

The Customer Journey of Electric Vehicles in The South Korean Market

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Abstract

The customer journey is a complex phenomenon which consists of numerous touch points. The customer journey is not only constructed through touch points but also by the level of involvement that the journey is characterized by. Thus, the customer journey could be designed and characterized by different touch points depending on the level of involvement but also the specific market. This research aims to discover the design of the customer journey and its integrated touch points of electric vehicles in the South Korean market. The study is built upon the chronological steps; pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase in order to derive the outline of the customer journey. In order to fulfill the aim, a qualitative research strategy was chosen. Semi-structured interviews with experts on the South Korean market and experience from the automotive industry were conducted. Furthermore, in order to strengthen and increase the reliability of the interviews an additional survey was conducted with customers operating in the South Korean market.

The main findings suggest that the customer journey cannot be considered to have a consistent shape, rather it can be viewed from different perspectives. Thus, in some instances it can be viewed as linear considering the purchasing process consisting of the phases pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. However, it could also be viewed as circular due to the loyalty loop and retention aspects of the customer journey and lastly it can be viewed as a maze where consumers take different paths towards the same destination or could decide to abandon the journey. Furthermore, the most prominent activities in the pre-purchase phase are information search, Word of Mouth and reviews where the most important touch points are Naver, Google, Kakao and the physical meeting with a car-retailer. In the purchase phase, payment and delivery showed to be the most important activities. These would rather be carried out in a physical setting, putting emphasis on the physical meeting as the most prominent touchpoint. However, if the purchases are performed online, the company website showed to be of significance and thus an additional important touchpoint. In the post-purchase phase the touch points related to loyalty, reviews and service were most prominent. The specific touch points were loyalty programs, physical meeting in after-services and reviews on Naver Café, Naver blogs as well as pre-designed review forms. An additional finding that should be highlighted is that online touch points are more related to the pre-purchase and post-purchase phase, however the physical element still permeates the entire customer journey.

Keywords: Electric Vehicles, Customer Journey, South Korea, Touch Points

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1. Introduction

The introduction chapter presents the chosen field of research for the study. The chapter starts with an explanation of the background and problem discussion. Secondly, the purpose is presented together with the research questions.

1.1 Background

In today's society, digitalization has become a huge part of our everyday lives and the usage of the internet has increased rapidly (Hagberg, Sundström & Egels-Zandén, 2016). The increase in the usage of digital platforms have affected the way customers search for information and proceed in their decision-making process (Miklosik, 2015). Customers now interact with brands in new ways with multiple different digital channels and almost infinite touch points, which according to Plananska (2020) can be described as any form of interaction between a customer and a brand. Hence, customer experiences have become more social in nature which has resulted in more complex customer journeys. With a higher importance of and easy access to Word of Mouth (henceforth WoM) and increased interaction between customers, companies have to a large extent lost control of the customer journey and its associated touch points. Thus, it is more difficult for companies to create, manage and control each customer's experience and purchase journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). To understand customers' behavior and ways of getting through the customer journey, companies have therefore begun to use customer journey mapping as a way to analyze, understand and influence the touch points that the customer encounters (Rosenbaum, Losada Otalora & Contreras Ramírez, 2017). The customer journey is not only differentiated through what kind of touch points it consists of but also by the level of involvement that the customer feels towards the purchase (Niemand, Kraus, Mather & Cuenca-Ballester, 2020). High involvement purchases are characterized as demanding more effort and typically include longer decision-making processes (Niemand et al. 2020). Purchasing a car could therefore be defined as a high-involvement purchase (Fauser, Wiedenhofer & Lorenz, 2011). The level of involvement a consumer feels towards a product is dependent on several different aspects such as uniqueness, personalization and price risk etc. (Charles, 1998).

South Korea (henceforth SK), has been identified as being in the front of innovation and technology (Kumar, 2019). Additionally, SK is acknowledged as the "*most wired country in the world*", since the country has the highest use of broadband penetration as well as use of information technology (Park & Mcmillan, 2015; Daekyung & Johnson, 2009). Around 75% of the population in the country has access to high-speed internet. Online information is also valued as highly credible in SK. (Daekyung & Johnson, 2009). Hence, these factors contribute to a reformation of the customer journey. Considering that SK is a highly technological country and in front of innovation, the interest in electric vehicles (henceforth EVs) is increasing. In line with the global environmental trends, the competition on the EV market in SK has become increasingly fierce as several local and foreign car brands launch new electric cars with help

from governmental support (Ji-Hye, 2018). Additionally, the government in SK has declared plans for encouraging EVs as a means of transportation which is made through subsidies for EV purchases as well as extension of charging infrastructure (Lim, Kim & Lee, 2020). Singh (2020) states that it is calculated that nearly 825 000 new vehicles globally were sold online in 2019. Consequently, companies within the automotive industry have more and more shifted to selling their cars online (Singh, 2020). For example, Volvo Cars has declared that they will focus on selling more EVs online in order to reduce the purchase complexity. Hence, making the purchase a more convenient and simplified process. However, while the EVs will be sold online, the dealership will be a decisive factor within the customer experience (Horswill, 2021).

1.2 Problem Discussion

The digital landscape and social media have dramatically affected the way customers interact with brands. Rather than being passive recipients, modern customers actively interact and co-create brand meaning through several digital channels, not least social media (Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse, Friege, Gensler, Lobschat & Rangaswamy, 2010). As the purchasing decisions we make largely depend on our access to information (Holland, Karimi & Papamichail, 2014) as well as the trustworthiness of information, not least regarding more expensive purchases such as cars (Hafner, Walker & Verplanken, 2017), the media landscape and the way we receive information play a major role (Woo, Ahn, Lee & Koo 2015). In the pre-digitalized era, company-controlled advertising was dominating. However today, consumer related media such as social media activities, reviews and WoM represent a big part of brand information and content (Klein, Zhang, Falk, Aspara & Luo, 2020). Payne, Peltier and Barger (2017) argue that five forces of change exist, which are; science and technology, proliferation of media landscapes, empowered and skeptical consumers, a turbulent and hyper connected world and new business models. These changes have led to the increased importance of understanding the customer journey and the valuable integrated touch points (Payne et al. 2017).

Several prior studies and models related to the customer journey that have been constructed, are developed before the digital era (Howard & Sheth, 1969; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; De Haan, Wiesel & Pauwels 2016; Li & Kannan 2014), but with new digital services and operations, redesigning the customer journey is necessary. Traditionally, the customer journey, thus the process of making purchases, has been described as a funnel. In other words, it is viewed as a series of continuous and linear processes (Chung & Jung, 2018). However, as the digital channels have emerged and the customer has gained more control, there is a need for being more critical to the linear customer journey. Two thirds of the customer purchasing decisions are said to be affected by what the consumer experiences throughout the customer journey (Chung & Jung, 2018). Thus, there is a need for understanding the customer journey from a non-linear perspective. However, a number of prior studies have examined the customer journey after the digital transformation (Scott, Scott, Stokes, Moore, Smith, Rowland & Ward, 2017; Court, Elzinga, Mulder & Vetvik, 2009). These studies have investigated the outline of the customer journey in a non-linear fashion and instead suggested circular customer journeys. Furthermore, Scott et al. (2017) studied this phenomenon within the travel and tourism industry. It could be argued that the customer journey differs between different industries,

considering that the touch points are not the same depending on the product or service (Rosenbaum et al. 2017) . Thus, there is a need for understanding the customer journey throughout different industries and its associated touch points. Hogan, Almquist and Glynn (2005) argue that the automotive industry is characterized by traditional manufacturers, but even these industries are now realizing there is a customer relationship continuum, before, during and after a purchase. Furthermore, the emergence of eCommerce channels within the automotive industry has shifted elements of the customer journey into the digital sphere. However, in contrast to offline purchases, the possibility of purchasing cars online has created a more complex customer journey. Purchasing cars involves large investments and thus requires a lot of thought, research, comparison and discussion (Küster, Baum, Shin, Müller-Ost, Wittig & Scheibe, 2019).

Previous research has investigated the external and environmental factors that affect the purchasing process of EVs. These factors mostly relate to the options of charging stations (Hardman, Jenn, Tal, Aksen, Beard, Daina, Figenbaum, Jakobsson, Jochem, Kinnear, Plötz, Pontes, Refa, Sprei, Turrentine & Witkamp, 2018; Yu, Yang, Zhang, Wang & Miao, 2018), EV subsidies (Lin & Wu, 2018), charging costs (Zhang, Bai & Shang, 2018) and factors related to lifestyles and habits (Axen et al. 2015). Ma, Fan, Guo, Xu & Zhu (2019) studied consumers online behavioral data to examine consumers preferences for EVs in China. They found that the most important factors influencing EV purchases were prices, performance parameters and aesthetics rather than EV brands and services. Furthermore, Plananska (2020) studied the purchasing process and touch points related to EVs in the Swiss market. The findings concluded that the most prominent factors for purchasing an EV were the car retailer and the energy label as well as the touch points of online car configurator, brand website and objective online and offline media. Most of the previous research has thereby focused on the factors influencing consumer purchase intentions of EV, emphasizing touch points that are out of the customer's direct control. However, Plananska (2020) has more focus on touch points related to EV purchases limited to the Swiss market. Arguably, in order to contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon it is necessary to study other countries with different market shares of EVs. As previously described the SK government has declared plans for encouraging EVs as means of transport (Lim et al., 2020), as well as being a highly technological country and in front of innovation (Ji-Hye, 2018), resulting in SK being a highly dynamic market. Furthermore, not many studies have examined the customer journey from a media landscape perspective specifically related to EVs. Additionally, as there is little research focusing on the touch points within the direct control of the customer, there is an incentive for examining the customer related touch points related to EV purchases.

Investigating the customer journey of EV and its associated touch points with a more critical outlook towards the linear customer journey is, thus of interest. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, considering prior studies have focused on company and governmental related touch points there is also an incentive for understanding the customer-owned touch points associated with the EV customer journey.

1.3 Purpose

This research aims to analyze and get a deeper understanding of the customer journey of EVs in the South Korean market. Additionally, the aim is to identify specific touch points within the customer journey together with an overview of the media landscape. The study is based on three chronological time phases as part of the customer journey mapping; pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. Firstly, by performing a qualitative study with interview data from experts within the field, we aim at getting a deeper understanding of how the customer journey is designed. In other words, how the customer journey is constructed based on its characteristics such as which channels and actors that are involved in its configuration. Secondly, through a survey, we aim at analyzing the phenomenon from a customer perspective. Our conclusion will be to highlight the design of the customer journey of EVs in SK as well as the integrated touch points. The customer journey is described from a customer perspective and the touch points that they encounter during the purchasing process, rather than a brand or external perspective. Thus, the objective is to view the customer journey based on the touch points within the customer's own control.

1.4 Research Question

To fulfill the purpose of the study our main research question has been formulated as following;

- **How is the customer journey of electric vehicles designed in South Korea?**

Moreover, to answer this question, a sub-question has been constructed;

- What are the most prominent touch points related to electric vehicles in South Korea?

1.5 Disposition

Disposition of Research	1. Introduction	2. Theoretical Framework	3. Methodology	4. Empirical Findings	5. Analysis	6. Conclusion
Content	Background Problem Discussion Purpose Research Question	Customer Journey Mapping The Customer Journey of The Digital Era High Involvement Purchases Purchase Phase Theory The Media Landscape Omni Channeling	Research Strategy Research Approach Data Collection Data Analysis Research Quality Ethical Considerations	The Pre-Purchase Phase The Purchase Phase The Post-Purchase Phase	Touch Points in The Pre-Purchase Phase Touch Points in The Purchase Phase Touch Points in The Post-Purchase Phase The Design of The Customer Journey	Answer RQ Implications of Research Limitations & Future Research

Table: 1.1. Disposition of the thesis

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides existing literature within the research areas related to the customer journey in order to provide a theoretical background. More specifically the research fields related to the customer journey, high-involvement purchases, purchase phase theory, media landscape and omni-channeling are presented.

2.1 Customer Journey Mapping

It is of high importance to look at the business through the eyes of the customer to get a holistic perception of the entire customer process (Fichter & Wisniewski, 2015). Therefore, customer journey mapping has become a widely used strategic management tool for companies (Rosenbaum et al. 2017). Through a customer journey map, companies are able to display what courses of action the customers are taking when engaging with the company (Fichter & Wisniewski, 2015) and by doing this they are able to improve the customer experience by understanding the customers actions (Richardson, 2010). The map is built through a diagram that shows every step the customer takes when engaging with a business (Fichter & Wisniewski, 2017). According to Fichter and Wisniewski (2017) the customer journey mapping becomes more complex but necessary the more touch points it has. The customer journey map registers all thinkable organizational touch points that the customer may face throughout the purchase or service process. Hence, the senior management are able to work with cross-functional team members to create tactics that encourage service innovation if they clearly understand the touch points. Thus, the objective of the tactics is to increase the customer service provider interactions through improvement of the customer experience related to every touch point (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). In addition, Plananska (2020) explains the definition of touch points as any form of interaction between the customers and the brand, which are often multiple and complex. According to Rosenbaum et al. (2017), the touch points are generally pictured horizontally on the map in line with a process timeline where the timeline can be categorized into three steps regarding services which are; the pre-service, service and post-service category. Before the actual service begins, the customer goes through the pre-service period which includes touch points such as radio advertisement, email solicitations etc. Further, the service period includes touch points that the customers go through during the service such as visiting the store, engaging with employees etc. Lastly, post-service refers to the experiences that the customer encounters after the purchase such as posting a post about a purchase item etc. When the touch points have been identified through the three different categories, the managers should create strategic categories along the vertical axis. This should show relevant strategic initiatives that are connected to every touch point. This can be a rather complex stage and the map as an innovation tool, depends on this axis (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

Additionally, customer journey mapping assists in prioritizing service development as well as supplies with authentication and strong arguments for where investments are required (Fichter & Wisniewski, 2015). Hence, customer journey mapping work as a tool that facilitates the service provider's understanding of the steps that are essential to accomplish a given task (Maraquez, Downey & Clement, 2015) According to Richardson (2010) the journey is often

nonlinear where the customer can move from awareness directly to purchase or the other way around, consuming a great amount of time on research.

Even though customer journey mapping is a widely discussed phenomenon, practitioners and academics question which way is the best way to frame the customer journey (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Rosenbaum et al. (2017) argue that a great amount of the maps are critically flawed where they presume that every customer of a company goes through the same touch points and that every touch point is equally important. Instead, touch points are more or less critical in the customer journey and not every touch point is experienced the same by every customer (Rosenbaum et al. 2017).

