. (2012).

Seeking to guarantee quality in the analysis of the data, and the interpretation of this mass of content and information, some methods to analyse this data are necessary. The main one is *Thematic Analysis*, which researches themes or patterns that will be coded by the interviewer for analysis and a better conclusion on each theme later, relating to the research objectives and question, Saunders et al. (2016). This is done through the definition of main themes, and patterns, integrating this large amount of data, notes, and recordings, to be able to define a grouping of data that contributes to the researcher drawing conclusions about that theme (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The interviews were recorded using the Microsoft Teams app, which also allows for the transcription of the speeches. These transcripts were read and monitored during the response analysis process, so that the researcher could, through the thematic analysis process, develop the main findings from the research.

### 3.9. ETHICAL ISSUES

Within research, ethics refers to the standards and behaviours that will guide the conduct of the researcher concerning the rights of those who are affected or become part of a research, Saunders et al. (2016). The American Marketing Association, The Marketing Research Association, ESOMAR - European Society and all other research entities have their codes of ethical conduct for conducting research. As cited by (Burns and Bush, 2006), the main areas

addressed in these codes of conduct are failure to obtain income or funds under the pretext of conducting research. Maintaining the integrity and not hiding pertinent data that could alter research insights; treating everyone involved fairly; ensuring data storage and non-external sharing of information, maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

For (Bryman and Bell, 2015) research ethics should take into account at least 4 main factors: If there is harm to participants; a lack of informed consent; any kind of invasion of privacy and any deception involved. Malhotra et. al. (2012) indicate that the researcher must commit to not harming the reputation of marketing research, taking care when using minority groups and children, having the voluntary contribution of the participants and respecting them.

Before starting this work, the researcher informed all the details and purpose of the research through the ethics review form provided by the National College of Ireland, which also contributes with guidelines regarding the standards of ethical conduct that must be followed by the university's students. Knowing this in advance allowed the researcher to conduct his research ethically, acting transparently with the participants without breaking any rules of conduct or lacking ethics about the subjects involved in the entire process. In addition, the researcher carefully paid attention to plagiarism, referencing all books, articles and other materials that contributed to the construction of this material.

### 3.10. LIMITATIONS TO RESEARCH

This research was conducted with 6 participants, which was enough to understand most of the research objectives. However, it is natural to understand that it cannot be fully conclusive due to the small sample and possible bias of the interviewer. A longer survey in terms of time and resources, applying an associated quantitative survey, and increasing the sample and profile of respondents could contribute to a broader view of this consumer. In addition, the fact that English is not the language of the interviewer made it more difficult to carry out the research, both in terms of the literature review and the interviews, given that some details may be lost in the process of translation and understanding by the researcher. However, this limitation was observed, and great care was taken, seeking to reduce as much as possible any impact on this research work.

## CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

The e-cigarette market is relatively new around the world, launched less than 20 years ago – a much more recent story than society's relationship with tobacco consumption, Marketline (2012). Given this, consumer behaviour and society's understanding of this category are still under development. With this, it becomes important to understand how this category is inserted into the market, and how the consumer is evaluating and being impacted by it. Therefore, throughout this next chapter, the author seeks to present the main findings obtained through 6 in-depth interviews carried out with vape consumers in Ireland, in addition to its relation to the literature. The main purpose of this research was to obtain relevant insights regarding the “*Key consumption drivers of vape in the Irish Market of the generation Z – consumers aged 18 to 25*”. This broader objective had some sub-objectives used to direct the structure and main purposes, which were described in chapter 3.2. Additionally, the author discusses the main findings of this research, and the relationship with the current literature on the topic.

### 4.2. GENERAL PARAMETERS AND CONTEXT

Initially, it is necessary to understand some general characteristics of the research participants. The purpose of this initial part is to give the interviewer some general parameters of the interviewees, seeking to relate these characteristics with the perceptions of each interviewed participant about their consumption characteristics. These main established parameters are described below, and how the participants characterize themselves with this product.

