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# Product attributes that facilitate disruption survival in declining markets

What we can learn from the disruption veteran vinyl

by

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# Abstract

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Title:</b>                   | Product attributes that facilitate disruption survival in declining markets: What we can learn from the disruption veteran vinyl  |
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| <b>Keywords:</b>                | Disruption Survival, Declining Markets, Product Attributes, Product Life Cycle, Market Innovation   |
| <b>Thesis purpose:</b>          | The purpose of this thesis is to (1) investigate if product attributes relevant for early stages of the product life cycle enable the survival of disruption and (2) to further examine if there are any specific product attributes related to later stages of the product life cycle enabling market innovation.  |
| <b>Methodology:</b>             | For the purpose of this thesis, qualitative semi-structured interviews and a netnography were applied to study subjective customer perceptions towards attributes related to product survival. The approach of social constructivism and the relativist stance of this research compliments upon the overall observational view and gathered information of how individual people experience vinyl and product attributes. These attributes, stemming from customer behaviour research and mainly applied to early product life cycle stages served as guiding themes for the data analysis. Directed content analysis was further applied to identify and categorize textual data with subsequent coding. The survival of vinyl served as an exemplary research field to explore the individual experience users have with disrupted products. |
| <b>Theoretical perspective:</b> | This study makes use of concepts and models in relevant literature regarding disruption, the product life cycle, substitute theories and consumer behavior. These act as a theoretical framework to assess the research field.  |
| <b>Empirical data:</b>          | Semi-structured Interviews, Netnography   |
| <b>Conclusion:</b>              | The product attributes of tangibility and aesthetics can be applicable to later stages of the product life cycle as they contribute to a superior product quality and differentiation, thus enhancing the customer experience. Nostalgia answers to a growing societal desire for recollection. In combination, these attributes inspire consumers to create rituals in their interaction with the product and can evoke the development of a strong, community-focussed customer base. This builds the foundation for a successful market innovation.  |

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# Abbreviations

|     |                    |
|-----|--------------------|
| CD  | Compact disc       |
| DJ  | Disc jockey        |
| Etc | Et cetera          |
| PLC | Product life cycle |
| PR  | public relations   |



# 1 Introduction

In today's rapidly changing and fast-paced world, products and markets are in a constant flow and businesses need to differentiate their products and services from competitors in order to sustain their market share. The effects of the advancing technological disruption can be observed in the retail business, media industry, photography and telecommunications, with experts expecting for more sectors to follow, such as the automotive, health or education sector (Leavy, 2017). Because of the high possibility of disruptors to abolish established products and markets, the importance of knowledge on how to survive such disruptions is of immense need. Firms have the tendency to focus alone on catering to the preferences of their core customers, which acts as the ideal opportunity for disruptors to enter the market by delivering solutions for the needs of overlooked market segments or customer groups (Bower & Christensen, 1995; Christensen, Raynor & McDonald, 2015).

In addition to technological disruptions, there is a steady transitioning towards the digital realm. For example, the digitization in the music industry forms part of a general trend of leisure and entertainment content. This process is represented in the book market with the popularity of e-books and can also be observed in the games, newspaper and photography industry (Magaudda, 2011). Adding to disruptions and digitalization, companies must be aware and able to respond to potential substitute products that are constantly introduced to the market and can threaten their position (Porter, 2008).

The risk companies face with the disruption of their market and the implied replacement of their products is illustrated in the product life cycle (PLC). In later stages of this cycle, well-known and established products experience a diminishing popularity among customers who in return shift their demand and attention towards newly launched products. A product is said to be able to survive such a shift only when its life cycle stages are properly evaluated by the company and a necessary product development takes place. The most common response from companies to such situations, with the added pressure from disruptors posing a threat of substitution is by applying a product or market innovation strategy (Johne, 1999; Nilsson, 2018).

Even though a company can be successful in surviving disruption by applying general strategic steps of market innovation, its products should exhibit certain product attributes that are able to maintain survival in the new market, being desirable for existing and emerging consumer segments. Gonçalves (2008) characterizes such product attributes as a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes, which impact the customer behaviour displayed towards the offered products. Consequently, companies must identify and solidify the attributes that are making a product attractive to customers and market them accordingly. By implementing these attributes, firms are able to increase the chances for their products to survive in disrupted markets with strong competitors and low demand.

The effect of product attributes acts as an important stimulant for consumer behaviour towards a product (Balla & Deari, 2015). Tangibility, aesthetics and nostalgia are among those generally mentioned product attributes that are perceived to have high relevance for the majority of customers. The power of such product attributes can be observed in how the return to vintage technology is increasingly making a comeback in many markets. For instance, camera manufacturers are reintroducing instant cameras to their product portfolio,

with customers appreciating the product's nostalgic, imperfect look of the photos combined with their tangibility (Ingenieur.de, 2016).

One of the most popular examples defying the digitization trend is vinyl, which left the mainstream market in 1991, being widely replaced by the compact disc (Millard, 2005; Osborne, 2012). The convenience of digital media and online streaming service providers, with easy access to songs, playlists and albums from any location, any minute of the day, pushed physical albums further into irrelevance (Hargreaves & North, 1999, Kyrnin, 2019; Spotify, 2019). And although the retro technology has been disrupted several times by more convenient music media formats, enthusiasts around the globe remain loyal customers to vinyl (Sarpong, Dong & Appiah, 2016). Since then, vinyl reclaimed a significant fraction of the music market it dominated in earlier stages of its product life cycle, with sales again increasing by 22.3% in 2017 (IFPI, 2018). Britain's bestselling music magazine Mojo declared "the vinyl revival" the music trend of 2011 (Osborne, 2012). However, vinyl only holds 3.7% of the overall recorded music market and can therefore be considered a niche market and exception in the overall music industry digitization process (Osborne, 2012; IFPI, 2018).

This is why the survival of vinyl served as a research subject to explore the importance of product attributes for the continuance of products in declining markets. It displayed the opportunity to confirm the importance of the general product attributes mentioned in the literature, but also hinted towards additional characteristics explaining the survival of products in declining markets. It therefore became a starting point for the conduct of the presented research in order to draw conclusion for other products and industries.

## **1.1 Problematization**

The life cycles of products are getting increasingly shortened and firms are pushed to continually innovate if they want to present their customers with exceptional quality while at the same time being profitable. These innovative measures are mostly done by introducing new products, advanced or new variants of existing products or instituting new strategies (Peter & Olson, 2010). The fact that consumer behaviour and its relation to product attributes is mostly investigated in the context of the earlier stages of the PLC, raises the question if such attributes can be applicable to later PLC stages. The majority of scholars put emphasis on product attributes fulfilling the functions of originality, freshness and merchandise, thus implying that these attributes are being more relevant to the early stages of the PLC (Ahmed, 2007, cited in Shamsher, 2012). Academic research and literature has taken no extensive focus on developing the special product attributes that are of importance in order to remain appealing in a declining market. Johnne (1999) and Nilsson (2018) argue that one way of surviving in the market is to apply market innovation, which they illustrate in a generalized concept. The problem arises with the scarcity of information regarding the specific product attributes enabling the survival in the declining stage. The authors in consumer behaviour research are mentioning the relevance of product attributes, however they are often referred to as necessary tools for developing new products (Nowlis, 1995 cited in Akpoyomare, Adeosun & Ganiyu, 2012). For that reason, there is a high relevance for specifying if certain product attributes can be identified as suitable for later PLC stages and which attributes enable disruption survival.

## **1.2 Research Aims & Question**

In relation to the background illustrated above and the outlined research problematization, this study aims to identify which product attributes make products survive disruption. In addition, the presented research aspires on finding attributes specific to late stages of the PLC that make it possible for products to survive in declining markets. This thesis and its conducted investigation therefore pursue to answer the questions stated below.

Can attributes relevant for early stages of the product life cycle enable the survival of disruption?

Are there specific product attributes related to later stages of the product life cycle enabling market innovation?

## **1.3 Purpose Delimitation**

A delimitation of this research is that it was conducted focussing on the European market, with respondents from four different European countries. Therefore, the situation in other markets around the globe could differ at great extent. The insights gained could be less representative for customer groups from other countries and cultural backgrounds or the situation for retailers on other continents.

## **1.4 Outline of the Thesis**

In order to deliver answers to the research questions stated above, the thesis commences to review the existing theoretical background of the studied field. This section acts as a platform for establishing theoretical frameworks that are relevant for the assessment of the explored phenomenon, with necessary and relevant concepts, models and theories from various researchers. This is followed by a justification of the applied methodology, which demonstrates the structure and process of the study and provides reasoning for the chosen research approach, design, data collection method and analysis model. Furthermore, it will show how the thesis followed ethical considerations and elaborates on the credibility of the study. In the consecutive chapter of analysis and discussion the interpretations of the analysed data are presented and combined with the aforementioned theoretical background, revealing insights and newly gained comprehension deriving from it. The final chapter of the thesis comprises of a conclusion, in which the gathered knowledge is summarized and an overview of practical and theoretical contributions regarding the phenomenon is given. The thesis closes with an acknowledgement of possible limitations of the research resulting in propositions for future research.

## 2 Theoretical Background

The following chapter provides an overview of the meaning of disruption, how it affects existent businesses and why it poses a threat to the market status quo. It demonstrates how disruption is linked to market mechanisms such as standard battles and the concept of competitive forces in Porter's Five Forces model. The PLC and the innovation concept give insight on the dynamics that underlie the success of products. Furthermore, it scrutinizes how businesses can encounter disruption according to the existing literature and what different strategies for the survival of disruption are recommended. Lastly, the implications of consumer behaviour research regarding the attributes that make a product fitting for such strategies are discussed.

### 2.1 Disruption

Cambridge dictionary (2019) describes the business term of disruption as a change to the traditional way that an industry operates, especially in a new and effective way. In today's busy and changing world, disruption is a topic which many companies are currently dealing with.

One of the increasing challenges in markets today is how companies can stay competitive and consequently be able to cater to their customers' needs. Disruption is becoming so aggregated, that not all market competitors are able to survive. Recently, disruption forces are not only present in technological and digitalization bodies, but has become prevalent in information technology companies, start-ups, artificial intelligence and social media platforms. Important elements of such disruptions are not only of technological nature, but relate to changes in customer behaviour or societal norms (Strandvik, Holmlund & Lähteenmäki, 2018). Disruptive new entrants can effectively shift markets, leaving established companies with a difficult task of how to respond to such changes.

With disruption being a present threat to businesses in every sector and especially prominent because of the accelerated nature of technological disruption, it has led to an overuse and subsequent obliteration of the term. In many occasions disruption is used for any context where a market status quo is changing, but not every marked shift means companies have to defend themselves against a challenging disruptor (Christensen, Raynor & McDonald, 2015; Leavy, 2017). Although disruption is closely related to innovation, it does not refer to any new improvement to the activity of a business, but instead refers to situations, where a "smaller company with fewer resources is able to successfully challenge established incumbent businesses" (Christensen, Raynor & McDonald, 2015, p.45).

The topic of disruption was first brought up by Bower & Christensen (1995) where they introduced the concept of disruptive innovation in form of technological advancements. They illustrated how successful disruptors were able to answer to future performance needs of products while the disrupted firms were focused on their current customer desires. Established firms tend to overly attend to the preferences of their core customers, which opens the field for disruptors to enter the market by catering to the needs of other market segments and customer groups (Bower & Christensen, 1995; Christensen, Raynor & McDonald, 2015). If the incumbents fail to respond in time to this development, the entrants are able to broaden their reach to the mainstream, offering products and services for their

needs while sustaining their competitive advantage responsible for their early success (Christensen, Raynor & McDonald, 2015).

Christensen (1997) continues to show how new technologies are the reason for firms' decline and subsequent failure by focussing on the difference between sustaining technologies and disruptive technologies. The former is mainly targeting current products and how already existing procedures can be made more efficient, whereas the latter is focused on the possibility of reinventing those actions. A sustaining approach, no matter if incremental or sudden, aims at increased sales to the firm's most profitable customer segment. It can sometimes underestimate competitors and their disruptive innovation approach, mostly because their activity is assumed to be inferior to the own. This often leads to failure of well-known and established companies, as new entrants to the market can start to influence the market itself without initial interference by the incumbents (Christensen, 1997; Christensen, Raynor & McDonald, 2015). Christensen (1997) further argues that the one thing that differentiates winners from losers in disruptive markets is not the company itself, but rather the individual who is able to detect future notions better than others and carries out the vision in order to navigate the company to undiscovered territory. His major conclusion regarding disruption is that the individual mind-set can make or break a company, as it could be observed in Steve Jobs and the company Apple, where he served as the main innovative mind. The focus therefore lies on companies that are able to think differently and be able to evaluate happenings in the market before settling on what to do (Strandvik, Holmlund & Lähteenmäki, 2018). The analyzed literature on disruption provided the authors with valuable knowledge on the meaning of disruption and served as the first research stream of this thesis. A main focus has been the threat of technological disruption for incumbent businesses, as it is a dominant force in the modern economic landscape.

## **2.2 Competitive Forces**

The new disruptive entrants are one of the main competitors for established companies, making them the main threat to their existent business. As previously illustrated, disruptors enter the market with a new product or business model that does not only pose competition but has the ability to change the current market standard of doing business. Porter's Five Forces model deals with possible threats for a company, covering, amongst other aspects, the threat of substitute products, which is discussed more in depth in the following section.



Figure 1 Porter's Five Forces (Porter, 2008)

Porter (2008) describes the essence of the model as a company's competition for profit while evaluating five competitive forces: suppliers, customers, potential entrants, substitute products and rivalry, as illustrated in Figure 1. By combining these forces, the industry structure actually forms the competition and synergy between companies in an industry. Even when there are many types of industries, the underlying factor communicated is the ambition for profitability. By introducing this framework, companies are able to apprehend and prepare for disruptors over time by evaluating the strongest competitive forces, which in return affect the profitability in their industry. This action then can help companies to develop stronger strategies to tackle the disruptors.

### 2.2.1 Threat of substitutes

This section of the model demonstrates how a substitute can be able to act the same way or similar when compared to an already established product in the industry. One of the most famous examples of successful substitutes is express mail being pushed out by the substitute of electronic mail communication. There are instances where the substitute is direct, others are indirect but both have the ability to replace well-known industry products. Among many threats linked with substitutes, one particular is displayed in not identifying certain products as potential substitutes. To one's business they may present themselves as very different from the own product; however it may be a potential substitute in the eyes of customers (Porter, 2008).

Grundy (2006) states that the link between substitutes and buyer power brings the customers to often seek for substitutes, which in return invites and helps them into the market. The number of substitute threats is negatively affecting the industry profitability, while confining the actual profit potential by capping prices. A substitute usually presents a more favourable price-performance exchange in comparison to the products in the industry. Examples of such action can be seen in the telecommunication industry, where Skype has become a more

affordable and interactive substitute, or in the video rental industry which has been struggling to survive next to services like Netflix and Youtube. A frequent reason for the decrease of substitute threat over time is technological improvement, which can decrease the price of a product. Overall, a company should be active and observant to changes happening in also other industries, where substitutes to their offering might emerge. An unrelated industry or business may have considerable influence, for example by applying technological changes or competitive disruptions (Porter, 2008). As it can be observed from the examples above, technological substitutes play a major threat for companies. The high amount of successful technological innovations has the ability to start new industries and completely transform or destroy the existing ones. After the initial lounge, the sales of threatened companies may endure to grow for a few years, however then generally decline, with the new technology passing the old in sales. The authors argue that threatened firms usually resist the substitutes in two ways. Either the older technology is getting advanced or firms invest in extensive commitments for new product development using the new technology (Cooper & Schendel, 1976). Trivikram (2016) talks about the different options for overcoming threats of substitutes on the market. He introduces alternatives such as product differentiation, value for money, strengthening brand loyalty and image and improvement of customer relations in order to overcome the competing substitute products.

Furthermore, the Porter model discusses the topic of business networks and how it is important in building resistance against the threat of substitutes. They are named demand-side benefits of scale and are also known as network effects. The concept implicates that a buyer's eagerness to purchase a product grows alongside with the amount of other buyers obtaining a certain product. The network effect translates to the customer's mind-set that appreciates being in a network or community together with other customers exhibiting similar consumption patterns. The threat for new competitors entering the market is the restricted willingness of customer to purchase product from a newcomer, when there are existing companies featuring a large loyal customer base.

### **2.2.2 Standard battles and Business Network**

Following the topic of networks as they were mentioned above, Hartigh, Ortt, van de Kaa and Stolwijk (2011) studied the relationship of business networks and standard battles of technology during the technology life cycle. Standard battles hold many risks for participating companies, where the loser is presented with high financial losses. All the risks lead to companies being highly dependent on which standard to support. In order to overcome this challenge, firms need to know the characteristics that affect the standard power. When it comes to standard dominance within the technology life cycle, a regular situation is the competition of two different technologies where a new technological standard confronts or disrupts the current predominant standard. The relationship between business networks and standard dominance pushes firms to cooperate, because the resources and capabilities related to a technological standard dominance are commonly not accessible in one single company. This is why the size of a network is a crucial trait, where the amount of involved participants in a network size can influence the success. Network effects contain also indirect chains such as the accessibility of complementary goods. These complementary goods have a wide variety of abilities, such as the advancement of standard based products sparking end user network effects. The presence of network effects in a company's environment make users an influential core value and a competitive aspect in the dominance struggle (Suarez,

2003); Suarez (2005, cited in Hartigh et al., 2011) said that network connections which are stronger can closely help the likelihood of a user's choice for a given technology over other substitutes. Hartigh et al. (2011) argued that standard battles can be present in different stages of the life cycle of a product, where the network size diversity and density are extremely imperative standard dominance drivers.

By investigating the concept of standard battles and combining it with the insights from the literature on disruption and the threat of substitutes, the authors gathered knowledge about the effect of technological substitutes. In the modern economy, substitutes tend to be increasingly of technological nature, often acting as the disruptor for a variety of industries. As mentioned in the section on disruption, companies can survive by advancing their development of new products or production methods with the help of new technology. The competitive forces model provides supplementary background information on the topic of substitutes and reinforces the research focus.

### 2.3 Product Life Cycle

The Product Life Cycle is a model-based proposal which highlights flows of product sales throughout the life of a product, starting from the formation to the extinction (Marques & Coelho, 2017). Every product on a market follows a certain life-cycle, which consists of observable stages. Products which are considered as long-time established eventually change and decrease in popularity, while new launched products are demanded more from customers. This shows the importance of life cycle stages of a product, which can provide the company with a lifespan diagram making it possible to focus on product development in the right timing (Product Life Cycle Stages, 2019).

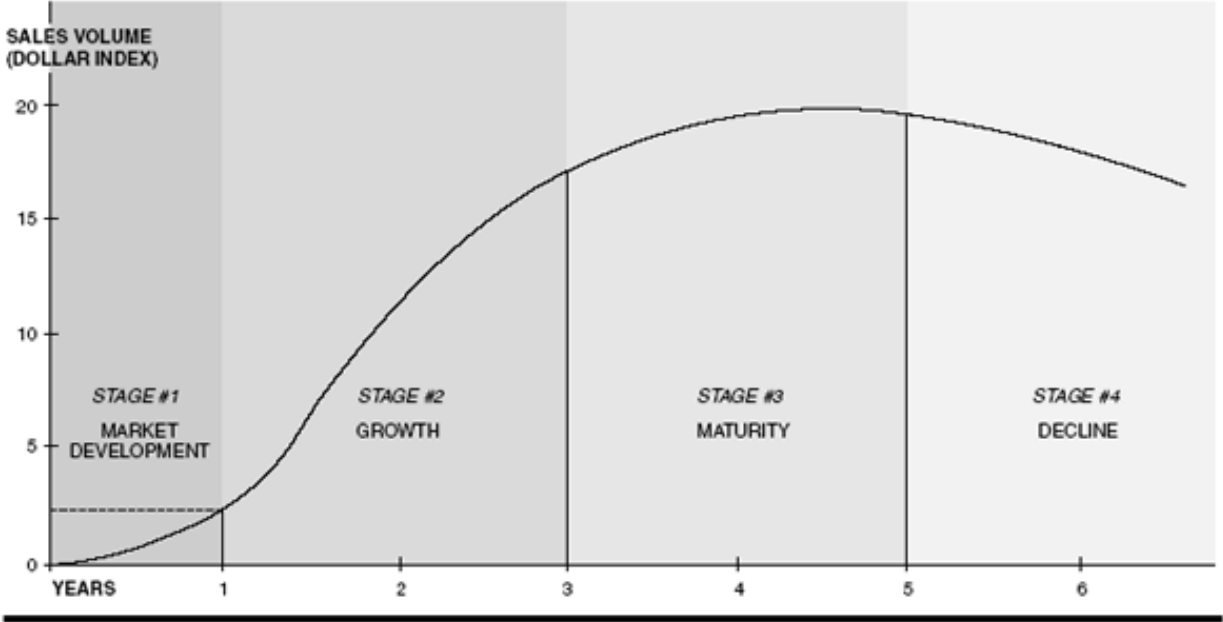


Figure 2 Product Life-Cycle (Levitt, 1965)

As it can be seen in Figure 2, the PLC obtains four main stages: Market Development, Market Growth, Market Maturity and Market Decline. However, the main focus in this paper is



the survival of disruption. Therefore only two of the stages fit the objective of this paper and will be further examined: The stages of maturity and decline, which are presented below.

