

Master Thesis

*Customer Experience: an exploratory study  
into the drivers of flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences*



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## **Preface**

In front of you is my Master Thesis, which concludes my master specialization in Innovation & Entrepreneurship at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Writing a master thesis in times of COVID-19 has been challenging. Working from home, supervisor meetings on remote and few possibilities to discuss with fellow students made me rely more on my own abilities. Despite feeling unequipped at moments during the process, I am proud of the thesis I delivered, and I enjoyed conducting research in a topic of my personal interest.

I could not have finished this project without all the help and support I received, for which I would like to express my gratitude. First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Karim Sidaoui for encouraging and supporting me to pursue my own research topic, for taking the time to chat and discuss whenever I needed it, for his critical view and keen eye to pinpoint exactly where the points for improvement lie, and for his persistence and ambition to pursue the best quality work. Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude towards Csilla Horváth and my second examiner Olga Tsoumani, who provided essential feedback in a crucial state of the research process. Thirdly, I would like to thank all respondents who participated in my research by sharing their experiences. Lastly, I want to thank the persons in my private circle for their endless support throughout the process of writing my thesis.

I hope you enjoy reading my work,

Oda Schenkman

## Abstract

The importance of online Customer Experience (CX) has accelerated due to the lockdowns and regulations of the COVID-19 pandemic. This holds for the hospitality industry in particular, which was forced to think creatively in order to keep generating revenue after multiple forced closures. This study aimed to understand customer's experiences of virtual wine tastings, to explore potential drivers of flow – a pleasant state of mind in which one acts with total involvement – in this setting. This abductive study followed a qualitative and exploratory approach by employing semi-structured interviews with 24 respondents who participated in a virtual wine tasting. By applying template analysis, five themes were found to be important drivers of flow in the given context: 1) social interaction among participants, 2) offline factors, 3) interactivity between host and participant, 4) the host and 5) gamification. This research was first to study flow antecedents in a non-achievement, and online context. The findings contribute to both flow and CX literature by means of advancing the concept of social interaction in the digital servicescape, furthering the understanding of servicescape through home experiences and addressing the importance of buyer-seller interaction in this sensory context. Furthermore, findings suggest managers to incorporate (social) interactivity and dedicate attention to the packaging and guidance of the physical servicescape of the customers. Concluding, results demonstrate that virtual wine tastings have significant future potential for customers, whereas future research might look into the value for firms.

Key words: *Customer Experience, Online Customer Experience, Flow, Flow Drivers, Online Wine Tastings*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the coining of the term ‘experience economy’ by Pine and Gilmore (1999), Customer Experience (CX) has become a dominant marketing concept for both practitioners and academics (De Keyser et al., 2020). The “*non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli*” (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020) that define customer experiences, are one of the key focus points adopted by firms (Kandampully et al., 2018). The importance of experience, both offline and online, has been reinforced by the current COVID-19 pandemic (KPMG International, 2020), as the daily rush has been put on hold and consumers now want to get value in all they experience (KPMG International, 2020). Consumers reunite with friends and family and embrace digital technologies more than ever (Sheth, 2020).

Hence, in this new world, customers need digital, at-home, and low-touch points and want touchless experiences (KPMG International, 2020). Moreover, they seek enjoyment in these times of crisis which emphasizes the importance of hedonic services (KPMG International, 2020). Companies that act quickly and innovate in their delivery model to serve customers in the safety of their home will establish a strong advantage (Diebner et al., 2020).

The hospitality industry in particular was largely affected by the pandemic, because of the important role that servicescape – a combination of service and landscape – (Bitner, 1992), plays in this sector. Furthermore, because of its focus on delivering hedonic services and selling experiences in which social connections play a prominent role (Baum & Hai, 2020). Hedonic components, in a consumption experience, emphasize the enjoyment or pleasure an experience offers (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), and emotions act as the core component of experiences, as emotions make experiences memorable (Bastiaansen et al., 2019).

Specifically related to this emotionality, is flow theory. Flow defines a pleasant state of consciousness in which individuals are absolutely involved and absorbed in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). The notion of flow has great potential future relevance when it comes to shaping service experience outputs such as performance, loyalty, attitudes and even well-being (Ostrom et al., 2015), as it relates closely to pleasure and enjoyment. However, it is hard to scientifically capture flow, as there are an infinite number of factors determining it (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). Literature to date has mainly focused on this concept with high achievement content (McGinnis et al., 2008), but understanding flow in non-achievement contexts is highly relevant (Drengner et al., 2018), as companies can use flow theory to enrich their customer experiences.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing hospitality services online was almost unimaginable. However, due to the regulations, hospitality firms needed to be creative and, for example, virtual wine tastings became very popular, as wine is an important enjoyment-related product within hospitality (Massa & Bédé, 2018). Wine consumption is largely hedonic, and it gives pleasure in terms of the derived social and psychological benefits (Mora & Moscarola, 2010), which makes wine particularly suited for an analysis of emotional mechanisms (Mora & Moscarola, 2010). Suddenly, it became fairly easy for consumers to do something fun together without meeting in real-life, escaping daily lockdown routines and meet people with a common interest.

In January 2021, a global online survey by Geisenheim University in Germany and WineTourism.com has been conducted on Online Wine Tastings with 1,423 wineries from more than 40 countries. The study clearly reveals the effect of COVID-19 on the tendency to employ online wine tastings, as the results show that around one-third of the wineries surveyed (36%) introduced online wine tastings because of COVID-19. Only 3% organized online wine tastings before the pandemic (Szolnoki et al., 2021). These results hold for wineries solely, which means even greater numbers when considering other players in the wine industry. Furthermore, the survey indicated that 64% of the wineries who currently organize online tastings, is willing to continue online wine tastings post-pandemic. However, there is no research done yet on how these online wine tastings are experienced by customers.

It is important to study this, as creating meaningful customer experiences can provide companies with a significant opportunity to differentiate from competitors (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Due to the pandemic and its consequences, companies lost the ability to provide CX the way they used to. Now, it is of crucial importance for these organizations to find a way to provide meaningful experiences to customers at their homes (KPMG International, 2020). Subsequently, these firms need insights into what it is that determines home experiences and how engagement can be stimulated in this setting. Flow is a critical construct to understand online customer engagement (Kim, Yoo & Yang, 2020; Bilgihan et al., 2014), as it has a significant positive impact on enhancing engagement levels (Carlson et al., 2017). Moreover, flow experiences increase desired CX outcomes as loyalty and satisfaction (Hoffman & Novak 2009). Despite the importance of CX, academic research on hospitality services in the online environment is limited.

Therefore, the overall purpose of this study is to gain insight in and explore customers' experiences of virtual wine tastings, in order to identify potential drivers of flow in online wine-

tasting experiences, ultimately in order to improve CX in this setting. Hence, the following research question came to light:

*“What are the potential drivers of flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences?”*

By exploring these potential drivers of flow in a non-achievement context, virtual wine tastings in particular, this study contributes to both flow and CX literature. It closely links these two streams by addressing flow to a large extent through enjoyment. Findings suggest three main theoretical contributions. Firstly, by addressing the importance social interaction in the digital servicescape. Secondly, by approaching the physical servicescape through customers' home environments and thirdly, by addressing the importance of buyer-seller interaction in this sensory context. Moreover, the findings of the present study are interesting for managers in the wine industry, who are considering moving some of their activities online or want to improve their online customer experiences. Results show that social interactivity and offline environments, including tangibles as the packaging of the wines, are crucial focus points for practitioners. Furthermore, the potential drivers of flow might also be applicable to other contexts, as flow is human experience.