#### **4.2.1. Profile and consumption characteristics of respondents**

As defined in the research question for this work, the focus was on understanding the habits and characteristics of e-cigarette consumption by young people of generation Z in Ireland, aged between 18 and 25 years old. Among the interview participants, the oldest was 25 years old and the youngest participant was 19 years old. All research participants are students, some taking English courses, others attending college or masters. Likewise, everyone is also working on full



or part-time activities. Regarding nationality, half of the participants are Irish, and the other half are from other nationalities, living in Ireland to study and/or work.

Seeking to understand the profile of electronic cigarette consumption, all interview participants are users of this category, and the researcher needs to understand how they consider themselves to the frequency of consumption: regular or occasional. This characteristic allows the researcher to understand and deepen the characteristics and knowledge of each interviewee, as a regular consumer buys more frequently, and has a greater attachment to and knowledge of brands and prices, while an occasional consumer may be more superficial concerning their knowledge about the product. As such, half of the respondents consider themselves regular vape users, and the other half consider themselves occasional vape users. It became quite clear during the interviews that moments of socialization in bars, parties, and friends' reunions are strong influences for the first experimentation and use in an occasional or regular format.

Another important factor in understanding the interviewees is their relationship with the use of cigarettes. All respondents use or have used cigarettes, either occasionally or regularly – most only occasionally, on social moments. It called the attention of the researcher that a large part of the interviewees stopped using cigarettes after starting to use vape. *“I used to smoke when I used to drink alcohol when I used to go night out, and I won't smoke normally, just like a social smoker. So then I stopped doing that and vaped instead on nights out” (IV 5).*

This initial base of understanding allowed the researcher to move on to questions that delve a little deeper into consumption habits, preferences, drivers and reasons to use this category of product, and move to answer the objectives of the research.

#### **4.2.2.Objective 1: To understand which external factors serve as a stimulus and driver of consumption for vape in the Irish market of generation Z.**

The first objective of this research seeks to understand the main stimuli for the use of this product, how consumers feel, and how external, social or group belonging factors become apparent and direct in the investigation process, which can make some relation to the sociological model of consumer behaviour.

#### **4.2.2.1. Vape consumption – Reasons, feelings and experiences**

As presented in the literature review, the electronic cigarette is a very new product, and the experiences lived by the researcher living and working in the consumer goods sector in Dublin, indicate that this consumption has become increasingly constant among young people, as is also evidenced in journals, articles and research Smith, S. (2022). That's why understanding user feelings, reasons for use and experiences is important to characterize this market and obtain relevant insights that can be used by the industry in the sector.

The reasons for starting consumption are varied, however, friends are the main influencers for the first experimentation, usually on social occasions, where one or more friends are using it. The most salient reasons indicated by the interviewees were the taste. *“The flavours fascinated me that there are many flavours. So I got attracted to it, like in cigarettes, there is no flavour and normal cigarettes like it's only tobacco but here you get to try different types of flavours. And so was the factors like, which then attracted me to its wave, and started using it”, (IV 1)*. The realization that the vast majority of friends are also vape users also becomes a driver of experimentation. *“Probably just because a lot of people were doing it. And they're just easy to access as well, I suppose” (IV 2)*.

In addition, being an alternative to cigarettes was also signalled by some interviewees, seeing it as both a health benefit and a better feeling in its use in relation to cigarette consumption. *“I use it to stop smoking because I wanted to stop smoking on nights out because I used it to wake up feeling sick, and it's obviously not good for you or whatever” (IV 5)*.

When asked about their feelings when using the product and what does it says about self-image, some of the interviewees signalled that the sensation of nicotine delivery makes them feel good, calm down and relax, whether through a smoke break at the work or after a stressful day. *“I don't feel great using it because I know it's not good for me and you. But it calms me down, and my job is very stressful, so that's why I do this”. (IV 3)*.