### **2.3.1 Market Maturity**

The maturity stage of the PLC shows the highest market exposure and introduces market saturation, with most consumers being familiar or owning the product. This also increases the growing price competition between companies in the market (Levitt, 1965, Marques & Coelho, 2017). Continuous challenges start to arise, such as decreasing market share and profit, caused by the high amount of competing companies (Product Life Cycle Stages, 2019). For the first comer of market development stage, it becomes crucial to maintain a close relationship and direct communication with its customers. Other activities recognised in this stage contain focus on packaging, advertising differentiation and interest in particular market segments. One characteristic of the maturity stage is its duration, it can prevail for many years neither declining nor growing. However, the maturity stage can retain its favourable position as long as no competitive substitutes or disruptors are introduced to the market (Levitt, 1965).

### **2.3.2 Market Decline**

The stage of decline is the last stage in the PLC model. It arises when industry and the market has become reconstructed, with less businesses able to endure the highly saturated competition. Opportunity for profit in the market reduces, that is why strategies like mergers, buy-outs or other aggressive activities are practiced by the remaining companies to accelerate the decline or extinction of others. In terms of consumer behaviour, the product becomes dull and uninteresting, creating a plummeting product market with customers not inclined to purchase given product (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2009; Levitt, 1965). Eventually, the challenge of not generating profit from the actual product makes businesses not able to dismantle the decline. Companies are faced with the last choice of product withdrawal, in order to avoid being financially deprived. However, there are a few options for companies to attempt in market decline stage. One of the options is cost reduction by engaging with different manufacturing choices such as relocating production facilities into other locations or employing new techniques. Furthermore, businesses can fight against the decline stage through product introduction in unfamiliar, cheaper markets (Product Life Cycle Stages, 2019).

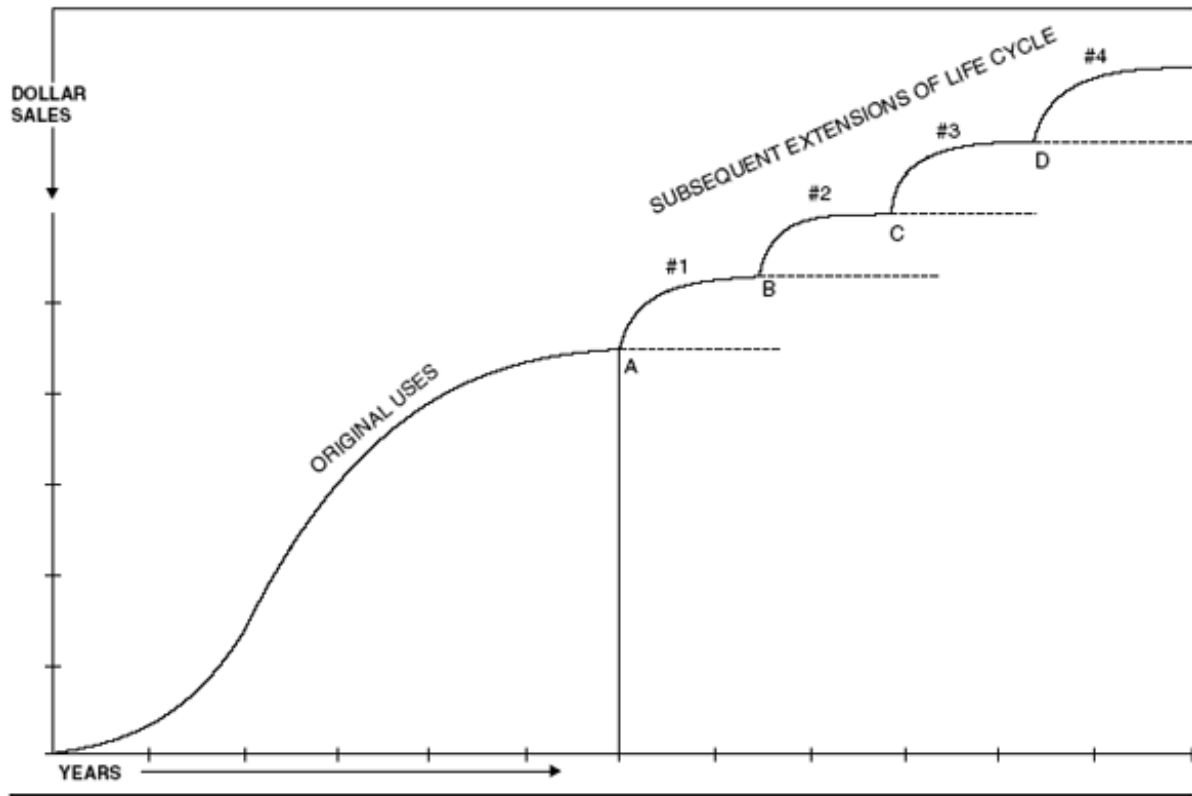


Figure 3 PLC extensions (Levitt, 1965)

However, there are certain sub-sequential actions in the extension of the PLC. The example of nylon can describe a successful extension action. Firstly, the nylon products were used mostly in the military; however, the Du Pont Company initiated measures to revitalize the nylon sales and increase profits by using nylon in fashion items. The societal shift towards casual living helped the company to rebuild their brand. Since smart fashion for women had become widely accepted by society, the company was able to invest in PR, advertising nylons as the perfect product for the fashionable youth. This created an action called product life-stretching, also known as extension strategy (see Figure 3). These strategies are characterized as active product tactics, a long-term plan of revitalization of a product combined with the right timing, force and consideration and lastly with accompanied market-prolonging activities in the later stages of the PLC (Chodak, 2011; Levitt, 1965).

The PLC gives businesses a framework for company and product practices. It creates a great advantage pursuit in foreseeing the future in product planning and merchandising, while keeping a rational stance. The development of strategic moves against the competition can be supported at great extent by using the PLC. However, companies need to keep in mind the threats that the introduction of new products entails. The newer or unique a product introduced to the market is, the longer it takes for the consumer to get familiar with it and socially normalise it. The need for a positive first experience and impression is fundamental, given that many future consumers wait for the first movers to try the product and share their opinion on it (Levitt, 1965).

## Reposition for Growth

The venerable product life cycle curve describes the growth trajectory most products take from introduction to decline. But by changing products' positioning in the marketplace, companies can propel their products backward or forward into the lucrative growth phase.

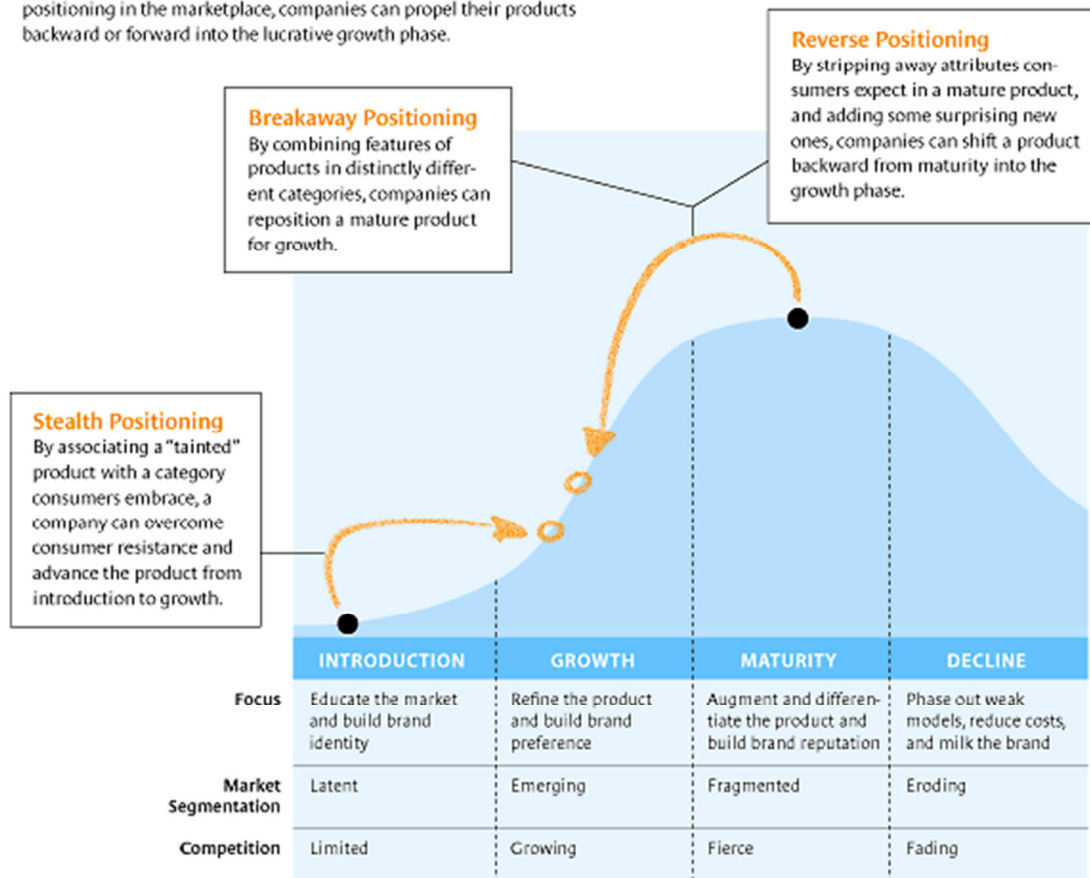


Figure 4 PLC Repositioning for Growth (Moon, 2005)

When it comes to the relationship between PLC and disruption, Moon (2005) argues that businesses using the method find themselves quite exposed to market disruptive competitors. He argues that PLC can be positively restructured, by firms disrupting its section by positioning, which is shown in Figure 4. This can form a desirable place for the company and consequently damage its competitors. Starting with reverse positioning, this action offers firms in the maturity stage the ability to leap backwards into the growth stage by implementing unexpected attributes and features into the product. Such action then provides the company with a possibility to appeal to the customers with a product they do not perceive as mature. Another approach is known as stealth positioning. Although this concept has not been associated with disruption in its core, it can provide a new attempt at PLC instead of decline. This is usually done by affiliating the product into a dissimilar market category.

## 2.4 How to encounter disruption

In business literature, the dominant suggestion to encounter a possible disruption by a competitor is to create a new disruption on its own (Wessel & Christensen, 2012). In order to do this, businesses have to be able to monitor their competitors' actions and market developments at all times to foresee potential threats to their business sphere. This process, described by Day and Shoemaker (2005) as scanning the periphery, serves to identify and

evaluate changes in the firm's environment to react in time to emerging shifts in demography, new competitors and technological progress. However, recognizing a threat to the own business early on does not represent the only challenge for managers. In order to hinder competitors to supersede the existent business it is necessary to identify the strengths of the disruptor's business model and compare them to the own key competitive advantages (Wessel & Christensen, 2012).

As stated before, a business wanting to rise above its weaker position in the market or fight the potential disruption can do so by creating an innovation on its own. Although disruption is highly intertwined with innovation, the term only refers to a radical innovation by smaller companies that challenges the current industry status quo. Innovation is able to "shift competitive advantage when rivals either fail to perceive a new way of competing or are unwilling or unable to respond" (Porter, 1990, p.45). This can assist in the move towards a new market for products or become superior to the competition. Change can be implemented in different parts of the business' elements. Therefore, the different types of innovation can be divided into product innovation, process innovation, market innovation and organizational innovation (Nilsson, 2018). In the following, two of these forms will be observed in detail.

### **2.4.1 Product innovation**

Product innovation is concerned with new or improved characteristics, materials, components and design elements of consumer goods. It can also involve the introduction of an entirely new product as well as it serving a new purpose through the change of its functions. A representative and very popular development for this category is the invention of the iPhone. In 1997, Apple was facing bankruptcy after being in direct competition with Microsoft for two decades. In that time, no one would have ever predicted for Apple being superior to Microsoft anytime soon. Although it started with Apple producing computers and Microsoft developing software, they soon had a very similar business focus (Stewart, 2015). Microsoft even thought of launching the first ever smartphone in 1991, even before IBM's first attempt at a similar device, but discarded the idea (Webster, 2012). The mobile phone market was at length dominated by firms like Nokia and Blackberry until in 2001, when Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone. This device was varying to an enormous extent from all other existent phones, with new functions, components, services and a completely new design (Pierce & Goode, 2018). This product innovation formed a disruption on its own, positioning smartphones in the mainstream market and changing people's way of living in the long-term. It saved the company from its weaker position in the market, with 69% of Apple's revenue coming from the iPhone sales, resulting in Apple ultimately growing bigger than Microsoft with a market capitalization of \$683 billion, which is more than double the amount Microsoft displays (Stewart, 2015).

Although product innovation is widely presented in literature as the most successful way to encounter disruption, it is not applicable to all businesses. Especially such companies in declining markets who are facing constantly decreasing revenue due to fierce competition and low demand might not have the financial resources to innovate their product. Additionally, innovation relies on emergent creative ideas that cannot be forced into existence but surface deliberately from business challenges, new developments and trends. Another factor is that firms with a loyal customer base, even if low-numbered, might not want to give up to serve the needs of their consumers but keep the characteristics and core

advantages of their product to do so. That is why for some businesses, market innovation might be the better option for survival.

#### **2.4.2 Market innovation**

Market innovation is understood as penetrating new markets for the already existing product. It is not necessarily restricted in location, meaning it does not only refer to new regional markets but also to different segments and industries a business has not been active in before (Johns, 1999; Nilsson, 2018). Market innovation presents a possibility to move into other markets when a disruptor is challenging the current market status quo. A popular type of market innovation is known as the blue ocean strategy. The main objective of this strategy is putting the competitor into an irrelevant position in relation to one's core business by moving on into new market spheres (Blue Ocean Strategy, 2019). The need for a blue ocean strategy is created by the fight for market share in markets with declining demands, so called red oceans. Due to the fast pace of technological developments challenging prevalent businesses, the level of competitiveness intensifies and the supply levels supersede the demand side in basically every existing market (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). Businesses can move into untouched markets by following a strategy of product differentiation combined with low-cost pursuit, therefore creating new demands. The measures of the blue ocean strategy rely on the industry player being able to remodel the market borders and industry rules, essentially conducting a market innovation. By creating blue oceans, businesses are tapping the potential of new markets and segments, enabling the company to reach profitable growth and set the standards and set of rules in the new market (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005; Blue Ocean Strategy, 2019).

A representative example for the repositioning of a product through market innovation by a weaker market player can be seen in the example of Snus, the Swedish moist powder tobacco product. After the Second World War, the product was threatened to be replaced by American cigarettes, which were very popular and highly requested in Europe. The usage numbers of snus were steadily declining for a few years until the awareness of the strong health risks of smoking cigarettes was risen by several health experts and institutions in the late 1960s. This was an incentive for snus producers to advertise the product as a less harmful tobacco alternative, making it more attractive to a younger audience, therefore experiencing a revival in popularity in the 1970s within a new market (Ramström, Borland, & Wikmans, 2016; Swedish Match AB, 2016).

However, declining markets can be still inviting for companies to keep competing if they are faced with attractive conditions such as a price insensitive demand, the continuous support of loyal customers and the ongoing need for replacement equipment in the future. If a declining market is deemed as potentially favourable, businesses tend to commit to pocketing, where the firm keeps the facilities running at a lower capacity for an extended period of time. It is a sign of positive declining market if it serves to pocket a demand of reasonable size. When aiming to go beyond pocketing a market, companies need a strong strategy formulation in declining markets (Harrigan, 1980). Contrary to the popular belief, a number of firms investing in declining businesses have managed to succeed. The success of such action depends on meticulously investigating the market to see if the demand is able to remain in spite of incoming substitutes.

To ensure an ongoing demand, the product itself must be appealing enough to either cause high switch reluctance, or to depict the substitutes as less desirable. This differentiation compared to other competitors without making changes to the product is a crucial condition to be able to move into a niche market. By continuing the business in a market niche, companies have the ability to reposition itself and focus on the most promising target group of customers. In declining sectors these tend to be the customers who are least likely to switch to substitutes due to increased switching costs or because their needs cannot be fulfilled by them (Harrigan, 1980) Businesses operating in niche markets use their core competence of understanding their customers very well and serving their needs with their existing products, without eliminating the possibility to be appealing to a larger group of customers if the market demands change over time (Bellisario, 2009).

One could argue that by moving into a niche market, businesses can lay the foundations for a later market innovation. By continuing to fulfil the needs of their existing customers, there is a chance of other, new segments recognizing the appeal of the product to the niche target group. This could attract the interest of new target groups for the product and its ability to create a satisfying customer experience, thus eventually opening up a new market and creating a new demand.

### **2.4.3 Dual transformation versus the power of little ideas**

In an addition to the theoretical view of product and market innovation, other authors present measures that a company can implement to their business in order to deal with disruptors from a different perspective. Leavy (2017) discussed the possibility to fight against disruptors by implementing two options: dual transformation or the power of little ideas. The options were firstly introduced in "Dual Transformation: How to Reposition Today's Business While Creating the Future ""and in The Power of Little Ideas: A low-risk, High-Reward Approach to Innovation" (Anthony, Gilbert & Johnson, 2017; Robertson & Lineback, 2017, cited in Leavy 2017). Firstly, the dual-transformation view recognizes that companies have nowadays very short response time to disruptions. Dual transformation describes a concept on how to best confront a disruption. In order to deal with disruption effectively, companies should implement two types of transformations at the same time. Transformation A indicates a reposition of the business to maximise its flexibility, whereas transformation B focuses more on how to create an independent new growth instrument. To highlight the differences more, option A is seen as the ability to search and find a way of doing the company's' activity with its current acknowledged competitive advantage, but with the twist of repositioning its main core to design competitive products or services in the post-disruption market. Option B differs from the previous one in focussing on essentially changing the business model of a company, creating a shift towards another business direction with a different target market. However, for the dual transformation to work, it is crucial to administer the two transformations as linked but separate processes to exploit the different contributions of both (Leavy, 2017).

The concept of the power of little ideas is another approach to encounter disruption. This standpoint is questioning if companies must fundamentally change the business model in order to survive. It instead focuses on incrementally advancing a business' products or services. This is why the second standpoint is acknowledging the difficulties with disruption in markets, but introduces the option of innovating around the core product of a company. This can be done by enclosing it with different integral innovations, rather than to focus on

redesigning or re-features the product itself. This option might not be efficient in all disruptive circumstances, but it has been proven effective to enable a business to compete against disruptors with changes applied to one product instead of having to rethink the target group, market or business model (Leavy, 2017).

The literature stream of innovation strategies showed that the presented approaches can be applied in declining markets to ensure a product's survival. However, the concepts lack the ability to explain why certain businesses and their products succeed in surviving through innovation while others fail. Product innovation fails to provide a fitting approach for firms with a well-established core product that fits the need of its customer base, as it would rob them of their central competence. Market innovation offers a possibility of survival for these companies, but the literature on the topic explains the approach only in general terms and does not identify which attributes products should exhibit in order to succeed in market innovation and ensure an ongoing demand. For that reason, the next chapter will engage in discussing different product attributes that existing research has considered to be important manipulators of customer behaviour and customer perception.

## **2.5 Consumer behaviour and preferred product attributes**

As shown above, the existing theory on innovation, especially regarding declining markets and market innovation lacks to deliver knowledge about the characteristics that enable products to survive. This section reviews another literature stream that provides information on product attributes that can be driving the success of products. It will be discussed how product attributes and consumer behaviour are interlinked and how this forms a foundation to assess critical product characteristics for the survival of disrupted businesses.