The present study is comprised of five chapters. After this introductory chapter, chapter 2 provides the results of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on CX. This gives an overview of the existing literature on this concept with a particular focus on hedonic consumption services. Chapter 2 also presents propositions and delivers *a priori* themes, used in the template analysis. Chapter 3 describes both the process of the SLR and the qualitative method used to answer the research question. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study. Finally, chapter 5 gives the discussion, theoretical and practical contributions, limitations and directions for future research.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this second chapter, an outline will be provided of relevant theories and perspectives on CX, in order to get an understanding of its position in today's literature. To achieve an overarching view, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) has been conducted on the concept of CX. This review starts with the principles of CX literature, and gradually progresses towards hedonic consumption experiences and flow in the online environment. Propositions are derived throughout the contributions of the various authors. The chapter will end with a framework that visualizes the relationships between the concepts in the literature.

### 2.1 EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were the first authors who addressed consumption experience from a phenomenological perspective, seeking to understand the mechanisms at work when an individual engages in consumption (Roederer, 2012). Pine and Gilmore (1999) coined the term 'experience economy', in which consumption is largely experience based. In the preceding service economy, organizations deliver intangible benefits to the customer, which are seen as rational and functional (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The sensations and emotions involved in consumer experiences already existed, but they had not yet been understood as capable of generating value (Fontenelle, 2020), which links these positive changes in feelings and emotions to benefits and outcomes (Buswell et al., 2017).

In an experience economy, they argue, there is much more emphasis on emotions and feelings (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), as experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way and derive from the individual's prior state of mind and being (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999). As a result, customers expect more than a service transaction; they want a seamless and memorable end-to-end experience, with senses stimulated, emotions evoked, and memories created (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Verhoef et al., 2009).

More demanding consumers and increasing competition are driving the experience economy (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010), that made companies competing on experiences (Johnston & Kong, 2011). This interpretation of consumer behavior has encouraged firms to reconsider their offerings and produce an experience (Roederer, 2012). A successful brand shapes customers' experiences by embedding the fundamental value proposition in every feature of the offering (Meyer & Schwager, 2011), with fostering commitment as the ultimate goal of improving customer experience (Keiningham et al., 2017). A deeper understanding of the multi-dimensional construct of CX will be given in the following sections.

## 2.2 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

CX has become one of the dominant marketing concepts for both practitioners and academics (De Keyser et al., 2020). De Keyser et al. (2020) recently published a formal nomenclature on this concept, where they inductively analysed 143 papers on customer experience. CX addresses those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Definitions of CX vary widely; however, many definitions consist of two important concepts: 1) **responses** from the consumer to stimuli from the company (the experience itself) and 2) responses which are driven by a certain **context** firm (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; De Keyser et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Various researchers and practitioners have also paid attention to outcome variables in consumer attitudes like satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth as short-hand for CX (Williams et al., 2020). This means that in some studies, CX overlaps with outcome variables such as satisfaction or value, while in others, it is an independent variable leading to, for example, satisfaction or loyalty (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Rather than defining CX, these variables indicate the outcome, result or consequence of experience (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013), mostly applied by practitioners in the field (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013).

CX can be defined as follows: *“non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli embedded within a specific context”* (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020, p. 637). In this definition, there are no outcome variables, but solely the specific context and the reactions to stimuli, which comprise the experience itself. These two concepts can be considered as most important when talking about customer experience (De Keyser et al., 2020) and will be elaborated on below.

### 2.2.1 CONTEXT

Although the exact nature of contextual influences is not always specified, 78.3% of the CX papers studied by De Keyser et al. (2020) recognizes the importance of context. The context comprises all factors that are particular to a certain time and/or place (De Keyser et al., 2020). This time and place are determined by service encounters and the servicescape is the context of the service encounter that influences the customers' sense of well-being, directly or indirectly (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). Bitner (1992) coined the construct of servicescape - a combination of service and landscape - and stands for the environment in which the service is being realized and the experience created. Servicescape refers to the built environment; the physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment (Bitner, 1992). So,

servicescapes are purposeful environments, designed to fulfil the specific needs of consumers (Lockwood & Pyun, 2020).

Most customers (and employees) give little or no conscious attention to their role in the construction of these servicescapes and the individually and socially constructed meaning of this physical space is overlooked (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017). However, consumers are likely to be sensitive to the aesthetic properties of their surroundings (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). Hence, the servicescape does influence the flow of experience and hence the meaning customers attach to it and their emotional connections with the company delivering that experience (Zeithaml et al., 2006). Despite describing physical components of the environment, the servicescape also has a social dimension which enhances human-related interactions (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994).

### 2.2.2 CX DIMENSIONALITY

The reactions or responses to stimuli are interpreted in terms of experience dimensions (Keiningham et al., 2020). CX dimensions reflect the nature of customer responses and reactions to interactions with the brand or firm (De Keyser et al., 2020), which differ across contacts between the brand and customers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). De Keyser et al. (2020) conclude that the most established experience quality is this CX dimensionality, since it is recognized in most CX definitions to date. The dimensionality of an experience consists of five components: thought, feeling, sensation, activity and relation (De Keyser et al., 2020; Sidaoui et al., 2020), based on the work of Schmitt (1999). More research is still needed to understand the importance of each dimension, how this varies across distinct situations (De Keyser et al., 2020).

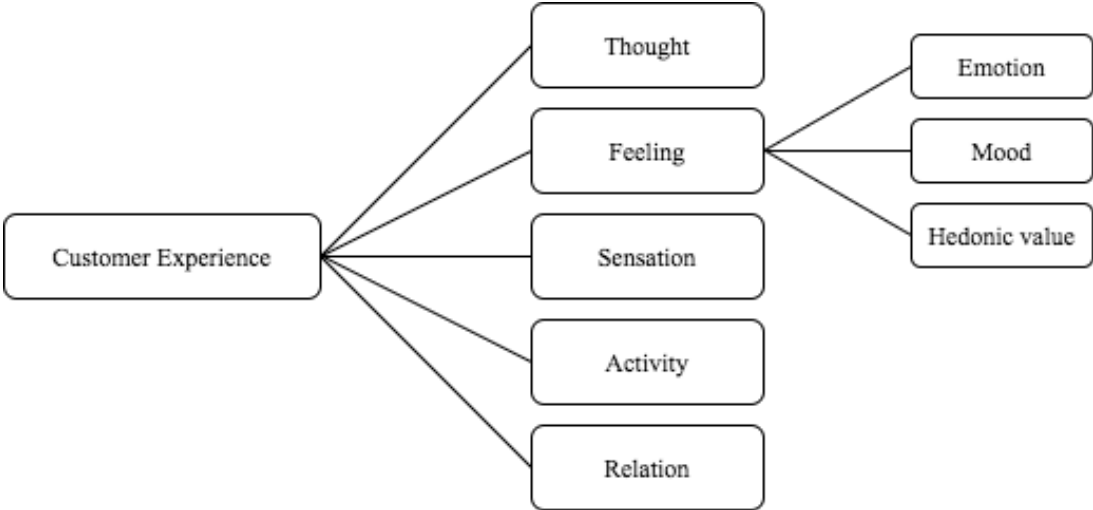
Sidaoui et al. (2020) argue that the feeling component consists of emotion (encounter specific), mood (temporally prolonged) and hedonic value (context specific), in which emotions can be seen as the core building block of an experience (Bastiaansen et al., 2019), as emotions make experiences memorable. Mood is referred to the emotional state in which customers engage in a service, which can influence CX (Sidaoui et al., 2020). Opposite to utilitarian value, hedonic value is about how customers feel after having experienced the service (Sidaoui et al., 2020), and how much pleasure or enjoyment a consumption experience can bring (Miao, Lehto & Wei, 2014). Subsequently, where utilitarian value represents a usefulness of consumption and is necessity-oriented (Babin et al., 1994), hedonic value is focused on pleasure-oriented or experiential consumption (Babin et al., 1994; Ryu et al., 2010). Hedonic components entail sensory pleasures, daydreams, emotional response and aesthetic enjoyment (Joseph-Mathews

et al., 2009) and are related to getting away from daily routines and gaining experiences that bring pleasure and excitement (Carpenter & Moore, 2009).