When trying to understand the main reasons for being e-cigarette users, the most flagged factors were good taste and different flavours, the sensation and delivery of the nicotine, being a tool to socialize and follow a trend and also used to stop smoking. Some statements below:

*“I just think it calms me down like it's just a moment that I have to breathe”.(IV 3)*

*“Probably just because it's like a thing at the moment. I'd say like I won't always do it, I think.” (IV 2)*

This category is presenting some very attractive factors to this audience, and some of these main characteristics became quite evident. The flavour is a great attraction and its great variety, which makes this differential from the cigarette. In addition, it is perceived that there is a need for young people to follow trends, being influenced by the environment and the groups they attend, and this influences their buying behaviour, Neostrom (2021). Even though no interviewee has clearly said that they do not consume this product because others consume it, all of them started consumption through the influence of friends. This demonstrates the power that peers, reference groups and society have with the consumption of individuals, Kumar (2014), a feature of the sociological model of consumer behaviour.

#### ***4.2.2.2. Friends and the consumption***

During the interviews, it was possible to understand that friends are an important factor of influence for the beginning of the consumption habit. In this way, we sought to understand the penetration of this consumption habit in the group of friends to which the interview participants belong. Through this question, it can be seen that this product is highly present in the consumption habits of these young people, with the vast majority of respondents indicating that more than half of their friends vape regularly or occasionally. *“Definitely most of my friends are using vape” (IV 6). “A few do always and most uses occasionally” (IV 2).*

Although the interviewees did not voluntarily declare that the use of this product is influenced by peers, friends or to follow a trend, it was noticed that all interviewees began to consume the product through friends. It was consumed in social situations, parties, bars, among others, demonstrating the important factor of socialization tool that the product plays. *“I think a lot of people smoke vapes because they look very aesthetic like they're pleasing to look at. Umm. And they are, like, more attractive to people than cigarettes” (IV 2).* Another interviewee gives a similar declaration. *“I just smoked sometimes, you know.. I think it would be people just jumping on the trend because everybody is doing. So, everybody vapes, so I think that's why people wanna deal with” (IV 6).*

It is clear from this that this product is a trend and almost a social norm among young people. This can be seen on the street, at points of sale of these products, when meeting groups of people in bars, on the street or in front of universities, where the vast majority of groups of young people are consuming this product, demonstrating how the environment has a factor of great influence on consumer buying behaviour, Blythe (2008).

#### **4.2.3. Objective 2: To access the consumer's habit in relation to the consumption of electronic cigarettes, the ritual of consumption, frequency and social behaviour.**

The second objective defined for this research is to understand the consumer's habits, how they consume, their preferences and forms of consumption. For this, a series of questions were asked to understand this step of the research.

##### ***4.2.3.1. The consumption habit***

The moments of consumption of this product are quite driven by the social environment, being with friends, parties, and associated with alcohol consumption. A difference can also be seen between occasional consumers and regular smokers of the category. As an example, an occasional smoker more strongly signals use as a form of social interaction. *"I would say that I'm trying to be more sociable than I am"* (IV 4), and this same occasional consumer demonstrates having a lesser acquaintance with the category.

The product is also used for moments of relaxation and as a kind of escape, whether as a break at work, seeking to reduce the level of stress or a break from the exhausting routine of work or studies. *"Normally on my break at my English school and my break at work. So it's normally when I'm stressed, like if I'm at home, sometimes I don't smoke it"* (IV 3). Only one of the interviewees signalled the use of vape as a very clear addiction and need to have and consume constantly. *"So if I'm in work, I'll vape like I'll go and go for a smoke break. And then once I'm home, I'll just use it all the time, every hour. If I am not sleeping, like all the time, the whole day. I don't put it down!"* (IV 6).