2.2 The Customer Journey of The Digital Era

Court et al. (2009) state that the new digital customer journey is circular rather than linear. This is also highlighted by Roggeveen and Grewall (2020) who state that there are nonlinearities with consumers switching between purchase phases. Court et al. (2009) further explain that the non-linear customer journey consists of four different steps; 1. The initial consideration stage, 2. The active evaluation stage, 3. The purchase stage and 4. The post-purchase stage. All touch points and accumulated impressions that a customer encounters during the customer journey will affect the original considerations of brands and potential purchasing options. In line with this, Scott et al. (2017) stress that customers can at any point of the customer journey take a decision to abandon or defer the purchase for multiple reasons. Moreover, the consumer can experience cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses in each stage that has been affected by another phase or will have an impact on other phases (Roggeveen & Grewall, 2020). This refers to high-involvement purchases, however less complex purchases with lower involvement does not require such a journey (Scott et al., 2017).

In the initial phase, the consideration phase, the customers consider those brands within a certain industry that comes on top of their minds (Court et al., 2009). Court et al. (2009) explain that the fragmentation of media and the proliferation of products result in consumers reducing the number of brands in the consideration of a purchase. The brands that the consumer is already familiar with have also been found to be three times more considered and purchased compared to brands that do not exist in their original considerations. Thus, it is important for brands to be among the limited set of brands that are in consumers' initial consideration. However, it is not only these brands that are purchased by consumers. The next phase, the active evaluation phase, enables consideration of more brands as consumers gain access to and search for more information. How many brands are added to the customer's consideration varies depending on the industry, but according to Court et al. (2009), an average of 2.2 brands are added to the original set of brands within the automotive industry. This also means that brands can influence the decision-making process by "*forcing*" out rivals and adding touch points to the customer journey that the brand itself can influence (Court et al., 2009).

The traditional customer journeys were more controlled by companies and brands through direct marketing, traditional advertising and sponsorships. However, today's consumers have

gained more power (Court et al., 2009). This is also highlighted by Scott et al., (2017) who describe that the development of digital channels and social media have had a profound effect on customer behavior. This since it enables the consumers to publicly express their opinion freely. This in turn has changed the power relationship between brands and consumers, where the consumers have more influence in how the brand is presented in the media. Roggeveen and Grewall (2020) further explain that consumers who perform their purchases online are more likely to read reviews, engage with friends, virtual employees, seek posts by opinion leaders and use chatbots.

According to Court et al. (2009), this means that the consumer controls certain touch points in the active-evaluation phase, such as WoM, reviews, recommendations and recollections of past experiences. Furthermore they explain that this type of touch points accounts for two thirds in this phase and company-driven marketing only accounts for the remaining third. Both these types of marketing are important but marketers should focus on trying to influence consumer-driven touch points as well as company driven. Succeeding with such marketing and generating positive consumer experience, the likelihood of making it into the initial consideration set increases as this will create positive WoM, recommendation, etc. (Court et al., 2009).

After the two initial phases, the customer hopefully reaches a decision and proceeds to reach the purchase phase. However, it is the experiences in the post-purchase phase where customers shape their opinion for every following decision, resulting in the digital customer journey thus being circular. Customers can be both actively and passively loyal and the difference is that those who are actively loyal are more prone to write recommendations and spread positive WoM. Passively loyal customers may be loyal to a brand insofar as they stay with a brand but are not very committed to it. This can be due to both laziness or confusion of the abundance of information which also means that they are open to switching to competitors if so convinced. Thus, brands should carefully validate which touch points during the customer journey they should allocate the most resources to. Some require more effort in the initial consideration phase to increase understanding of the brand when customers actively evaluate it while some need to focus on converting passive to active loyalists (Court et al., 2009).

In addition, Roggeveen and Grewall (2020) emphasize the importance of cultures and how it directly or indirectly has an impact on the purchasing process and thus the customer journey. Mainly, differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures are identified. The authors explain that peer-to-peer interactions and online community building drive engagement in collectivistic cultures. In contrast, distinct self-expression (i.e. unique design and problem solving) builds engagement in individualistic cultures. Thus, social media influencers and new technology have different driving forces in different cultures and these touch points thus have different effects on the customer journey depending on culture.

2.3 High Involvement Purchases

High-involvement purchases is defined by Bloch and Richins (1983) as “*the extent to which a consumer links a product to salient, enduring or situation-specific goals*” (p.71). High-involvement purchases are characterized as being more effortful and long-term as well as typically include a longer decision-making process (Niemand et al., 2020), an example of such products are car purchases (Fauser, Wiedenhofer & Lorenz, 2011). Furthermore, Niemand et al. (2020) also highlight that consumers react differently to different touch points based on the purchase level of involvement. Consumers that have a high-involvement incentive of a purchase tend to have a more substantial interest concerning product information search, more developed comparison capabilities and are more sensitive to other available options (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Fauser et al. (2011) state that important touch points related to high-involvement purchases in the online setting are blogs and communities in the pre-purchase phase. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of social media channels such as YouTube as a source of information related to high-involvement purchases. In addition, reviews written by trustworthy sources have an effective input on the consideration of a brand. During the purchase and decision process their importance of interaction and easy access to contact are considered the most influential aspects. As soon as the consumer has purchased and received their product they enter the post-purchase phase. This phase primarily relates to customer satisfaction and retention aspects. For high-involvement purchases the most important digital touch points are related to blogs, microblogs and social networking. Thus, digital messaging applications and online communities produce much faster response times for the consumer in contrast to the traditional instruments (Fauser et al. 2011).

Considering the high-involvement characteristics, Charles (1998) found that there are different aspects that impact the level of involvement a consumer feels towards a certain product. One of those aspects is “*uniqueness*”, meaning the level of personalization and choices between different colors, materials, styles, options etc have a direct impact on the consumer's involvement. “*Nostalgic values*” have also been found to be important when formulating a higher involvement with a brand. The aspect of “*price risk*” is not necessarily connected to the initial purchase decision, rather in the post-purchase phase where high-involvement purchases tend to have more expenses related to them such as insurances, maintenance and repairs. Furthermore, “*association*” emphasizes the linkages between the product and events, feelings, images, people and places, thus if the product or brand is associated with positive feelings and memories the consumer is more likely to be more involved. Another aspect of high-involvement purchases are the perception of the products having superior technical ability or higher prestige or a certain image. Furthermore, Charles (1998) also mentions that the high-involvement purchases often result in more long-term and durable “*relationships*”. Necessity is also considered a factor contributing to the level of involvement a consumer feels towards a product, for instance, an automobile is essential for transportation purposes (Charles, 1998).

2.4 Purchase Phase Theory

The development of the internet and its entrenched capacity has resulted in changed ways of getting through the entire customer journey, which broadly can be described as consisting of three phases; 1. pre-purchase phase, 2. purchase phase and 3. post-purchase phase (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Pavlou och Fygenson, 2006; Chung & Jung, 2018; Roggeveen & Grewall, 2020). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) explain that the customer behavior is characterized as being increasingly complex, which affects the customer experiences and the customer journey. Furthermore, it consists of infinite touch points through all the different steps, making it even more complex (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) have identified four different types of touch points which are 1. brand-owned, 2. partner owned, 3. customer-owned and 4. social or external. Brand-owned touch points refer to touch points where the customer interactions are controlled by the company itself such as advertisements, websites and loyalty programs. Partner-owned touch points are customer interactions that are jointly managed and controlled by the firm or their partners, such as marketing agencies, multi-channel distribution channels or communication channel partners. Customer-owned touch points on the other hand includes customer actions that are part of the overall customer experience but can't be influenced or managed by the firm (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Furthermore, what distinguishes online and offline contexts is that online tends to be significantly more informative, dynamic and characterized by technological innovation. In addition, online contexts allow for direct interaction where consumers have the opportunity to engage with both the brand and other customers. Instead of generating direct revenue from sales, this type of recurring interaction offers revenue through advertising, subscriptions and licensing (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013).

2.4.1 Pre-Purchase Phase

The initial phase, the pre-purchase phase, includes all types of interaction with a brand before purchase, such as need recognition, search and consideration (Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). Thus, the activities within this phase encompasses all the experiences of the initial need, goals and impulse to consideration of satisfying these with a purchase. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) The pre-purchase phase is also explained by Klein et al. (2020) as an important phase for managers to study, to gain a deeper understanding of the customer's final decision-making processes. Furthermore, this is of particular importance during the digital customer journey which is characterized by an abundance of touch points (Klein et al. 2020). Customers in the present digital landscape interact with firms through a variety of touch points which are linked to several different media and social media channels, resulting in more complex customer journeys (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In the pre-purchase phase the customer-owned touch-point could be the customer's own reflection regarding their needs and desires. Lastly, social and external touch points refers to peers, other customers, independent information sources, environment etc. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) Hence, consumers' pre-purchase information status shapes subsequent information retrieval behavior and its associated barriers (Klein et al. 2020). Plananska (2020) concludes

that the most prominent touch points related to EV in the pre-purchase phase is the car-configurator, brand web-site, objective car news in brand and social media and energy label of cars. Furthermore, these touch points are also more prominent related to EV adopters in contradiction to non EV adopters (Plananska, 2020).

The customer journey is different depending on the consumer, as some consumers want to reduce the purchase risk at an early stage and thus do not encounter as many touch points, while others do continued searches with more frequent interactions but end up not buying anything anyway (Klein al., 2020). Important to highlight is that customers do not possess complete information about brands before the purchase. This leads them to the search for brand-related information in order to reduce the purchasing risk and the value of this information is determined by its clarity and credibility. Clarity is characterized by the extent to which the information reflects the intended message and whether it is considered unambiguous. Credibility instead refers to the reliability of the source from which the information is obtained. These aspects are important to take into account as people tend to ignore evidence that is contrary to their own ideas, expectations and beliefs. Furthermore, a completed purchase of a specific brand depends on factors that determine how consumers interpret the information they have been served. Such a distinctive factor is previous brand knowledge, thus knowledge and perceptions of a brand before the purchase (Klein al., 2020).

2.4.2 Purchase Phase

The purchase phase concerns all interaction that takes place in order to make the purchase. This refers to selection, ordering and payment, where Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020) identify purchase transaction technology and physical acquisition technology as the essential features. Transaction technology has entailed major changes over the past decade. In particular, there has been a shift from cash-based payments to card and digital payments. Moreover, social media platforms have facilitated faster payment through stored information, which has reduced purchasing friction. The expectation of getting the purchased product at the right time is no longer the only requirement, but consumers today also demand expedited deliveries, preferably directly to the door (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020).

The online purchasing phase is similar to the physical purchasing phase (Lee, 2002). The customer is acting as a typical shopper in a physical store, thus browsing product offerings. However, the difference is that online shopping provides the customer with the capability to compare prices and information while simultaneously browsing the site. Therefore, the purchaser values fast search competences and intuitive navigation, which facilitates for the customer to move back and forth between web sites. Furthermore, the online purchasing phase should be seamless and easy to navigate between orders, purchasing policy and product information (Lee, 2002). In the purchase phase, Plananska (2020) argues that the most significant touch points related to EV are the meeting with the car retailer and the test-drive. Furthermore, the car retailer could have an impact of diminishing concerns amongst consumers regarding EV purchases if they have a lot of knowledge within the subject (Plananska, 2020).

2.4.3 Post-Purchase Phase

The interaction between the customer and the brand that takes place after the purchase has been completed, is part of the post-purchase phase. This phase refers to certain follow up services, loyalty programs and technologies that facilitate this (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). This phase is of utmost importance to study as it describes the relationship between the consumer and the brand and its products under the consumer's ownership. The main reason for replacing a product in one's possession with a new one is due to experiences and feelings about one's old product, which emphasizes the importance of this phase in the customer journey (Mugge, Schifferstein & Schoormans, 2010). The importance of customer experiences has been highlighted for over a decade, emphasizing the emotional aspects of the decision making process (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

However, it is important to highlight that product attachment and relationships between consumers and brands are separate. Thus, a consumer can develop a strong attachment to a specific product from a brand but not a relationship to the brand itself. However, product attachment can eventually result in brand attachment and further brand loyalty (Mugge et al., 2010). In this way, it can influence future purchase decisions and create positive WoM recommendations (Mugge et al., 2010; Ma et al. 2019). Furthermore, strong attachments to products do not necessarily have to be associated with positive emotions and vice versa. In addition, satisfaction should be seen as an evaluative assessment of the performance of a product that is affected by both cognitive evaluations and affective reactions that occur during consumption. The symbolic meaning of a product is thus linked to attachment but not to its performance, which means that it does not affect the degree of satisfaction (Mugge et al., 2010). As the post-purchase phase is characterized by interactions that take place after the purchase, it often includes service convenience. Consumers' perceptions of service quality are often affected by service convenience and in turn affect customer value, satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand (Kahn & Kahn, 2018).

Fauser et al. (2011) argue that the post-purchase phase might be of most importance in terms of social media marketing, considering that this phase offers the possibility for establishing more loyal customers in the future. Valuable touch points in this phase are networks such as service and support blogs which creates a direct link between the customer and the company in order to strengthen the relationship. Furthermore, strong and engaged customer communities are of great value in order to generate a positive online WoM (Fauser et al., 2011).

2.5 The Media Landscape

The amount of internet users has grown dramatically during the last ten years, with the aim of seeking information, integration and social interaction, finding personal identity as well as for entertainment. For companies, the internet has become a way to communicate directly with customers. Hence a part of their new business strategies. Looking at SK, the country has the highest rate of internet use worldwide. This means that the population are active users in the digital media landscape (Daekyung & Johnson, 2009). However, the population in the country does not use the search engine Google as most individuals in other countries in the world do. Instead, SK has their own search engine system, called “Naver”, which is the most popular search engine in the country (Park & Mcmillan, 2015).

In today’s digital society, consumers have the possibility of accessing an extensive amount of digital information sources that are both within and outside the direct control of the business (Klein et al., 2020). Additionally, consumers’ interaction with brands has transformed dramatically through digital media where they are able to actively co-create brand meaning through different social media platforms instead of being passive information receivers. Hence, company-controlled advertising has become less predominant and has been replaced by peer-to-peer media such as social media activities, customer reviews and WoM, which have become important brand information sources. Rather than obtaining information from one single medium, exposure through numerous media ought to be more informative for consumers (Klein et al., 2020).

Companies operating within the digital media landscape are often aware of establishing online brand communities on the internet (Park & Mcmillan, 2015). These communities can be described as “*groups of people who engage in many interactions online and form wherever people with common interests are able to interact*” (Williams & Cothrel, 2000 p.81). However, consumers who have high levels of loyalty towards a certain brand are also establishing their own brand communities. Within these online brand communities, the users design social networks which are grounded upon homogenous interests. The users are performing online activities with the striving for favorable returns. Furthermore, the members are able to leave the community if their expectations are not met. Hence, it is important to meet the needs of the members in order to carry out the online community in the long run. Online brand communities have thus become both good advertising as well as promotional channels for companies (Park & Mcmillan, 2015). Looking at SK, the population places high on Hofstede’s (1991) scale of collectivism, meaning that they are prone to sacrificing themselves for the greater good of their society. Thus, they prioritize group obligations as well as interdependence. This desired feeling of belonging to a group has created powerful online automotive brand communities. The most significant automobile brand communities within the country are the socially oriented ones. As mentioned above, the country is ranked as one of the most collectivist populations on the globe, which means that they are expected to be a part of the online brand community in order to expand their social relationships (Park & Mcmillan, 2015).