The hedonic dimension is central to all consumption experiences (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), and the effect of experiential customer-centric elements on consumer attitudes (satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth) is higher for hedonic services compared to utilitarian services (Roy, 2018). Roy’s (2018) study supports the general notion that experiences would matter more for a hedonic service compared to a utilitarian service (Jones et al., 2006), as a hedonic service is more related to the fulfilment of emotional or sensory gratification (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). In Figure 1, the dimensionality of CX, as described above, is visualized, which indicated the direction of this research.

**Figure 1**

*Direction of the present research*



**2.3 HEDONIC CONSUMPTION EXPERIENCE**

Within this hedonic dimension, a link between experience and hedonic consumption has been established at the start of the experiential stream (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) defined hedonic consumption as “*those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage experience*” (p. 92). Hedonic components in a consumption experience emphasize the enjoyment or pleasure the experience offers, separate and apart from realizing any utilitarian benefit (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The concept of consumption experience grew from pure curiosity about the nature of consumer’s fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook, 2018).

Customers' hedonic value perceptions related to particular products and services can be an important factor for determining their behavioural intentions (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018). However, hedonic value only indirectly affects the experience through positive emotions (Song & Qu, 2017). In other words, not every perceived hedonic value leads to a positive outcome, unless customers experience positive emotions from such a value (Song & Qu, 2017). Furthermore, environmental factors and atmospherics play a critical role in determining behavioural intentions like repeat visit intentions or word of mouth recommendations in hedonic services, as consumers attach personal meaning to a service environment (Joseph-Mathews et al., 2009; Dedeoğlu et al., 2018).

Constant interactions with consumers at the pre-consumption phase to build a positive anticipatory experience and communications with consumers at the post-consumption phase to reinforce remembered experience will help influence future repurchase decisions (Miao, Lehto & Wei, 2014). Savoring an upcoming experience positively affects ongoing and remembered consumption enjoyment (Chun et al., 2017). Savoring is a cognitive process, involving awareness of current pleasure from a target-specific, future consumption experience (Chun et al., 2017). Nelson and Meyvis (2008) found that interrupting a consumption experience can make pleasant experiences more enjoyable. Breaks disrupt hedonic adaptation and, as a result, intensify the enjoyment (Nelson & Meyvis, 2008). Something similar was studied by Stephen et al. (2004), who found that delay increases consumption enjoyment for pleasurable products, when actual consumption occurs.

The hedonic service experience has inspired research in marketing and opened new research avenues that highlight the phenomenological service experience as the foundation for all business (Helkkula, 2011, p. 381), which explains the relevance of the hedonic component dimension of customer experience. Campbell (1997, p. 20) stresses the involvement by the following quote: *“Modern hedonism is a construct made of emotions and sensations – whereas what people are looking for, before any other thing, is imagination”*, making it vital for marketers to maximize consumers' real-time (ongoing) and remembered enjoyment of consumption experiences (Schmitt, 1999).

### 2.3.1 SOCIAL INTERACTION

Hedonic consumption experience can also be linked to extraordinary service experiences. Collier et al. (2018) explored the extraordinary service experience in their paper, by conceptualizing a term called Idiosyncratic Service Experience (ISE), to represent the interpersonal aspects that create unique or special service experiences. Among the core service

and the psychical environment, an important driver of CX in the context of hospitality is social interaction (Walter et al., 2010). Consumption emotions are not a purely intrapersonal phenomenon, but the social context matters and influences the consumption experience (Manthiou et al., 2020), as people do not always define themselves in opposition to others, as they used consumption to define themselves as part of a collectivity (Gainer, 1995).

Dedeoğlu et al. (2020) discovered a significant relationship between social interaction and hedonic value in the context of food consumption. Subsequently, creating an environment in which consumers are able to experience positive emotion is crucial in enjoyment, consumption and repetitive behavior (McNeill & Mather, 2016). McNeill and Mather (2016) find that even in a bar setting, where consumers are likely to be highly socially involved, they still need the company of close friends to become fully involved in the service experience. Where many service environments are concerned with creating ‘extraordinary’ experiences, in relation to the physical aspects of the servicescape, customers are more likely to value being comfortable and at ease, and these factors have a greater impact on the experience (McNeill & Mather, 2016). However, for negative emotions, sharing emotions with strangers after a negative consumption episode can be more beneficial than sharing with friends (López-López et al., 2014).

Gainer (1995) took this notion of social interaction one step further in her research on the ‘ritualization of interaction’. Definitions of ritual vary widely, but usually emphasize scripted behaviour, the use of artefacts, a serious and intense atmosphere, and the symbolic meaning of actions (Gainer, 1995). In this research, the ritual context is one in which individuals in an ongoing world participate, in order to establish and maintain the bonds of a particular ‘small world.’ She examined shared consumption from the perspective of participatory ritual, in which individuals act symbolically together, to achieve communal goals, and found that common participation in shared consumption rituals, even if not performed face-to-face, can be used actively to manage the social relationships that bind consumers together in ‘small worlds’ (Gainer, 1995).

### 2.3.2 TRANSCENDENT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Sukhu et al. (2018) studied the under-researched concept of Transcendent Customer Experiences (TCE), which indicates that customers derive extreme enjoyment, focus and emotional intensity from service experiences (Sukhu et al., 2018). TCE combines two interrelated but unique concepts – flow and peak experiences. Peak experiences occur when the customer’s joy is at its most superior (Privette, 1983). Flow experiences zoom in deeper into

CX and can be described as the so-called “optimal experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). The following sections will discuss this concept in more detail.

## 2.4 FLOW

Flow is described as “*a highly enjoyable psychological state that people feel when they act with total involvement*” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 36) or “*the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter*” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 6). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) developed the concept of flow when researching the common experiential characteristics of these optimal experiences, asking hundreds of rock climbers, chess players, artists etc. to describe what their best moments felt like. Csikszentmihalyi described nine dimensions of flow, which are shown in Table 1. The abbreviations, in bold, are taken over from Drengner et al. (2018, p. 705), and will be used throughout this thesis.

**Table 1**

*Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) nine-dimensional conceptualization of flow*

Flow characteristic	Description
Challenge-skill balance <b>(Balance)</b>	One has to perceive a match between challenges and skills at a high level, otherwise states like boredom or anxiety occur. Challenges describe demanding tasks whereas skills are the capacities one possesses to reach the desired outcome.
Sense of control <b>(Control)</b>	One has the feeling to control the situation at any time, without a need to actively exert control.
Unambiguous and immediate feedback <b>(Feedback)</b>	One continuously receives responses about how the performance is progressing in relation to the set goals
Clear goals <b>(Goals)</b>	The objective of the activity has to be defined distinctly. One is always aware of the requirements of the respective activity.
Concentration at the task at hand <b>(Concentration)</b>	One is totally focused on the task at hand. There are no distracting thoughts, attention is high.
Action-awareness merging <b>(Merging)</b>	One acts spontaneously without conscious effort. The dualism between actor and action disappears. People experience a unified consciousness.
Loss of self-consciousness	One's concerns about the self-drift out of the focus of attention. Disturbing thoughts during the activity fade away.
Transformation of time <b>(Timelessness)</b>	One feels time altering; hours seem to pass by in minutes or it seems as if time slows.
Autotelic experience <b>(Enjoyment)</b>	One perceives the situation as highly enjoyable. This state of mind is extremely gratifying. Hence, one wants to repeat an activity for its own sake, the activity becomes autotelic.

*Note. Adopted from Drengner et al. (2018, p. 705).*

Indicating a mental state of being, flow is in close connection to the feeling component (Sidaoui et al., 2020) of CX dimensionality, and through enduring involvement, positively influences service experience (McGinnis et al., 2008). Subsequently, experiencing a state of flow is a critical determinant for experiential quality (Wu, Gursoy & Zhang, 2021). Interestingly, Han & Kim (2020) found the opposite effect, namely that the experiential consumption value (hedonic, aesthetic, or emotional) of luxury brands has a positive effect on flow, which indicates a reinforcing, positive relationship between experiential quality or value and flow. Moreover, the notion of flow offers new avenues to study and shape service experience outputs such as performance, loyalty, attitudes and even well-being (Ostrom et al., 2015).