It was evident that this product is widely used in moments of socialization, very similar to the use of cigarettes, but in a more palatable way, with attractions such as flavours and aromas. It also doesn't have the social barriers of cigarette consumption, and its impacts such as smell on clothes, and hands, and still without many restrictions as to the places where the product can be consumed. Likewise, users consume the product during commuting, breaks at work and studying

#### **4.2.4. Objective 3: To analyse key perceptions about the vaping habit, its relationship with tobacco smoking and the consumer's understanding of health impacts.**

Tobacco consumption, as mentioned in the literature review, is millenary, used in different ways and for different purposes by society, Henningfield et al. (2009). With the evolution of science and medicine, the impacts of the consumption of tobacco products became increasingly evident, and today the consequences on health are widely publicized and known by the population. However, electronic cigarettes are more recent, and still do not have such clear and exposed evidence for the population about their benefits or harm to health. Therefore, understanding consumers' perception of the health impacts of their consumption, and also the perception of this category as a healthier alternative for nicotine delivery, becomes fundamental for this study.

##### ***4.2.4.1. Knowledge on health impacts and vape as a healthier alternative***

Initially, the researcher sought to understand the knowledge of the interviewees regarding the health impacts of both vape and cigarette consumption. All the interviewees indicate that they are aware of the health impacts related to cigarette consumption, and this is certainly due to the extensive anti-smoking campaigns that have been taking place for years in our society, seeking to raise awareness of the health impacts derived from cigarette consumption. An example of this understanding is the short sentence of an interviewee, when asked about the knowledge of the impacts of cigarette consumption *“Yes, I know, it’s terrible” (IV 3)*. Problems such as lung cancer, skin cancer and asthma are examples of diseases caused by cigarette consumption as reported by the interviewees.

A better understanding was sought beyond the health point of view, but also to understand the perception of respondents regarding the image of a cigarette smoker versus a vape user. The perception of respondents is that the cigarette user is a little older, less health conscious, smells like cigarettes and has a face, skin and voice that are often associated with smokers. Regarding electronic cigarette consumers, they understand that most are younger, that they follow a trend, and that even using a product that can be harmful, they understand this habit as healthier than cigarette consumption. *“I feel like they are a little old fashioned, and vapes are very trending right now, especially in youth generation” (IV 1)*. Another interviewee also gives his statement on the subject: *“If you smoke a cigarette, you smell like a cigarette. And if you smoke vape you*

*don't smell like anything. But the taste of the cigarette is very different and it's not very good” (IV 3).*

When looking for a deeper understanding of the possible impacts of consuming electronic cigarettes, it became clear to the researcher that the level of knowledge, both of the risks and the benefits, is very low. Respondents sought to signal that they knew it was not good for them, however, they were unable to bring evidence or information on the subject. *“I personally don't know the exact effects of this vape consumption because it is very new to me”.* (IV 1).

The participants also brought some vague information on the topic. *“Yeah, I know that one vape is equivalent to four cigarettes and that it can put make like balls in your lungs like popcorn. I heard it too”* (IV 2), or as brought by another participant. *“Well, in some articles I've seen that it is even more dangerous than cigarettes”* (IV 4).

With this, related to the perceptions of risks associated with vape consumption, it was clear that users do not have extensive knowledge about risks/benefits, but there is a perception of being healthier than cigarettes and low knowledge about the risks. As this product has been available on the market for much less time than traditional cigarettes, research is still not widely disseminated for society to have knowledge about it. *“People don't know what the effects will be in, you know, like in 30 years what the effect will be because vaping is only like 10 years, 15 years old”* (IV 6).

Finally, the researcher sought to understand users' knowledge about vape as a healthier alternative for cigarette consumers. Knowledge about this is also superficial, but it was clear that the majority of respondents who smoked cigarettes switched to vape. However, only one participant made clear the change for health reasons *“Yes. I changed because I think it's healthier”* (IV 5). The others migrated for other reasons, but none of them clearly signalled the change for health reasons, and it was clear that this understanding is not fully widespread among consumers. *“Yes, I heard, and I just I don't know...like the information isn't accessible like nobody really knows the science behind vaping. And in terms of... like, everybody knows, smoking is terrible for you and nobody knows for sure what the effects will be in a long period of time”* (IV 6).