However, the internet expansion has caused concerns regarding both the credibility and quality of the retrieved information. As people are not likely to use sources that they do not trust, credibility is of high importance within the medium. Furthermore, the credibility of online information sources can be highly questioned as they both lack publishing standards as well as are easily accessible (Daekyung & Johnson, 2009).

2.6 Omni-Channeling

As discussed by Saghiri, Wilding, Mena and Bourlakis (2017) different shopping channels and choices are creating a diverse experience for the consumer. Hence, the multiple channels together seek to increase the customer value proposition as well as reaching out to a larger customer network. However, these channels primarily consist of stand-alone channels that have been created by retailers in response to the fast-changing world of e-commerce and information technology. Therefore, there is a risk that these independent channels are giving rise to fragmented supply chains and at the same time do not supply the customer with a consistent experience (Saghiri et al., 2017). Due to this issue, omni-channeling, which is taking on a broader perspective, has developed during recent years. This is characterized as a customer focused approach that emphasizes the facilitation for the customer to move between channels through one single synchronized process (Hagberg et al., 2016). The process implies a multiple number of channels as well as a change towards fading out the borders between the channels (Verhoef, Kannan & Inman, 2015).

Since both the emergence of the online channel as well as digital channels such as mobile channels and social media have reconstructed today's business models as well as shopper behaviors, omni-channeling has become of large importance for businesses to succeed in the digital world (Verhoef et al., 2015). As omni-channeling in contrast to multi-channeling implies both more channels as well as fading out the borders between these channels, this is also impacting competitive strategies. For example, new channels will decompose old barriers such as consumer ignorance as well as geography. The shift towards omni-channeling provides customers with a large number of search alternatives (Verhoef et al., 2015). Prior to a purchase, information search with help from technology is also assisting the customer to acknowledge his needs and in turn detect the best options for fulfilling these (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). Furthermore, digitalization has changed the communication between customers and retailers through third party communication types as well as social media (Hagberg et al., 2016).

Moreover, Barwitz and Maas (2018) argue that throughout the purchasing phases, the customer utilizes different channels for different purposes. This results in customers gathering information in one channel but purchasing in another etc, which have eventuated in the phenomenon of showrooming, thus consumers researching in store and purchasing online. Furthermore, this highlights the value of creating a seamless process for the customer when switching between channels (Barwitz & Maas, 2018). Omni-channeling has become even more important since the mobile platforms have increased and gained an important role in marketing

purposes. Thus, mobile platforms are core components of omni-channeling and are contributing to the blurring of traditional channels (Payne et al., 2017).

3. Methodology

This section aims to describe how the research has been conducted. Firstly, the research strategy is depicted, followed by the research approach. Thereafter the data collection and data analysis are presented and lastly the research quality, reliability and validity ensured.

3.1 Research Strategy

Based on the aim and research question, a qualitative research approach was chosen. The qualitative research strategy has the objective of being more suitable for understanding business related phenomena in its context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Through a qualitative research approach the factors and context of the South Korean customer journey related to EVs could be understood in depth. The qualitative research approach emphasizes words and interpretations of those participating in the research rather than quantification and numerical data which is used in quantitative research strategies (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Furthermore, the aim is to understand the reality of a complex phenomenon where contradictory equivocal results can occur, thus the qualitative research strategy is adequate. The qualitative research strategy further provides flexibility for understanding the touch points in the EV customer journey as well as how the customer journey is constructed related to these kinds of purchases. Furthermore, the qualitative approach also allows for adjustments during the research process in accordance with new information (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The qualitative research strategy allowed for the respondents viewpoints and perspectives to be in focus when gaining insights within the subject (Bell et al., 2019). Considering the qualitative nature of this research, keeping a high level of involvement with the respondents has been of importance in order to notice the emphases and perspectives. This close interaction reduces the risk of the results being subjective through the researchers own predetermined biases (Bell et al., 2019).

Prior to the research the choice was made to have qualitative interviews in order to fulfill the research aim, however a survey was also conducted in order to strengthen the results and get the consumer perspective. This in order to assure that the responses from the interviews were reasonable. Bryman and Bell (2013) state that the combining of qualitative and quantitative methods is called triangulation which could be of significance when wishing to control the validity and relevance of the results. Hence, by utilizing triangulation the trustworthiness of the other method was increased. This allowed for combining the specific characteristics of the quantitative method related to the survey with the qualitative methods analytical ability to interpret complex perceptions. Moreover, Eliasson (2013) states that it is advantageous to combine a qualitative and quantitative method, where the interviews function is to give a preliminary understanding which the quantitative survey can be built upon. The results from

the survey and the semi-structured interviews were then intertwined in the result and analysis to analyze if the consumers' perceptions matched with the respondents.

3.2 Research Approach

The research approach shapes our research strategy's data collection, processes and analysis. Typically, the inductive approach is most common when performing a qualitative approach while a deductive approach is more commonly used for quantitative research. An inductive research approach is concerned with collecting data with the objective of connecting it to theory to be able to draw generalizable results (Bell et al., 2019). Considering the scope and nature of this research, it is acknowledged that the results derived from the collected data will not result in fully generalizable results. Rather, the results found in this study will contribute to existing knowledge as well as elaborate on previous theory. This research is mainly characterized by an inductive approach, however it does consist of certain elements deriving from the deductive approach. Hence, the research takes on an abductive approach which means that the findings have been evaluated and connected to theory continuously throughout the entire research process (Patel & Davidsson, 2019).

3.3 Data Collection

An essential part of the research is the data collection, where the research questions are directing the research (Bell et al., 2019). The data collection process for this research was based upon both primary and secondary data. The primary data was conducted through qualitative interviews with external experts as well as through a quantitative survey. To support the primary data, secondary data was collected through reports as well as articles within the field and are found in the introduction and theoretical framework chapters.

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

When performing qualitative interviews, three different types exist, namely unstructured, structured and semi-structured interviews (Bell et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews provide the possibility to have a pre-set of questions but still be able to ask follow up questions and adapt the questions to suit the direction of the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Considering that this research had a predetermined focus and aim, the semi-structured interviews were considered preferable in order to maintain focus towards the particular subject and yet as mentioned being able to ask follow up questions. The interview template was designed in accordance with the theoretical framework before conducting the interviews, as well as being assured to answer the two research questions. The interview template was formulated in a chronological order in relation to the contextual phases of pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. However, considering the semi-structured layout the particular order of the questions within each phase and supplementary questions could differ among the different interviews. Most of the questions were formulated as open-ended questions in order to provide the possibility for the respondent to elaborate freely. The open-ended questions could make the answers become less generalized and result in contradictory data (Bell et al.,

2019). However, considering that the customer journey is a very complex phenomenon and hard to determine, contradictory answers are hard to avoid and could even provide valuable information in such a way.

3.3.2 Selection of Respondents

Considering that the aim of the research was to find out how the customer journey of EV is designed in SK, the selection of respondents had to have expert knowledge of the South Korean market as well as some context regarding EV purchases or the automotive industry. Bell et al. (2019) explain this as purposive sampling, which means that the respondents are identified and included in the sample in a strategic manner in order to purposely fit the research goal. Furthermore, except for purposive sampling some of the respondents were also identified through snow-ball sampling. Snow-ball sampling is described by Bryman and Bell (2013) as when a respondent or collaborator recommends a specific person who they consider suitable for the subject. However, these respondents also had to be considered to have specific knowledge within the research area in order to fit the profile. Due to the prevailing circumstances of the pandemic, the selection of respondents were to a large extent limited to people in our vicinity, mostly provided by our collaborative partner Polestar. However, considering the specific topic, the respondents had to be considered experts or specialists within the subject. Therefore the respondents were identified through recognized organizations with experience from the South Korean market. In this research we define an expert as *“a person who has specific knowledge of the South Korean market as well as some connection to the automotive industry”*. Despite the method of identification of the respondents, all respondents are considered to contribute to the research and enable answers to the research questions.

The reason for choosing expert interviews was due to their specific knowledge of the purchase process related to cars and EVs and their perception of the touch points related to these specific purchases. Additionally, their knowledge of the South Korean market provided crucial information regarding how to proceed to understand the customer journey and the touch points related to this particular market. An alternative would be to interview consumers that operate in the South Korean market, however there was a barrier in reaching this particular target group and using a suitable sampling technique. Additionally, a practical implication regarding the language barrier existed, which resulted in this being an inconsistent respondent choice. Nevertheless, the choice to have expert interviews may result in the findings being biased which should be taken into consideration. In addition, considering that the majority of the respondents are within the same organization this could imply that they have the same perception regarding the construction of the customer journey and its associated touch points. However, this potential issue could be argued to be diminished through the external respondents and the survey.

As is shown in *table 1.3*, interviews with 7 different respondents were performed. Considering the objective of this research was qualitative, the number of respondents is less significant, since the purpose is not to provide generalized data. Instead, a suitable sample size is determined by the ability to answer the research question in an adequate way (Marshall, 1996).

Thus, the number of respondents in this research is considered suitable even though it could also be considered as a limiting factor.

Name	Company	Position	Channel	Date	Length of interview
Ola Bernhardtz	Polestar	Market Expansion	Online Conference Call	2021-03-04	32:43:00
Jani Toivonen	Business Finland, Korea	Consumer Business Advisor	Online Conference Call	2021-03-11	37:10:00
Jovana Jovic	Volvo Cars	Marketing and Communication, APEC	Online Conference Call	2021-03-12	38:33:00
Natalie Choi	Volvo Cars	Digital Marketing Manager	Online Conference Call	2021-03-17	25:53:00
Justin Mcleod	World Markets Korea	CEO	Online Conference Call	2021-03-18	39:19:00
Jason Ham	Polestar Automotive Korea	Managing Director	Online Conference Call	2021-03-23	37:30:00
Karin Källmark	Polestar	Project Manager CRM Marketing	Online Conference Call	2021-04-09	28:02:00

Table: 1.3. Overview of the interviewed experts

3.3.3 Interview Guide

The interview guide was established in order to assure that all the themes and subjects are captured throughout the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2013), Please see *Appendix A*. In this research the first interview guide was established as a pilot which was tested before conducting the interviews. After the pilot was executed the interview guide was reformed and complemented in a way suitable for capturing all aspects of the research subject and areas. The interview guide was originally derived from the three chronological time phases; pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase in order to capture the touch points integrated in each phase as well as getting an overview of the customer journey. Furthermore, the interview guide also consisted of some introductory questions in order to establish some ethical aspects of the interview as well as what professional role the respondent had.

The interview guide was consequently used for all interviews in order to facilitate the analysis and comparison of the interviews. However, the order of the specific interview questions could differ among the interviewees as they often made their own connections and elaborations between the subject of the questions. All respondents were provided with the interview guide prior to the interviews being held, in order to enhance the quality of the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2013) as this gave the respondents the possibility to prepare for the questions. As previously mentioned the interview guide is established in order to reassure that all themes and subjects are captured. However, as the aim of this research was to get an understanding of the customer journey and had a qualitative objective, the interview setting was desired to be more of a dialogue in order to gain deeper understanding and gaining additional insights.

Qualitative research has been criticized for being too subjective (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Therefore it was considered important to not ask leading questions nor interpret the answers in a subjective way. Therefore, keeping a cautious and critical objective throughout the analysis of the data was of importance.

3.3.4 Practical Implications of The Interviews

The interviews were conducted through online conference calls. According to Bell et al. (2019) it is preferable to conduct interviews face-to-face due to the aspects of being able to interpret facial expressions and body language. However, considering the progression of technology and simulating “face-to-face” interaction through online video calls, it could be argued that the importance of physical presence is less significant. Furthermore, several obstacles existed as to why the interviews could not be carried out through physical meetings. The first being the geographical obstacle, considering that several of the respondents were located in SK or other parts of the world. Second, the prevailing circumstances of the pandemic have limited the ability to travel as well as social interactions. Lastly, the interviews were scheduled with short intervals due to time limits on the respondents' behalf.

During the interviews all three researchers were present in order to diminish the possibility of misinterpretation. The presence of all researchers also facilitated the analyzing of the data as well as improved the consistency of the interviews. Bryman and Bell (2013) state that multiple

interviewers could contribute to a more relaxed atmosphere and lead to more discussion wise interviews. Moreover, several interviewers also enable improved quality of interpretation and consistency (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Two of the researchers held the interview while one of the researchers took notes in order to facilitate the transcription. However, in addition to the notes, with the consent of the respondents, the interviews were also recorded to enhance the quality of the transcription of the interviews. Bryman and Bell (2013) argue that recording the interview enhances the quality of the understanding of the interviews as well as diminishes the risk of interpretation and biases. The transcribing of the interviews were performed alongside the progression of the research in order to increase efficiency. Thus, all three researchers did not participate in the transcription of each interview. Furthermore, in order to protect the integrity of the respondents all respondents were asked for permission to publish their names in the final thesis as well as the information regarding recording the interviews, which all of the respondents agreed to.

Language can create difficulties when performing qualitative interviews due to misinterpretation of the meaning and emphases (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The respondents in this research were all fluent in English, however some of the respondents were native Swedish speakers. Thus, the interviews with the respondents who had Swedish as their native language were held in Swedish in order to reduce the chance of misinterpretation and increase the convenience. Consequently, with the foreign language speaking respondents the interviews were held in English, nevertheless considering the respondents English proficiency this was not considered as a complication.

As exhibited in *table 1.3*, the length of the interviews could vary between half an hour to forty minutes. This mostly depended on the availability of the respondent due to their time limitation, however some respondents were also more prone to elaborate their answers and discussion. Bryman and Bell (2013) argue that there is often a variation in length of qualitative interviews, however shorter interviews should not be assumed to be less informative and could be just as valuable for the research analysis and findings.

3.3.5 Survey

The survey was designed in a standardised way with a higher degree of structure with multiple choice answers. Furthermore, considering the qualitative objective, the respondents could also answer several of the choices which enhances the ability to interpret the results together with the interviews. These answers were continuously derived from the theoretical framework discussed in *section 2.4*. Hence, the multiple choices were outlined through categorization of “*brand-owned*”, “*partner-owned*”, “*customer owned*” and “*social or external*”. Evidently, this categorization was chosen in order to facilitate the analysis of the data. Furthermore, the survey was sent out to consumers in SK through digital forums such as the media platforms Kakao Talk and Facebook. In order to ensure responses from relevant target groups the survey was also promoted through one of the respondents who was currently located in SK. The questionnaire was built upon the differences between consumers' latest purchase and a potential EV purchase. When answering the questions regarding their latest purchase, the respondents

were given the option to specify what kind of product this referred to in order to draw conclusions regarding differences between high- and low- involvement purchases.