Drengner et al. (2018) contributed to the flow literature by providing a revised conceptualization that regards flow as the process from engrossment to enjoyment, studied in the context of extraordinary experiences in service encounters. Engrossment ranges from moderate engagement to total immersion, and describes the experience that completely captivates a person, whereby time seems to pass by differently, the person is highly concentrated, and his/her action and awareness merge (Drengner et al., 2018). The sensation of engrossment while using a service, is perceived as highly enjoyable; which is why the person wants to capture it again (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). Existing research has mainly studied flow within achievement contexts (McGinnis et al., 2008), and, in service encounters with high achievement content (e.g. gaming or sports), challenge-skill balance, clear goals, unambiguous and immediate feedback, and sense of control serve as antecedents of engrossment (Drengner et al., 2018; Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh & Nakamura, 2005; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2009; Abuhamdeh, 2020).

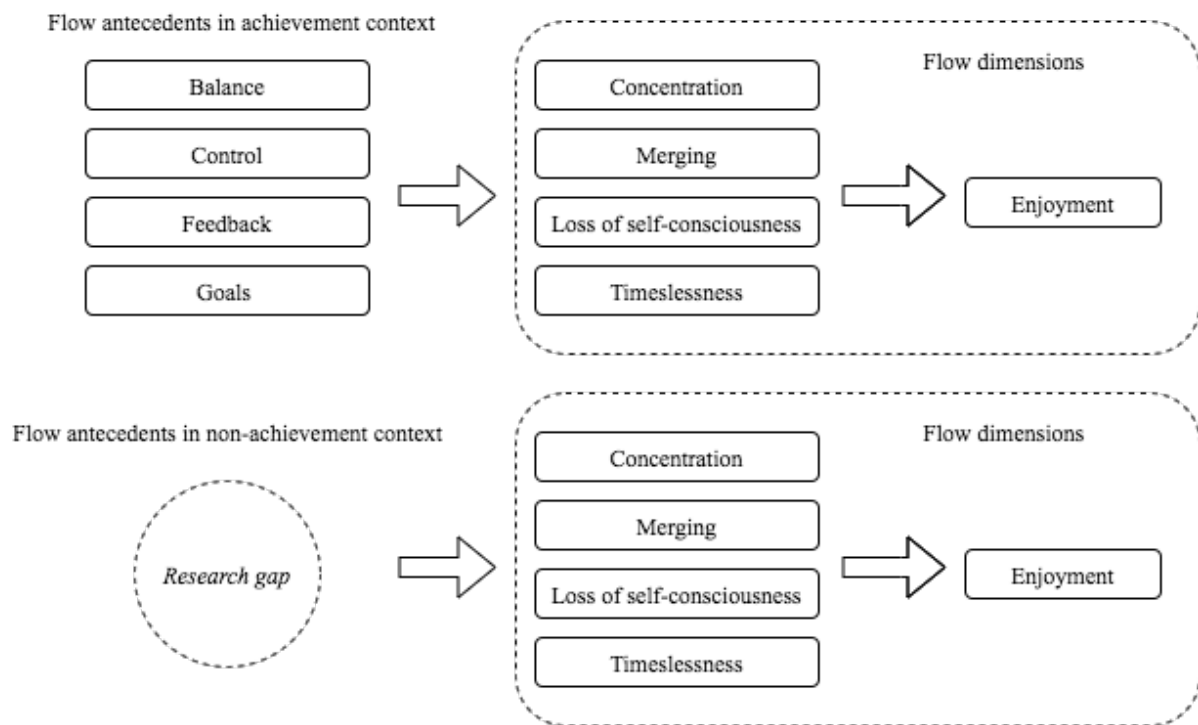
Extant research has largely neglected the possibility to broaden the scope of the flow experience to other areas (Drengner et al., 2018). Nonetheless, flow also appears in service contexts without achievement content and has significant potential in this context as well (Drengner et al., 2018). In particular, flow antecedents that increase engrossment in nonachievement context are mentioned as interesting as future research opportunities, among the role of telepresence, curiosity, intrinsic motivation and other potential flow drivers (Drengner et al., 2018). In Figure 2, this gap in current flow literature is visualized.

The lack of research on flow in non-achievement settings forms the starting point for this study, with special focus on hedonic consumption. In this research, the gap is addressed in the online environment, as engagement and involvement are especially important in this context because of the absence of servicescape (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017).



**Figure 2**

*Visualization of research gap identified by Drengner et al. (2018, p. 714)*



## 2.5 FLOW IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

In today's world, online or technology-mediated services are also part of service encounters (Klaus, 2013), as new forms of digital servicescape are being created as software continues to generate new opportunities (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017). Incorporating the human element in customer experience by creating emotional connections, gains competitive advantage (Kandampully & Solnet, 2019). However, the more reliance on technology results in declining opportunity for emotional connection (Kandampully & Solnet, 2019) and the integration of the digital, physical and social domains creates superior and holistic customer experiences (Bolton et al., 2018).

Flow theory is recognized as an important phenomenon for understanding and delivering compelling experiences to consumers when using computer-mediated services (Valinatajbahnamiri & Siahtiri, 2021; Hoffman & Novak, 2009; Kim et al., 2020). The flow dimensions of concentration and enjoyment are the two most common dimensions that researched have adopted when it comes to flow in human-computer interactions (Chen, Hsu & Lu, 2018). The following sections are dedicated to conditions under which flow can occur in the in online environment.

Gamification is a term used to describe digital design techniques that involve elements

of game playing (competing and collaborating with others, subject to the rules of play and with some form of point scoring), with the aim of stimulating a player's engagement (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017). However, this game playing is embedded in non-game applications, but there is a discernable servicescape element (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017). Otherwise stated, gamification is adding game-like elements to a task to encourage customer participation and can be an especially attractive strategy for organizations in business-to-consumer (B2C) markets to improve customer experiences (Bolton et al., 2018). Since gamification stimulates engagement, it is also likely to stimulate flow in an online environment. Therefore, the first proposition is:

*P1: Gamification is an important driver of flow in the online environment.*

Furthermore, interactivity is an important stimulus in the online environment, that can lead to rich experiences (Parise, Guinan & Kafka, 2016). The effect of interactivity on flow in the online environment has been found significant (Koufaris, 2002). Perceived interactivity is the degree to which the user perceives that the interaction or communication is two-way, controllable, and responsive to their actions (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Social interaction plays an important role in both hedonic consumption experiences and flow (Collier et al., 2018; Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Hoffman & Novak, 2009; Klaus, 2013; Walter et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2021), as social group members use hedonic services as a tool for maintaining or further enhancing social relationships (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007). However, social interactions might more easily get disrupted while depending on technology (Wu et al., 2021). Accordingly, the following proposition was developed:

*P2: (Social) interactivity is an important driver of flow in the online environment.*

Furthermore, in a technology-mediated environment, telepresence or immersion is of significant importance, which represents the degree to which the user has a feeling of 'being there' (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Telepresence and immersion are metaphors, often used interchangeably, to describe what it means to experience presence in an environment by means of a communication medium (Steuer, 1992). They refer to a perceived sense of being physically present in a non-physical world (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017), and have the ability to reduce spatial and psychological distance. This is desirable in a computer-mediated environment, since in this context, firms cannot make personal contact with their customers (Orth et al., 2019). Furthermore, telepresence in online servicescapes leads to consumers perceiving that they are more informed about a product or service, and therefore feel more positively about it (Suh &

Chang, 2006). The virtual representation of physical places provides a powerful background context to users, stimulating their sense of place (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). Young people especially are immersed in a world of technology but with an overarching social dimension (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017). Logically, this led to the following proposition:

*P3: Immersion is an important driver of flow in the online environment.*

Recent progress in the field of human–computer interaction means that online environments will likely engage more of the senses and become more connected with offline environments in the coming years (Petit, Velasco & Spence, 2019). This expansion will likely correspond with an increasing engagement with the consumer's more emotional senses (Petit et al., 2019). Furthermore, extant literature on flow in computer-mediated environments suggests that touchable elements increase the likelihood of flow experiences (Hoffman & Novak, 2009) and that the contextuality of CX needs to be explored in the online field (Klaus, 2013). Ballantyne and Nilsson (2017) indicate the influence of servicescape in digital service-space on consumers' service experience as an opportunity for future research. Accordingly, the following proposition was developed:

*P4: Connection to the offline environment by means of physical elements is an important driver of flow in the online environment.*

Hoffman and Novak (2009) researched flow in online environments and interpret it as cognitive absorption, which mainly deals with user motivations and involvement in technology (Balakrishnan & Dwivedi, 2021). Cognitive absorption consists of control, temporal dissociation, focused immersion, heightened enjoyment and curiosity (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). Contrary to the other dimensions, curiosity has not been addressed in this literature review yet. It reflects an intrinsic desire for new information to remove uncertainty or stimulate interest, which is aroused by novel, complex, or ambiguous stimuli, and motivates exploratory behaviour (Litman, Robert, & Spielberger, 2005). People become curious upon realizing that they lack desired knowledge. This creates an aversive feeling of uncertainty, which motivates them to discover the missing information, leading to increased engagement (Loewenstein, 1994). It had been identified by Drengner et al. (2018) as a potential flow driver, leading to the formulation of the final proposition:

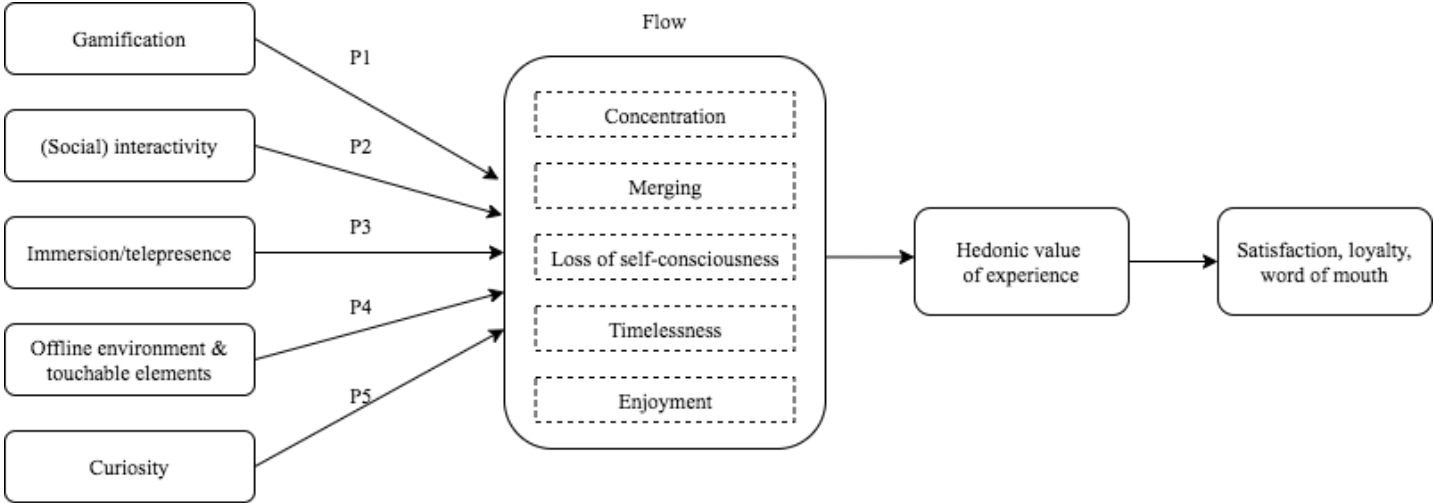
*P5: Curiosity is an important driver of flow in the online environment.*

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical relationships between the concepts in this SLR can be summarized in the conceptual the framework as shown in Figure 3. This framework indicates five drivers of flow in the online environment, followed by the effects of flow on CX and marketing outcomes of CX.

Figure 3

Conceptual framework



### 3. METHODOLOGY

The third chapter of this thesis consists of two parts. The first part describes the process of the SLR that is conducted for chapter 2. The second part indicates the qualitative method chosen to answer the research question, including a description of the data analysis procedure that was used.

#### 3.1 SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the SLR was to examine current theory and to provide an overview of what the current literature described about the concept of CX. Conducting a SLR is chosen, because it is a way to synthesize research findings in a systematic, transparent, and reproducible way, with the use of pre-specified inclusion criteria (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2017, Snyder, 2019). By using this systematic approach when reviewing articles, bias can be minimized, resulting in reliable findings from which conclusions can be drawn (Moher et al., 2009).