With society being more influenced by the ongoing globalization, increased mobility, and legal frameworks facilitating cross-border employment relations, modern society is characterized by travelling and moving around (Richards, 2015). Especially the younger generations are more open to the idea to change their residence location in smaller intervals compared to older generations. This lifestyle, referred to as global or urban nomadism, evokes a tendency to renounce extensive amounts of possessions, which consolidated the vast rise of digital formats (D'Mello & Sahay, 2007; Amrith & Sahraoui, 2018). Although these spreading tendencies towards more mobility can be observed in the practices among the majority of consumers, there are also contradicting current consumer trends. The return of appreciating and preferring physical objects over their digital counterparts is a movement against the ongoing digitization of society. Consumers see their possessions as an extension of themselves, which have the ability to convey the message of who they are as a person, their self-reflection and perception of their role in society. Even with the increasingly nomad style of life, people want to create deeper feelings of ownership and meanings with a physical product (Jarrett, 2017).

For physical products to stay appealing to customers despite these ongoing trends, they have to exhibit a combination of special attributes. A product comprises of a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes that help the consumer to decide whether to purchase such product and enable him to evaluate its quality. One of the most relevant product attributes that initially influences the customer's purchase motivation is its price. Additionally, when consumers are presented with a different variety of products, there is a need for them to evaluate the quality and product performance. This assessment is usually

done by weighing the functionality, utility and value against product attributes such as price or brand (Gonçalves, 2008; Miyazaki, Grewal, & Goodstein, 2005). Anderson and Mittal (2000, cited in Shamsher, 2012) argued that quality is seen as the most powerful product attribute affecting the purchase decision. A product's attributes act as an important catalyst that further affects consumer behaviour and customer understanding of a product. Consumers can judge product attributes in terms of their own values and past experiences (Balla & Deari, 2015). A fair bit of research has been conducted focusing on how product attributes are assessed by the consumer. These product attributes however are usually linked with the earlier stages of the PLC, often described as a fundamental element for the development of new products, and for integrating specific strategies in positioning such products. Consumer behaviour research reveals that decisions made by consumers take place as a result of them observing and evaluating accessible product attributes and use this information to decide on a final purchase decision (Nowlis, 1995 cited in Akpoyomare, Adeosun & Ganiyu, 2012; Alba et al., 1991, cited in Mason & Bequette, 1998).

One popular example for a product that followed the emerging trend of people returning to physical objects by offering them a combination of valuable attributes is vinyl. Vinyl as a medium for music has been superseded by a number of other formats like tape, the compact disc and completely digital formats like the mp3, but it withstood the threat of being dispersed by the substitutive mediums, experiencing a revival during the past 20 years (Scull, 1997; Pantzar, 1997; Greenburg, 2011; Sarpong, Dong & Appiah, 2015; Nobile, 2018). As reasons for the continuing appeal of vinyl and the reason for the and recent recovery of vinyl sales numbers, authors like Pantzar (1997) and Greenburg (2011) see the nostalgic notions associated with it, its tangibility and aesthetic allure.

The approach of consumer culture theory presents the authors with a suitable linkage between the attributes of nostalgia, aesthetics and tangibility. The work of Sassatelli (2007) provides the necessary theoretical background for all three themes to have a common link and to be contributing to the disclosure of the studied phenomenon. Within the field of consumer culture theory the concept of nostalgia is described by Campbell (1987), who describes the contemporary consumer as a hedonist, who repeatedly retreats from reality in the form of daydreaming. These dreams are appointed to objects the modern hedonistic consumer desires and, once acquired, he surrounds himself with them in his home. The author continues to describe the relation to the ethics of romanticism, and how the sense and desire for inspirational, aesthetic objects as well as the indulgence of such instigated consumption. In romanticism, people aimed not only for the sheer enjoyment of products, but took them as motivation for self-refinement. That is why the romantic consumer attributed high value to the novelty and originality of products. Forty (1986) argues that placing aesthetic products inside the home environment creates a feeling of a non-work space, as the consumer surrounds himself with objects of his liking, connected to his non-economic person. By furnishing the home with aesthetic objects, such products quickly evolved into elements of the domestic scenery. In addition, Featherstone (2007) describes the postmodern consumer as someone who is hedonistic and artistic and became able to aestheticise consumption. The participation in the act of hedonism governed by aesthetics has been established as one of the main motivations for consumers to engage in a number of consumption practices (Sassatelli 2007).

One of these consumption practices is conspicuous consumption, which usually applies when one has the desire to emphasise his socially or culturally dominant stance. By presenting objects that are new or exotic, the consumer aims to spawn the allurements and



fascination of others. In that sense, conspicuous consumption plays a role in the ethical and aesthetic connection to products which display novelty and originality (Sassatelli, 2007). They not only work as status-communicating commodities in the modern disenchanted society but also connect members of a community through the associated emotional rituals (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2015). The positive feelings that uphold such communities are projected on and ultimately linked with the object (Durkheim, 1915). The following passages reveal how the three mentioned attributes are as well contributing to consumer behaviour while at the same time rely on global consumer behaviour developments.

### **2.5.1 Tangibility**

As Overmars and Poels (2015) point out, touch is intertwined with emotional response and highly influences the way a product is perceived. The design of a product does not only inflict stimulation of the optical sense but furthermore provides a specific tactile experience the brain connects with the item. The process of exploring the product by feeling its' surface topography and other material attributes shapes the emotional connection of the consumer with the product and enables a sense of attachment to it (Peck & Shu, 2009; Overmars & Poels, 2015). A pleasant tactile experience with the product can enhance the customer's evaluation of its qualities (Peck & Wiggins, 2006; Peck & Shu, 2009). This takes effect already in the process of purchase consideration and forms a crucial part of the final purchase decision. Peck & Wiggins (2006) show that the touching of a product can enhance purchase intentions and increase confidence in the customer's opinion of an item. Not only can retailers make use of customers' need for touch, but invite customers to touch and engage with the product even more with the help of interesting surfaces, sleek designs, different materials and other haptic components (Overmars & Poels, 2015). By creating a visceral reaction through touch, the decision making process can be positively manipulated, even if the touch process itself does not transmit information about the product itself (Peck & Wiggins, 2006). Although the necessity and effect of a tangible product experience differs among individuals, Peck and Childers (2003) found that assessment and evaluation of a product's attributes resulted higher when touched among all their participants. The element of tangibility is seen as one of the perceived value predecessors from the customer's perspective, with product tangibility forming an essential part of customer expectations.

Customer perception towards quality of a product or service is often based on the tangible affirmation. Based on this assumption, several authors questioned and hypothesized a positive connection and relationship between tangibility and the perceived value of a product (Levitt, 1981; Zeithaml, 1981 cited in Santos, 2002; Santos, 2002). This is why not only physical retail stores are trying to optimize their tactical customer experience, but also online retailers are working on technologies that enable a more sensorial shopping journey with the help of image interactive technology, which uses imagery in a way that simulates an actual touch experience (Peck & Wiggins, 2006). With the absent possibility to touch products sold online, customers are not only deprived of one important tool for their purchase consideration, they also tend to be less emotionally engaged with the product. Tangible products have the ability to provoke the notion of empowerment and autonomy during the act of purchasing (Thibodeaux, 2017; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985 cited in Santos, 2002). According to Abaidi & Vernet (2018), a missing tactile experience can lead customers to perceive a product as dull. This becomes an especially critical issue in the modern era of digitization, with the existence of complete digital markets, encompassing all life areas with online

newspapers, social networks, online banking, virtual pets, game and music downloads. Digital products can be seen as hybrids between a physical product and a service, combining the characteristics and functions of a product with the tangibility of a service. Although these products allow an instant gratification due to their availability and accessibility at all times, they tend to degrade the hedonic pleasure a customer can derive from its use. As hedonic benefits and utilitarian benefits are positively related to the perceived global value of a product, intangibility can lower the value customers assign it. This creates an issue with digital content, where online users are generally more sensitive to price, as they tend to ascribe less value to the non-tangible products. Authors demonstrated on the example of online newspapers, that the perceived global value a customer assumes of a product decreases especially in cases where consumers can find the same or similar content elsewhere for a cheaper price (Abaidi & Vernet, 2018).

Digitalization on one side enabled a more interconnected, accessible world, driving internationalization, however at the same time it created a fast-paced society (Dalessandro, 2018). Although digital products bring a high level of convenience to the everyday life in this fast-moving environment, they also can further increase the stress an individual undergoes (Turel, Matt, Trenz, Cheung, D'Arcy, Qahri-Saremi & Tarafdar, 2019). A prominent example is technostress, caused by constant connectivity, ongoing multitasking and information overload in connection with the increased information technology use (Tarafdar, Gupta & Turel, 2013). Symptoms of technostress include high stress levels, tension, fatigue, hyperactivity, depression and anxiety (Tarafdar, Gupta & Turel, 2013; O'Donnell, 2015; Turel et al., 2019). It can lead to a techno-overload, where the individual feels overwhelmed, unable to process all information provided or to think creatively and imaginatively (Tarafdar, Tu, Ragu-Nathan & Ragu-Nathan, 2011). It can leave people feeling constantly distracted, busy, pressured and disconnected from important social peers (McGrane, 2013). Dalessandro (2018) describes how these fast-changing surroundings shaped by digital media create the longing for more organic, authentic experiences that are not corrupted by the alienating effect of technology. People wish for moments of deceleration and simple existence, they aim to practice more mindfulness in their everyday life and yearn for deeper social bonds and interpersonal connections (McGrane, 2013; O'Donnell, 2015; Dalessandro, 2018). Unlike nostalgic notions, the affected individual does not wish himself back to a time before the omniferous digital influence, but wants to reconnect with the physical world, being attentive to and interact with palpable things (O'Donnell, 2015).

Although the concept of tangibility and its impact on customers' preferences and consumer behaviour is widely discussed, little is known on how this product characteristic can enhance the survival chances of a product in declining markets. The reflections on tangibility being a valuable product attribute mainly focus on the first impression the product has on the customer and how it helps him evaluate its functions. It therefore refers to the early stages of a product's life cycle. Some authors have connected the appeal of tangible products to the contrast they form to the increasingly digitized modern society. Nonetheless, it remains unclear why some tangible products survive digital disruption while others disappear from the market. Therefore, tangibility alone is not a sufficient element to secure that a product survives in a world that becomes ever more digitalized. This is why other product attributes will be considered subsequently.

## 2.5.2 Aesthetics

In the modern economy which is characterized by a prevailing consumerism and the availability of a broad range of products and brands, consumers and retailers alike thrive for products to be differentiated from the competition. One way to achieve to set a product apart from others is the use of aesthetics (Cox & Cox, 2002; Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015). The research on aesthetics dates back to the 18th century, when aesthetics were defined as “a theory of beauty” (Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015, p.529). Aesthetics refer to one’s individual concept of what is considered beautiful and is deeply intertwined with taste (Cox & Cox, 2002). It is governed by knowledge, experience, context and the understanding of an item and therefore unique to every individual. An aesthetic perception process constitutes of interplay between a purely sensory event of enjoyment on one hand and the interpretation of the object and query for its meaning and purpose on the other. The two elements however cannot be cognitively perceived independently from each other, which lets individuals always evaluate the design of an object based on their societal context instead of solely perceiving its appearance with their senses. This is why for every particular object different expectations and perceptions are held of its aesthetic value, due to the specific meaning associated with it. This interplay also is responsible for taste and perception of aesthetics to change over time, as the evaluation of an object’s appearance depends on the knowledge and understanding congregated at the moment of observation (Walker, 1995).

In marketing, this research stream gained popularity during the late 20th century, introducing the concept of aesthetical consumption and distinguishing it from aesthetic product components. At first, its importance was recognized in only a small number of industries, with fashion leading the way. Just during the last decades the awareness of the tremendous effect of product aesthetics spread across all branches. This led to many products detached from the classical fashion industry per se to be advertised as chic accessories and part of one’s lifestyle, especially in the small consumer electronics sector. Nowadays, aesthetics has become an element of the everyday life of the consumer, spreading even to cotidiary discounter products like kitchenware, office equipment and even car wash buckets (Cox & Cox, 2002; Bloch, Brunel & Arnold, 2003).

Aesthetic product elements like colour, shape and other design aspects evoke partly involuntary emotional and physical response. In research, a strong focus is set on the functionality of a product and how to respond to this essential customer need through the means of design, while studies have shown that design is much more linked to emotional responses (Radford & Bloch, 2011; Tan & Sie, 2015). These reactions are created without the need for a verbal information exchange. A product’s appearance is the first impression the customer gets in contact with. Before accessing any information about the properties, function and price of an item the customer normally sees a product’s appearance or an image of it first. Levitt (1981) discussed how the presentation and appearance of a product is judged by customers who then draw conclusions of these products and their realities. People usually to some extent rely upon tangible and evoked extrinsic effects of a product and its appearance. Generally, it does not have a high significance if the product is basic or complex, expensive or cheap or if the buyer himself is familiar with the product itself. People use the external appearance for their primary evaluation and assessment of the product. The packaging of a product and the way it is showcased in terms of design and appearance presents an important element which influences the final customer decision whether to purchase or dismiss the product (Levitt, 1981). A sophisticated aesthetic design of a product

allows demanding higher prices for it. It also evokes a higher tolerance among customers towards the cost of the product (Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015). This allows companies with a good and innovative product design to establish their perception in the market and aim for higher profits (Cox & Cox, 2002; Bloch, Brunel & Arnold, 2003). A market report on luxury packaging has shown great opportunities for increasing sales via integrating higher aesthetics in the packaging concept for products, with an estimated 21 billion dollars by 2024. With luxury packaging the company communicates the product's high quality, niche characteristics or transmits a sophisticated image. Nowadays, there is an increasing need to be aware of brand identity and integrate brand equity in the packaging, to positively manipulate consumer decisions (Report Buyer, 2018).

The functions of aesthetics that have been illustrated in existing research can be reasoning partly for the customer purchase decision process and their evaluation of the value and quality of the product. However, little investigation has been done on how an aesthetic design is able to shape the interaction with products once acquired. Along with the product the consumer buys its value and experiences with it (Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015). Although one could assume that a long lasting aesthetic appeal leads to a higher appreciation of the product and strengthens the emotional bond with the object there is no validation of this argument (Tan & Sie, 2015). The theoretical background on aesthetics is therefore lacking descriptions of this attribute referring to later stages of the PLC. Muehling and Pascal (2012) suggest that nostalgic elements in a product's design and packaging are able to elevate the positive perception of customers towards a brand or product even in late PLC stages.

### **2.5.3 Nostalgia**

Nostalgia is understood as the propensity towards objects connected to former times where these objects were more popular and more widely used. It depicts the notion of wishing to relive the past, which can be motivated either by personal experiences or by a commonly shared emotion towards a former point in time (Muehling & Sprott, 2013). Several authors differentiate between various forms of nostalgia, with the most popular being personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992; Baker & Kennedy, 1994). Personal nostalgia is the fondness for things which were present and associated to a person's lived past, usually their youth (Holbrook, 1993). Historical nostalgia however refers to a past time that was not personally experienced by the individual feeling it (Muehling & Pascal, 2012). It is therefore important to divide between memory and nostalgia. Contrary to the process of remembering, nostalgia usually positions the self as the active center of the narrative (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006). At first the experience of nostalgia was seen as a dysfunction of the psyche, comparable to homesickness or even depression, due to the negative feelings, such as sadness and anxiety, associated with it. More recent studies however show individuals more commonly associating positive concepts with nostalgia, for example warm childhood memories (Vess, Wildschut, Arndt, Sedikides & Routledge, 2012). It has even been shown how nostalgia can have a positive effect on one's self-esteem, channeling positive attributes about oneself (Wildschut et al., 2006; Vess et al., 2012). It therefore recently came to be a dominantly positive notion with bittersweet emotions attached to it (Wildschut et al., 2006). An interesting aspect of this is that nostalgic emotions are often triggered by negative affections and loneliness, with the longing to reestablish a positive mood and social connection as well as reducing anxiety via the reverie (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildschut, 2008). However, mood swings are not the sole inducement of nostalgia. In fact, there are more naturalistic triggers like music, food, furniture, fashion and art (Vess et al., 2012).

Muehling & Sprott (2013) imply that nostalgia gains popularity in times where the future gets more unpredictable, making people feel concerned about the things to come. This applies to the recent economic crisis where the economic landscape was shaken and future developments were highly unsure. This led some major brands like McDonald's, Pepsi and Unilever to include nostalgic themes in their marketing strategies, trying to meet the customers' longing for stability by offering comfort through known elements and images evoking trust (Elliott, 2009). In this process the customer is subconsciously developing an emotional connection with the product by reliving their youthful years and stimulating positive emotions and memories (Holbrook, 1993).

### **2.5.4 Product attributes and the PLC**

The review of the literature streams of consumer behaviour and consumer culture theory was able to distinguish product attributes deemed as the most fitting to induce appeal for the customer. The product attributes tangibility and aesthetics are able to influence consumer behaviour and their purchase decisions related to the context of the introduction of new products. They therefore are able to generate assumptions about the success in the launch products, thus focussing on the PLC's early stages. However, it is not clear how they affect the ongoing customer experiences and perceptions in the ongoing use of the product in later stages of the PLC. Although the tangibility and aesthetic attributes in the literature are

deemed to be important for a product's appeal, it remains unclear if these attributes are applicable to the same extent in the final, declining PLC stage. The focus on early product life stages can cause scholars to overlook the importance of other attributes enhancing the survival chances of disrupted businesses, especially of those related to later stages in the PLC. It is true that nostalgia, which is related to the late PLC stage, is one product attribute described in existing theory that can explain the successful survival through market innovation. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that more of such attributes that influence the customer perception long after the product's introduction exist but have been left unattended by the present research landscape. This concludes in a need for scrutinizing other possible factors enabling market innovation and product survival.

## **2.6 Theoretical framework**

The in the literature review contained numerous streams provided the necessary theoretical framework to assess the central research problem of the presented thesis. By considering the existing concepts of disruption, Porter's threat of substitutes, innovation methods and the product life cycle model, the authors were able to understand the context of disrupted businesses and possible strategies to ensure their survival. However, the strategies described in the research literature failed to comment on the conditions a product needs to fulfill in order to successfully survive. In practice, this can lead to businesses following the scholars' recommendations in restructuring its market orientation in order to form a market innovation strategy but without knowing if this would be a suitable measure in relation to their product. Such actions can result in high sunk costs for businesses and might fully eliminate their chances of surviving in declining markets.

Therefore, the second stream of consumer behaviour acts as a complementary addition to the first because it is covering the topic of product attributes and their influence on customer perception and evaluation. However, it fails to provide knowledge about the impact of product attributes related to every moment in the product life cycle. Based on the theory of declining markets, there is a lack of information on what kind of attributes businesses should focus on in order to encounter disruption. To sum up, the examined literature streams are able to deliver satisfactory information on what attributes are able to be applied in earlier stages, however it lacks knowledge if such attributes can be applied in later stages of the PLC in disrupted markets and what more attributes influence consumer behaviour in declining stages.

### 3 Research Purpose

The extensive amount of literature around disruption, the PLC and consumer behaviour is well-developed and multi-various. Product attributes which are connected to the product are mainly defined and mostly assumed by literature to be applicable during the earlier stages of its life cycle. However, there is only so little exploration done around the options that businesses have when facing disruption in the declining stage of the PLC in terms of distinguishing attributes which can be also applied and relatable to declining stages. Dominant suggestions from both theorists and practitioners focus on product innovation and market innovation as counter-measures to ensure the ongoing existence of the business. Although product innovation literature is a strategy which is applicable to declining markets, not every incumbent business is able to perform product innovation. It is furthermore insufficient to explain the survival of products like vinyl and Polaroid cameras, as no changes to the product itself have been made, but they switched to a niche market. Although market innovation is a popular topic for disrupted businesses, it does not give concrete advice on what kind of attributes should be used in a product to attract different segments and open new markets. The literature in market innovation is merely focussing on defining the strategy and process in general terms.