Prior to the survey being sent out the survey was tested multiple times in order to assure the quality and clarification of the questions as well as the answers. Bryman and Bell (2013) highlight the importance of distinct instructions which could help diminish the potential fall-out. Furthermore, the purpose of the survey and the reason for the respondents being targeted were clearly highlighted in order to facilitate the understanding of the survey which is also a factor that could contribute to reducing the fall-out (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

The survey had 143 initial participants whereof 50 completed the survey. As described by Bryman and Bell (2013) fallouts are characterized by those answers that are not available because of the lack of complete answers, missed questions or unsubmitted answers. Additionally, as the survey was aimed to investigate the answers from South Korean consumers, respondents who indicated that they did not currently live in SK as well as respondents under the age of 18 were sorted out. Consequently, the final amount of useful responses were 41.

3.4 Data Analysis

An essential method for analyzing qualitative data is the thematic method which is used for analyzing, describing and identifying themes within data (Bryman & Bell, 2013). As this research explores a complex phenomenon where several areas are being investigated, this was considered as an appropriate method. Furthermore, the findings were coded, characterized, and analyzed by found patterns in the empirical findings resulting in identified themes, which is also significant for thematic analysis (Bell et al., 2019), please see *Appendix D*. Within these themes, several touch points and additional factors were recognized and analyzed as part of the customer journey.

The interviews were coded into themes where topics were recurrent and highlighted multiple times. This is important when identifying themes in a thematic analysis according to Bell et al. (2019). When these themes were identified, the survey was constructed accordingly. Furthermore, the standardized multiple alternatives of the survey were coded into the four categorizations of owned media: “*brand-owned*”, “*customer-owned*”, “*partner-owned*” and “*social and external*”, which are explained in section 2.4. This in order to ease the analysis of the data from the survey. Considering that the survey was built upon the interview data, the themes occurring in the survey were coherent with the analysis of the interview data. Thus, a combination of predetermined codes originated from theory and emerging themes were used in both the interviews and the survey.

3.5 Research Quality

Throughout the methodology, issues regarding the research quality have been examined to an extent. However, this chapter aims at expanding these issues in order to achieve high research quality. According to Bell et al. (2019) the most dominant research quality measures are validity and reliability.

3.5.1 Reliability

Reliability is explained as the level of which the research can be replicated with equal existing results (Bryman & Bell, 2018). Leung (2015) highlights the importance of being consistent in order to increase the study reliability. Hence, in order to obtain as high reliability as possible, we used the same interview guide for all respondents in the study. By doing this, we increased the probability of recognizing similarities from which generalizations could be drawn. By recording and transcribing the interviews we have been able to both re-listen and see over and go through the conversations. Hence we were able to decrease the likelihood of misunderstandings and thus further strengthen the reliability of the study.

3.5.2 Validity

When conducting qualitative research, the validity can be explained as the suitability of both the data, processes as well as the tools that are exercised throughout the research (Leung, 2015). Additionally, the validity measure is generally categorized into three different categories, which are; internal validity, external validity and construct validity (Yin, 2012).

Starting with the internal validity, this refers to the causality in the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Considering that it was we as authors who gathered the information that we considered relevant to be able to answer the research question, the findings incline subjectivism. However, outlining the research questions in a suitable way as well as ensuring that they have been answered properly increased the internal validity.

The external validity refers to the generalizability of the results. The external validity tends to be weaker in qualitative research due to a limited sample and using case studies (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Furthermore, the validity of the research is strengthened by the combination of methods, called triangulation as previously explained in section 3.1. Lastly, the construct validity includes the collection of data where the sampling must be properly performed. By utilizing a large number of resources of confirmation for example several experts as well as different data sources, we have been able to increase the construct validity.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the whole research, ethical principles have been taken into consideration. The ethical rules within qualitative research generally touch upon factors such as integrity, voluntariness, conditionality and anonymity for those people who are directly involved in study

(Bryman & Bell, 2015). Considering these aspects, we were careful to inform the participants of the study objectives prior to their acceptance to participate in the study as well as if we were allowed to record the interviews. Additionally, we also asked if we were allowed to use their names or if they wanted to be anonymous. Hence, we offered them anonymity. Therefore, none of the respondents have been forced to be a part of the research. We further focused on not asking too personal questions in order to not intervene with the respondent's privacy.

4. Empirical Findings

This section consists of the empirical findings of the study. The chapter presents the empirical findings conducted through the semi-structured interviews as well the survey. The results are structured through the three chronological time phases; pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase as well as identified themes related to the different phases. Furthermore, additional factors impacting EV purchases are described in the latest chapter.

4.1 The Pre-Purchase Phase

4.1.1 Information Search

Since SK is one of the most digitized countries in the world, Jovic highlighted that the population generally searches for information on platforms online before purchasing a product. In line with this, Källmark stated that SK is a highly digital market with a high degree of maturity and that information search thus primarily takes place online. The respondents stressed that the most prominent platforms for information search are Naver and Kakao, where Kakao is built upon features, apps and instant messages can be sent, information can be exchanged, and advertising can be performed. Whereas Naver is the South Korean equivalent for Google Search. According to Toivonen, these results stand for approximately 90% of the searches. However, he mentioned that if there is an interest in foreign products, Google searches may also be used in order to gather international search results. Additionally, the interview with Jovic revealed that even though these are the most prominent search engines, the amount of search results are limited compared to a Google search, since these do not include as many international search results. Choi suggests that these results stand for approximately 28% of the information search. She further highlighted that Youtube has become on the rise as a more common place for information search. Furthermore, Jovic emphasized that because of the high number of social media users in SK, information tends to be read much more in detail. This results in consumers being exposed to tremendous amounts of information constantly. Thus, in the consideration phase, they are being exposed to information without actively searching for it. Therefore, it is almost impossible to influence anyone from scratch, but rather it is about receiving good reviews and recommendations. This is also strengthened by the survey which disclosed that the initial awareness of a brand occurred primarily through customer reviews, WoM and past experiences. In contrast, traditional commercials were the media that least frequently made people aware of a brand.

Moreover, Ham stressed that at an early stage in the purchase process, the consumer primarily perform web searching activities on the two major web portal sites, Naver and Kakao, while checking online shopping stores on mobile apps like 11th street, Coupang, WeMakePrice etc. for discounted offers when purchasing products below one million KRW. However, regarding larger purchases that have a monetary value above one million KRW, more detailed information about product-specification, images etc. are done by visiting brand stores or websites. In accordance with this, Källmark highlighted that EV purchases that are

characterized by several components with higher value demand a more detailed search process. This means that consumers turn to reviews to a greater extent but they also do research in newspapers and magazines. This was further strengthened by the survey, which revealed that the product information for a potential EV purchase was mainly collected through reviews as well as WoM. However, collecting product information at a physical car retailer was also shown to be popular among the survey respondents. Additionally, the survey results further stated reading articles and newspapers as the primary activities performed before an EV purchase. In comparison, when searching for product information for previous low-involvement purchases, the respondents stated that they primarily looked at customer reviews and the company website for gathering information. Moreover, Källmark emphasized the importance of source reliability and that a high amount of trust in these specific sources need to be assured in order to use them as information sources for a purchase. In addition, she explained that when purchasing cars, a physical meeting is often desired in some part of the purchase process, which is in accordance with the findings from the survey. Thus, the consumer journey of EVs is often not completely digital as the consumer often completes the purchase by herself but wants to feel some kind of security with a real person.

Furthermore, in accordance with what Ham previously mentioned, Källmark explained that consumers initially gather the information themselves and are therefore well-informed before completing a purchase. In contrast, regarding car purchases, Ham highlighted that product information is not only conducted from online channels, but also through visiting the physical store and getting both the physical brand and product experience. In addition, the interviews commonly revealed that an underlying phenomenon throughout the customer journey is the switching between channels as well as not moving from pre-purchase, purchase to post-purchase, but rather jumping back and forth. For instance, Mcleod mentioned that a customer could have decided on a particular car brand and almost entered the purchasing phase but then realizing they need additional information which causes them to move backwards in the customer journey.

Moreover, the respondents stated that WoM is considered as important for information search. Thus, what is heard from people in the vicinity. In line with this, the interview with Mcleod revealed that there is a high amount of trust in each other's reviews. The interviews further highlighted that the mobile phone is primarily used during the information search process rather than the computer or other devices. However as the consumers move along in the purchase process they tend to switch to using the computer instead. In addition to this, Toivonen mentioned that specifically for EVs, the phones are used to go on Naver and sign up for example a free consultation or similar.

4.1.2 Social Media in Pre-Purchase Phase

The most distinctive feature of the South Korean customer journey for EVs is the use of social media platforms. All interviews revealed that throughout the customer journey, South domestic platforms such as for example Naver, which Mcleod argued accounts for about 80% of the market, and Daum (Kakao), which accounts for about 15% are most commonly used. However,

international social media platforms are widely used during the customer journey, where Instagram is described as the most common one, especially when it comes to visual presentations. In the interview with Choi, it emerged that trends within social media are largely similar to those in the rest of the world, where Facebook was dominating earlier but instead has switched to Instagram and now a shift to YouTube is also being visualized. Nevertheless, these different platforms deal with different demographics and users. Choi explains that Facebook is mainly used by male South Koreans in their 40s and that they use it for more political purposes and thus presents more facts and information, rather than for example posting pictures. In contrast, Instagram's largest target group in SK is individuals in their 20s and 30s and is therefore used more to deliver good and inspirational brand images. The interview also highlighted that Youtube has become a popular platform for information retrieval.

Common to all interview respondents was the emphasis on the usage of the domestic platform Kakao, which consists of a variety of features. Kakao Talk in particular was mentioned by several respondents as a frequently used social media in SK, especially in the pre-purchase phase. This messenger app is described as a platform where brands and individuals interact and can build a form of friend page. Thus, companies have their own accounts where they can send out marketing messages and are available via chat. However, the interview with Mcleod revealed that the platform Naver Band, an official chat app, is used to an even greater extent.

4.2 The Purchase Phase

4.2.1 Devices

Generally, the respondents mentioned that the most prominent device when purchasing products is the mobile phone. Bernhardz stressed that 95% of the population in SK owns a mobile device whereof 98% of those are smart phones. In line with this, Mcleod stated that the mobile phones in SK are very important since it is a highly mobile country. Therefore, all searches are generally made on mobile phones including EV purchases. He mentioned that mobile phones are used to read reviews before any purchase is performed. However, the final purchases are often made offline in store but can be performed on the mobile phone as well. In accordance, the survey showed that regarding where the respondents performed their latest purchase, the answers were equally divided between mobile apps, online and offline in a physical store. A significant majority, however, would choose to perform a potential EV purchase offline in store, while very few would choose to perform their EV purchase online or via mobile apps.

Jovic further highlighted that the use of mobile phones are increasing and that the device is most common during the beginning of the purchase process. As the process moves along, the consumer tends to switch to using the computer. Regarding larger purchases, she mentioned that the consumer tends to use the computer rather than the mobile phone. Furthermore, she stated that if the consumer wants more detailed information regarding car purchases, such as for example insurance etc., the consumer prefers to look for this information on their computers. However, it is also important with the visuals and the consumers generally use their

mobile phones when looking for pictures etc. Hence, which device the consumers use depends on where they are in the purchase phase. In accordance, Källmark described that the mobile phone is used in 80% of the entire consumer journey but regarding EV purchases with a higher monetary value, larger tablets are often included. This was also highlighted by Ham who explained that the majority of the purchases are being made mainly via mobiles, apps and websites. Nevertheless, the customer journey is less characterized by shopping through social media.

Furthermore, Toivonen highlighted that the customer journey is characterized by usage of mobile phones to go on Naver where people are able to sign up for a consultation or similar. However, in line with what Mcleod mentioned, the customer journey of high involvement purchases such as EVs, is generally characterized by physical purchases. In line with this, Jovic highlighted that physical contact plays a more important role when the price is higher, because people tend to think extra carefully regarding larger investments. Choi also mentioned that consumers prefer to go to the physical retailer when purchasing cars even now during the ongoing pandemic, since they want to experience and see the car in front of their own eyes.

4.2.2 Deliveries

The interview with Jovic revealed that SK has the highest e-commerce penetration in Asia, however a small proportion of cars are included there. Furthermore, the respondents mentioned that in SK, everything is generally delivered to the consumer's home. According to Jovic, the reason for this is that the population generally focuses on both education and career and therefore work a lot. Thus, it becomes more comfortable and convenient to perform online shopping and get everything delivered right to the door. However, regarding cars, she stated that companies should try to sell cars online but not entirely online.

According to Toivonen, convenience is highly important during the SK customer journey. Furthermore, he highlighted that delivery times are critical, since everything nowadays can be delivered very fast which increases the competition. This was further stressed by Ham who described that fast delivery times are one of the most important factors in the SK customer journey and the earlier the product is delivered to the consumer, the better acceptance and acknowledgement by them. Choi further stated that regarding car purchases, South Koreans tend to prefer to be physically involved in the delivery and further go to the store and pick it up. However, since South Korean consumers tend to be brand loyal, they are willing to wait for a longer period of time when purchasing a desired brand. In contrast to this, Mcleod mentioned that South Korean consumers have very efficient delivery services. They expect to get the car fast even if it's tailored. However, he also pointed out that there is some flexibility in the expectation of the delivery when related to major purchases.

4.2.3 Payment Methods

The interview with Choi revealed that the most prominent payment method in SK when purchasing EVs are financial services such as lease programmes. This was also mentioned by Ham who estimated that this payment method stands for approximately 20-30% of car

purchases. The survey results instead pointed out that regarding a potential EV purchase, the majority would prefer to pay for the EV offline in store. The second most common options were, in accordance with the interviews, bank transfer and leasing. However when purchasing more general products, Jovic mentioned that credit cards are a frequently used payment method in SK. This was further highlighted by Ham who described that credit cards stand for approximately 95% of all payments regarding consumer goods. This was in line with the survey findings, where credit cards were superiorly dominating as payment methods with only a few respondents using other options such as mobile payment, invoice or cash when performing their latest purchase. However, Ham stressed that for car purchases, credit cards are used approximately 70-80% of all such purchases. Furthermore, the interview with Toivonen revealed that there are over hundreds of different payments in the country such as for example Naver Pay etc. He further highlighted that regarding cars, consumers generally pay with bank transfer or with credit card.

4.2.4 Personal Contact

Physical contact is described as having an important role in high-involvement purchases and purchases with higher prices, thus EVs. Jovic highlighted that an important part of the customer journey is to feel taken care of by a person that previously have been involved in the purchasing process. In addition, the physical environment is described as specifically important because of the great emphasis of the car exterior and the opportunity to test drive, thus showrooms were highlighted as an important factor when purchasing EVs. This was also found in our survey results which stressed the importance of physical contact in the purchase phase, both regarding information search, how to perform the purchase, payment and contacting the brand.