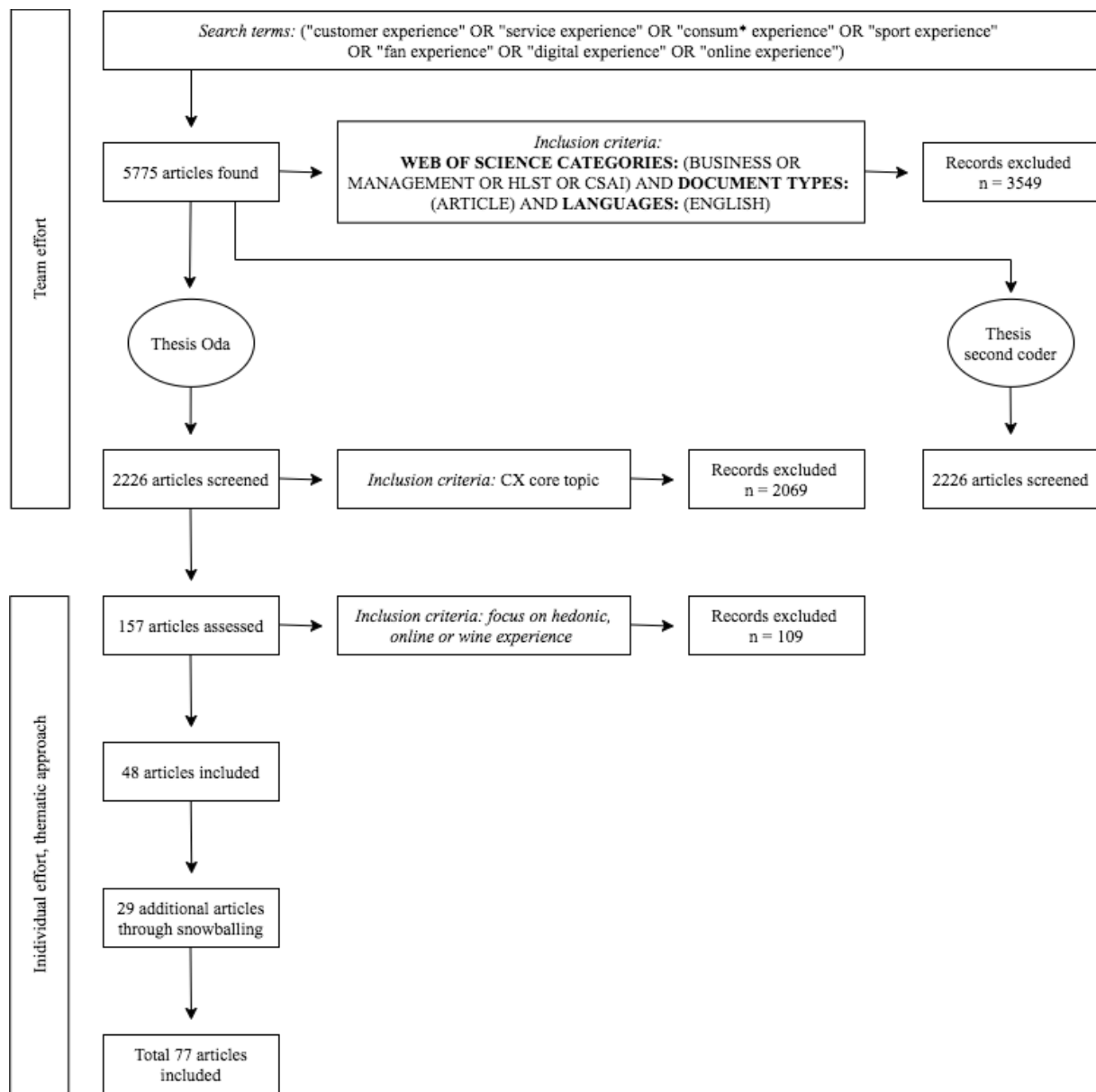
##### 3.1.1 RESEARCH PROTOCOL

In Figure 4, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, or PRISMA statement (Page et al., 2021) is indicated, which forms the basis for reporting the SLR. For this research, a SLR is conducted with a fellow student, who acts as the second independent coder and represents *researcher 2*. In order to do the literature review, Web of Science is used as repository. The source was chosen because its categories fit best with this research. In order to collect relevant articles, the search terms, based on the research question, are defined. Multiple combinations of keywords have been used and tried out in order to retrieve the most relevant articles. Eventually, a search query has been determined that covered the research questions of both researchers (see Figure 4).

Running these search terms in Web of Science in the title, abstract or author keywords, generated 5775 results (see Figure 4). To increase the relevance and quality of the results set, the selection was limited to academic articles as document type and written in English. Also, the results were refined with respect to subject categories “Business”, “Management”, “Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism” (HLST) and “Computer Science Artificial Intelligence” (CSAI). Reducing the results to these categories is chosen because they include the field of business administration and were therefore expected to yield the most relevant content for both our research topics.

**Figure 4**

*PRISMA statement*



*Note. Adopted from Moher et al. (2009)*

This refinement resulted in 2226 articles and both researchers separately and thoroughly screened in title and abstract for the relevant inclusion criteria, being that CX is the core topic of the study. Cohen’s Kappa coefficient is computed to assess the inter-rater reliability, which refers to the consistency of ratings given by different raters to the same subject (Sun, 2011). Cohen’s Kappa is the most widely accepted measure of inter-rater reliability when the outcome of interest is measured on a nominal scale (Sun, 2011). The Cohen’s Kappa coefficient is .36

(see Appendix 1), which indicates a fair agreement (Sun, 2011). This outcome could potentially be more favorable with a better understanding of the other researcher's inclusion criteria.

After calculating the intercoder-reliability ratio of Cohen's Kappa to determine the reliability, both researchers went through the list of articles together and discussed every article which was not agreed on, to eventually align all articles and resolve inconsistencies. This resulted in 157 articles to be assessed for full-text analysis for this research. Hereafter, the team effort ended, and both researchers continued with the individual full-text analysis of the remaining articles. The 157 articles were downloaded and imported into the reference manager software called Mendeley (Mendeley Desktop, 2020).

### 3.1.2 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

For the full-text analysis, a thematic approach has been applied. This can be broadly defined as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns in the form of themes within a text (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inclusion criteria for the articles of either a focus on hedonic, online or wine experiences were applied. At this stage, another 113 articles were excluded. Once the number of articles was reduced to 44 articles, the analysis process began. The article content was coded by adding notes in Mendeley (Mendeley Desktop, 2020). These codes were then categorized into four categories: 1) CX in general, 2) focus on context or servicescape, 3) online or digital experiences and 4) wine experience in particular. From these four categories, codes were compared and further analyzed to review the different concepts.

Through snowballing (Wohlin, 2014), an additional 29 articles were used. As an additional strategy, snowballing refers to scanning references in the selected articles, to identify other articles that may potentially be relevant (Snyder, 2019), and is particularly useful for extending a systematic literature study (Wohlin, 2014). By thematically analyzing the selected and additional articles through snowballing, a few themes emerged that were most mentioned with regards to antecedents of flow in the online environment, which are the *a priori* themes, as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2***A priori themes*

Theme	Source
Gamification (Social) interactivity	Ballantyne and Nilsson (2017), Bolton et al. (2018) Parise, Guinan and Kafka (2016), Koufaris (2002), Collier et al. (2018), Dedeoğlu et al. (2020), Hoffman and Novak, (2009), Klaus (2013), Walter et al. (2010), Wu et al. (2021)
Immersion	Ballantyne and Nilsson (2017), Mollen and Wilson (2010), Orth et al. (2019), Suh and Chang (2006)
Offline environment and touchable elements	Ballantyne and Nilsson (2017), Hoffman and Novak (2009), Klaus (2013), Petit, Velasco and Spence (2019)
Curiosity	Drengner et al. (2018), Hoffman and Novak (2009)



## 3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

This section of chapter 3 outlines the methodological choices, in order to answer the following research question: “*What are the potential drivers of flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences?*” It starts with a description of the overall research strategy, after which the research design is explained. Following, the data collection, including ethics is addressed. Finally, the procedure in which the data was analyzed is explained.

### 3.2.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY

This qualitative, exploratory study seeks to understand how customers experienced online wine tastings in order to explore potential drivers of flow. The research is grounded in an interpretivist or social constructivist philosophy, which is concerned with the understanding of subjective, constructed world of human experience (Symon & Cassell, 2012). In qualitative research, the essential concern is with human beings as meaning-makers (Symon & Cassell, 2012), and the main concept is customer experience, which is a subjective construct. Flow is indicated through human experience, which is why a qualitative approach yields the richest data in this case. Furthermore, little is known about this relatively new phenomenon, which again indicated towards a qualitative approach (Myers, 2009).

The best way to explore subjective constructs is through introspection (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), which can be defined as: “*an ongoing process of tracking, experiencing, and reflecting on one’s own thoughts, mental images, feelings, sensations, and behaviors*” (Gould, 1995, p. 719). The method of data collection employed to measure the remembered experience (Bastiaansen et al., 2019) was semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured format entails that with a few predefined questions were used, but there was still room for questions and topics to arise during the interview (Bleijenbergh, 2015; Myers, 2009).

### 3.2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Since this study aims to explore potential antecedents of flow, the research design focuses on variance theory, which aims to identify and explain the factors impacting a dependent variable, in this case flow (Symon & Cassell, 2012). This study was abductive in nature, as throughout the research process, it moved back and forth between data and existing literature (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In other words, the study acknowledged the existing theory at hand but sought to refine it and adjust to build new theory (Klag & Langley, 2013), and observations were translated into the propositions or key findings of this study (King & Brooks, 2016).

The exploratory research design did not allow for an extensive operationalization of concepts, but used a semi-structured interview approach, which means that an interview guide had been developed. This semi-structured interview framework allowed to explore experiences, feelings and perceptions of respondents (Bleijenbergh, 2015). With multiple iterations between the trial interview and the few interviews following up, the final interview guide resulted in a semi-structured protocol, with room for any other input from respondents. The original guide was written in the English language and had been translated to Dutch, to ensure respondents could answer freely in their native language to enhance the richness of the data (Bleijenbergh, 2015).

The interview guide started with some introductory questions about the respondent's motives to participate in an online wine tasting, followed by questions directly linked to the five dimensions of flow used in this research: concentration on task at hand (concentration), action-awareness merging (merging), loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time (timelessness) and enjoyment (see section 2.3.2). These questions aimed to identify to what extent respondents experienced the dimensions, and what caused or hindered them to experience it, to eventually come to the drivers. To ensure the credibility of the research, follow-up questions, as why and how, were asked to stimulate a good fit between constructed realities of respondents and the reconstructions attributed to them (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Finally, the guide included some comparative questions about the differences between and similarities of online wine tastings and wine tastings on premise, to further the understanding of the respondents' experiences in the online setting. The complete interview guide can be found in Appendix 2.