E-cigarettes are flagged by companies as a product with potential risk reduction when compared to traditional cigarettes (Evans and Hickey, 2020). This potential reduction is not widely known by consumers, either due to the short time since its launch and the small amount of research that validates this theory or not or due to the very little disclosure to consumers. With this, migration of consumption from cigarettes to vape can be perceived, mainly by occasional smokers. However, it is motivated by reasons other than the search for a healthier solution to nicotine delivery.

#### **4.2.5.Objective 4: Identify which factors influence consumption and consumer preferences, which can serve as a tool for the industry in its marketing plans.**

Finally, the last objective of this research was to identify consumer preferences about available products, prices, and models, among others. The investigation of these factors serves to define the consumer with their consumption preferences that can serve as characterizing factors for industries to reach their target audience.

##### ***4.2.5.1. Consumer preferences***

Currently, on the Irish market, the most highly distributed and present products are the disposable and rechargeable models, with liquids/essences ready for use by the user. There are also liquids that the user can mix and “create” their essence, but throughout the interview, these models did not appear to be used by the participants. The predominant model and accepted by 100% of the participants was the disposable, as it is understood that they are easier to use, it does not need any prior preparation, or battery charging, among other reasons that make the simplicity of this model an important and valued by the user. *“It's really just kind of convenient that you don't have to fill it up. You don't have to press buttons, just suck on it and you get what you need” (IV 6)*. In addition, disposable models are the ones with the greatest variety of flavours – a very attractive factor that was valued by consumers throughout the interview. *“it tastes amazing” (IV 6)*. *“The flavours fascinated me that there are many flavours. So I got attracted in cigarettes to it, like in cigarettes, there are no flavor normal cigarettes like it's only tobacco but here you get to try different types of flavours” (IV 1)*.

Currently, the most known brand mentioned by 100% of respondents is the Elfbar brand, a disposable model that costs between 8 and 10 euros in most places. Following this brand, others such as IVG, Hale, Vuse and Logic were mentioned in order of greater appearance throughout the interviews. All users use the Elfbar brand, signalled by some as the cheapest brand that they find more easily. Only one user has a rechargeable product, but he/she doesn't use it very often.

The purchase locations for these users are usually close to their homes, at the local newsagent, without any mention of online purchase or in specialized shops of this category. Regarding the price, they understand that it is an affordable price when they talk about disposables – normally between 8-10 euros. *“If you compare to cigarettes, it's cheap and for me the last more time” (IV 3)*. An interesting factor reported by a user is that due to the practicality of vape consumption – you do not need a lighter, or an ashtray, and you can also consume with greater

freedom, even indoors. With this, this interviewee indicates that this makes him consume more than if he used traditional cigarettes. *"...with the vape, just use it and use it and use it and use it and use it. Don't stop using it, so it probably costs more". (IV 6).*

Finally, the researcher sought to understand from the interviewees what the most attractive factors in the use of this category are for them. The vast majority of respondents indicated that the taste is very good, and the wide variety of flavours. As a result, electronic cigarettes provide users with something that traditional cigarettes do not, which is a pleasant taste in the mouth during and after consumption. *"I tried a lot of flavours and this one (showing one in its hand) is my favourite so, I like the taste. I really like the taste of it" (IV 3).* In addition, the convenience of its use and the ease of purchasing the product was also a factor reported by the interviewees. *"I think they are just easy to use and...I know they are bad for you, but not as bad for you as other things and...Yeah, just easy accessible" (IV 2).*

It was understood from the statements of the interviewees at the end of this session, that disposable models are the preferred ones, with a cost perception that is fair because they make an association of being cheaper than the traditional cigarette. In addition, the diversity of flavours and the feeling of consuming a pleasantly palatable product are important, in addition to the great convenience and ease of use are determining factors for this category. The Elfbar is the most consumed brand, and even the garbage generated in the streets, where the products of this brand are easily found on the ground, is evidence of it. It has great exposure on social networks, where it is even used in the composition of the outfit, varying the device colour following the clothing colour, Smith, S. (2022). These consumption preferences are important findings for recommendations to this industry.



## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1. OVERVIEW

The author of this study carried out a literary review on the topic of consumer behaviour, seeking to understand and apply the broad knowledge of this area of study and its relationship with the object of this work. In-depth interviews were carried out to answer the objectives of this research with vape users. The data collected indicate that the category is growing in the market, having some important drivers of consumption and attractiveness for young consumers in Ireland, such as taste, practicality, and availability, among others. In addition, it can be seen through the literature that this category can be an alternative for cigarette users, delivering fewer health risks, however, this alternative is little known among users. The consumption of this product is very driven by friends and the need to belong to the group and also to follow an established trend. Below, the main conclusions and recommendations obtained during this research work are categorized.

### 5.2. DRIVERS OF VAPE CONSUMPTION

Vape consumption is rising, Smith, S. (2022), and some of the main drivers of vape consumption stand out. Initially, it was noticed that most users of the category are influenced by the environment that they are inserted in and that influences their behaviour as a consumer, Blythe (2008) demonstrates the need to be part of and be influenced by reference groups and friends, Neostrom (2021). This consumer behaviour resembles and justifies the Sociological Model of consumer behaviour presented in the literature review. This social influence is evident when all the interviewees started using it under the influence of friends, in addition to using the product in moments of socialization and consumption when in groups of friends.

Furthermore, vaping does not have the social barriers that cigarette smoking presents. As a result, its consumption is seen as something cool, which is present in the daily life of young people, without a negative image association. The category features a wide variety of flavours – strongly signalled as something appreciated by users, in addition to a wide variety of models and colours, making it aesthetically cool for the image of the young person in their relationships.

### 5.3. HEALTH ISSUES - KNOWLEDGE OF IMPACTS OF VAPE CONSUMPTION

Through the interviews, it can be seen that most of the respondents have little knowledge about the impacts and/or benefits of vaping. They understand that it probably doesn't do them any good, but the knowledge is superficial and doesn't bring concern at that moment. However, what can be seen through the literature review and the actions of some countries in relation to encouraging the use of this product as a form of harm reduction, is that there is a potential benefit in its use.

When evaluating from the point of view of health impacts, it is understood that the ideal scenario is that new users do not enter any category of products that is harmful to the user's health. However, this category is hitting young people hard, and the available products must be regulated and tested to ensure the least possible negative effect for users. In addition, looking from a public health perspective, understanding that this consumption brings health risks, even if smaller than cigarettes, imposing some greater restrictions on the category can be an alternative and recommendation for regulatory bodies. The wide variety of flavours and its relationship with “childish” flavours makes it an attractive factor for use, so limiting the flavours of these vaporizers can be an alternative, which on the other hand would be a great loss for the industry.

Finally, the researcher understands that the use of vape can be an alternative in reducing the impacts on current cigarette consumers, and it is on this target market that the category should focus on in an ethically responsible way, even understanding that this brings a reduction in the potential gain. In addition, knowledge about this alternative must be increased for the population, giving greater access to knowledge and treating this alternative more comprehensively, imposing some restrictions on this large consumption among young people, but on the other hand, expanding the scope of this category to the other audiences.

### 5.4. CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND INDUSTRY RECOMMENDATION

When evaluating the main preferences of this consumer, a few characteristics became evident:

- **Flavors:** It is a great attraction and highly valued. Young people try different flavours and exchange devices with each other to increase experimentation.
- **Disposable device:** Users prefer disposable vapes, as they are practical and convenient for the user. In addition, it gives them the freedom to vary between colours and styles.