The interviews generally revealed that the remaining contact with customer service is performed through phone, especially when it comes to cars. This is supported by the survey findings which highlighted phone and chat as common options when contacting brands regarding an EV purchase. However, the most frequently used method showed to be offline, which is in line with the interview findings. Toivonen further mentioned that there are many options to contact companies, for example shopping malls have their own chat where consumers can write messages immediately or use for example Kakao Talk. Generally, the interviews pointed out that email is a rather unusual way to contact companies through and that the mobile phone instead is the most commonly used device, both through calls, text messages or MMS. This since emails have quite a slow response rate, in comparison to for example chatbots or calls. The interview with Toivonen further revealed that the service level and quality of services are generally very high. Thus, consumers are more demanding regarding the quality of services which has resulted in quicker response times for service inquiries in SK. This was further highlighted in the survey which showed that the phone was the dominating option for contacting brands regarding their latest purchase, closely followed by chat as well as offline.

4.3 The Post-Purchase Phase

4.3.1 Loyalty

In general, the interviews showed that there was a common belief that the South Korean market is characterized by higher loyalty towards a specific brand. Jovic and Bernhardt suggest that an explanatory factor for this could be due to the characteristics of the South Korean culture. However, Toivanen mentioned that considering a high-investment purchase such as a car, the brand loyalty is less significant considering that the consumer does not purchase a new car as often compared to other consumer goods. The interviews further revealed that the loyalty referred to cars is particularly connected to the brand and its image. Toivonen also stressed that the South Korean market is highly prone to endorse domestic brands rather than foreign brands when it comes to consumer goods. However regarding cars, it is much more related to the brand image. In accordance with this, Bernhardt stated that SK differs from the European market in this sense as it is a protectionist market which is characterized by purchases of domestic brands. Hence, the non-domestic brands stand for a low part of the market. Because of this, Källmark described that in order for international brands to strengthen the loyalty among South Korean consumers they have to offer something that the domestic brands do not.

However, Choi emphasized that loyalty has a lot to do with the brand reputation and especially if the consumer believes that the car they purchase will still be premium after a couple of years. This was also stressed by Ham, who expressed that if brand value and product quality altogether is well-accepted in the market, repurchase and retention would be fairly high regardless of its high pricing. Furthermore, he explained that specific brands are being considered as valuable because of its rarity. Throughout all the interviews, the factor “*customer service*” was mentioned as an important aspect of brand loyalty.

Generally, the interviews revealed that loyalty programs are commonly used among car brands in SK. The interviews also emphasized that loyalty programs related to car sales are more about making the consumer feel special and noticed. Therefore the loyalty programs related to premium brands are often designed in a way that benefits the consumer through for instance traveling benefits, rather than offering special deals and discounts.

4.3.2 Service

Generally, the respondents mentioned that quick service is considered as an important aspect of the post-purchase phase. For example, Jovic mentioned that waiting times in Korea could differ by several months compared to Sweden, where a car delivery in Korea can occur within two days while in Sweden the delivery time could be up to three months. Furthermore, both Mcleod and Ham stressed that after-services are highly valued and a decisive factor in the purchasing process. Jovic further highlighted that regarding cars, many South Korean companies are highly consumer oriented and aware to retain their consumers in order to increase loyalty rates. It was found that the South Korean customer journey of EVs are highly

signified by personal relationships even regarding services, which Choi emphasized could be because of the characteristics of the South Korean culture.

However, service does not only refer to specific after-services of the car but also the consumer management. Källmark explained that generally, it can take a long period of time between when the purchase is made and when the consumer actually can experience the purchase itself. How the consumer experiences this time and level of service is therefore of high importance.

4.3.3 Customer Reviews

Common for the majority of the interviews were the superiority of the frequent usage of reviews throughout the customer journey. All of the respondents emphasised that reviews are read to a high extent before a purchase, especially when it comes to high-involvement purchases. However, there are differing views on how frequently South Korean consumers themselves write reviews. Ham estimated that less than 10% of consumers actually write reviews, but the other interviews indicate a higher proportion. This finding was also prominent in the survey results where the respondents largely agreed that they had never submitted a review before, but for those who did, WoM was the most widely used method for doing so. However, if they would submit a review of a purchased EV, a large proportion would consider doing it on social media. The most commonly used social media platforms for submitting a review is through Instagram, Naver and Kakao.

Moreover, Choi explained that whether reviews are submitted or not depends a lot on the consumer personalities. Nevertheless, all interviews revealed that reviews are involved in the customer journey and that many consumers want to read reviews in the initial research phase. Furthermore, it is highlighted that it is more common for customers to write reviews if they are unsatisfied, rather than if they are satisfied with a purchase. In addition, the interview with Jovic revealed that brands almost need to handle service inquiries fast in order to prevent a bad review, since it's very important for the brand reputation.

Mcleod mentioned that a reason for customer reviews being such an important factor throughout the customer journey could be due to the fear of being embarrassed and not standing out in the crowd. Hence, reviews are to a large extent read in order to avoid certain purchase mistakes. He further highlighted that another reason for leaving reviews is the possibility to receive different bonuses for example consumer bonuses or discounts on the next purchase. According to Mcleod, one specific kind of review that is the most commonly used, are premium reviews. These kinds of reviews are described as more detailed with both pictures and potential videos of when the product is received, used and reviewed.

The interview respondents explained that customer reviews primarily are found on the most frequently used platforms, such as Naver and Daum (Kakao). In line with this, the survey respondents also highlighted Naver and Kakao as the most frequently used social media to write reviews on, as well as Instagram. However, the majority of the interviews revealed that the most used platforms for the purpose of writing reviews and sharing experiences are

community services, such as Naver Café - which is a popular platform for this purpose. The reason for the high usage of community platform reviews are explained by several interview respondents as the desire to come together and share experiences.

Even though there are after-purchase surveys, the majority of the respondents agreed that these are relatively unusual. Ham described that specifically for high-end brands, customers tend to put effort on evaluation of their experience with a brand. Additionally, both after-purchase surveys and regular reviews are generally written only if the experience were extremely good or extremely horrifying. Nevertheless, when the respondents of the survey were inquired to rank the activities they would most likely engage in if they were highly satisfied with an EV purchase, the alternative with the highest response rate was that they would not engage in any activity. The second most common answer, however, was to post a recommendation on social media. If they instead were highly unsatisfied with an EV purchase, the respondents would post it on social media first, followed by not engaging in any activity.

4.3.4 Social Media in The Post-Purchase

The interviews revealed that when viewing the social media landscape and platforms in the post-purchase phase, there is a larger focus on Naver cafes and blogs. In opposition to the pre-purchase phase where social media sites vary from Naver search, Daum, IG etc. Toivanen highlighted that blogs are frequently used in the post-purchase phase. These blogs are used as a platform to share experiences but also to write product reviews. Cafés are further referred to as a frequently used forum where the consumer has the option to discuss with other people about a specific topic, as well as ask questions where others answer and comment on their opinion. In addition to these cafés, Toivonen explained that Naver offers a function where the consumer can ask questions about a specific topic and a certified expert in that particular subject will answer. This feature is most commonly used in technical matters and purchases, such as cars or computers.

4.4 Factors Impacting EV Purchases

When performing EV purchases, the customer journey is highly impacted by WoM. Choi especially highlighted that WoM has a stronger impact before the consumer starts searching for information, which means that it affects what brands are present in the initial consideration phase before building a perception of the brand. One of the most prominent factors that was consistent in all interviews was the importance of brand value and reputation as part of impacting consumers willingness to purchase a particular brand. Furthermore, the interviews emphasized that the brand value and reputation reflects who the consumer is as a person, making it a highly valued factor. Choi mentioned that the number one reason for purchasing a specific brand is the exterior styling of the product. In accordance with this finding, Toivanen, Bernhardt, Ham and Källmark also stressed that luxury brands have a certain “*trend status*” in the Asian region and therefore, these brands are particularly desired. In line with this, Bernhardt stated that there is a significant sustainability focus in SK, when compared to other Asian regions such as China. He further emphasized that SK is a high growth market where the

EV segment has had a massive growth and that the purchasing power among the population is high. This was also highlighted by Källmark who described that the environmental awareness is high and that this drives the EV market forward.

Additionally, several of the interviews revealed that the unavoidable factor “*price*” will have an impact when purchasing cars. However, the interview with Mcleod highlighted that the South Korean government is very dedicated to increasing the amount of EV’s in the society and therefore there are a lot of subsidies when purchasing EVs. Another factor that showed to be of importance from the interview with Toivanen when purchasing cars, is the level of convenience that the car offers based on the consumer needs. Ham specifically highlighted three distinctive factors that impact high-involvement purchases, where self-research is on top of the list followed by online reviews and recommendations from friends and family. However, he further stressed that this is highly individual but common since people tend to care a lot about others' perception of them. Another factor impacting high involvement purchase is mentioned by Bernhardtz and refers to cultural differences. He stated that culture will have an effect on what appeals to the consumers as well as how they engage in a purchase.

5. Analysis

This chapter combines the data from the empirical findings together with the theoretical framework. Consequently, the empirical findings have been connected back and forth together with the theoretical framework and discussed in a critical perspective. Firstly the touch points in each phase of the purchase process are outlined. The touch points are identified based on the themes presented in the empirical findings. Lastly, the discussion of the construction of the customer journey for EVs in SK.

5.1 Touch Points in The Pre-Purchase Phase

According to Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020), the pre-purchase phase encompasses all types of interaction with a brand before a purchase is made, such as need for recognition, search and consideration. Additionally, Court et al. (2009) explain that within the initial phase, the consideration phase, consumers examine those brands within a specific industry that comes on top of their minds. These are also those brands that are considered and purchased three times more than those who are not in their initial consideration (Court et al. 2009). In line with this, the survey revealed that in the pre-purchase phase, the awareness of the brand originates through either customer reviews or friends and family, followed by past experiences. However, as mentioned by Källmark, these factors are hard for a car company to have complete control over. This is in line with Klein et al. (2020) who argue that consumers' have increased access to information due to the extensive use of digital media, which results in businesses not having direct control over the information flow. Consequently, this highlights the importance of customer-owned touch points, which according to Lemon and Verhoef (2016) are the customer actions that a company cannot have control over. Hence, these own customer reflections in the form of reviews or WoM have an impact on which EV brand becomes the final purchase choice. In accordance with this, Scott et al. (2017) describe that the development of social media and digital channels have impacted consumer behavior, since it enables them to express their opinion freely online. As revealed in our findings, the customer journey mainly begins with searching for information online before completing the purchase. An explanation for this could be that consumers have access to a larger amount of information online which makes them more selective with their choice of information sources. Hence, consumers trust independent sources to a larger extent such as reviews and WoM since these have a more objective view regarding the brand. However, WoM proved to be more important before the consumer starts to search for information, thus it affects what brands the consumer considers and are aware of before building their own perception. Reviews are instead of higher importance when actively starting to look for information oneself. However, the survey results indicated that it is equally common to search for information offline in a physical setting in a potential EV purchase. Hence, this indicates less emphasis on the importance of the development of digital media. This may instead highlight the importance of source clarity and credibility as explained by Klein et al. (2020). It can thus be argued that in complex purchases that demand more detailed information, such as EV purchases, online and offline sources are equally important in order to access the most credible information possible. This was also stressed by Källmark who highlighted the importance of source reliability and that a high

amount of trust needed to be assured in order for it to be used as an information source for a purchase.

The physical interactions in the pre-purchase phase are primarily connected to gaining product information and the possibility of a test drive. The interview with Jovic especially highlighted that physical interaction is important since purchasing a car requires a big investment. Arguably, this corresponds with what was mentioned by Plananska (2020) regarding the test-drive and physical meeting being the most important touch points in the pre-purchase phase related to car purchases. Hence, it is not about the lack of information through online channels that make the customer value physical contact in the pre-purchase phase. It is more about test-driving the car which results in creating both loyalty and trust.

Additionally, as argued by Scott et al. (2017), customers are able to take a decision to abandon a product or defer the product for different reasons at any time during the customer journey. Therefore, since reviews showed to be important in the customer journey, bad reviews may have a larger impact on why the consumer decides to abandon the purchasing process of EVs. This connects to the empirical findings from the interviews which emphasized the importance of brand reputation in SK and for premium vehicles. This again highlights the importance of what Lemon and Verhoef (2016) state as customer-owned touch points, which refer to touch points that contain customer actions that cannot be impacted or controlled by the firm. The empirical findings highlighted that the most frequently used touch points for information search in the pre-purchase phase are Naver and Kakao. Additionally, the empirical findings revealed that Naver Café is most used for looking at reviews from customers who have already purchased the product, whereas Kakao is used for messaging and asking questions to experts within the field. However the number of search results on these platforms are limited in comparison to Google searches since they do not include that many international search results. Nevertheless, as Naver does not include as many international search results, this may be a contributing factor to why the domestic brands are more considered in the initial consideration when searching for cars. Thus, there is a need for international brands that have an incentive to enter the South Korean market to be present on these platforms, as these are amongst the most important touch points in the pre-purchase phase. However, as explained by Court et al. (2009) consumers add more brands into consideration in the active evaluation phase as they gain access to more information. Specifically when referring to high-involvement purchases as mentioned by Zaichkowsky (1985), since consumers are more prone to do more extensive information search as well as more thorough comparisons.

Moreover, our interview with Choi highlighted that the media landscape related to information search in the customer journey has undergone a shift from using Facebook to using Instagram and Youtube instead. Instagram has become a social platform for the younger generation and is more important when it comes to the visual aspects such as images as well as the brand itself. The brand is also able to communicate with their potential customers through the app. In contrast, Youtube has become a more informative platform that is dominated by men in the middle age. This was also supported in our survey which highlighted that those who were in the age between 40-50 were more prone to use YouTube whereas younger respondents instead

used Instagram, Naver and Kakao. A possible reason for this could be what Fauser et al. (2011) state about social media channels such as YouTube as a common source of information related to high-involvement purchases. It can be assumed that the target group for EV purchases, which are characterized generally by higher prices, are middle aged consumers rather than the younger generation. Thus, depending on a brand's target group, social media touch points, such as Instagram and Youtube could be more or less prominent. However, as the importance of omni-channeling has increased, presence on several platforms is important as consumers tend to switch between channels during the purchasing process. This was also emphasized in the interview results, but there is no clear evidence of how or when consumers tend to switch. This may be because the customer journey does not have consistent predetermined steps. Each purchasing process is characterized by different touch points and depending on when these are encountered, the switching between the channels can thus look different.