What is lacking in the research landscape as well as in manager manuals and is presenting itself as a knowledge gap is detailed insight and guidance regarding the characteristics a product needs to exhibit for these measures to be likely to succeed during the decline stage of the PLC. Although product characteristics like tangibility and aesthetics are described to be of importance when creating a new product, they have been mainly viewed from the perspective of introducing new products. They have yet to be related to disruption survival and late PLC stages of already established products. Moreover, nostalgia is widely discussed to have strong influence on customer's perception of the brand image. Researchers found strong emotional response to nostalgic elements in marketing strategies. However, nostalgia is treated as an opposed topic to innovation and does not find enough consideration in terms of market innovation. Although it represents a product characteristic typical to late PLC stages, there is a lack of existent research to detect other such characteristics which could explain the success of some products in survival through market innovation.

To fill this gap, the presented research attempts to describe which product characteristics need to be exploited by disrupted companies that want to ensure their survival by aiming for a market innovation. It aims to explore what attributes make products suitable for a market innovation strategy, based on the former illustrated characteristics described by the existent literature. As tangibility and aesthetics are linked with the early stages of the PLC, the research aims to explore if these are applicable to declining markets. Therefore the thesis follows the research question:

Can attributes relevant for early stages of the product life cycle enable the survival of disruption?

With nostalgia, an element related to later stages of the PLC has been described in the theoretical background. But as the literature on product characteristics enabling survival is scarce, other product attributes specific to later stages in the PLC might be applicable and

might have been overlooked by the literature. Following the course of the first research question, there is a subsequent second question:

Are there specific product attributes related to later stages of the product life cycle enabling market innovation?

The underlying approach to this research problem is unique, as the authors investigate relevant product characteristics in the context of declining markets and disrupted businesses rather than the context of introducing new products which is focused entirely on earlier stages of entering a market. In fact, it is examined how customers perceive the inspected attributes in a product that did survive ongoing disruptions in its industry through market innovation while being in the later declining stage of the PLC. Focusing on the example of vinyl records, the study creates in-depth insights into the perception of product characteristics responsible for the survival of vinyl as a niche product. Various scholars have examined the phenomenon of the vinyl survival, ranging from the reasons of its appeal, its cultural value up to the consumer groups it attracts and their motivation for vinyl consumption (Scull, 1997; Greenburg, 2011; Bartmanski & Woodward, 2013; Connolly, 2013; Sarpong, Dong & Appiah, 2016; Breckenridge & Tsitsos, 2017; Sonnichsen, 2017). The rich descriptions and findings in the field of vinyl are valuable, but researchers seem to have missed to look at the phenomenon from a broader angle. This is why the present research attempts to connect the existent theoretical background on the appeal of vinyl with the survival of disruption through market innovation in later PLC stages in order to draw conclusions transferable to other sectors and products. The research furthermore examines if there are additional specific attributes applicable to enable market innovation. It aims to demonstrate how leveraging these attributes in products can serve disrupted businesses in other sectors than the music industry as a starting point of their market innovation intentions. The presented findings will help practitioners in every industry prone to disruption to adapt and promote their products accordingly in order to secure them from being eliminated by competitors. For scholars it can serve as groundwork for product attribute research in the context of market innovation.



## 4 Methodology

To illustrate how the authors approached the disclosure of the studied phenomenon to find answers to the research question, the ensuing chapter describes how the research was structured. It gave insight on what perspective and philosophical stance the authors chose for their study, which logical processes they follow and how they construct their research accordingly. The chosen methods for the data collection as well as the considerations regarding the sampling were outlined as well the selected data analysis model. Lastly, concerns regarding the data credibility as well as the validity and reliability of the research were discussed and the author's considerations on ensuring an ethical research process were explained.

### 4.1 Research Approach

The relationship consumers build with brands and products does not follow strict patterns as the product's characteristics have different levels of influence on each consumer individually. As the presented work tries to explore the perception of such product characteristics on side of the consumer, it is limited in its ability to draw absolute and universal conclusions about the studied field. The authors are orienting their research on the relativistic ontological stance, where the nature of reality is highly individualistic. While studying the phenomena of product survival, it relied upon the observational view and how individual people experience it differently. This relates to the attributes that are perceived as important in the vinyl product market, which are highly dependent on the interviewed individuals. This division in opinions can be caused by age, social class, sex, interests or role within the researched context. Thus, it concludes a standpoint where relativist ontology presents not a single reality, but rather multiple opinions on a given issue (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). For the aspect of epistemology of this thesis, the authors saw social constructionism as the most fitting. It deals with a viewpoint of reality constructed by people rather than by external determinants. This displays the importance of appreciating the manner how individuals perceive their experience. Thus, it complements the ontological stand in seeing reality as subjective. The mean of language encourages society to share their thoughts and experiences with other individuals, constructing the way how people see and understand the world. This is reflected in the chosen data collection method of conducting interviews and an observative netnography, described in detail below. Overall, relativism and constructivism form the most suitable pairing for the approach to this research problem, together with the involvement of qualitative methodology (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

In order to gather the relevant understanding to answer the research question, the presented research follows an inductive approach. Induction serves the generation of new theories through the observation of empirical material. In contrast to deduction, which bases the research on hypotheses that are then tested along the data, inductive reasoning draws conclusion only after the data has been analysed. Although the data gathering process orientates itself on a number of predetermined themes, these themes are not to be understood as general assumptions about the research topic that need to be verified through the research method. They rather serve as a starting point and incentive for the research design and later analysis without restricting the creation of possible new themes derived from the data itself (Bendassolli, 2013).

In addition, phenomenology served as a comprehensive orientation, which compliments the research approach character illustrated above. It deals with studying people's understanding and perceptions towards products or interests which have been experienced by them before. Because the researched phenomenon is closely linked with the individual customer and his perception of vinyl, phenomenology allows the researchers to take an according perspective. Phenomenological research is usually done by conducting interviews with a reduced number of participants, and occasionally by performing observations. If done by interview, the questions tend to be open to offer respondents the chance to interpret their own standpoint. By applying phenomenology, researchers are able to compose generalizations regarding the lived experiences with the studied phenomenon from the respondents' point of view (Center for innovation in research and teaching, 2019).

## **4.2 Research Design**

The presented thesis paper follows a qualitative approach, where information is obtained through the use of language, text and additional observations. The researchers did not use any statistical procedures in the analysis of the data. The gathered data and the subsequent investigation of its content are of qualitative character as they examine lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings. The flexibility and diversity a qualitative research approach provides in the gathering and analysis of such data makes it suitable for the presented study and the topic to explore. The data was gathered by passive observation as well as active inquiries on side of the researchers, aiming to provide relevant data and investigate the concepts, categories and theories related to the research field (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The qualitative approach generates conclusions that were not formulated in advance with the help of hypotheses, but stem from close observation and evaluation of the empirical material. Furthermore, by following the qualitative approach the researchers were able to comprehend the research problem and field from the viewpoint of the involved community, in this case vinyl market participants. Qualitative research enabled additional immersion into the problem question (Mack, 2005). The conducted interviews offered affluent and detailed information from respondents which are able to show subjective aspects of their understanding of the topic and their individual experience, giving way for exploring the studied field from a personal in-depth perspective. It enables the understanding not only of the phenomenon but also its interdependent elements and their existent relationships to each other. Additionally, the qualitative character is reflected in the the focus on open rather than pre-coded questions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

In terms of qualitative data, secondary textual data had been gathered for the purpose of this paper. The focus was on already existing information which was additionally picked by the researchers from extraneous, electronic or tangible publications and sources, such as company reports, websites, books and journal articles. All secondary data were critically evaluated to correspond to the scientific and unbiased nature of the presented work. The sources were official and recognized publications, with reliable authors recognized among industry experts and scholars (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In addition to secondary sources, primary data was gathered as well. It was directly collected by the researchers themselves for specific purpose, which can be seen in the interviews and observations conducted by authors.

The validity of the findings was adhered through the use of appropriate timing, methodology and a suitable sampling method. The alignment of these requirements for the chosen

qualitative research method ensured high scientific quality during the generation process of the research findings. The reliability aspect was ensured by the replicability of the used processes and the final results. By maintaining consistency in the research objectives, qualitative approach contributed in lines with the ontological and epistemological strategy. To establish reliability further, authors practised accuracy comparisons and verification (Leung, 2015).

### **4.3 Data Collection Method**

The following section is emphasising on reasoning for the choice of the data collection processes in the presented research. The authors used semi-structured interviews as a main data collection technique with emphasis on knowledgeable respondents with years of experience with vinyl products in either their professional or personal life. A netnography served as an additional source of information on customer's perception of vinyl. In terms of sampling, next to an online research to find participants fitting the previously mentioned requirements, ad-hoc and snowballing were used to gather apt respondents for the generation of relevant data for the research. Lastly, the interview process followed predetermined conditions in order to ensure the quality of the interviews and a satisfactory experience for participants and researchers alike.

#### **4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Within the duration of the thesis research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants. The aim of the interviews was to gather sufficient in-depth and particular information from users of vinyl on one hand and from sellers of vinyl on the other to get insight into their experience with vinyl and their perception of the music medium. The collected information served to explore the relevant attributes that make it possible for products to survive disruption through market innovation. A focus for this type of data collection method was to achieve personal and rich insights from the individuals, without external influence from other users. While the conduction of focus groups would be an option to observe the interactions between the members of the community and their joint view on the phenomenon, individual and experience-based insights on the different attributes of vinyl and why it survived were adjudged to be more suitable to attain data related to the research question (Tracy, 2013; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

For the development of the interview guideline including the order and formulation of the interview questions, the general attributes described in the literature to be adding value to a product served as points of reference for the question formulation. Nostalgia, tangibility and aesthetics became the three main themes to explore along the gathered data to see if the interviewees responses described additional aspects to the attributes that were not represented in the literature. However, attention was paid to remain as neutral as possible regarding emergent elements of the customer experience and preserve receptivity for new themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This happened in accordance with the chosen directed content analysis approach by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) which is explained in the analysis section.

During the generation process of the interview questions the main focus was to follow a number of established guidelines in qualitative research through interviews that aim to bring forth unbiased and rich responses by the participants. It was ensured that the questions were

of a neutral nature, without leading the respondent towards a certain stance or topic. Each question aimed to explore on topic at a time, inquiring about one issue before moving to the next one instead of asking about them at once. Although formulated short to facilitate an easier understanding of the questions, they were still designed to be complex, evoking long, elaborate responses. In the few cases where a question was closed and tended to generate yes/no answers, a second question was posted immediately afterwards by the interviewer, motivating the respondent to comment more on the topic and explain his opinion. The wording of the questions was adapted to the interviewees context and their knowledge, removing marketing research jargon and keeping them as simple as possible (Tracy, 2013). Therefore, three different guidelines were created for the three types of respondents to enhance the accuracy of the questions to the respondent's situation (see appendix A). This also served to generate a more holistic view on the studied phenomena by exploring the topic from two different perspectives - the customer and the retailer side as well as an additional, more general view that the representatives of the different vinyl associations could provide.

However, some researchers criticise the high dependance of the interview's generated findings on the interplay between the both dialog parties. They claim that the interviewer through his own understanding and knowledge of the topic as well as his involvement in the research has a high influence on the statements of the respondent. This could potentially cause a biased description of the phenomenon coherencies, which is why the author decided to support their research with a second, less intrusive qualitative method.

#### **4.3.2 Netnography**

As an additional research medium to support and complement the information gathered from the interviews, the authors conducted a netnography. As stated by Kozinets (2002), netnographies enable researchers to study customer needs, purchase motivations, taste and decision making processes within online communities. The observations were realized in online communities with the goal of observing virtual interactions between vinyl users that are not influenced by the presence of the researchers (Lynch & Mah, 2018). As the research context is not constructed by the researcher, netnography offers the unique advantage of very naturalistic and unobtrusive observations. Using public information available on online platforms aided in understanding the thoughts and motivations of various consumer segments within the vinyl market from an outside point of view (Kozinets, 2002). Conforming with the netnographic research protocol, although the information is displayed in an online medium, it still can be considered a social interaction and communication. Therefore the subject matter online was deemed appropriate to observe and analyze, thus making it a trustworthy source (Bertilsson, 2019). As Lynch and Mah (2018) underline, findings gathered during a social media observation do generally represent offline communities and their views and are therefore useful tools to get insights into community interactions that might be hard to obtain with offline observations. Hine (2017, cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) points out that in netnography research it is possible to select various online platform with similar communication modes which facilitates the comparability of findings. Another advantage in the observation of social media discussions is that the researcher is able to read past and present discussion contributions, enabling a study of opinions and experience stated over different points in time, therefore adding a new dimension to the observations. To

do that in offline observations requires a high input of effort and time on side of the researcher and can be a complex process (Lynch & Mah 2018).

A networked approach was concluded to be the most suitable, where the authors were able to follow the information stream between the participants. Reddit forums were chosen as the online communities most suitable for netnography. In the presented research a passive netnography approach was used, meaning that the authors did not participate in the communication of the observed communities, but strictly monitored the flows of user communication. In order to ensure a high quality level of the netnography research, a number of steps were followed. The authors started with a cultural initiation with finding appropriate online communities and gathering as much information possible about the participants as well as the community itself. Part of this process was to determine the structure of the forum, the level of activity among the conversation participants as well as the discussion history. This served to build an ethnographic image of the observed forum (Lynch & Mah, 2018). Following the second step known as data collection, the authors sifted through the data in osearch for meaningful findings to include in the thesis, mainly on the basis of relevancy to the research question and the volume of gathered interaction between the observed subjects. Afterwards, the most significant user quotes from the forums' conversations were directly copied and included in the analysis to underline and broaden the insights from the conducted interviews.

### **4.3.3 Sampling**

A focus point of the sampling process was to reflect the different perspectives on vinyl by including in the sample the various interest groups that are present within the larger population of the vinyl market (Tracy, 2013). The sampling relied on theoretical aspects that ensured to decrease the possibility that the outcome of the research would be altered by the chosen participants' backgrounds. The respondents and observation targets were not chosen randomly, but the selection was based on their relation to vinyl and their engagement in the market to accomplish valuable and rich insights. An online research helped to locate experts that could provide significant insights from the retailer's perspective. This research resulted in the unearthing of more possible participants which would form a new group of respondents, contributing valuable insights from the position of associations dedicated to the preservation of vinyl. Next to this mixed strategy of maximum-variation and ad-hoc sampling, snowball sampling strategies also helped to find respondents for the customer side and for the netnography. It was deemed appropriate based on the feasible time and tools for collecting the data, furthermore considering the lower cost input to conduct the interviews and the netnography through the easier access the researchers had to the participants (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). With the help of ad-hoc sampling, the authors selected the interviewees and respondents based on their availability and the researchers' possibility to personally gather data from them via interviews or online observations. The snowball sampling provided the benefits of participants introducing the authors to other vinyl users and retailers by recommending to get in contact with their acquaintances, colleagues or friends within the vinyl community (Tracy, 2013; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Table 1 List of Interview Participants

| Respondent No. | Respondent type | Language        | Duration      | Date       | Location   |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Respondent 1   | Customer        | English         | 11:13 minutes | 19.04.2019 | Telephone  |
| Respondent 2   | Customer        | English/Swedish | 39:42 minutes | 21.04.2019 | Kyrkhult   |
| Respondent 3   | Retailer        | German          | -             | 24.04.2019 | Written    |
| Respondent 4   | Association     | German          | 42:05 minutes | 09.05.2019 | Oberhausen |
| Respondent 5   | Customer/DJ     | Slovak          | -             | 10.05.2019 | Written    |
| Respondent 6   | Retailer        | Czech           | -             | 15.05.2019 | Written    |
| Respondent 7   | Retailer        | German          | 35:54 minutes | 13.05.2019 | Berlin     |
| Respondent 8   | Customer        | English         | 10:25 minutes | 21.05.2019 | Skype      |
| Respondent 9   | Association     | German          | 50:53         | 24.05.2019 | Telephone  |
| Respondent 10  | Customer        | English         | -             | 26.05.2019 | Written    |

Although the interview participants were partly gathered by ad-hoc and snowballing sampling, the authors assured to maintain a high degree of credibility by being able to interview respondents on expert-level with an immense amount of knowledge of the vinyl market. The respondent groups for the interviews consisted of three positions, one representing the retailer point of view, the second one targeting the point of view of customers and the standpoint of associations as a result of the mentioned online research. The classification of the interviewees is depicted in Table 1. For the first group, the authors interviewed owners of established physical vinyl stores across Europe, as well as the world's largest vinyl manufacturer GZ Media (GZ Media, 2019). A regional focus was set on the countries of origin of the researchers because of easier access and reduced language barriers. Regarding the consumer point of view, the focus was set on finding respondents that presented a high level of emergence in the market and knowledge of its processes. Therefore only individuals that have been actively buying and listening to vinyl records for a longer period of time came into question. For the association perspective, delegates of national vinyl museums in Germany as well as a cross-national association for the preservation of analogue music media served as sources. Next to representatives of vinyl associations and active members of the vinyl community the authors also interviewed DJs who are concerned with vinyl records in their profession as well, ensuring a holistic view on the phenomenon.

The authors are aware of the fairly low amount of conducted interviews that could have a negative impact on the validity and significance of the research. However, as Patton (2002) states, the number of respondents is not perceived as the most important aspect in the sampling process. The eventual answers and their quality are seen as the most valuable outcome. This is why the high quality of the gathered information coming from trustworthy participants with long-time experience and expert knowledge in the vinyl sector makes the insights extremely valuable and more than sufficient to provide extensive contributions related to the research field.

As for the sampling process for the netnography, the authors had to firstly deal with a great number of possible observation spheres gathered online. These were then reduced by evaluating what samples would be the most interesting and insightful for the research, constructed by the purposive sampling. The attention laid on distinct sample characteristics that were most promising to contribute to answering the thesis' research question. A online research within the online communities with the help of search engines aided in the process of sifting through the large amount of data, and to be able to find related communication streams about vinyl. Furthermore, the authors were guided mostly by the number of users in the various online platform communities, following the number of upvotes and general interaction ratios exhibited by the participants (Kozinets, Dolbec & Earley, 2014). To ensure plentiful and reliable communication streams, the netnography was conducted on several forums within Reddit's music and also vinyl community group with 345 thousand active users who displayed knowledge, interest and personal insights within the researched topic. Due to privacy regulations and in line with the ethic considerations for this thesis, further details on the community and the identity of its users will remain anonymous but are available at request.

In the sample compilation, the researchers found respondent characteristics like age, ethnicity, gender and nationality to be dispensable factors for the nature of the insights to be gathered. As the focus of the research was set on evoked emotions and perceptions of the medium and less on the characterization of the user group, the sampling focussed on the involvement of the respondents with the medium. The majority of selected respondents within the costumer party sample were young adults and adults who were actively listening to vinyls and purchasing them periodically. Contrasting this was the age structure of respondents on the retailer side and those representing vinyl associations. However, no complete and consequent assessment of the demographic distribution of participants was administered due to its negligible role in the customer experience with the vinyl medium.

#### **4.3.4 Interview Process**

Before conducting the actual interviews the respondents were informed about the authors, the research project and its intended goal. They also received short information on the type of research, the duration of the interview and the intended use of the gathered information within the written work. By engaging in semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked open questions with additional guidance from interviewers where necessary, starting from general information about them and their daily business or routine with the medium. These opening, more general questions served to establish a comfortable setting for the interviewee, overcoming the first nervousness and establishing a relation with the interviewer. Once the conversation flow was established, the interview then continued to evolve around thoughts and personal experience around the vinyl market and the importance

of attributes linked with the medium. The interviewers assured to keep a moment of silence between each question to give the respondents a chance to overthink their answer and talk about additional aspects that might have come to their mind (Tracy, 2013). The interview was concluded by a general question for future developments and further thoughts on the topic, which acted as a closing statement while giving participants time to rethink the topic and their answers one more time and add further comments if needed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). It also served as a tool to reassure the respondent of his knowledgeable stance and importance for the research, allowing him to leave the dialogue feeling smart and pleased with the interaction. Lastly, the respondent was given acknowledgement of his contribution to the research and was reassured that his personal information was to be kept confidential once again, portraying him as an appreciated and respected participant in the research project (Tracy, 2013).