### 3.2.3 DATA COLLECTION

The population or unit of analysis in this study are individuals who have participated in an online wine tasting since the start of the first lockdown, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The criteria for selection were that the online wine tasting needed to be live, through video conferencing and with other participants in the meeting. In the recruitment message, respondents were informed about the research topic, the duration of the interview and confidentiality. Respondents were selected based on a pragmatic approach, using convenience sampling (Noy, 2008). A risk of this sampling method is that the collected sample may not represent the target population and therefore be a source of bias (Noy, 2008), for example because customers with a positive experience might be more willing to share their experiences than customers with a slightly less positive experience.

In total, 24 interviews have been conducted during the period of May 1<sup>st</sup> until June 23<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Of those interviews, 21 were conducted via the online video-conferencing platform Zoom (ZoomVideo Communications Inc., 2016), 2 were conducted face-to-face and 1 by voice call. All interviews were recorded with the help of either the Zoom (ZoomVideo Communications Inc., 2016) record function, or by smartphone. Prior to each interview, the respondents were informed about the aim of this study and were asked for consent to record the interview. Furthermore, respondents were told that their answers would not be shared with third parties and the results would not identify them, which ensured their anonymity and privacy. Furthermore, the recordings of the interviews were audio only.

After data collection, the transcripts of respondents 3, 5 and 11 were excluded from the initial analysis, since they did not fit the specified criteria of the homogenous sample, as mentioned above. Respondent 3 attended a pre-recorded online wine tasting, respondent 5 attended a live, but private wine tasting and respondent 11 attended an online wine tasting as an assistant of the host. The remaining 21 interviews were included for analysis.

The duration of the included interviews ranged from 16 to 37 minutes, with an average of 24 minutes. From the respondents, 52.4% was female and 47.6% was male (see Appendix 3). Conducting the interviews through video conferencing did pose some difficulties with regards to observing and corresponding to the respondent's non-verbal communication as body language, which might have resulted in some gaps in interpretation (Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour, 2014). However, conducting most of the interviews online reduced costs, increased flexibility when scheduling and a lower threshold for respondents to participate (Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour, 2014). Since all respondents have had plenty experience with Zoom (ZoomVideo Communications Inc., 2016), the interviews were conducted without any (technical) issues.

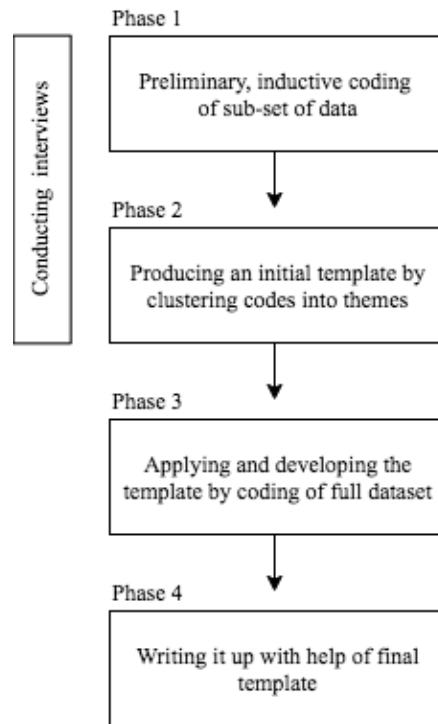
#### 3.2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and manually, after which the transcripts were coded: a relevant passage of text was marked and labeled with open codes (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Template analysis has been used to analyze the qualitative data thematically (King & Brooks, 2016). Thematic analysis is a suitable approach when researching someone's experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Template analysis is a structured way of conducting thematic analysis but allows for flexibility during the research process (Symon & Cassell, 2012). The confirmability and transparency of this research was ensured by keeping a detailed codebook in an Excel sheet, which is available upon request due to privacy concerns. Based on

the template analysis process of King and Brooks (2016), the steps taken in the data analysis of this research are described below and visualized in Figure 5. During phase 1 and 2 of the template analysis, interviews were conducted.

**Figure 5**

*Phases of template analysis in this research, adopted from King and Brooks (2016)*



### Phase 1

Once the first five interviews were conducted and transcribed, preliminary coding started, in which anything was noted that might be relevant to answering the research question, especially looking for material that supported the *a priori* themes (see Table 3) (King & Brooks, 2016). This was done to see whether the interview guide was well-designed in order to generate relevant findings for answering the research question. While familiarizing with a sub-set of the data, it became clear that the two dimensions of concentration and enjoyment yield the most appropriate data, as supported by literature that names these two dimensions are most relevant in flow in human-computer interactions (Chen, Hsu & Lu, 2018). The other three dimensions (merging, loss of self-consciousness and timelessness, see Table 1) proved to be difficult to understand and/or recall for respondents. To enhance credibility (Symon & Cassell, 2012) in following interviews, the primary focus was on the dimensions of concentration and enjoyment.

## Phase 2

On the basis of the preliminary analysis, codes were compared to the *a priori* themes and clustered into distinct, initial themes (see Table 3). Accordingly, an initial template was produced that clustered both emerging and *a priori* themes, which means that by going through the transcripts, some themes were discarded, and new relevant themes were added that aided answering the research question and were distinctive enough from the other themes. Empirical findings supported three *a priori* themes (interactivity, social interaction, offline environment), and one theme (immersion) was discarded in the context of this study. Additionally, new themes emerged that helped answering the research question: pre-experience, autonomy, spontaneity, post-experience and other. The full initial template can be found in Appendix 4.

## Phase 3

The initial template was then applied to further interview transcripts, modifying it iteratively to capture what is relevant and potentially important in the data (King & Brooks, 2016). After the analysis of 21 interviews, new transcripts did not result in any changes in the template, or new relevant findings in order to be able to answer the research question, and saturation was reached. Empirical findings supported another *a priori* theme (gamification) but discarded another theme (curiosity). Moreover, the theme of the host was added, because it was mentioned a lot of times during the interviews, which gave enough basis for making it a theme. Furthermore, it became clear that interactivity needed to be distinguished between host and participant and among participants, as they were both mentioned a lot of times.

## Phase 4

This process resulted in the final emerging themes (see Table 3). The full final template can be found in Appendix 5. Finally, the final template was used to organize and structure the results in chapter 4.

**Table 3***Findings based on SLR and qualitative method*

<i>A priori</i> themes	Initial emerging themes	Final emerging themes
○ Gamification	○ Pre-experience	○ Social interaction among participants
○ (Social) interactivity	○ Autonomy	○ Offline factors
○ Immersion	○ Interactivity	○ Interactivity between host and participant
○ Offline environment	○ Social interaction	○ The host
○ Curiosity	○ Offline environment	○ Gamification
	○ Spontaneity	
	○ Post-experience	
	○ Other	

## 4. RESULTS

In this chapter, the five drivers of flow that resulted from the template analysis of 21 interview transcripts are discussed, namely: 1) social interaction among participants, 2) offline elements, 3) interactivity between host and participant, 4) the host and 5) gamification. Each section, corresponding with each driver, starts with an introductory table that indicates the relative importance of the driver. This is done by means of the number of respondents who mentioned the theme, expressed in percentage, followed by the total amount of times that the theme was mentioned during the interviews. Furthermore, in each section, an elaboration on the sub-themes is given, illustrated with several quotes (all quotes used were translated from Dutch to English). At the end of the chapter, an additional finding is shared.

### 4.1 SOCIAL INTERACTION AMONG PARTICIPANTS

The first driver of flow that resulted from the template analysis was social interaction among participants, which is defined in Table 4. This interaction among participants happened both in the online and offline environment (when respondents participated together), which are addressed accordingly in the sub-themes. Illustrative quotes are presented in Table 5.

**Table 4**

*Driver 1: Social interaction among participants*

Resp. (%)	Count	Definition
90.5	97	The degree to which participants interacted with other participants, both online in the meeting and in the physical environment.