Fauser et al. (2011) explain that important touch points related to high-involvement purchases in the online setting refers to blogs and communities in the pre-purchase phase. Although our empirical findings did not highlight any importance of blogs in the pre-purchase phase, many respondents instead stated that communities are predominant in this phase. Regarding high-involvement purchases such as EVs, the pre-purchase phase generally consists of visiting communities on the platform Naver where there is a possibility for asking questions about the product before the purchase or connecting with brand communities which they are loyal to. This result is in line with Park and Mcmillan (2015) who argue that within the digital media landscape, online brand communities are established. As described by Fauser et al. (2011), strong and engaged customer communities are important to generate positive online WoM. Both the interviews and the survey revealed that WoM is highly valued in the pre-purchase phase and this may be an additional reason behind the frequently used community platforms. As described above, reviews and the experiences of other consumers are of high importance when searching for information about EV's. As described by Park and Mcmillan (2015) the South Korean population places high on Hofstede's scale of collectivism. Peer- to-peer interactions and online community building are explained as driving engagement in collectivistic cultures (Roggeveen & Grewall, 2020), thus this can be an explanatory factor of why online communities are widespread and used in SK. Furthermore, it was found in the interviews that any type of embarrassment is desired to be avoided during the purchasing process. Therefore, it is important to read reviews to avoid making any kind of purchase mistake that someone else has already made, which again points to the characteristics of collectivist cultures.

Hagberg et al. (2016) argue that omni-channeling is characterized as a more customer focused approach which enables the customer to move between channels through one coherent process. Hence, each media in the EV purchase process fulfills each purpose. Our empirical findings revealed that social media and reviews are highly valued early in the pre-purchase phase as much as they value physical contact through for example a test-drive of the EV before purchase. Moreover, the empirical findings highlighted that the customer journey is characterized by searching for information through mobile phones which allows for more flexibility and possibilities. As the mobile enables for customers to be highly flexible and allows for constant

access to information this facilitates the use of different sources simultaneously. For example, a customer can be present in an offline and online setting at the same time.

As described by Niemand et al. (2020), high-involvement purchases include a longer decision-making process. This was also discovered in the interview findings which revealed that consumers are both looking for a larger amount of information as well as more detailed information when it comes to EV purchases. Because of this, customers participating in the customer journey are exposed to information that they do not actively search for by themselves. This is also explained as the reason for the importance of reviews and WoM when it comes to car purchases, which is also supported by Zaichkowsky (1985) who describes that high-involvement purchases are characterized by more developed comparison capabilities and higher sensitivity to other available options. This can be an indicator of why consumers turn to reviews to a greater extent but also do research in for example magazines or newspapers. This is also supported by the survey which revealed that reading articles and newspapers was considered one of the most performed activities to engage in, in the pre-purchase phase. Thus, customers value what Lemon and Verhoef (2016) state as social and external touch points and in this case independent information sources, within the pre-purchase phase. Consequently, consumers' pre-purchase information status shapes subsequent information retrieval behavior and its associated barriers (Klein et al. 2020). This can be a result of what Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013) argue, that the online and offline context are distinguished from each other by the fact that the online setting tends to be more dynamic, informative as well as characterised by technological innovation. Additionally by doing online searches through brand-related information, the consumer is able to do what Klein et al. (2020) argue, which is reducing the purchasing risk where the value of the information is determined by its clarity and credibility.

Previous experiences of a brand have a high impact on whether the brand exists in the initial consideration of brands in a potential purchase (Court et al., 2009). In line with this, Court et al. (2009) state that the brands that the consumer is already familiar with are considered and purchased more often. Hence, it can be argued that the nostalgic value of a brand will have an effect on the brand loyalty, which is also highlighted by Charles (1998). This may be the reason why it was emphasized in the interview findings that domestic brands are taken into consideration more often than international brands in the initial consideration phase. The domestic brands simply have a higher nostalgic value. This is also supported by the finding that SK generally is interpreted as a protectionist market. However, as revealed in our findings this is not applicable to EV purchases to that high extent compared to other industries. This may be due to what previously was described about brand image and that international car brands may have a higher perceived brand value compared to domestic car brands. Therefore, it may be argued that within the South Korean EV customer journey, brand image is valued higher than nostalgic value. The reason for this could be due to an EV purchase being defined as a high-involvement purchase. Charles (1998) states that high-involvement purchases have higher prestige considering their superior technical ability, which specifically is the case of EVs. Hence, EV purchases are characterized by the importance of brand image, rather than origin of the brand. As revealed in our findings luxury brands have a specific trend status in the Asian region. Thus, brand image can be argued to largely affect the purchase decision. As

Mugge et al. (2010) state, product attachment can eventually result in brand attachment and further brand loyalty. Thus, it can influence future purchase decisions and create positive WoM recommendations (Mugge et al., 2010 ; Ma et al., 2019)

5.2 Touch Points in The Purchase Phase

The purchase phase encompasses all interaction regarding the payment transactions as well as the delivery possibilities (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). It could be argued that the characteristics of the automotive industry have a certain impact on these factors considering the high monetary value of a car, as well as it being a high-involvement purchase as explained by Fauser et al. (2011). The empirical findings revealed that mobile phones and digital platforms are used to a large extent during the EV customer journey. However, it can be argued that the mobile phone is more used related to the pre-purchase as well as post-purchase phases, as for the purchase phase the empirical findings indicated that the computer is more likely to be where the consumers perform a car-purchase. The reason for this could be related to the high-involvement characteristics of an EV purchase where the consumers seem to have a need for bigger screens and easier ways of interaction. This is also supported by Lee (2002) who argues that the purchaser values fast search competences and intuitive navigation, which could facilitate the possibilities of moving back and forth between web-sites etc. Moreover, this can also be explained by the importance of detailed information, when purchasing high-involvement goods as described by Zaichkowsky (1985). According to our interview findings, larger screens allow for more detailed information rather than smaller screens. Apart from this, the switching between channels as shown by the empirical findings could be explained by the omni-channel phenomenon considering that consumers tend to move between channels during the entire purchase process (Hagberg et al., 2016).

The empirical findings revealed that the payment method possibilities related to online purchases are multiple, such as credit card, bank transfer, payment through social media platforms such as Naver, Kakao etc. However, specifically regarding EV purchases, the payment methods mostly used by consumers are credit card and bank transfer. Ham mentioned that leasing is a common method related to car purchases. Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020) state that the increase in social media platforms within the purchase phase has facilitated faster payments. Nevertheless, the customer journey related to EV purchases has not been as affected by these payment methods considering the EV purchase characteristics as previously mentioned. The most prominent touch point in the purchase phase is thus, the physical meeting that occurs when completing the payment.

Deliveries are also considered as an important aspect of the purchase phase. For instance, Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020) argue that the expectation from the consumer side today is more than just receiving the product on the expected time. Consumers have a higher demand on the rapidity of the delivery (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). The interview findings emphasized that faster delivery times are an important part of the delivery element and therefore becomes a crucial part of the customer journey. However, it was especially pointed out that when referring to EV purchases, there is a more forgiving attitude towards delivery

times considering the complexity of the purchase. Furthermore, one of the respondents highlighted that the challenge within the automotive industry is to keep the consumers updated and active during the delivery times. Thus, there is a need to find ways to connect with the consumer during these periods. This is also supported by Court et al. (2009) who argue that there is a need to add touch points throughout the customer journey that the brand themselves can influence. Such touch points can thus increase the loyalty towards the brand by engaging the customer throughout the whole process. Considering the emphasis that was put on the physical aspects of the purchase phase in the empirical findings, the touch points regarding delivery and the payment can be argued to be the physical interaction. Thus, the interaction between the brand and the customer takes place when the customer visits the car-retailer and pays for, or picks up their EV.

As previously mentioned, it was highlighted in the empirical findings that even though the customer journey is becoming more digital, there is still a need for personal interaction with the brand and personnel. This was especially the case when referring to the purchase phase aspects such as delivery and payment. In accordance with this, Plananska (2020) argues that an important touch point connected to purchasing EVs is the meeting with the car retailer and the test-drive. Thus, it could be estimated that even though a huge part of the customer journey is carried out in a digital setting, the importance of personal interaction is still one of the major touch points. This was especially emphasized in the survey which indicated that when referring to an EV purchase, the consumers would rather complete the purchase offline in a physical setting. Moreover, it could be argued that the purchase phase is even more dependent on the touch point of personal interaction considering that this is where a lot of the pressure is put. This is in line with what is mentioned in referral to the high-involvement purchases mentioned by Fauser et al. (2011), regarding the tendency among high-involvement purchases to be more dependent on interaction and easy access to contact.

5.3 Touch Points in The Post-Purchase Phase

The post-purchase phase is characterized by all types of interaction that takes place after the purchase is made, such as loyalty programs and follow up services (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). Furthermore, Fauser et al. (2011) highlight that apart from customer satisfaction and retention aspects, social networking is of high importance within high-involvement purchases. Thus, the post-purchase phase is characterized by online interaction and online touch points, even though after services are most likely to be defined by physical interaction. As SK is the country with the highest rate of internet users worldwide (Daekyung & Johnson, 2009), the online communities and online interactions are important sources of communication even after an EV purchase. Our empirical findings showed that both blogs and online communities, such as Naver Café and Naver Blogs are prominent touch points in this phase. Such communities gather reviews, opinions and tips in order to share purchasing experiences with each other. As previously mentioned this could be explained through the characteristics of collectivism in South Korean culture. Furthermore, engaging in online communities and writing reviews on Naver Café or Naver blogs are prominent touch points in the post-purchase phase in order to

interact with others. In the pre-purchase phase, this instead is an important touch point related to information search. This could indicate that there is a certain connection between the post-purchase phase and the pre-purchase phase which could be viewed as the joining of the circular customer journey that has been described by Court et al. (2009).

The empirical findings suggested that in the post-purchase phase, the reviews are most likely to be written if the consumers are highly satisfied with the product or brand or in contradiction, highly unsatisfied. However, there seems to be some contradiction within the results considering that many consumers value reviews highly in the pre-purchase phase but on the other hand, in the post-purchase phase reviews are less prone to actually be written. Court et al. (2009) argue that the consumer-driven touch points such as WoM and reviews are often more complicated for the brand itself to control. However, the survey results revealed that consumers tend to be more devoted to writing reviews when receiving pre-designed review forms, this could indicate that this is a highly important touch point for brands to consider. In contrast, the interview respondents perceived that such reviews is not a common method used and therefore not seen as an important touch point in the customer journey. However, this can still be argued for being an important touch point in the post-purchase phase as such reviews turned out to be answered more frequently and thus the opportunity of getting more feedback for the brands. Even though it can be argued that WoM and reviews are touch points themselves as in line with Court et al., (2009), Plananska (2020) argues that the touch points are defined as the interaction between the customer and the brand, which in this case becomes the pre-designed review form. Thus, WoM and reviews could be argued to be important activities of the EV customer journey. By implementing pre-designed review forms this provides the opportunity for brands to add a touch point in the post-purchase phase, which they can influence themselves, in accordance with Court et al. (2009). By incorporating brand-owned touch points and forcing out the customer-owned touch points, the opportunity to control these will increase. This can be done by sending out pre-designed review forms instead of letting the consumers write freely, resulting in a higher amount of reviews as customers are more prone to write them, as well as more control. According to our empirical findings from the interviews, this may further result in higher loyalty towards the brand since the possibility of receiving bonuses increases the chance of writing reviews. However, regarding EV purchases, such bonuses may not be a decisive factor in a potential re-purchase as brand image is more crucial than the availability of bonuses for high-involvement purchases, as supported by the interview findings.

As mentioned by Fauser et al. (2011), reviews written by trustworthy sources have an effective input on the consideration of brands. In accordance, the interviews revealed that the most commonly written and read type of review are premium reviews. The reason for this is described as the higher level of trustworthiness because they are characterized as being more detailed. According to Court et al. (2009), writing reviews, recommendations and spreading positive WoM points at being actively loyal rather than passively loyal. Again, this points out the importance of these activities in the post-purchase process. In order for customers to stay loyal and committed, it is important to turn passive loyalists into active ones (Court et al., 2009) which can be done by encouraging the online communities as well as writing reviews.

The level of involvement differs between high-involvement and low-involvement purchases, resulting in the customer journey being differentiated with distinguished touch points (Charles, 1998). The empirical findings revealed that loyalty programs tend to be important for high-involvement purchases but they do not necessarily have the same motives as for low-involvement purchases. Loyalty programs could therefore be viewed as an important brand-owned touch point in the post-purchase phase, however the characteristics of the loyalty program are highly significant when referring to EV purchases. Instead of focusing on discounts and price reductions, consumers of premium brands often focus on other benefits such as the feeling of uniqueness. This is also explained by Charles (1998) who describes that the level of personalization has a direct impact on customer involvement. As was highlighted in the interviews, brand image and perceptions of brands were highly emphasized and of great importance, especially regarding EV purchases. An additional factor implying the importance of brand image and social status, especially regarding EV purchases is the focus on sustainable choices which can be depicted in SK, according to our interview findings. As our empirical findings revealed, the South Korean customer journey is characterized by high awareness of environmental aspects, resulting in the expansion of the EV market. This implies that owning an EV in SK could be interpreted as a status symbol. However, Mugge et al. (2010) explain that product attachment and relationships between consumers and brands are separate. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that if brand value and product quality are well-accepted in the market, the chance of a repurchase would be high. This could again be explained by the importance of social status and thus the brand image, especially regarding car purchases. Hence, a brand can have a symbolic meaning to show social status and therefore resulting in attachment to the brand. To some extent, the car should maintain a certain level of quality in order for a repurchase to be made, but it can be argued that the brand image is more of an important factor in the choice of brand.

In line with Kahn and Kahn (2018) who state that consumers' perceptions of service quality affect satisfaction and loyalty to a brand, fast service is of high importance during the EV customer journey in SK. In order to be loyal to a brand, a high level of service is therefore required, especially after a purchase. The experience of service quality, both in anticipation of the delivery of a car as well as after-service of the car is an important part in the post-purchase phase. Nevertheless, as defined by Plananska (2020) the touch point is related to the interaction which in this case relates to the physical meeting in after-services as revealed in our findings. This is also highlighted by Rosenbaum et al. (2017) who emphasize that it is of high importance to increase the interactions between the customer and the brand by improving the customer experience throughout the entire customer journey and related to every touch point. The importance of service throughout the customer journey, can possibly be explained by what Charles (1998) describes as the aspect of price risk. Thus, the price for acquiring the car is not of the utmost importance, but rather what price risks are associated with after the car has fallen into the consumer's possession, such as service costs, maintenance and repairs. Therefore, it can be assumed that such services are highly valued in order to reduce the price risk during the customer journey in SK. Additionally, this can be an indicator of customer loyalty towards a brand. The more reduced price risk, the more loyal to the brand. Thus, if the perception of the

service is negative this could affect the loyalty loop negatively, resulting in the consumer abandoning the customer journey which prevents the circle from closing.