The conducted interviews lasted for approximately 15-40 minutes, with the participants being guided by the semi-structured interview questions. As shown in Table 1, the length of interviews differed based on the individual respondent, their availability, their level of knowledge and overall enthusiasm about the researched phenomenon and the resulting digression in their answers. The interviews were conducted either personally by the researchers in for the respondents familiar places or via telephone, video conferencing or email. In almost all cases only one of the authors was present as an interviewer in order to create an intimate setting without the possibly overwhelming presence of two interviewers which could intimidate the respondent and provoke limited answers (Tracy, 2013). All of the interviews were recorded, after initially asking the respondent for permission to do so. The recording acted as a helpful tool for the authors to prevent data loss, and provided the possibility to re-listen to the interview several times. This not only facilitated the transcription of the interviews but also the process of detecting themes within the responses (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The predominant form of conducting the interviews was a personal, face-to-face conversation. However, due to limited availability on side of the respondents and their geographical location, remote interviewing was used in some case. The interviews were then conducted either in a dialogue via telephone or in a video call. Next to the obvious logistic advantages of flexibility in scheduling and avoiding travel expenses, Skype interviews offer a balance between the convenience of a phone call and the face to face presence of a personal interview (Irani, 2018). Another way to gather insights from shop owners despite their time constraints was a written conversation via email. Researchers are criticising the lack of nonverbal communication and contextualization in this method, which generally help the researcher to observe communication patterns. Secondary clues are able to pinpoint additional non-verbal hints of interviewees, which consequently can aid the researcher in verifying and clarifying statements with secondary questions where needed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). However, there are also positive effects an email interview presents. As Murray and Sixsmith (1998) indicate, the answers of interview participants can be more truthful and richer in their nature in written interviews due to the element of anonymity and distance between the two interview parties. The respondent is then less influenced by any personal negative notions towards the interviewer's appearance such as his ethnic background, class affinity, physical health, age or gender which is able to reduce the quality of the data because of the respondent being uneasy about the interviewer (Fielding, 1993). Another benefit of interviewing via email is that the respondents can answer the questions in the comfort of familiar environments of their choosing, such as their home or



office (Lynch & Mah, 2018). Usually, the richness of answers can be reduced by respondents feeling intimidated in new, formal settings (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). Moreover, in written interviews respondents have more time to read and understand the questions, which can further increase the quality of acquired data because the respondent has more time to arrange his personal thoughts and develop them further before answering (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998; Lynch & Mah, 2018). Respondents can answer the questions according to their time preferences, not being confined to the usual business hours and in several parts if they prefer (Lynch & Mah, 2018). Nonetheless, as the interviewee has to make the effort to type his answers, they tend to be more controlled, less reactive and shorter than in face-to-face interviews (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). A last, mainly practical advantage of written interviews is the reduction of the time required to transcribe the interview (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998).

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

A research technique that has been used abundantly in qualitative research contexts is content analysis. Content analysis is described as suitable for data which have been presented in textual form, such as observational records and interview transcripts, as employed in this thesis. It serves to interpret and derive meaning from texts, with its different subforms varying in the level of stringency, systemacy and intuitiveness. It presents researchers with a framework for coding the gathered data and to assess the importance within the themes (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). While in conventional content analysis the text data delivers the themes to categorize them, the directed approach bases the analysis on initially identified categories that is based on previous theories presented in relevant literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The categories the authors worked with during the course of the presented thesis were tangibility, aesthetics, nostalgia. These main categories derived from the previously mentioned general product attributes described in the literature review. Content analysis is usually used in academic works based on deductive methods. However, it is the most fitting method for analyzing data that can be connected to predetermined categories and that are consistently looked for within the collected data. Herefore, the written transcription was scanned for statements that relate to the themes and other recurring aspects the subjects remarked during the interviews or within the netnography. Usually this is done by marking specific words of high frequency within the text which are afterwards counted by the researchers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). That is why content analysis is often linked with a latent positivist framework because of its ability to present a certain amount of quantification aspects within the research process. At the same time, Nandy & Sarvela (1997) argued that content analysis is continuously showing its potentiality and popularity in qualitative works, where the goal of the study is to validate or broaden certain theoretical concepts. Here the analysis goes beyond simply counting words but examining textual data for a meaning that connects different statements in a large amount of data to categorize it. The researchers then connect the analyzed data to the categories derived from theories. After the analysis is able to recognize newly structured categories derived from the data, the findings are able to give further context and refine existing theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Another crucial element of the analysis was that it combined emic and etic perspectives by considering coherencies present in the data and theories and assumptions from the literature alike. It therefore followed the logic of an iterative analysis. The meaning derived from the

data was reflected and supported by existing theoretical background. The process of repeatedly scanning the textual data and connecting the detected implications with explanations from the literature served to further develop existing concepts and progressing understanding of the researched field (Tracy, 2013).

The combination of both directed content and iterative analysis presented the authors with the most fitting method to use during the study of the data. The existent theory background on the topic of disruption guided the previous described formation of themes. Together with the rich insights provided by the interviews and netnography the authors were able to develop a deeper understanding of the characteristics that enable product survival through market innovation.

## **4.5 Data Credibility**

Every academic research paper must adhere to certain criteria regarding the credibility of the research and its findings. Commonly the most recognised points in regards to business research are reliability, validity and credibility (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Data credibility ensures the quality of data used in the research and its related trustworthiness and authenticity. In order to deliver and maintain quality inputs from respondents, all interviews were audio-recorded to avoid losing important information (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Authors were also available for answering any questions regarding the study if there was any ambiguity present from the interviewees. All interviews were manually transcribed word for word into written documents for easier accessing the data and facilitating its usage in the thesis. Extensive fact checking via listening to the audio material repeatedly and corroborating it was transcribed correctly helped to assure the quality and accuracy of the written data (Tracy, 2013).

The reliability of the presented information can be split into two sections, external and internal reliability. Qualitative research is more frequently linked with the former one, which corresponds to external reliability being associated with the presented approach. Overall, external factors of reliability are representing the degree to which the research can be replicated in the future. However, since qualitative research is often linked to social surroundings and opinions of people, these factors often change due to different social views or general changes in society. To overcome these difficulties with external reliability, it is to be recommended to take a comparable approach in future research regarding the participants' level of expertise and viewpoints on the topic. Therefore it is necessary for future researchers to be emerged in the topic at a comparable amount in order to be able to evaluate the former mentioned conditions for the sampling process. Furthermore, to achieve a comparable amount of rich textual data, a replication of the interview design should be assured in the personal communication through the same use of open-ended and neutral questions. This further helps to avoid bias of the respondents or the researchers that could have influence on the prospective study's outcome. Internal reliability is linked with the consensual agreement between the authors of the thesis in terms of input and final outcomes of the studied phenomenon. The validity is also concluded through the division into two groups of internal and external perspective. Internal validity secures a high degree of compliance between the earlier illustrated research approach and philosophical stance and the gathered information and observations throughout the research process. External validity ensures the level in which conclusions can be discerned over social contexts (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Furthermore, to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the authors conducted a test interview to verify if the questions were understandable and evoked responses relating to the research aim. It was assured that the person chosen for the test interview was not familiar with the research and its purpose to achieve a neutral feedback on the interview questions and that the given answers provide insights on the examined phenomenon. This was done in order to ensure the quality and open nature of questions provided to the respondents.

## **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Various ethical considerations were implemented during the research process of the thesis. Authors employed variety of steps into ensuring ethical behaviour while conducting research. Bell and Bryman (2007, cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) argued about key principles that needs to be ensured for a research to be seen as ethical. They divided the principles into two categories of securing research participants as well as the overall research community. The aim of implementing such principles into academic work results into stabilising unity of research public by being accurate and avoiding biased actions.

Ethical concerns were presented in the gathered data from online sources, which are Reddit and Facebook communities. Authors were not presenting or publicising any personal information collected by netnography research. However, it was evaluated that using such information in the thesis is not perceived as unethical, given its free availability on the Internet without any requirements of formal sign-in. Therefore, the desired inputs from participants of netnography were presented anonymously, without names or other personal information.

In terms of ethical concerns regarding the interviews and its participants, the authors started the initial communication with participants describing the aim of the interviews with focus on using their answers for the thesis purpose. All participants were introduced to the overall process of via email communication, asking for their consent for using their inputs in the research and the written thesis either verbally before the interview or during the written communication process. An example of the consent formulation can be found in appendix B. Furthermore, it displayed the names of the authors, name of the university, brief background information of the studied topic and the future publication of the thesis in the intranet. In addition, all face-to-face interviews were being recorded for study purposes, and all participants were also informed about this action. Although inputs from various participants were used in the thesis, the name of each participant was confidential and therefore was not presented. All interviewees therefore were assigned numbers for the thesis purpose.

## 5 Analysis and Discussion

The following chapter presents excerpts from the textual data and its interpretation referring to the established product attributes. It examines relevant remarks made by the interview participants and observations from the netnography. The presentation of analysis and the subsequent discussion follow the logical order provided by the research questions of this thesis. The findings have been divided into two main groups with attributes that have been connected to the appeal of products in the literature on one hand and attributes that can be specifically applied to declining markets on the other. First, the authors discuss the product attributes which have been recognized in the literature to be generally favourable for customer perception by providing the subjects' statements regarding their perception of these attributes. Secondly, the product attributes that emerged from the data and are characteristic for later PLC stages are presented. For each attribute, the analysis and discussion is supported not only by quotes gathered from the respondents and online community users but also linked to relevant theory.

To provide clarification and a comprehensive view of the analysis and discussion section, appendix C gives an overview of the identified product attributes. The respondents' quotes were summarized and assigned a second-tier category. These were later consolidated into the five product attribute dimensions. During the analysis of the data the authors scanned the written transcripts and online discussions for descriptions that connected the product attributes described in the theoretical background to their vinyl experience. This provided insights on how customers perceive these attributes to be contributing to a superior customer experience as well as having formed part of the survival of vinyl over the years. These insights will be presented in the following passages.

### 5.1 The tangible vinyl experience

The existence of digital media and the vast rise of streaming services as a more convenient, personalized and easily transportable format for music that is available at all times, alongside its high diffusion and dominance in the music industry could logically imply the supersession of physical formats (Hargreaves & North, 1999, Spotify, 2019). A number of professionals predicted vinyl to have disappeared by the end of the 1990s (Sarpong, Dong & Appiah, 2015). However, as Magaudda (2011) demonstrates, the digitization of the music market does not automatically imply material music objects to have less importance in the eye of the consumer. Although the physical or analogue process of recording and listening to music might be obsolete, the need for physical experiences with music continues (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2013).

Respondent 7: “[Vinyl] is something of value. When you have mp3s they are worth nothing.”

User 4: “Due to Napster, I no longer valued tangible music. I could get all that stuff for free now. I was downloading so much that I couldn't listen to it all [...]. This bothered me because I liked music for the artistic elements. [Then] I started buying records because I liked the personal touch of the format. I bought tons of used records. I liked touching them [...] seeing their discrepancies, and looking through liner notes.”

With physical music media, the tangible experience the consumer has with the product stands in contrast to the immediate but less emotional gratification when downloading digital media. One positive emotion connected to vinyl is the anticipation that comes with the purchase when the acquired product cannot be used immediately. Instead, the customer has to wait until he arrives somewhere where he then can use the equipment to play the LP, raising the customer's anticipation. That is something that digital media does not offer in the same way (Greenburg, 2011).

Tangibility plays a major role in the eyes of vinyl customers. It was chosen by participating respondents as an important factor which makes the vinyl experience especially desirable for customers. Customer behaviour research has shown that customers tend to perceive tangible products as superior, even with many technological disruptions in the market making physical music media obsolete (Thibodeaux, 2017; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985 cited in Santos, 2002).

User 6: "The quality of a vinyl far exceeds that of a cd or any digital downloads available through iTunes, Spotify, or torrents."

Respondent 3: "It is a product that you can touch. It makes you engage with it and the artists behind it. It is a small part of music history."

Respondent 1: "[the tangibility factor] is similar to when you read an actual physical book you get to touch it, you get to smell the pages. It's kind of the same. You can touch the disc, you feel it, you see the audio traces [...] It's nice."

The interviewees emphasized on the wholesome sensory involvement with the medium, the ability to touch it, feel it with all senses and cognitively engage with its intentional design and background. Together with the record, vinyl packages often contain additional tangible pieces such as photo cards or pictures within the vinyl package.

Respondent 1: "You have the signs of the band or of the artist [...] sometimes extra pictures from concerts. It is kind of like the K-pop industry. They have little books with pictures and the band logos."

Respondent 4: "And then there are conceptual albums where the main theme expands over the entire record or a series of records, which comprises of outstanding artistic value. This works for CDs the same way, but is due to the size realizable in a better way with vinyl, when you even have stickers and posters within the package."

As respondent 4 points out, the possibility to create a story around a music piece and assign a theme to an album is facilitated by the physicality and the dimensions of vinyl and the packaging. This contrasts to the emotionally and cognitively limited experience when using digital media.

Hoyer, MacInnis (2009) and Levitt (1965) discussed how in declining markets, uniform products can become dull and uninteresting to customers resulting in a plummeting market demand. In the example of vinyl and by evaluating answers from the respondents, it can be observed that the product itself is being kept interesting by enabling customers to experience additional tangible elements in the vinyl experience such as photo cards and artist's signatures.

### 5.1.1 Tangible products as contrast to the digitized world

Many customers recognize that the world surrounding them is becoming increasingly digital. The wide variety of activities done online is slowly changing the way people perceive the digital world. It is not only older people who are not trusting and rejecting digital technology. In recent years studies have shown that young people, who are usually seen as digital natives and naturally welcoming digital technologies tend to act equally resistant (Knowles & Hanson, 2018; O'Hare & Smith, 2013). Sonnichsen (2017) finds record collecting to be a "testament to the materiality of music consumption" (p.236). Similar views can be found in the responses of vinyl communities, where people stated their current mind-set towards digital mediums in the music industry.

User 7: "As everything in our lives become more and more convenient, it is nice to be able to stop and appreciate what got us here. With our day-to-day lives dominated by technology that is focused on making everything as efficient as possible, there is suddenly a lot of value in being anachronistic in our free time."

User 8: "I think a big part of the resurgence [of vinyl] is that kids these days never had anything to 'latch on to'. Everything being digital is so ephemeral that they kind of missed the boat on having something they could enjoy, then put back on a shelf."

User 9: "What are the big buzzwords for restaurants in this digital age? Hand-made, local, craft, etc. For a generation that is fuelling this vinyl trend (I am thinking college age and under), they probably didn't grow up with much physical media if any at all."

In the earlier mentioned example of nylon products, the social change and shift in the consumer perspective enabled the declining market of nylon to revive itself by market innovation towards the fashion industry (Levitt, 1965). In the case of the researched vinyl sector, the perception of society towards digital technologies has slowly shifted, and people are more frequently seeking non-digital products.

What the users repeatedly pointed out is that vinyl creates a contrast to the dominant digital spheres they and the majority of society are moving within in most parts of their lives. Not only does vinyl provide physicality in the digital age but also does the listening experience interrupt the hectic daily routine shaped by digital efficiency.

User 17: "It is just so mechanical, and finicky, and not convenient. It forces you to slow down and think."

User 5: "I think it is human nature to crave physicality and we have seen everything in our day-to-day lives become impersonal and ethereal."

Respondent 10: "When the digital era in music came and streaming became the new standard I think people started to long for having some physical connection with music."

Respondent 4: "Vinyl benefits from the status as a counter movement to the overarching digitization."

The vinyl users stated that their customer behaviour can be described as seeking for physicality and that the tangible vinyl records are able to respond to that desire. Vinyl seems to invite consumers to experience moments of conscious enjoyment through its design and function as well as the components for playing it. It requires the consumer to focus on the music rather than just having it as background noise, as the following participants state.

Respondent 9: “You have to focus more on what you are doing than when listening to mp3 [...]. With digital music you put it on [...], do something else on the side. This is not the case with vinyl. It is a more mindful listening.”

Respondent 10: “In today’s era of streaming, music is always humming in the background. We listen to music when walking to work, when doing emails, cooking, in the gym but finding time to just sit down and put a record on and enjoy it is a rare and special occasion for me.”

Although the vinyl community demonstrates their resistance against most mainstream developments connected to the ongoing digitization in the music industry, the vinyl market still underlies modern economic trends and rules. One issue all industry branches have to envisage is the threat of online retail to cut out physical retailers of their markets. The profit span for vinyl settles around 2.8% of the total revenue, making it difficult for physical stores to survive. Experts predict the number of physical record stores in the US to be 1038 in 2022, which is half of the number of shops in 2017 (Nobile, 2018, p.11). The physical album market has changed so quickly and dramatically, it is said many music companies struggle to adapt to these changes (Christmas, 2018). The respondents ascribe this to the changed shopping behaviour in the digital age.

Respondent 7: “The problem is that the new generation purchases differently from ours back then. // They are used to browse the internet for what exactly they are looking for and to get it instantly.”

Respondent 4: “[...] the many online platforms and online stores make it difficult for record stores to stay profitable.”

The online trade, comparable to digital music formats, offers the advantage of convenience and instant gratification. With the help of search masks and massive product catalogues customers are able to look for records and buy them on online platforms in only a few minutes. With smartphones this is possible from virtually every location, either on the commute, the lunch break, a dinner with friends or after a concert of their favourite artist (Kyrnin, 2019). Customers, especially those from the younger generation are used to this comfort and appreciate the possibility to shop anywhere, anytime. Visiting a record store, taking the time to browse through the covers and having to transport the bulgy item home is a step out of the modern customer’s comfort zone (Alam, Bakar, Ismail & Ahsan, 2008).

Nonetheless, some customers value the return to a physical shopping experience. This shows the importance for businesses that plan on ensuring the survival of their product via market innovation, to not only pay attention on analyzing the emerging trends in the aimed market but also considering major economic trends and changes in customer’s overall shopping behaviour. It is important for businesses to find a balance between these two influences in order to offer the customer a differentiated, but still satisfactory experience. Going to the physical store and conversing with the seller elevated their shopping encounter.

Respondent 4: “The experience [...] begins with the query at the record store and the conversations with other customers or the salesperson.”

Respondent 1: “[...] if you go to physical shops...the people who sell them mostly know quite a lot and they can tell you little bit of the backstory. It’s a nice customer experience.”

By physically engaging with the medium and participating in direct conversations at the store the interviewees found their customer experience to become rich and vivid, and their relationship with the product strengthened. This relates to Trivikram (2016), who among the different options of how to overcome threats of substitutes in the market suggests to strengthen and improve customer relations. A widely stated element of vinyl that is claimed to offer the customer a superior and therefore more engaging customer experience and thus strengthening the relationship with the medium, is the sound of vinyl.

### **5.1.2 The palpable sound of vinyl**

Apart from the tangibility of the disc itself, sound quality is a characteristic that consumers perceive higher in vinyl than in any other medium (Greenburg, 2011). According to Greenburg (2011), the sound of vinyl offers an acoustically more complacent listening experience than digital media and even CDs, induced by a better resonance. Therefore the sound has an element of physicality as well, as you can hear the running of the needle.

Respondent 7: “[...] vinyl just offers the better sound quality. Real rock music, with those guitars does not sound right on CD. It hits the ears but not the stomach. [...] if I really want to have the experience and that it touches me physically [...], you only achieve that via vinyl.”

This statement was further confirmed during the netnography observations of a vinyl community forum where members discussed the special attribute of the sound experience to be one of the most unique aspects of vinyl products.

User 11: “Analog audio has an uncompressed, broad, warm sound to it that I like, and vinyl captures that best.”

Respondent 10: “I listen to vinyl mainly due to its characteristic warm sound.”

User 12: “I think [vinyl] records never really died off because their sound quality is so much better than any other medium of recorded music that has been developed since.”

The users and respondents regard the sound in vinyl to be different and having the ability to deliver a smooth and enjoyable encounter. The association of the medium with warmth is similar to what other music experts, like Chuck Leavell from The Rolling Stones, states: “Whether it's a CD or a download, there's a certain jaggedness to it. Vinyl wins every time. It's warmer, more soothing, easier on the ears.” (Greenburg, 2011, p.64). Other respondents continued to state that the sound attribute provides users with superior listening experience when compared to other mediums.

Respondent 4: “I listen to vinyl because of the sound quality. You cannot compare it to anything else on the market.”

Respondent 6: “Vinyl has a different sound compared to CDs or other newer mediums.”

Another contributing element to underline the differentiation of vinyl in comparison to other mediums is the complementary products that are needed to play the records. Some of the respondents elaborated on the influence of the playing devices on the sound quality.

Respondent 9: “The better the equipment, the better is the sound quality when playing the record. // There are different pickup systems, some are laser-driven that



of course have very few disturbances, the usual are the needles, diamond and other pickups [...]. Also the player itself has influence.