- **Price:** For the preferred models – disposable, it is positioned properly, and understood as a fair price by users.
- **Availability:** Easy to find in different places makes consumption even more convenient for the user and a strong point for the industry.

### **Recommendations for the industry**

Throughout the interviews and the review of the topic in articles and newspapers, it can be seen that this category has great potential, however, given the sensitivity of the topic, this category needs to be prepared for possible new regulations seeking to limit its use. In this way, it is understood that companies that are using a very strong appeal to young people are negatively affecting the category in the long term, because by making this product very associated with young people, it can arouse the attention of health agencies to impose restrictions, and this must be taken into account in their marketing strategies.

A second recommendation is for the big players in the cigarette category, who only have rechargeable devices. These companies need to launch disposable devices, as it is the consumer's great preference and they are losing an opportunity for consumer loyalty to the category because they have an established reputation in the market, but they are losing space to new players in the market.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Due to limitations of time and resources, this research was carried out only through qualitative interviews. However, it is understood that carrying out a qualitative study associated with quantitative research could cover a greater number of users, delivering relevant insights not covered in this research. Understanding the penetration of this category in the market, deepening issues related to health, risks/benefits understood by users and understanding opportunities in the way of communicating this category and its benefits to the consumer are important topics that can be looked at in more depth in the future.

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## APPENDIX 1 – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. **To start, I would like to ask you some questions about you and your characteristics**
  - 1.1. Can you tell me your age?
  - 1.2. What's your profession/occupation?
  - 1.3. Where are you from?
  - 1.4. Have you been a user of any type of electronic cigarette/vape?
  - 1.5. For how long have you been using vape?
  - 1.6. Are you or have you ever been a cigarette consumer in a regular or occasional way?
    - 1.6.1. If yes, do you smoke a cigarette before, during, or after starting to use an electronic cigarette?
    - 1.6.2. For how long have you been smoking cigarettes?
2. **OBJECTIVE 1: To understand which external factors serve as a stimulus and driver of consumption for Vape in the Irish Market of generation Z.**
  - 2.1. How do you describe the reasons to start using vape?
  - 2.2. Tell me about your first experience using a vape. Why did you use it the first time? Where was it? Alone or with friends?
  - 2.3. What is your feeling when are you using vape? What does it say about your self-image?
  - 2.4. In relation to your group of friends, how would you describe vape penetration? Few of them use or do the vast majority use?
  - 2.5. If you need to describe the main reasons for being a vape user, what would they?
3. **OBJECTIVE 2: To access the consumer's habit about the consumption of electronic cigarettes, the ritual of consumption, frequency and social behaviour.**
  - 3.1. Do you consider yourself a regular or occasional consumer of vape?
  - 3.2. Where and in which moments do you usually consume vape?
  - 3.3. What type of electronic cigarettes do you prefer most? Rechargeable, disposable, or another type? And why?
4. **OBJECTIVE 3: To analyse key perceptions about vaping, its relationship with tobacco smoking and the consumer's understanding of health impacts.**
  - 4.1. How do you describe the image of a person who uses vape, and how do you compare it with the person who uses cigarettes?
  - 4.2. Are you aware of any kind of health impacts of the habit on tobacco/cigarette consumption?
  - 4.3. Regarding vape consumption, what is your opinion and knowledge regarding the possible health impacts of its consumption?
  - 4.4. Do you have an understanding about vape being a healthier alternative to stopping smoking? What is your knowledge and opinion about this?
5. **OBJECTIVE 4: To identify which factors influence consumption and consumer preferences, which can serve as a tool for the industry in its marketing plans.**
  - 5.1. Which brands of vape do you know?
  - 5.2. Which brand do you usually use?
  - 5.3. Where do you usually buy your vapes?
  - 5.4. What is your perception of the price of electronic cigarettes in Ireland?
  - 5.5. What most attracts you to vaping?