Moreover, according to the empirical findings, online options are more widely used when contacting companies about service inquiries. In accordance with Charles (1998) who states that digital messaging applications and online communities allow for faster response times, the interview respondents also stated that this is the most likely reason for this being the most used way of communication. However, as earlier explained, it is hard to avoid the importance of physical meetings within high involvement purchases. As discovered in our empirical findings, the customer journey is still distinguished by the physical meeting and interaction with a specific person, often the car retailer, even after the purchase is made. Accordingly, Plananska (2020) explains that the interactions between the customers and the brands are often multiple and complex. Even though the physical contact is of importance in the post-purchase phase, this interaction can be argued to occur primarily regarding after-sales and services. Thus, the post-purchase phase is less dependent on the physical interaction compared to the pre-purchase and purchase phase. However, it can be argued that the physical meeting regarding after-services are one of the most important touch points in this phase, because of the high importance of the perceived service quality. Moreover, loyalty programs based on brand image and reviews on Naver Café, Naver blogs as well as pre-designed review forms are prominent touch points in the post-purchase phase.

5.4 The Design of The Customer Journey

The development of digital technology has led to changes in earlier models related to the customer journey. With new digital services and operations, a redesign of the customer journey is required. From earlier being described as a funnel and a series of continuous and linear processes, digitalization has in some instances, created wiser consumers with an infinite access to product selection, information as well as digital channels (Chung & Jung, 2018). Although it could be assumed that the customer journey would consist of even more digital touch points considering the South Korean market is viewed as highly digital, however there is still a lot of emphasis put on the physical touch points in the EV customer journey. Thus, there is an incentive for comprehending the customer journey of EV purchases differently from already existing models. As can be interpreted from the findings there are no clear distinctions between the different phases, as touch points are reoccurring during the purchase process. Hence, the customer journey should not be seen as completely linear where one goes through pre-purchase to purchase and lastly post-purchase in a predetermined order. Even though the customer journey could be argued to be somewhat circular, it should not be considered to be entirely circular either.

The customer journey is designed through touch points which could impact customers to proceed in the purchasing process or abandon at any time. Court et al. (2009) argue that every experience in the post-purchase affects the opinion for every subsequent decision. Thus, the perceived quality of after-service, loyalty programs and reviews could result in a repurchase either through retention of a customer or through other customers. For instance, positive WoM

can result in influencing other customers to initiate a purchasing process and thus include the particular brand in their initial consideration phase. This could be argued to result in a circular loyalty loop, which indicates that the customer journey consists of certain circular elements. One of the interviews highlighted that, considering EV purchases, brand loyalty is less significant as the consumer does not purchase a new car that often. In contrast, the majority of the empirical findings still pointed towards the importance of building loyalty amongst consumers even considering high-involvement purchases such as an EV. This especially since WoM showed to be of high importance in the post-purchase phase as well as the pre-purchase phase, indicating the circularity of the loyalty loop. In line with this, the empirical findings emphasized that loyalty was strongly associated with the reputation of the brand which again points towards the significance of WoM.

Moreover, the empirical findings highlighted that the customer journey in line with what Niemand et al. (2020) state, have different outcomes depending on the response to the different touch points based on the purchase level of involvement. Additionally, as argued by Scott et al. (2017), customers are able to make a decision to abandon a product for different reasons at any time throughout the customer journey process. Considering this, the EV purchase can be abandoned at any stage throughout the customer journey dependent on factors such as bad reviews, negative WoM or contradictory sources of information. Hence, customers can receive different perceptions from different sources. For instance, the empirical findings showed that the most common way of searching for information, and thus the most prominent touch points in the pre-purchase phase, is through customer reviews on Naver Café, as well as the company website. These sources of information could consist of incongruous messages which may be a reason for abandoning the purchase process. This is supported by Klein et al. (2020) who argue that the consumers pre-purchase information status shapes subsequent information retrieval behavior. Accordingly, this could also be an incentive for the consumer to conduct additional research from other sources or to move back and forth between initial consideration and active evaluation. Consequently, it can be interpreted that the consumers jump between different platforms, without any particular aim. For example, consumers start searching for information on Naver and then jump to the company website and then back to Naver. This is also strengthened by the empirical findings, which showed that the customer journey is signified by an abundance of information without necessarily active information searching. This suggests that consumers receive information both consciously and unconsciously, which in turn results in the consumer not having to complete specific steps in order to move forward in the purchasing process. Hence, contradicting the linear customer journey model.

As argued by Scott et al. (2017), the power relationship between the brand and consumer has changed, where the consumer has gained more influence. Consequently, it can be argued that a shift has emerged within the customer journey, from one-way communication into two-way communication, where the brands need to both meet the customer needs as well as manage the WoM. In accordance, the omni-channel perspective supports the more customer focused approach, fading out the borders between the channels (Hagberg et al., 2016). Since the customer journey is characterized by information searches on the mobile phone, this facilitates switching between channels and stages constantly. Arguably, the omni-channel phenomenon

could be an explanatory factor as to why the customer journey is signified in a less linear way, considering the weak distinctions between channels and phases.

The empirical findings further revealed that the physical meetings are of importance in the customer journey of EVs, regardless of what part of the purchasing process the customer is in. As stated by Roggeveen and Grewall (2020), the customer experiences different responses such as cognitive, emotional and behavioural in each stage that further has an impact on other stages. Thus, depending on where in the purchasing process the physical meeting takes place, it can have an effect on the subsequent steps, both regarding the final decision and the setting.

If the physical meeting takes place in the pre-purchase phase this could affect whether the purchase is completed or abandoned. However, if the physical meeting instead occurs in the post-purchase phase the outcome will affect a potential repurchase decision and other possible customers in terms of WoM and reviews. As our findings revealed, if a positive impression has been created, the brand will be in the customer's consideration phase when performing the purchase later on. As described by Court et al. (2009), brands are both added and subtracted to the initial set of brands in the active evaluation stage. In the same way, the amount of information increases and decreases in later steps in the purchase process, which means that the customer can go back from the purchase phase to the pre-purchase phase again. This since the customers may want to reconfirm their conviction and thus go through unpredictable touch points that are not controlled by the brand. However, as the customer journey can be argued to be highly individualized, how or when consumers tend to switch between channels can differ. Thus, there is still vague evidence regarding the specific order of where the touch points are encountered. One customer journey can be characterized by initiating information search on Naver Café to perform a test drive and then engaging in a physical meeting with the car retailer, while another customer journey can start with a physical meeting and then go to Naver Café.

Consequently, it could be considered that the customer journey could be viewed from a circular perspective referring to the loyalty loop and retention aspects. Nevertheless, the customer journey is also partly individualized considering that the touch points differ and are used in different phases. The phenomena of the chronological time steps; pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase could be viewed from a linear perspective. However, as has been mentioned, the customer journey is also characterized by moving back and forth in the purchasing process. As previously described, a customer could for instance move from the purchase phase back to the pre-purchase phase in order to search for additional information. Accordingly, the customer journey is not linear in one constant direction. It could be argued that the customer journey can be resembled to a maze as the customer could take different paths and still end up at the same destination. This could be illustrated through customers encountering different touch points throughout the customer journey, but still completing the purchase or abandoning the customer journey. Thus, the customer journey is not outlined equally for each and every customer. Nevertheless, depending on which perspective the customer takes, the customer journey could be viewed in terms of a circle when referring to the loyalty loop, as well as linear when viewing it stepwise, or as a maze from an individualized point of view.

6. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the derived findings from the analysis as well as answers the research question; “How is the customer journey of EV designed in South Korea?” and the subquestion; “What are the most prominent touch points related to EV in South Korea?” Lastly, the implications of the study and suggestions regarding future research is outlined.

6.1 Answering The Research Question

- How is The Customer Journey of Electric Vehicles Designed in South Korea?

The customer journey related to EV in the South Korean market is a complex journey, consisting of a large number of touch points. Our main finding concludes that there is no distinct design of the customer journey, in contradiction to previous research that has described it as a linear or circular process. However, depending on from what perspective the customer journey is viewed, the shape of the customer journey could differ. The customer journey could be viewed as circular in terms of the loyalty loop, where the touch points related to the post-purchase phase and the pre-purchase phase are intertwined, referring to the retention and loyalty aspects. The linear steps; *pre-purchase*, *purchase* and *post-purchase* are still found to be prominent throughout the customer journey considering that these are natural steps in the purchasing process. Nevertheless, the customer journey is also characterized by moving back and forth between different touch points, indicating moving in a non-constant direction. It is also important to highlight the possibility of the consumer abandoning the customer journey at any stage in the purchasing process. Consequently, the customer journey is considered to be constructed independently, where different consumers could take different paths, but still reach the same destination. Hence, the customer journey could also be viewed as a maze.

An additional conclusion regarding the design of the customer journey is the distinctive touch points related to the different steps throughout the purchasing process in SK. The customer journey could thus be outlined in different ways depending on the touch points. The touch points do not follow a distinct order and are not entirely connected to each phase. Additionally, they are found to be recurrent during the entire purchasing process. Nevertheless, depending on where in the purchase process the consumer is located as well as the level of involvement, the touch points have different impacts.

- What are The Most Prominent Touch Points Related to Electric Vehicles in South Korea?

The most prominent touch points referring to EV purchases in the pre-purchase phase are related to the information search. In the initial consideration, before the active searching takes place, WoM were found to be the most prominent activity, both in an online and offline setting.

When starting to search actively, reviews showed to be more prominent. Both WoM, reviews and other types of information searches primarily occur on the domestic platform Naver. Nevertheless, there are also other platforms that are salient for information search, such as Kakao, Google and YouTube, depending on the purpose of the information. Conclusively, the most prominent touch points are Naver as a search engine, Naver cafés, Google, YouTube and Kakao. Even though previous research highlights that SK is a highly digital market, a conclusion can be drawn that the physical interaction and thus, the physical touch points test-drive and physical meeting for product information, is still of high importance, since EV purchases are considered a high involvement purchase which points to the importance of more detailed information search.

In the purchase phase, the most important touch points are related to payment and delivery. In addition, the touch points in this phase are most often carried out in a physical setting. Thus, when paying for an EV the most common payment method is either credit card, bank transfer or leasing. However, if the EV purchase is performed in an online setting, the purchase is carried out through the computer, thus emphasizing the company website as an important online touch point. The touch points related to delivery, is characterized by picking up the EV and thus, interacting with the brand through the physical meeting. Hence, all interaction in the purchasing phase occurs in a physical setting.

Conclusively, in the post-purchase phase, the most prominent touch points refers to loyalty programs, the physical interaction related to after-services and community networking on Naver Café and Naver blogs as well as pre-designed review forms. The loyalty programs are mainly built through brand-image rather than traditional loyalty program attributes. After-service is concluded to be one of the most significant activities, where the definite touch point is the physical meeting with the car retailer. Furthermore, the touch point related to communities is concluded to be of importance due to the characteristics of SK being a collectivistic culture. In this context the networking as such is performed through the online platform Naver Café and Naver blogs, which further concludes that these are highly significant touch points. In this phase most of the touch points related to reviews, community networking and loyalty programs are carried out in an online setting. However, the physical contact was shown to be of importance even in this phase, mostly related to the after-service touch point.

6.2 Implications of Research

This research has contributed to the understanding of the customer journey and how it is designed through its characteristics such as channels and actors that participate in its configuration. Specifically, the implications of this research has contributed to practice through identifying touch points and activities within the EV customer journey that can be of value when implementing strategic choices for marketing activities. Furthermore, the findings have contributed and developed the theoretical outline of the customer journey in terms of the loyalty loop and maze resemblance, considering that the customer journey previously mainly has been described as either circular or linear. Thus, this research has developed the contextual model referred to as the customer journey considering the different viewpoints.

6.3 Limitations & Future Research

This research has focused on the customer journey of EVs in SK viewed from a customer perspective and the interrelated touch points. As the customer perspective is emphasized, touch points within the consumer control are examined from a media landscape perspective. However, the customer journey is characterized by numerous touch points and taking another perspective could provide different insights due to the high level of complexity of the phenomenon. As this research is focused on the South Korean market and touch points specifically related to this media landscape, a suggestion for future research is thus to investigate other markets or doing a comparative study in order to study differences and similarities between markets. Furthermore, through examining alternative touch points with a brand or external perspective, possible disparities could be identified between EV purchases and other high-involvement purchases.

Lastly, as the customer journey is a broad subject, future researchers could narrow the scope through focusing on one phase in the customer journey, such as pre-purchase. This in order to develop more detailed knowledge of the design and touch points in this particular phase. These suggestions on further research might ultimately have an impact on the future understanding of the constantly evolving customer journey and the future within the automotive industry, hence EV.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

(1) Short introduction of The Researchers:

- *We are three students (Johanna, Olivia and Pauline) at the School of Business, Economic and Law at Gothenburg university. We are studying the Master program in Marketing and Consumption and are currently writing our master thesis in collaboration with Polestar.*

(2) Overview of The Subject, Research Aim and Question of The Thesis:

- *Our research aims to get an understanding of the customer journey related to EVs in the South Korean market. Furthermore, what touch points are interconnected within the customer journey phases. The research also reflects the customer journey with a media landscape overview.*

(3) Introductory Questions

- Tell us a little more about you, your role and what you work with.
- Do we have your permission to record the interview?
- Are we allowed to publish your name and role in the final thesis?

(4) Questionnaire

Pre-Purchase Phase

- What is the primary way of searching for information regarding an EV purchase in the pre-purchase phase in South Korea?
- Which channels would you say are mainly related to searching for information in South Koreans? (Naver? Google? Etc.)
- What factors would you say affect the customer journey in the pre-purchase phase when it comes to high-involvement purchases? (i.e. Online reviews, WoM, Website, social status etc.)
- What are the most prominent touch points in the pre-purchase phase related to a high-involvement purchase such as an EV?
- How are the different social media platforms in South Korea used and related to the customer journey of an EV purchase?

Purchase Phase

- Which devices are the most used related to the purchase phase of the EV customer journey?
- Which are the most prominent payment methods in South Korea?
- During the purchase phase of the customer journey, is it carried out in a primarily digital or physical setting?

- Which channels (both digital and non-digital) are mostly involved in a purchase?
- How are the different channels used throughout the customer journey and at what stages are the channels exchanged or switched?
- Is the purchase completed through one single channel or multiple channels?
- How are goods normally delivered in South Korea? Mainly home delivery, click and collect or pickup?

Post-Purchase Phase

- In the post-purchase phase what are the most contributing factors or touch points for establishing loyalty related to a high-involvement purchase such as an EV?
- Are loyalty programs an important part of the customer journey related to high-involvement purchases such as Cars and if so, how are they outlined?
- In the post-purchase phase, what are the main ways of leaving feedback and thoughts regarding a high-involvement purchase such as an EV?
- In the post-purchase phase, how common and on what platforms are reviews regarding a high-involvement purchase, such as an EV left?
- What kind of digital forums exist related to EV purchases? How are these platforms used throughout the customer journey?

Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire

Questions Regarding Demographics

- (1) Do you currently live in South Korea
- (2) International age
- (3) Gender

Questions Regarding The Latest Purchase

- (4) When performing your latest purchase, how did you become aware of the brand you finally purchased from? (Please select and specify what kind of product it was AND one or more alternatives)
Please specify what kind of product, Past experiences, Physical store, The company's social media channels/the company's website, Articles/Newspapers, Influencers, Traditional commercials (Radio, Television, outdoor, print), Other,
- (5) When you did research for the same purchase as in the previous question, where did you mainly look for product information? (Please select one or more alternatives)
Customer reviews, The company website, Friends or Family, Communities/Blogs, Social media not owned by the company, The company's social media channels, I did not look for product information, Other.
- (6) When you performed your latest purchase, where did you complete the purchase? (Please select one or more alternatives)
Website, Mobile app, Offline (in store), Other (Please specify)
- (7) How did you pay for the purchase in the previous question? (Please select one alternative)
Credit card, Mobile payments (i.e. Naverpay, Kakao pay, Samsung pay, etc.), Invoice, Cash, Bank transfer, Partner owned (i.e. Paypal, Hipay, Bluesnap), Other, (Please specify)
- (8) The last time you contacted customer service regarding a purchase, how did you contact them? (Please select and specify what kind of purchase it was AND one or more alternatives)
Telephone, Chat, Please specify what kind of purchase, Offline (in store), Social media, Email, I have never contacted customer service, Virtual consultation, Other
- (9) The last time you left a review of a purchased product, where did you do that? (Please select one or more alternatives)
I have never left a review, Friends or Family, Voluntary feedback (i.e. through the company website or reviewsite), Please specify what kind of product,

Answer requested feedback from the brand (i.e. email or text), Publish on social media, Other

Questions Regarding a Potential EV Purchase

- (10) If you were about to purchase a new electric car, where would you prefer to gather your product information? (Please select one or more alternatives)
Friends or Family, Customer reviews, Car retailer/physical store, The company website, Social media not owned by the company, Communities and Blogs, The company's social media channels, None of the above, Other (please specify)
- (11) If you were about to purchase a new electric car and wish to contact customer service, how would you prefer to do that? (Please select one or more alternatives)
Offline (in store), Telephone, Chat, Virtual consultation, Email, Social media, Other (Please specify), Would not contact the brand
- (12) If you were about to purchase a new electric car, rank the activities that you would perform before the purchase.
Read articles/ Newspaper related to the purchase, Visit the brand webpage, Look on reviews from other sites, Look on reviews on social media, Test-drive the car, Visit the car store
- (13) If you were about to purchase a new electric car, where would you prefer to complete the purchase? (Please select one or more alternatives)
Offline (in store), Website, Mobile app, Other, please specify
- (14) How would you prefer to pay for a new electric car? (Please select one or more alternatives)
Offline (in store), Bank transfer, Leasing, Invoice, Mobile payments (i.e. Naver pay, Kakao pay, Samsung pay etc.), Other (Please specify), Partner owned (i.e. Paypal, Hipay, Bluesnap)
- (15) Imagine that you have purchased a new electric car, which you are very satisfied with, what activity would you most likely engage in?
I would not engage in any activity, Leave a review, Post a recommendation on social media, Join a loyalty program, Tell friends/family
- (16) Imagine that you have purchased a new electric car, which you are very unsatisfied with, what activity would you most likely engage in?
Post a recommendation on social media, I would not engage in any activity, Leave a review, Tell friends/family
- (17) Imagine that you have purchased a new electric car and you decide to leave a review, where would you prefer to do that? (Please select one or more alternatives)

Friends or Family, Answer requested feedback from the brand (i.e. email or text), Publish on social media, Voluntary feedback (i.e. through the company website or review site), I would not leave a review, Other, please specify

(18) Imagine that you have purchased a new electric car and you decide to post a recommendation on social media, where would you prefer to leave it?

(Please select one or more alternatives)

Instagram, Naver (Band, Café etc.), Facebook, Kakao (Talk, Story etc.), I would not post a recommendation on social media, Youtube, Twitter, Other (please specify)

Appendix C

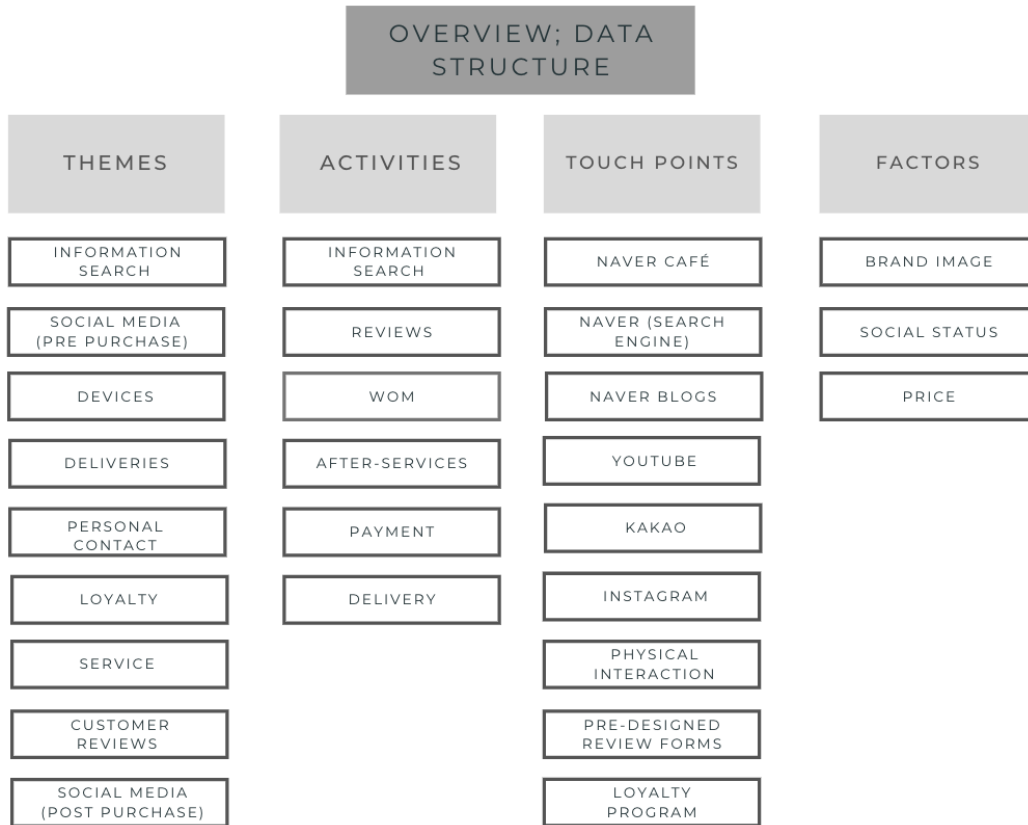
Survey Results (most frequently answered alternatives)

Pre-Purchase Phase	Questions in survey	Most frequent answers
Initial consideration stage / Awareness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> When performing your latest purchase, how did you become aware of the brand you finally purchased from? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Customer reviews (17) Friends and Family (17) Past experiences (16)
Information search	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> When you did research for the same purchase as in the previous question, where did you mainly look for product information? If you were about to purchase a new electric car, where would you prefer to gather your product information? If you were about to purchase a new electric car, rank the activities that you would perform before the purchase. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Customer reviews (27) The company website (20) Friends and family (26) Customer reviews (25) Physical store (24) Friends and family (24) Read articles/news (12) Visit the brand social media (9) Visit communities (6)
Purchase Phase		
Devices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> When you performed your latest purchase, where did you complete the purchase? If you were about to purchase a new electric car, where would you prefer to complete the purchase? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Offline (16) Website (16) Mobile app (16) Offline in store (34) Website (9)
Payment method	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How did you pay for the purchase in the previous question? How would you prefer to pay for a new electric car? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Credit card (33) Mobile app (9) In store (24) Bank transfer (19) Leasing (12)
Post-Purchase Phase		
Reviews	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Imagine that you have purchased a new electric car, which you are very satisfied with, what activity would you most likely engage in? Imagine that you have purchased a new electric car, which you are very unsatisfied with, what activity would you most likely engage in? The last time you left a review of a 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> I would not engage in any activity (12) Post a recommendation on social media (9) Leave a review (7) Post a recommendation on social media (13) I would not engage in any activity (8)

	<p>purchased product, where did you do that?</p> <p>4. Imagine that you have purchased a new electric car and you decide to leave a review, where would you prefer to do that?</p>	<p>3. I have never left a review (16)</p> <p>3. Friends or family (15)</p> <p>3. Voluntary feedback, i.e. company website or review site (9)</p> <p>4. Friends and family (27)</p> <p>4. Answer requested feedback (22)</p> <p>4. Publish on social media (14)</p>
Social media	<p>5. Imagine that you have purchased a new electric car and you decide to post a recommendation on social media, where would you prefer to leave it?</p>	<p>5. Instagram (21)</p> <p>5. Naver (18)</p> <p>5. Kakao (14)</p>
Service/personal contact	<p>1. The last time you contacted customer service regarding a purchase, how did you contact them?</p> <p>2. If you were about to purchase a new electric car and wish to contact customer service, how would you prefer to do that?</p>	<p>1. Telephone (19)</p> <p>1. Chat (15)</p> <p>2. Offline, in store (34)</p> <p>2. Telephone (23)</p>

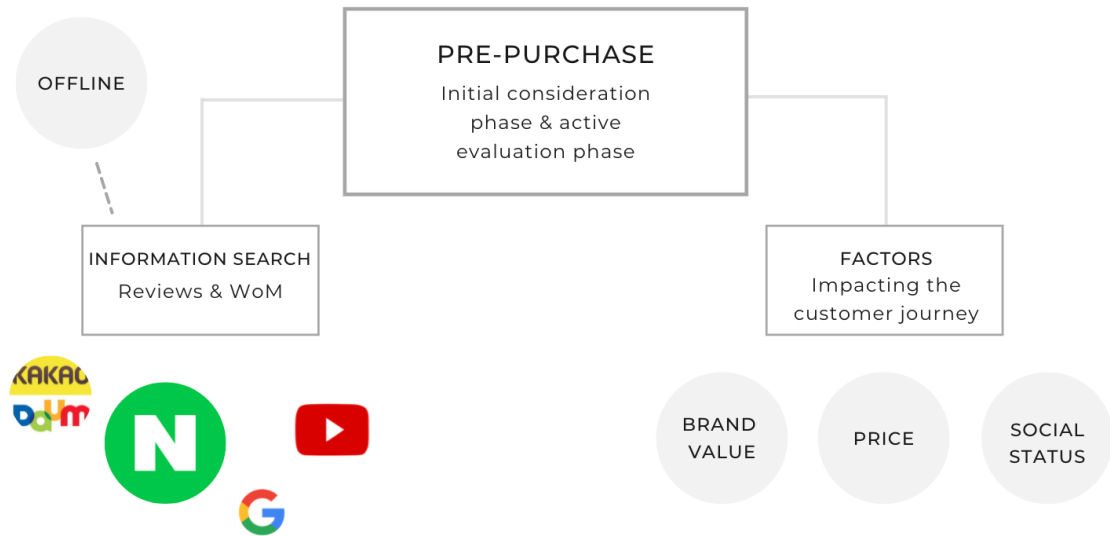
Appendix D

Overview of The Structure



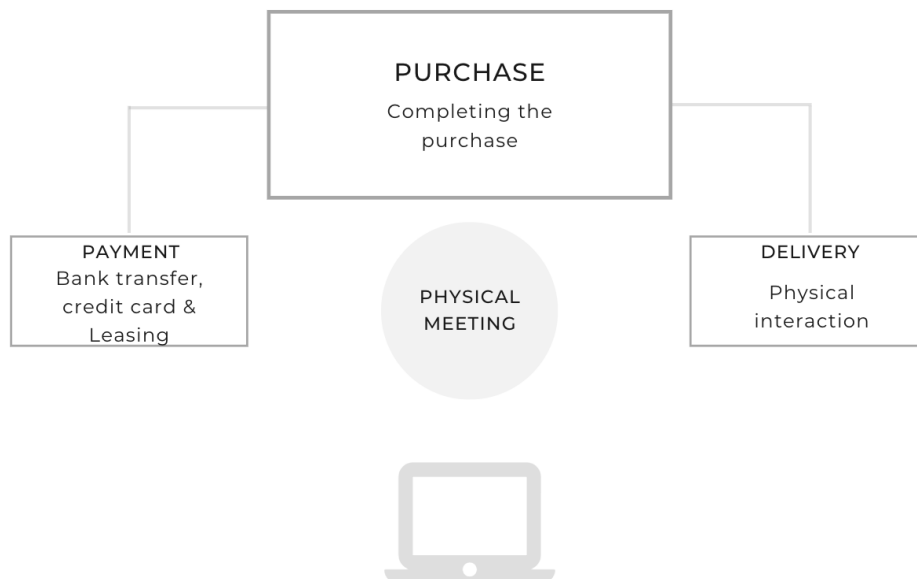
Appendix E

Touch Points in The Pre-Purchase Phase



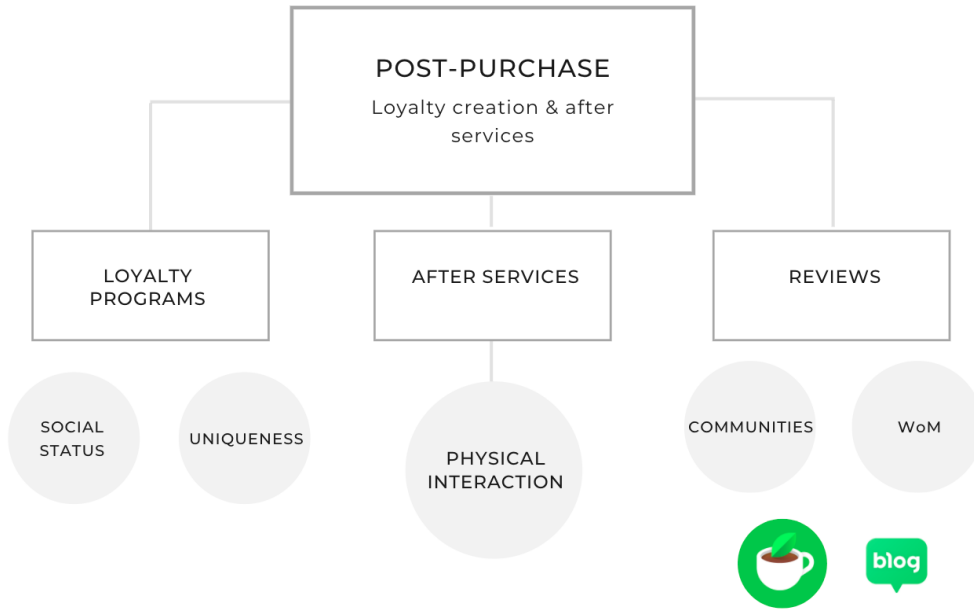
Appendix F

Touch Points in The Purchase Phase



Appendix G

Touch Points in The Post-Purchase Phase



Appendix H

Overview of The Customer Journey