As the sound of the vinyl disc is read off mechanically by the pickup heads, their quality in interaction with the disc's surface condition can influence the clearness of sound as well as sound interferences like white noise, distortions and crackles. Although for some occasion such interferences might be undesirable, they form a unique part of the sound experience, as described by this interviewee.

Respondent 9: "There are these cracking sounds that are part of listening to vinyl. You cannot imagine listening to vinyl without this cracking, it induces this melancholic emotion."

However, with playback equipment of high quality these effects can be minimized to have a pleasant listening experience that is at level or even outperforming the quality of digital formats. One of the participants pointed out, that the disc in itself provides the prerequisites for a superior quality and its potential only has to be fully exploited with the complementary products.

Respondent 9: "The record itself offers this sound depth, the pickup equipment is crucial in delivering a good sound."

Respondent 4: "It is possible to have a great listening experience with very simple or vintage equipment. But it is always possible to upgrade your experience with a better pick-up head or a preamp"

Next to the possibilities the equipment offers for the auditive experience, the recurring interaction with the equipment in every listening session adds another tangible element to the user experience and further differentiates it.

Respondent 9: "It begins with the process of putting the record on, which differs a lot from what you do with CDs or when streaming. [...] [T]he listening process requires a different form of activity, a more purposeful selecting and handling of the disc, putting it on and interacting with the player."

According to the interviewees, the peculiar sound of vinyl not only is a crucial element of it being perceived as superior to most mediums, it furthermore is a tangible element in itself. This adds a special dimension to the product, leveraging the customer experience with the product through differentiating the product's function from competing products. By making the sound graspable for the customer's senses, the value of vinyl is further elevated through an additional tangibility dimension.

### **5.1.3 The inconvenience of vinyl**

However, vinyl's tangibility also brings some disadvantages. As Greenburg (2011) describes, preserving the quality of the records requires certain knowledge, effort and right handling of the discs and the complimentary products. The extensive care vinyl records require was also described by several of the respondents.

Respondent 7: "You have to be careful in their handling when putting them on, you should not touch the surface to avoid getting grease on the grooves."

Respondent 1:" For me it is a bit of disadvantage to go always get it [the record player], set it up, play it. We keep it there [in the garage] because there are 2 little

kids in my household, so it is not really safe to keep it in the same room with them, all the time.”

Another disadvantage of the vinyl design compared to other music mediums that some of the respondents described during the interviews is the size and weight of the disc.

Respondent 3: “They are very bulgy, especially if you aim for a good collection. As they are so big you need the space to store them.”

Respondent 2: “Another thing is of course how to store them because now I have them in boxes. I would like to put them on shelves but [...] I do not have the space.”

Respondent 7: “They are very heavy and take quite some space in an apartment.”

Although Bartmanski & Woodward (2015) imply that the higher weight of some special edition records also connotes a higher significance of the discs content, it is the one element all the respondents agree on to be the biggest disadvantage of vinyl. A heavier record might be more durable and therefore of a higher quality, but it makes it even less easy in the handling.

Respondent 7: “[...] it is just a lifestyle that many quickly adopt but then let go quite as quickly. Because in all fairness: it is laborious. If you help somebody move who is collecting vinyl it is no fun.”

What the interviewee describes could be explaining why the vinyl market remains niche despite the recent trend of increasing sales. Vinyl collections are contradictory to the global nomad trend, narrowing down the potential customer segment. As reasoned above, the special dimensions of vinyl require customers, especially those with the motivation to assemble a bigger collection, to have enough space for the discs and to have a certain settled lifestyle. Additionally, Respondent three explained the special storing conditions that vinyl discs require:

Respondent 3: “And vinyl is sensitive; you can't store it everywhere if you want to keep the quality up. That extends from temperature to humidity and dust protection.”

Respondent 7: “You have to have a certain rite to be able to enjoy [vinyl] for a long time, where you clean and brush them regularly.”

Respondent seven later found the vulnerability of the medium to be contribution to the fascination for vinyl records amongst users. He then went on to describe this regular engagement with the medium as a sort of ritual, which emotionally bonds the user to the item. How vinyl is able to create certain rituality for consumers is a new theme that emerged from the interviews and observations and will be described at a later point.

#### **5.1.4 Vinyl discs and the upcycling trend**

The vulnerability that vinyl displays and that was described by the respondents results in the record's functionality to be corrupted easily. A scratched disk cannot be used for its original purpose of playing music anymore. Luckily, respondents showed that even beyond its original function, vinyl records can be valuable objects.

Respondent 9: “Those records that are broken and cannot be played anymore because they have too many scratches or if the disc is deformed can be recycled

and formed into something different. // So you can not only play vinyl but also later reuse it and make something different out of it.”

Respondent 1: “I think it is pretty important, [...] if the vinyl is damaged, that you cannot longer listen to it [...] you can make something from it. [...] you can repurpose it.”

What the participants describe relates to the contemporary trend of upcycling, which is the conversion of objects or their material into something that presents higher value than the original object or raw material. It is related to the process of recycling, but differs in the fact that instead of reusing an object for its purpose and thereby prolonging the product life or reintroducing it to its product cycle, upcycling can create a new purpose, appearance and meaning for products and materials. The interviewee then named a few of the repurposing possibilities for vinyl which not only include decorative objects but also functional uses of the material.

Respondent 9: “We form vinyl bowls, coasters and different stuff. That is really cool and decorative. Then you have a vinyl record as a fruit bowl on the table. // We also made games out of vinyl, like a small pelmanism game where you have to find the matching pairs. There is even funny stuff like toilet rolls made of vinyl.”

By forming the records into something new or assigning a new purpose to the disc or the vinyl material, it can be changed into a meaningful object. As Sung, Cooper and Kettley (2014) affirm, the creative upcycling ideas can not only create solution approaches for waste reduction and sustainable consumption but also can shape new business ideas and markets. Examples for instances where manufacturers benefitted from such repurposing ideas are backpacks that are made of used materials like truck tarpaulin covers as in the case of the FREITAG brand or sales and spinnakers used by the 360° brand which also produces home accessories. Both brands gave the material a new purpose, making use of its favourable characteristics and turning it into something of higher value which in turn enabled them to be luxury brands (Taschenagentur Kramer, 2016; FREITAG, 2019). The popularity of their products resulted in their need to partly purchase the materials directly from the manufacturers. Such emerging collaborations can be chances for businesses in declining markets and support market innovation strategies. One business that entered a collaboration which created several uses for parts of their product was Pepsi. In their CSR project with the MyShelter foundation, dispensable plastic bottles were used as sustainable light diffusers as well as material for building classrooms in the Philippines (Pepsi Philippines, 2015).

Repurposing products and their materials might seem at first sight a last option for manufacturers when all else fails, but the above mentioned examples show the possibility to renew a business strategy and enter or even create new markets. Therefore, the attribute of tangibility prevails as an advantage over digital formats, making it possible for products to survive even after their original use and purpose might be passed by. Only because of its tangibility, the damaged disc can still hold value for its owner, with the option of repurposing the product, creating new objects of ongoing value.

### **5.1.5 The power of tangibility**

As Leavy (2017) pointed out, when it comes to disruption and substitutes, there is a question if companies really have to choose between either fundamentally adjusting the business model or incrementally focussing on advancing their products or services. In the case of

vinyl, the manufacturers did not implement any major changes to the product itself. When looking at the gathered responses, even without alterations to the product or the complementary equipment, customers still appreciate the vinyl experience.

Although the digital substitute alternatives are more convenient, the tenor amongst the respondents illustrates that it is the higher engagement with the medium based on its tangibility creates a pleasant contrast to the modern digital sphere. It is its inconveniences that make vinyl special and contribute to its ongoing appeal. Not only the tangibility of the product itself and its graspable sound create a wholesome customer experience. Returning to a more tangible shopping experience that includes personal contact with sales personnel and other customers as well as taking the time to browse through products instead of instant gratification offer an escape from the alienating effect of technology. This demonstrates that tangibility can be a product attribute enhancing survival chances in declining stages when exploited. Lastly, the analysis showed that tangibility creates opportunities in finding new purposes for products, being a supportive force in the development of market innovation strategies.

## 5.2 Packaging aesthetics and artistic value

A unique selling proposition of the vinyl that digital media cannot provide remains in the artwork that is put into the product and the overall aesthetic appeal of vinyl (Greenburg, 2011; YouGov, 2018). Aesthetic design and packaging plays an important role in getting attention and buzz around the product. Physical albums have to be uniquely packaged, especially in the age of digital music, in order to have a convincing value proposition in contrast to digital formats. The application of unique aesthetics in packaging goes way back to the 1960s and is continuing to this day (Shutterstock, 2014). One example for the use of aesthetics was described by a respondent as followed:

Respondent 6: "Some of the dominant recent trends in vinyl are the preference for colourful packaging in different styles and designs. One of the emerging trends can be seen in shaped vinyl for example."

Respondent 9: "Some records have a special design entirely, they are not always the usual black but some are white or blue and that is really beautiful."

Using coloured or shaped vinyl for records is one way of promoting vinyl as a distinctive format. Although this practice is no novelty, its popularity seems to have risen recently in order to encourage collecting intentions for vinyl. But not only is the disc itself designed to be pleasant and exciting for the customer's eye. Especially the packaging, referred to as cover, plays a crucial role in the vinyl community and can alone be a purchase motivation, as respondent four acknowledges.

Respondent 4: "A well designed cover is an eye-catcher and already tells a lot about the content. The cover is the first and most important impression and can be a piece of art. A really good cover, such as gatefold covers, can already be the reason to buy the record."

Respondent 10: "I have previously bought records because of an amazing cover."

The cover is also able to give information about the content of the record. A well designed packaging can provide the customer with enough information to assess the quality and

character of the product at first sight. In the vinyl market the cover has the function of hinting at what type of music the customers can expect.

Respondent 7: “[...] you can read off a lot from the cover, for example what kind of music it is, if the record is expensive or not [...].”

Respondent 9: “For me it is important to see the cover because it tells you what kind of music it is. [...] DJs orientate the style of music on the people that are present and the covers help them in that.”

Both interviewees point out how important the cover is for transmitting information on the music that is contained on the disc. The cover provides guidance for customers to choose the right records for their preferences. The majority of respondents on the customer side as well as the retailer's side agreed on the importance of the cover design when choosing vinyl products.

Respondent 2: “I often like the covers and how they design the albums differently. Some albums from some bands look really cool.” “I like to decorate a bit with it.”

Respondent 1: “They have a very nice design. I use them as a decoration.” “I think [the design of the cover] is very important, sometimes I buy records just for the packaging.”

Respondent one emphasizes on the importance of the cover design for her purchase decision. This shows how the aesthetic elements of the product drive the motivation to buy the disc. It is therefore confirming the assumption of various researchers that design aspects in products can create a higher value for the customer than the sheer functionality or convenience of a product.

### **5.2.1 Self-expression through vinyl consumption**

Both respondents furthermore point out that they use the record covers to showcase them as part of their interior decoration. That the design of the cover inspires customers to decorate their homes was also mentioned by other interviewees as well as treating it as an additional component of their self-expression in their home.

Respondent 7: “Records can also be something like a fitment, enhancing a home as a very decorative element.”

This relates to Campbell's (1987) concept of the modernist, hedonist consumer who assembles objects of desire in his home for aesthetic enjoyment and attaching emotional and aspirational meaning to these objects. By attaching feelings to the objects, the desired object becomes an extension of oneself. The consumer can express who he is and convey this information by purchased goods. Some respondents underlined the reasons behind using vinyl as a furnishment.

Respondent 7: “You show your taste with it, your understanding of music.”

Respondent 4: “The vinyl collection defines a part of the own personality.”

The respondents agreed that by displaying vinyl in their home in an easily visible place, it can act as a bridge to show their status, their music knowledge and taste. Bartmanski & Woodward (2015) see vinyl as a vehicle for “moral values and instruments of identity-projection” (p.7). This corresponds to the conspicuous consumption, which talks about the

need to showcase products to others in order to display a culturally defined status (Sassatelli, 2007). The effect of directing other individuals' assumptions by displaying the vinyl consumption is confirmed by this respondent.

Respondent 9: "I think the vinyl consumer has a bit more music knowledge than the mainstream music consumer."

The respondents also identified their social status as a prompt to purchase or listen to vinyl. By engaging in these activities, their peers and other social actors would perceive vinyl users as hip or up-to-date with the recent trends.

Respondent 4: "For some people vinyl is just a hip lifestyle product. People who want to set themselves apart from the mainstream."

Respondent 9: "Because it has a cult status but remains niche it adds even more value to the product, because not everybody has it, also because not everybody understands it."

The participants underline the use of conspicuous consumption to present themselves as knowledgeable and distance them from the rest. Although the consumption of a niche product can indeed set one apart from the common practice it can also create a special product community. In fact, the vinyl cover is highly related to the formation of social communities and the individual's identification with cultural tendencies and philosophies. One participant elaborated exceedingly on the meaning of the cover for the transportation of values and messages in former times.

Respondent 7: "Back in the day, music played an even bigger role than today [...] because people strongly identified with it. Artists like Bob Dylan were perceived as nearly prophetic because they promoted some sort of truth. It was not only about the music but also the lifestyle. It was how the youth invented themselves and their culture."

He goes on to explaining that through the covers people could see images of the band and their fashion style. Because vinyl was a mass medium internationally, this was the start of cross-border youth culture and international celebrity fandom. Through the imagery on the cover vinyl users could feel inspired and belonging to a social group.

So far, the gathered responses and analysis correspond with the theory described in Sassatelli (2007). However, the respondents describe a new aspect of the modern customer practicing conspicuous consumption.

Respondent 3: "What changed is that many young people now just buy their first record to impress others. They have no idea of the material, cannot tell quality and garbage apart."

Respondent 7: "We were more the collectors, striving to complete our series. [...] They try to buy only the highlights, it's like the 100 best records of Pop and Rock that are listed in some books or magazines like the Rolling Stones and Musikexpress."

In contrast to the hedonic consumer that Sassatelli (2007) describes the emerging customer segment of the younger generation seems to have a slightly different motivation for their vinyl consumption. While the hedonic consumer desires a product's authenticity, novelty and exotic nature to expand his knowledge and broaden his horizon, some young vinyl customers

appear to lack the background knowledge that the former typical vinyl customer used to have. A part of the contemporary customers are not seeking to attain wisdom about the product and the music behind it at all, but still display their vinyl consumption to externally project a favourable image of themselves. These users engage in a strong form of conspicuous consumption, making more of themselves than they really are.

Respondent 3: "The industry tries to open up new market sections with the help of the hipness factor, which seems to work."

What respondent three describes is referring to the earlier stated assumption that a move into a niche market can create the possibility to reach new customer segments at a later point in time, thus enabling market innovation. The vinyl comeback has proven this strategy to work, as with the recent hipster trend the demand for vintage clothing and retro technologies increased and revived the interest for the medium. To show their social belonging to this group and differentiate themselves from the masses, hipster consumers use vinyl as a vehicle to express their taste (McColl, Canning, Shearer & McBride, 2018). One characteristic of vinyl that acts as a supporting element to this consumer behaviour is the artistic value of vinyl that elevates the value of the medium additionally and is therefore able to further set the user apart from the mainstream.

## 5.2.2 The artistic value of vinyl records

In accordance with the statement of Bartmanski & Woodward (2015), that the cover provides rich information about the level of cognitive and artistic groundwork that went into the record, one interviewee elaborated on the impression that a good cover can give on the artistic value and quality of the record.

Respondent 1: "The packaging of the vinyl is always like a little art piece".

Respondent 5: "I think that the packaging can have [...] artistic value, [however] it greatly depends on the taste of the person."

Respondent 4: "You immediately see that the artist has given thought to the design and hired a good graphic designer."

Respondent 7: "[...] alone the cover is so valuable because it is a high quality print."

The design of the cover often holds meaning and can transmit information on the artistic idea behind the record. Due to its artsy execution and deliberate design it is comparable to other art forms like prints. As other respondents stated, there are special editions of connected record series. They often hold a certain aesthetic theme that embellishes a number of discs. These series are of high interest amongst collectors, as they deliver superior artistic value.

Respondent 4: "If you look at the vinyl record in combination with the cover, the artistic value can exceed the sheer value of the recorded music. There are conceptual albums where the main theme expands over the entire record or a series of records, which comprises of outstanding artistic value."

Some of the interviewees gave examples of popular special editions. By building a theme or story around the record and combining it visually, the value of the product is exponentially increased. Such editions are often becoming iconic and are sought after by collectors.

Respondent 4: “Let us take Black Star by David Bowie, where the cover together with the visible part of the disc builds a complete optical artwork and at the same time underlines the dark nature of the music.”

Respondent 9: “[...] the special star wars edition record [...] became iconic because it has a hologram on the disc. When you put it on you can shine with a flashlight from the side and suddenly a hologram of a TIE fighter hovers over the record while the soundtrack is playing. That is so cool you will get goosebumps. So they created an even higher value and played with the design and several possibilities.”

By adding visual artwork not only to the design of the cover but embedding it in the functionality of the product, the manufacturers created a holistic customer experience, combining tactile, visually aesthetic and audible elements. Participant nine describes how this combination has a special moving effect on the consumer, even causing bodily reactions like goosebumps. The product therefore rises in its perceived quality, offering increased added value to the customer.

Despite the positive effect and importance an aesthetic packaging has on the attractiveness of vinyl, Respondent 3 identified a disadvantage when it comes to the product packaging and its aesthetics, in which he addressed the negative aspect of driving the price of vinyl up. He perceives the overall design and packaging to be a marketing move and the reason why the prices of vinyl are increasing.

Respondent 3: “I think the composition of the music piece itself is the artistic element, regardless what medium it comes on. The packaging and the design are just marketing instruments to drive sales up.”

To conclude, the analyzation of aesthetics as a product attribute confirmed its important impact on consumer behaviour. It is indeed possible to apply aesthetics to secure the survival of the product in later stages of the PLC, as the aesthetic design elevates the value of the product. By combining the tangible product with a pleasant appearance that is different from other possible substitute products, the customer is offered a highly differentiated and precious product. The respondents gave insight on new developments in the vinyl market, which aim at further augmenting the appeal and perceived value of vinyl. This includes using coloured material for the discs as well as creating collectable record series with a special theme expanding over every element of the disc. Some manufacturers maximize the sensory customer experience by adding dramatic elements, like holograms and 3D pictures. The enjoyment of vinyl is found to be in big parts aesthetically driven and still applies to this mature product in the late stages of the PLC.

### **5.3 The nostalgic characteristics of vinyl**

As music is assumed to be a strong inducer of nostalgia, it might also be an explanation for the growing vinyl sale numbers during the recent years (Wildschut et al., 2006; Vess et al., 2012). Listening to songs that remind one of earlier times and interacting with the medium that formed part of the everyday life of earlier generations takes people back to those former moments. Greenburg (2011) remarks that nostalgia is one of the main element why vinyl has a continuous appeal. It also was an important and recurring element in the participants' elaborations.



Respondent 4: "Everybody still remembers their first own record which they received as a present in their childhood or bought from their pocket money. Nobody remembers their first download or which song he listened to first with a streaming service. The vinyl collection defines a part of the own personality."

Respondent 9: "We share common experiences with vinyl records, for example the first kiss while a romantic song was playing in the background. Everybody has their own story with vinyl."

It is clearly seen that nostalgia was one of the primary emotions customers link to the vinyl experience. The participants underline the individual memories they connected with the medium. But more than merely remembering instances where they used vinyl, they perceive these encounters as deeply interwoven with emotions. The reminiscence of the past and emotions linked to such time led the customers to continue their support of vinyl.

User 1: "[...] But the thing I missed the most was browsing in a music shop. I did this all the time growing up and it was the most fun way for me to find new-to-me music. That was my draw to vinyl."

Respondent 2: "It is nice to sit down and enjoy my old music and think of maybe the time I listened to it earlier. It reminds me of moments in my life. Maybe you call that sentimental?"

What the statements describe is connected to personal nostalgia, which triggers emotions of fondness and affection towards objects which were connected to a user's past, usually in their youth (Holbrook, 1993). Vinyl has the ability to prompt such feelings in experienced customers that have interacted with the product in earlier stages of their life. One participant presented possible reasons why vinyl sparks these emotions.

Respondent 9: "In these times where so much is happening around us and we are impacted by so many impressions and quick changes, people return to former times and things they know. These known things appeal to them more than the current objects. And this is why vinyl has its comeback. It reminds us of the times when we were younger and lived differently, where it was less fast-paced than now. The vinyl record represents recollection."

Some of the respondents linked these nostalgic elements of vinyl to the two major target groups, which they described being older generations on one side and the rising hipster youth culture on the other.

Respondent 1: "I think in general it is the older people. Because they have a lot of nostalgia. My grandparents or even my parents back in the day, they used to listen only to vinyl [...] it is a good target group."

Respondent 2: "Older people like me who are stuck in the past."

User 2: "I can speak as a 40+ year old: nostalgia... I really love the format again [...] and it absolutely reminds me of a simpler time."

Respondent 1: "Everyone was like oh, let us buy it, it is cool, it is vintage, and it looks very hipster. It is more of a social group, like the hipsters, and vintage cool kids, who buy everything vintage."

Among the answers from respondents regarding the younger customer segment, reasons for listening to vinyl vary from interest in the social status to the influence from parents or older generation.

Respondent 1: “My parents do listen to it [vinyl], we have the player [...] it comes from my parents.”

User 3: “Because of my parents and grandparents I had exposure to vinyl for as long as I can remember. Playing a record always seemed special when compared to a CD or digital file.”

The answers show that young vinyl users are mostly interested in vinyl based from the influence of their parents or from the older generation in general. This represents the similar demeanour as network effects, where there is no restricted willingness of young customers to purchase product from an unknown company and an unknown product, since there is connection present in form of vinyl experience of older customers to influence them. Just in the way that playing old games with one’s own children is able to connect the different generations emotionally; introducing someone to one’s vinyl collection can form a social bond across generations (Beckman, 2018). Such interaction can act as a trigger for the initial interest for vinyl.

User 3: “One of the reasons I started buying vinyl is that it took me back to being a kid and flicking through my parents’ records. I grew up with my parents playing records so they are always comforting. “

Respondent 4: “To listen to a parent’s or grandparent’s vinyl record enables you to dive into their childhood and youth, which is an exceptional experience. // the music will still be hearable in centuries from now. That makes vinyl effectively its own archive.”

The respondent’s view corroborates Beckman’s statement of vinyl having the ability to build bridges among generations. Moreover, this articulation shows how vinyl serves as a historical archive, making cultural heritage from past generations available to everybody. It enables a transition of cultural elements independent of contact with contemporary witnesses.

This notion of perceiving vinyl as a link to the past can be linked to historical nostalgia. This type of nostalgic emotion refers to a past time that was not personally experienced by the individual feeling it, however the person experiences the nostalgic feeling himself (Muehling & Pascal, 2012). Above mentioned attributes greatly affect the purchases of vinyl in younger customer categories. Levitt (1965) talked about the threat of the unique or unknown products that are introduced to the market, the longer it takes for the consumer to get familiar with it and socially normalise it. Within the obtained responses, it is easily observable that younger vinyl customers do not perceive the product as something new or unknown. This immensely supports the popularity of vinyl, since there was no need of social normalisation with the product.

As for the manufacturer point of view, our interviewee stated that the one of the most important characteristic which makes vinyl desirable in today’s market is the retro feeling that customers get.

Participant 5: “The most important characteristics [of vinyl] can be described as retro feeling. Customers often demand high quality packaging with retro design.”

Nostalgia and retro factor often come together along with the aspect of vinyl packaging. The Respondent also stated that customers prefer discs with the printing on the reverse side of the disc which indicates it being an older vinyl product. Harrigan (1980) stated that in order to ensure continuing demand in declining market, the product itself must be appealing and has to create switch reluctance, or less desirable feeling for substitutes. In this case, the attributes that make vinyl desirable in the eyes of customers are recognized as nostalgia and retro feeling and act as a reluctant force against digital substitutes.

Instead of businesses following the dominant trend to repeatedly apply technological innovation and new features to their products to uphold customer demand, the analysis showed that nostalgia in products can help differentiate them. As nostalgic elements are experiencing an increased popularity within the customer base, it can serve as a crucial product attribute to maintain interest and appeal for the product, especially in later stages of the PLC. As nostalgia is connected to memories and emotions related to former times, it can build a positive atmosphere around the product that lets the consumer revive moments of his earlier customer experience with the object. This effect, as the analysis revealed, contributes to a newly discovered function that vinyl is able to offer. Even without the direct contact with contemporary witnesses, younger customers are forming an emotional connection to earlier times and former generations. Nostalgia is therefore able to not only affiliate people of the same generation but builds cross-generational bridges, serving as a tool to pass on culture. By implementing nostalgic elements into their products, businesses can add this function to their product, creating emotional bonds with the customer and elevating the product's value. It serves as a beneficial characteristic to apply in products in declining stages to intensify the relation with the existent customer base on one side and create the potential of reaching other customer segments in the future through the nostalgic appeal.

#### **5.4 Decline stage specific attributes**

The netnography as well as the interviews conducted by the authors revealed additional recurring attributes the online community and interview participants associated with the vinyl experience. These attributes serve as new findings of attributes that are related to the later stages of the PLC. To facilitate the understanding of the applied categorization of the product attributes in relation to the PLC, Figure 5 provides an overview.

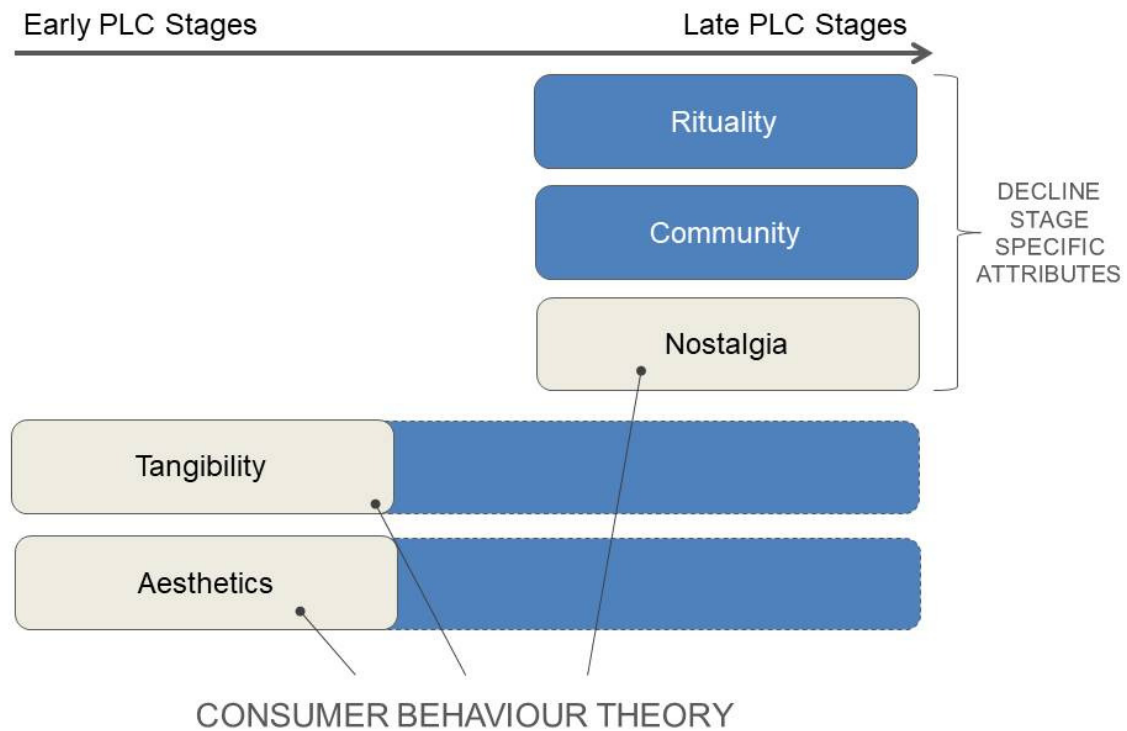


Figure 5 Attribute classification in relation to the PLC (Dubeňová, Koch, 2019)

Deriving from the reviewed literature the attributes of tangibility, aesthetics and nostalgia served as the main three themes guiding the data collection and analysis. While the former two are described in existing theory mainly in the context of the launch of products, nostalgia is acknowledged to relate to later PLC stages, as it relies on encounters with the medium in earlier times. Thus far, the analysis was able to demonstrate that tangibility and aesthetics can be applied as valuable product attributes in the later stages of the PLC, that enable a survival of a product. In the following section, two new product characteristics that the analysis brought to light will be disclosed. The attributes of rituality and community are specific to the decline stage of the PLC and therefore serve as a new contribution.

The act of rituality throughout the product usage can be explained as a sphere of customer behaviour ranging from personal to public execution. In many remarks there were hints at forms of ritualities the subjects form with the product. The development of these activities require the consumer to be familiar with the medium and having engaged with it at multiple instances. Thus, they are typically present and in later stages within the product life cycle. The rituality element of vinyl therefore is a new insight into customer behaviour within declining markets, enabling the survival of a product.

A ritual is usually described as an orchestrated act, often linked with energetic and passionate character including certain symbolic actions (Rook, 1985, Tetrault & Klein, 1990). Many consumers are drawn to the medium of vinyl because of the aspect of rituality it presents. Respondents who talked about the ritual aspect of vinyl experience characterized it as either the opportunity for solitude or the opportunity for social happenings.

### 5.4.1 Rituality in Solitude

Although showing some similar notions, the vinyl experience was described by every user and interviewee differently, which leads to the conclusion that every vinyl user has established for himself an individual way of listening and engaging with the medium. One user stated that by using vinyl as a music device, it presents him with the ability to stop and appreciate his life, disattaching himself from the modern way of life where everything is very convenient. The users in the online community described how their solitude in when listening to vinyl allows them to blank out the outside world, and focus on the music itself, keeping their focus on solely the listening experience without any external interruptions.

User 16: "As everything in our lives becomes more and more convenient, it is nice to be able to stop and appreciate what got us here. I know that with a record I only get fifteen or so minutes of continuous play, but really I am okay with that. I appreciate what I have now more because of the effort it takes to consume this media."

User 17: "[the vinyl listening experience]...the ritual of lifting a needle, picking sides, all that makes for a much different experience than digital music...listening to a record, I actually listen."

User 18: "The vinyl kind of forces you to be more attentive to the ritual of listening to music. I [play] vinyl when I want to focus on nothing but the music."

Other respondents highlighted the characteristics vinyl presents as a personal and secluded feeling which is experienced regularly. They are able to perform such ritual acts in solitude, creating a custom around it. They add other elements that add to a special atmosphere for their vinyl experience, such as changing the lighting and consuming semi luxury food.

Respondent 4: "To sit there in the evening with a glass of wine, picking a record and appreciatively listening to it awakes memories and evokes emotions. It has to do a lot with deceleration and mindfulness."

Respondent 9: "Sometimes in the evening when I watch television and do not like what is on, [...] I open the box, dim the lights, [...] lean back on the couch and do not need anything else. I then have a little wine next to it and feel so comfortable and happy. I do not do this every day, but it is a special ceremony."

The participants describe that they enjoy the ability to relax while listening to vinyl by themselves. It provides them with the feeling of rituality and seclusion during which they are able to realize the mindfulness of such activity. In fact, a number of respondents acknowledged the deceleration effect of vinyl.

Respondent 4: "It has to do a lot with deceleration and mindfulness. [...] To enjoy and celebrate music in a mindful, appreciative way at home will be the future of vinyl records."

Respondent 7: "You enjoy music deliberately instead of just consuming it."

Respondent 9: "And then you have to sit and listen to it. It is not something you just constantly carry around [...]. Instead you create this moment deliberately which gives that experience a new value and deceleration."

The interviewees describe listening to music via vinyl as more mindful than the predominant consumption of music on the side. It aligns with what O'Donnell (2015) described as the longing for reconnection with oneself and the physical surrounding. The statements relate to what researchers call information overload, when instead of paying attention to only one thing at a time people experience the pressure to multitask while at the same time feeling constantly distracted (Tarafdar, Gupta & Turel, 2013). Practicing mindfulness aims to reduce experienced stress through moments of deep attention to one single activity (McGrane, 2013; O'Donnell, 2015). The focus on this particular moment was confirmed by the interviewees.

Respondent 9: "Then you have to sit down close to it to listen to it [...]. You have to focus more on what you are doing [...], you are not as scattered with your thoughts. // With digital music you put it on [...], do something else on the side. This is not the case with vinyl. It is a more mindful listening and decelerates everything. // The senses do not get as overstimulated as with other things."

Respondent 8: "The vinyl listening experience provides me also with a ritual where I can be alone. When I listen to vinyl I can be all by myself. I can take a break from my high frequent work life. I do not need any digital medium for listening to vinyl so I can take a break from my mobile phone. That is the reason why I listen to vinyl at least once a week. It has become my ritual to relax."

Respondent eight even describes listening to vinyl as an opportunity to completely detach oneself from digital devices such as mobile phones and enjoy a break from a busy daily routine. Although this participant prefers to experience vinyl in solitude, other respondents described how they come together with other users to do so. How vinyl creates group activities and a feeling of community and social belonging will be illustrated next.

#### **5.4.2 Rituality and community**

Although the act of ritual behaviour varies from user to user, it also can be and is mostly linked with communal or shared activities (Rook, 1985; Tetrault & Klein, 1990). The product and its handling provide the listeners with an action that is able to create social encounters and communities developing shared rituals. In consensus with this, the respondents described how the purchase of vinyl creates an opportunity to meet with other peers and exchange views on the topic.

Respondent 4: "The experience [...] begins with the query at the record store and the conversations with other customers or the salesperson. [...] people exchange experiences and tips."

Respondent 7: "It has to do with people, entertainment and those little discourses at the counter."

Respondent 9: "Everybody has its own story with vinyl. And to meet and share that with others who had similar experiences is precious."

Respondent 6: "The vinyl experience is based on [...] the community experience and the sense of belonging."

The interviewees express that the customer experience offered by vinyl is characterized by the contact with other customers and the salesperson, because the exchange forms a crucial

element of the physical store ordeal. Gainer (1995) stated that customers appreciate products presenting them with the possibility of getting closer and more personal with their friends, family or acquaintances. This is in accordance with the respondents' descriptions of the ritual behaviour they have developed as a communal or shared act within their communities.

Respondent 4: "[...] they organize collective listening nights. The visit of a vinyl swap meeting is always a special experience, especially when done with friends."

Respondent 9: "[...] it is this element of enjoying vinyl together with people who think alike. Then you sit there and listen, of course you can also have a talk in between, have a drink together, chat a little."

All three respondents describe the possibility to get in contact with other users of the product and emphasize on how it adds a pleasant dimension to their customer experience. It presents them with a certain patterns of behaviour such as frequent or scheduled meetings which would not happen without the vinyl as a trigger for such activities. They enjoy and connect the consumption and listening act of vinyl in company. This serves to strengthen their relationship with family and friends and create personal encounters together with them.

User 13: "Once I started buying vinyl, it just became so much fun to collect. And honestly, my friends enjoyed it too! I am able to convince them all to hang out, drink beer, and thumb through my vinyl collection."

User 14: "My friends and I are all really into vinyl music, and we often go to the flea market together to look around."

User 15: "Taking a record to a friend's house and putting it on to show them a cool new EP is an awesome way to do things. There is a personal dimension to it. I like the ritual side of it, whether I'm listening by myself or showing a record to somebody. I get to show the artwork, put the record on the turntable and let it spin knowing we're going to pay more attention to it because of this conscious act."

The interviewees underlined the strong community sense in the vinyl sphere. When living in a world that becomes gradually impersonal, the vinyl experience provides a possibility to converse with others. The combination of rituality and social belonging forms new consumption patterns and is one reason why vinyl has a strong loyal customer base. This also correlates to the already mentioned longing for social connection associated with nostalgia. As nostalgic feelings can be triggered by loneliness, it seems that vinyl consumption not only fulfils this need via the medium but also through the strong immersion into a community.

Respondent 9: "And so an elitist circle of fanatics developed who enjoy the medium together. And there is never anything negative about it, it is always positive, always delightful, a pure positive emotion. // When people come together and listen to vinyl it is always a very peaceful togetherness."

The interview participant describes the encounter within the community as very pleasant, furthermore strengthening her positive emotional connection to the medium. By getting in contact with other users and develop rituals around the purchase and use of the product, a wholesome hedonic consumer experience is created. As these communities serve as ambassadors for the product, they not only are able to intensifying the product's appeal within the community, but also create a positive reference for new customer segments. This

is related to network effects and although the user number of products in niche markets might not be high, the personal contact with users of the product sharing their positive experiences can be an incentive to start using the product as well. This is another argument for disrupted businesses to resist the external pressure to innovate their product when their customer base is a very loyal one. A company can instead make the move into a niche market and focus on serving the needs of their customers at an exceptional level. The high customer satisfaction is a possible trigger for other consumers' interest in the product.



## 6 Conclusion

This closing chapter provides a summary of the findings the conducted research generated. It gives an overview of how scholars and practitioners alike can benefit from the insights presented in this paper and outline the main outcomes of the study. It discusses in what aspects the presented research and its findings might be of restricted character. This leads way to recommendations the authors wish to give future researchers to further expand the knowledge in the studied area.

The aim of this study was to investigate if product attributes associated with early stages of the product life cycle could be applied to declining markets in order to enable the survival of disruption, and then follow with an investigation of additional specific product attributes characteristic for later stages of the product life cycle that ensure their continuous appeal, increasing the chances for a successful market innovation.

The research justified that the attribute of tangibility is an important aspect for products in order to survive in declining market. Vinyl's tangibility attribute generates a contrast to digital music formats. Consumers value the physical music medium because of the tangible experience providing them with more emotional gratification than digitally downloaded music. Furthermore, customers tend to perceive tangible products to be superior to non-tangible ones, even with many more convenient technological disruptions present in the market. Additionally, the research results unveiled an aspect that has not yet been connected with tangibility in the reviewed literature background. A tangible product enables customers to repurpose it or reshape its materiality after the product has ceased to fulfil its intended use, creating new products of ongoing or even superior value. Customers growing enthusiasm for upcycling is linked with the emerging consumer behaviour trend of sustainable living and waste reduction. This can create an opportunity for businesses in declining markets to construct the tangibility of their product as appealing to customers and discover new business practices and partnerships, thus opening new markets and create new demands.

The importance of the aesthetic product attribute in enabling disruption survival has also been justified during the analysis. The findings underlined that aesthetic packaging has a crucial role in the vinyl consumer community. The aesthetically appealing vinyl cover provides information on the artistic value and highlights the quality of the record. This stresses once more how aesthetics can drive the motivation of consumers to buy the product. Because of its design, many owners of vinyl exhibit them as a part of their home decoration. There, it does not solely serve the purpose of an embellishment of their surroundings, but driven by hedonic consumption it inspires them to engage with the product's background. This contributes to vinyl being developed into an additional component of their self-expression. What presented itself as a new aspect is that the exhibition of the vinyl consumption is executed by younger users as a way to impress peers and evoke perceptions of them being a sophisticated, knowledgeable member of the hipster movement. This describes how the vinyl market was able to attract a new customer segment without making any changes to the product, thus accomplishing market innovation.

Nostalgia as a product attribute has been recognized as one of the main reasons for vinyl's popularity within its consumer base. The findings demonstrated that the desire for nostalgic and retro attributes is becoming more popular in contemporary consumer behaviour. Nostalgia is one of the main emotions that vinyl experience conveys to its users, even in the

younger customer segment, without them having explicit memories of earlier encounters with the product. They are interested in vinyl because of the influence of their parents and older generations, experiencing effects of historic nostalgia. These emotions that are highly connected with vinyl were recognized as a plug to build bridges among generations. The medium serves as a transmitter for cultural snapshots in time, which creates cross-generational relationships and additional value for the younger customer segment. Therefore, the nostalgia attribute, although related to the late PLC stage, can be an incentive for new purchases which eventually has enabled the vinyl survival albeit the many disruptions it witnessed.

Apart from being able to make more detailed assertions about the product attributes that have already been mentioned in the literature, the research furthermore identified rituality as a specific product attribute developed in the later PLC. The respondents' descriptions as well as the statements of vinyl users online gave insight in the rituality that vinyl consumers created around their product experience. This aspect not only was a recurrent theme mentioned by the majority of the subjects but it also proved to be a many-faceted one that every individual constructed for themselves differently. Nonetheless there were a few common elements that connected the different comments which enabled the division of rituality in two dimensions, one of rituals conducted in solitude and the other one focussing on the strong community sense and the resulting rituals executed in company.

By examining the relationship between tangibility, aesthetics, nostalgia and the two specific attributes of rituality, the reason for the successful survival of vinyl through the many disruptions it faced can be concluded in the fact, that it combines all the above described product attributes. Although in the example of vinyl they are all linked and dependent on each other, it does not necessarily signify that products that do not exhibit all these product attributes might not be able to survive disruption. Instead, the analysis showed that every consumer had different preferences regarding these attributes, with some emphasizing on one product feature while others reasoned for their attraction to vinyl to be reliant on another. This shows potential for disrupted businesses to build out their core competence in one or more of these attribute fields of their choice in order to make their product survive through market innovation, appealing to different customers. As it can be learned from vinyl, product survival does not necessarily depend on a wide and high numbered customer range whose needs are served with the product but rather the level of exhausting the existent potential of a product in one of those product attribute categories to ensure the ongoing appeal of the product.

## **6.1 Theoretical contributions**

The findings of this study can provide academic scholars and researchers with a series of valuable insights, contributing additional aspects to regard in the fields of innovation theory, consumer behaviour research and disruption survival. It also sheds light on new product attributes to consider in the context of customer experience and value perception. Additionally the presented thesis hinted at the relevance of these attributes in different stages of the PLC.

One of the main theoretical contributions of this thesis is the extended knowledge about how certain product attributes that are usually applied to products in their early stages of the PLC, can be applicable in later stages. Some of the product characteristics that are important for

the introduction of new products or transferring products to new markets can play a crucial role in securing their survival once the demand for them decreases. Tangibility and aesthetics were already described to be valuable in influencing the consumer behaviour during his purchase decision process. The findings of this study not only confirmed this to still be true for disrupted products but also imply that they have an important role in securing an ongoing demand, therefore turning the move into a niche market into a successful operation.

The ability of products to induce nostalgic emotions was further affirmed to be a valuable factor in creating an emotional bond with the customer and enhancing the appeal of certain products. A contribution delivered by the statements of the interviewees is that nostalgic elements in products can enable them to act as a transmitter of culture, building cross-generational bridges. This shows for nostalgia to be even more relevant in the customer experience itself that in marketing strategies, as implied by the existing research literature.

Regarding product attributes and effects they have on consumer behaviour the research unveiled two new aspects. The before mentioned product characteristics lead to consumers developing certain rituals and new consumer patterns in their vinyl consumption. Although the existence of rituals in customer behaviour is acknowledged, the literature on how the attributes of products enable the development of such rituals is scarce. One conclusion derived from the analysis is that tangibility, aesthetics and nostalgia are able to motivate the formation of rituals that are either performed by the customer in solidarity to fully enjoy these characteristics of the medium, or drive community activities. This adds a new dimension to consumer behaviour and its interaction with product attributes. Through this thesis, the list of product attributes that show high interdependencies with consumer behaviour and perception in later stages of the PLC can not only be confirmed to contain the well-established product attributes of tangibility, aesthetics and nostalgia, but is complemented by the aspect of rituality and sense of community.

Regarding the PLC model the case of vinyl demonstrated that the theory of repositioning for growth that is suggested within the PLC model might have to be reviewed. Most of the forms of repositioning are taking the early and mature stage of the life cycle as a starting point. However, the study showed that it can be valuable to extend such repositioning strategies to the declining stage of the PLC, as the example of vinyl demonstrates that the performance of such actions in the declining stage can in fact prove to be successful and secure the survival of products. The presented thesis furthermore provides some groundwork in combining the theories of the PLC with insights from product and market innovation as well as dual transformation and the power of little ideas. Although these concepts can all be applied to the same context, as they are concerned with the decreasing demand established products face at some point of their existence due to competitors gaining market share, they have not yet been treated as related frameworks. The combination of the different theories and strategies provided by these concepts can help understand the problematization that disrupted businesses face and give direction in what countermeasures would fit in different situations. It can help to develop a more wholesome approach in finding individual solutions for businesses with different core competencies.

Another valuable contribution to the theoretical landscape concerned with disruption and innovation is that the repositioning of a business in a niche market and market innovation do not necessarily have to be different strategies. Although market innovation takes into consideration the move into a new segment in order to achieve higher demand for the product, it can be achieved through the earlier move into a niche. This is a valuable

contribution to the theory on market innovation by adding the dimension of a laggard market innovation from a niche.

## **6.2 Practical Implications**

In addition to the theoretical contributions to the academic sphere, this study's findings also provide practical implications relevant for marketing practitioners. Although gathered in the context of the music sector, the findings of this research can be transferred to other industries. They will support businesses in the development of survival and market innovation strategies that are fitted to their individual core competence.

As much as this thesis' findings contribute to the theoretical background on market innovation, it also provides businesses with more insight on how it can be achieved from the position in a niche market. Up to now, market innovation strategy seemed to contrast the move into a niche market which is characterized by a reduced customer base, therefore not offering the immediate growth in demand. But the vinyl context has demonstrated that moving into a niche market can aid firms in optimizing their core competencies in catering to the needs of a small customer base at a superior level, creating an exceptional customer experience and reaching high customer satisfaction. At a later point, this can result in new customers recognizing the product's appeal, therefore increasing the demand for the product. This equals a staggered market innovation, where new customer segments are tapped- only with a delay. This is a valuable insight which can help businesses overcome their negative notions associated with the move into a niche market. In fact, positioning a company in a niche market can help to differentiate its products and further developing core competencies which later can bring the product in a position of higher perceived value and iconic semblance.

Another implication for managers is that companies can benefit not only from focussing on making improvements to their product-customer-relationship, but encouraging features in their products motivating relationships between customers. The vinyl market showed that the product and its attributes prompted customers to engage in certain rituals that brought them together with other users. This rituality sparked a feeling of community which plays an important role in the eyes of the vinyl user to enhance his customer experience. The communities served as further motivation for the consumption of the product and introduced an element of recurrence to it. By enhancing the socializing trait of a product businesses can exploit the potential that communities hold for a product's survival. A loyal and interconnected customer base can not only increase demand within the segment but can serve as an ambassador for the product, making it interesting for new customer segments. The community driving attributes of a product therefore can be a crucial part of its survival strategy.

Lastly, when pursuing the strategy of market innovation in order to survive a disruption, businesses cannot rely on their experiences and blindly follow their habitual strategy they had in their former market. Instead they have to act as if they would enter a market as a new player, re-evaluating all changes and emerging trends in the aimed market as well as in consumer behaviour. This is shown in how record stores struggle with the implications the growing online retail sector poses on physical trade, although their product and business models have been working in the past.

### 6.3 Limitations & Future Research

Due to the countless sociocultural influences in the music industry, the relevance of music in every individual's life and the different meanings associated with it, the music entertainment market is a highly complex entity. Among the different branches, the music industry is one that underwent many more and faster technological disruptions than many other sectors. Therefore, some of the insights gained throughout this research regarding digital and physical formats might be unique in their peculiarity to this market. Nonetheless, the authors perceive many of the conclusions to be transferable to other sectors and markets.

The music industry is shaped by a constant process of renewal, always influenced by short-term trends and major shifts. The fast pace within this sector can present difficulties to be able to reproduce the research process and findings. As a number of the interviewed experts accentuated, the faced-paced developments in the music industry in general and the demographic challenges in the vinyl sector make it hard to predict how the market demand will develop in only a few years from now.

One of the issues that could be affecting the profundity of the findings is the different perspectives the interviewed parties have on the topic of vinyl. As the authors aimed for a broader depiction of the vinyl market by choosing divergent interview partners, the questions and their contained concepts could be understood differently due to the respondents' dissimilar background. A sampling process focussing on only one market perspective, that is to say either customers or retailers, could gain even more in-depth information on the different motivations for their attachment to vinyl. The same aspect applies to the demographic structure of the participants. The sample exhibited a spectrum of different age groups but in the presented research the influence that demographic characteristics like age or profession could have on the findings was declared to be negligible. Taking into account these factors in future research projects could unearth more in-depth knowledge and detailed idiosyncrasies relevant to the different customer segments. An interesting item for future research is to deeper investigate the relationship between demographic factors (gender, social class, age, profession, etc.) and the mentioned product attributes to see if these have influences on the perceptions. The gathered data in such research can serve as a helpful tool in product marketing, branding and positioning. In addition, since the conducted study only focused on the region of Europe, future research may benefit from broadening the perspective by conducting research in other parts of the world to achieve a wholesome understanding of the phenomenon.

Another option to enhance the insight depth could be to instead of interviewing individuals one by one, to conduct other qualitative data collection methods such as focus groups to let the different actors interact. This would also result in the conversation being less influenced by the respondents' interaction with the interviewer and his ideas and assumptions on the research field. Through the more unrestrained conversation flow in a focus group the interviewer's influence on the dialogue is decreased, possibly allowing for even more themes the authors have not considered in the beginning of the research to be brought to light. However, by conducting individual interviews, the authors believe to have gained answers relatively free of bias due to other participants' views and expectations that would likely influence the results during a focus group.

In terms of the applied research approach, future research could, by implementing the research from a different ontological and epistemological standpoint, give contrasting

perspectives on the topic. In addition, quantitative research might be able to produce additional outcomes and more generalizable conclusions. To broaden the representativity of the data on product attributes, future research on other niche markets and its products might be favourable for developing concrete frameworks applicable to a number of markets. Moreover, future research can also investigate the phenomenon within industries exhibiting less disruption frequency in order to provide a new, constructive view.

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# Appendix A

## Interview guideline for consumers

| Question   | Topic/Theme to explore  |
|--|---|
| How old are you?   | Categorization of individual (customer group)   |
| What is your profession?   | Categorization of individual (customer group)   |
| How often do you buy vinyl?  | User type (habitual?)   |
| How often do you listen to vinyl?  | User type (habitual?)   |
| How easy is it to buy Vinyl? Where do you buy it?  | Accessibility, Dissemination  |
| Why do you buy or listen to vinyl?   | Product relationship, preference factors  |
| What characteristics in vinyl do you like that other media doesn't offer?  | Preference factors (Tangibility, Emotional value, Nostalgia, Aesthetics), Customer experience |
| With which medium do you play your vinyl? Why do you prefer this one?  | Complementary products  |
| How would you describe the experience you have when buying or listening to vinyl? (special listening experience, emotional value, sense of community, purchase process?) | Tangibility, Emotional value, Nostalgia, Customer experience, Product Community               |
| How important is the design of the packaging to you? What do you like/don't like about it?   | Aesthetics theme  |
| Do you think there is an artistic factor to vinyl?   | Aesthetics theme  |
| What in your opinion changed in the vinyl market?  | Relates to Market innovation, inhibitors of usage/survival                                    |
| Who do you think is the target group for vinyl?  | Relates to Market innovation, Product Positioning   |
| Do you perceive the vinyl market to be a niche or is it a mainstream medium to you?  | Relates to Market innovation, Product Positioning   |
| Do you feel that there are some disadvantages to vinyl? Please elaborate.  | Inhibitors of usage/survival  |
| What will the future of vinyl look like?   | Survival  |
| Do you have any other remarks on the topic of vinyl?   |   |

## Interview guideline for shop owners

| Question  | Topic/Theme to explore  |
|---|---|
| How often do customers purchase vinyl (per week)?   | Accessibility, Dissemination  |
| How much of your product offer is vinyl (in %)?   | Accessibility, Dissemination  |
| Why do you sell vinyl?  | Profitability   |
| What kind of channels do customers use for vinyl purchase?  | Accessibility, Dissemination, Customer experience   |
| How does your vinyl trade process look like? (Product Selection, Suppliers, Supply Chain, Sale channels, Advertising)               | Vinyl market processes, niche market?   |
| What are the characteristics that make vinyl desirable (compared to other media)?   | Preference factors (Tangibility, Emotional value, Nostalgia, Aesthetics), Customer experience |
| Do you sell any mediums to play vinyl? What kind of mediums are there? Are there any trends?  | Complementary products  |
| How would you describe the vinyl experience? (special listening experience, emotional value, sense of community, purchase process?) | Tangibility, Emotional value, Nostalgia, Customer experience, Product Community               |
| How important do you think is the design of the packaging? What do customers like/don't like about it?                              | Aesthetics theme  |
| Do you think there is an artistic factor to vinyl?  | Aesthetics theme  |
| What in your opinion changed in the vinyl market? Have the customers changed?   | Relates to Market innovation (niche market?), inhibitors of usage/survival                    |
| Who do you think is the target group for vinyl?   | Relates to Market innovation, Product Positioning   |
| Do you perceive the vinyl market to be a niche or is it a mainstream medium to you?   | Relates to Market innovation (niche market), Product Positioning                              |
| Do you feel that there are some disadvantages to vinyl? Please elaborate.   | Inhibitors of usage/survival  |
| Are there any dominant, changing or emerging trends regarding vinyl?  | Survival  |
| What will the future of vinyl look like?  | Survival  |
| Do you have any other remarks on the topic of vinyl?  |   |

## Interview guideline for associations

| Question  | Topic/Theme to explore  |
|---|---|
| Why do you think it is important to preserve vinyl?   | Preference factors  |
| What are the characteristics that make vinyl desirable (compared to other media)? What does it offer that other mediums can't?      | Preference factors (Tangibility, Emotional value, Nostalgia, Aesthetics), Customer experience |
| How would you describe the vinyl experience? (special listening experience, emotional value, sense of community, purchase process?) | Tangibility, Emotional value, Nostalgia, Customer experience, Product Community               |
| Does the playing device play a crucial role in the listening experience?  | Complementary products  |
| What in your opinion changed in the vinyl market?   | Relates to Market innovation (niche market?), inhibitors of usage/survival                    |
| Who do you think is the target group for vinyl?   | Relates to Market innovation, Product Positioning   |
| Do you perceive the vinyl market to be a niche or is it a mainstream medium to you?   | Relates to Market innovation (niche market)   |
| How accessible is the vinyl market in your opinion? Is it easy to find and buy vinyl?   | Accessibility, vinyl market processes, niche market?  |
| How important do you think is the design of the packaging? What do customers like/don't like about it?                              | Aesthetics theme  |
| Do you think there is an artistic factor to vinyl?  | Aesthetics theme  |
| Do you feel that there are some disadvantages to vinyl? Please elaborate.   | Inhibitors of usage/survival  |
| Are there any dominant, changing or emerging trends regarding vinyl?  | Survival  |
| Why do you think vinyl is still a lucrative medium? Why did it make a comeback in terms of sale numbers?                            | Survival, Market innovation, target group   |
| What will the future of vinyl look like?  | Survival  |
| Do you have any other remarks on the topic of vinyl?  |   |

# Appendix B

## Written interview form sent to participants

Below you will find 17 questions on the topic of vinyl. If you have any doubts or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via [5arah.koch@web.de](mailto:5arah.koch@web.de). Your answers will not be published; they solely serve for the analysis for our master thesis. Your identity will be protected. We will however incorporate anonymous citations in the written report. Please leave me a short message if you do not agree to that.

**1. How often do customers purchase vinyl (per week)?**

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**2. How much of your product offer is vinyl (in %)?**

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**3. Why do you sell vinyl?**

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**4. What kind of channels do customers use for vinyl purchase?**

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**5. How does your vinyl trade process look like? (Product Selection, Suppliers, Supply Chain, Sale channels, Advertising)**

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**6. What are the characteristics that make vinyl desirable (compared to other media)?**

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**7. Do you sell any mediums to play vinyl? What kind of mediums are there? Are there any trends?**

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**8. How would you describe the vinyl experience? (special listening experience, emotional value, sense of community, purchase process?)**

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**9. How important do you think is the design of the packaging? What do customers like/don't like about it?**

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**10. Do you think there is an artistic factor to vinyl?**

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**11. What in your opinion changed in the vinyl market? Have the customers changed?**

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**12. Who do you think is the target group for vinyl?**

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**13. Do you perceive the vinyl market to be a niche or is it a mainstream medium to you?**

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**14. Do you feel that there are some disadvantages to vinyl? Please elaborate.**

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**15. Are there any dominant, changing or emerging trends regarding vinyl?**

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**16. What will the future of vinyl look like?**

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**17. Do you have any other remarks on the topic of vinyl?**

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Many thanks for your answers and taking the time to support our research project.

# Appendix C

## Comprehensive overview of product attribute analysis

| First-tier category   | Second-tier themes                              | Aggregate attribute dimensions |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| <i>The personal touch of the vinyl format is of high importance, the ability to touch the record acts as an important benefit.</i>                      | Higher perceived quality through touch          | Tangibility                    |
| <i>Tangibility makes the sound graspable for senses, which further elevates the vinyl quality and experience.</i>                                       |   |                                |
| <i>The higher weight of vinyl records connotes a higher significance of the disc's content.</i>   |   |                                |
| <i>The quality of sound is uncompressed, broad, warm. It has a special sound to it, and vinyl as a medium is able to capture that quality the best.</i> | Sound quality                                   |                                |
| <i>It presents high value in being decelerating in the free time.</i>   | Wholesome sensory engagement                    |                                |
| <i>The listener can touch the vinyl record, play it. It is nice to stop and appreciate it with all senses.</i>  |   |                                |
| <i>Vinyl experience interrupts the hectic daily routine. dominated by technology.</i>   | Contrast to the digital word                    |                                |
| <i>Vinyl is able to provide physicality in the digital age.</i>   |   |                                |
| <i>Going to the physical store and conversing with the seller elevated their shopping encounter.</i>  | Return to physical shopping experiences         |                                |
| <i>People are craving physical interactions, there is a need to go back to the roots, browse through records in a physical store.</i>                   |   |                                |
| <i>There is a need to be careful with vinyl disc handling, when putting them on the player. The storing of vinyl requires space.</i>                    | Disadvantages of the tangible disc              |                                |
| <i>Vinyl user can get to know the backstory of each vinyl and the artist. Retailers are knowledgeable and open to tell stories about the discs.</i>     | Storytelling aspect around the music experience |                                |
| <i>If the disc is deformed, it can be recycled and formed into something different.</i>   | Upcycling trend                                 |                                |
| <i>The material can be transformed into something with higher value or a different purpose.</i>   |   |                                |
| <i>Vinyl users can show their individual taste with the record.</i>   | Expression of self                              | Aesthetics                     |
| <i>The vinyl collection defines a part of the owner's personality.</i>  |   |                                |
| <i>The cover is the first and important impression and can be a piece of art.</i>   | Artistic value of vinyl                         |                                |
| <i>Records can be a fitment, enhancing a home as a very decorative element.</i>   |   |                                |
| <i>It can show off the knowledge one has on vinyl. Displaying vinyl, it showcases the overall consumer's understanding of vinyl.</i>                    | Wisdom demonstration                            |                                |

| First-tier category   | Second-tier themes            | Aggregate attribute dimensions      |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>It is nice to sit down and enjoy the music, think of the past times and connected memories. It is a reminder of earlier moments in one's life.</i>                                   | Evoking memories              | Nostalgia                           |
| <i>The exposure started with parents, grandparents, who listen to vinyl and already purchase the complementary products.</i>  | Influence by older generation |                                     |
| <i>To listen to a parent's or grandparent's vinyl record enables younger generation to dive into parent's childhood and youth, which is an exceptional experience.</i>                  | Bridge between generations    |                                     |
| <i>Vinyl is able to connect the different generations emotionally, introducing someone to one's vinyl collection can form a social bond across generations.</i>                         |                               |                                     |
| <i>While listening to vinyl, user can better appreciate what he has now. It is linked to the actual effort with playing vinyl medium.</i>   | Detachment and appreciation   | Rituality in solitude               |
| <i>The vinyl pushes you to be more attentive to the ritual of listening to music. Vinyl can be played when user wants to focus on nothing but the music.</i>                            | Mindfulness and deceleration  |                                     |
| <i>Vinyl experience enables you to enjoy and celebrate music in a mindful, appreciative way at home.</i>  |                               |                                     |
| <i>Vinyl presents the ability to relax while listening to vinyl in solitude. It provides the feeling of rituality and seclusion.</i>  | Relaxation                    |                                     |
| <i>People organize meetings, where they share experiences with vinyl records. There is a feeling of community belonging, many people know each other and see each other frequently.</i> | Sense of belonging            | Rituality within a social community |
| <i>Vinyl gives the opportunity to meet with friends, family. It acts as a trigger to meet, and get closer to fellow vinyl listeners, maintain the relationship.</i>                     | Strengthening of bonds        |                                     |