#### 4.1.1 ONLINE

First of all, the importance of interacting with other participants in the virtual wine tasting was acknowledged by 90.5% of the respondents. Respondents indicated that it was important for them to share and compare their tasting experiences, for example, when it comes to the aromas, tannins, acidity or sweetness in the wines. Wine tastings are fairly personal in nature, as everyone tastes differently or thinks differently about a wine, which makes it interesting to share and compare. Moreover, by sharing, learning is stimulated, as well as the connectivity between participants as a group.

Despite, in most of the tastings, there was few to no verbal interaction among the participants in the meeting. Due to the high number of participants, microphones were muted

in most cases. Even when this was not the case, participants expressing verbally resulted in being framed in yellow when they were detected as speaker, which made it impossible to have small private moments or conversations with other participants. Therefore, verbal communication happened mostly through chat. Respondents indicated that the chat function was of value to their experience, but also worked distracting at times. Especially for people who participated alone, this lack of social interaction in the online environment was problematic, since they had no opportunity to speak their minds and needed this online connectivity the most.

Most communication among participants, however, was non-verbal, which refers to communication between participants that is not spoken or written. Respondents indicated that online, a lot of the non-verbal communication, such as energy, gets lost when there is only the sight of someone's face and when sound is switched off. This results in fragmented information and therefore, at least seeing the participants by turning on their cameras is crucial. Respondents mentioned that it stimulated a feeling of a collective activity and enhanced the cohesiveness. Furthermore, seeing others allowed for small interactions, for example by raising the glasses and having a toast in that way. Another 38.1% of the respondents acknowledged the difference in this feeling of collectivity or togetherness when participants were acquainted and participated in the virtual wine tasting as a group activity.

Moreover, the visible surroundings of other participants were of importance, as they were part of the virtual servicescape. Subsequently, seeing other participants who paid attention to their physical setting or virtual background that fitted the occasion, positively contributed to the experience. The sight of seeing others in an office-surrounding with fluorescent lightning had negative impact on the experience. Further elaboration with regards to the physical environments of participants will be given in section 4.2.

#### 4.1.2 OFFLINE

Interaction among participants, for the ones who participated together, also happened outside of the online environment. 71.4% of the respondents mentioned the interaction with other participants (acquaintances) in the physical environment as important. These respondents enjoyed the fact that they were able to evaluate the wines and share their tasting experiences in between of tasting them and indicated that this is easier to do in-person. Furthermore, having others around physically was of added value to their experience, as it enhanced the feeling of a joint activity. However, respondents also noticed that engaging in conversations in the offline environment, entailed risks for disconnection of the online environment. Moreover, 57.1% of the respondents indicated that they continued their wine-tasting activity, when the virtual



meeting was over. Because this entailed a finding outside of the research scope, this will be discussed in section 4.7, additional finding, at the end of this chapter.

**Table 5**

*Sub-themes and illustrations of Driver 1: Social interaction among participants*

	Resp. (%)	Count	Illustrations
Online	90.5	63	<p><i>“Wine is never... how should I put it. In terms of quality, they were all good, but you can have one that you don’t like of course. So, there were quite a few bizarre things going around in the chat. Yes, that was funny to read, it did add something to the experience.” (R24)</i></p> <p><i>“Then it somewhat gets a contra effect, so it seems. Like when someone sitting at his office all by himself, with the sterile surrounding and fluorescent lighting, and then a bottle of wine, I think hmm. And I mean, that is the picture you see in the left corner of your eye, so that does affect your perception.” (R10)</i></p>
Offline	71.4	34	<p><i>“Well, it is just more atmospheric when there are people around. I was alone behind the screen for the most part, so, of course, it was really nice that my friend came by at some point. If that did not happen, I would have found it regrettable that I was sitting there all alone.” (R4)</i></p>

## 4.2 OFFLINE FACTORS

The second driver of flow was concerned with factors in the offline environment, as defined in Table 6. The sub-themes of this driver are the physical surroundings, through which customers participated in the online wine tasting, on the one hand, and the wines and other tangibles on the other hand. Examples of both sub-themes are given in Table 7.

**Table 6**

*Driver 2: Offline factors*

Resp. (%)	Count	Definition
90.5	84	The participant’s physical environment, in which he or she participated in the activity, including the (received) tangibles.

#### 4.2.1 PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS

The importance of the physical surrounding in which customers participated in the online wine tasting was acknowledged by 81% of the respondents. These surroundings consist of contextual factors like the room, lightning, sound, music and the position in which participants were situated, such as on the couch or at the desk or kitchen table. When the participant was not committed to the online experience by not putting any effort in aligning their surroundings, the online wine tasting resulted in a less enjoyable experience. For example, when respondents participated from their home office, this influenced their experience negatively, when compared to a cosy setting in the living room.

An important aspect of the physical surroundings entailed the fact that participants were at their homes. Being in a home environment, in most cases, stimulated concentration and focus on the activity, because the participant was in his or her own familiar surroundings. On the other hand, while being in their own environment, this increased the tendency of respondents to engage in household chores, or other homely activities that needed to be done. When a respondent participated at the kitchen table for example, where she expected guests for dinner afterwards, it was hard not to be concerned with her personal schedule.

Additionally, being at home while participating in the virtual wine-tasting activity, enhanced a feeling of being safe and comfortable, which affected the experience. Besides, this gives a sense of autonomy, as indicated by various respondents, which entails that participants were in control over their activities during the tasting.

#### 4.2.2 WINES AND OTHER TANGIBLES

Another important offline factor was concerned with the fact that participants received the wines at their homes prior to the online wine tasting. In most cases, the package needed to be opened immediately, as it included guidance on preparatory activities. Opening the package generated pleasure, since, in most cases, it came as a surprise and felt almost like a present. Other than the wines, tangibles like booklets, information on paper, aroma charts or corkscrews also added to the experience. The importance of these touchable elements was acknowledged by 76.2% of the respondents, in which the pre-sent wine package played a major role.

**Table 7**

*Sub-themes and illustrations of Driver 2: Offline factors*

	Resp. (%)	Count	Illustrations
Surroundings	81	43	<i>“Normally with a night out, you’re actually going somewhere. But in this setting, it’s like, well, let’s finish the dishwasher, clean something up. And then at the same time, the presentation starts, or a child comes downstairs because he can’t sleep. Normally, you would have arranged a babysitter and you would have an evening off, and now you, well, you don’t.” (R18)</i>
Wine package and other tangibles	76.2	41	<i>“And then you receive the package and you open it up and you see eight of those tiny bottles of wine. Next to that, I also received a bottle of sparkling wine and an A4 sheet with a short story on it and some log-in codes. Then right away, you have some fun, because it has to be put in the fridge and you can already read a little bit about what you are going to taste. So, I really liked that, and besides, it was beautifully wrapped.” (R24)</i>  <i>“So, the last time we tasted, we did the same, instead of sitting behind a big screen, we just took the tablet and sat on the sofa with a candle and the glasses. And you know, because you have three to eight glasses in front of you, you really do have the idea that you are actually in a tasting.” (R24)</i>

#### 4.3 INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN HOST AND PARTICIPANT

The third driver of flow was the interactivity between host and participant, which is defined in Table 8. Every virtual wine tasting consisted of the educational part and the tasting of the wines. The interactivity during the tasting component proved to be the more valued than the interactivity during the educational component. Quotes illustrative of these sub-themes are presented in Table 9.

**Table 8**

*Driver 3: Interactivity between host and participant*

Resp. (%)	Count	Definition
90.5	63	The degree to which the communication, both verbal and non-verbal, between host and participant was two-way. Hence, the degree to which participants actively contributed to the experience.

#### 4.3.1 TASTING COMPONENT

The central part of the online wine tasting comprised the actual tasting of the wines. 66.7% of the respondents indicated that the opportunity to share their tasting experiences was an anchor point for a good or bad experience, as mentioned before in section 4.1. A crucial role concerning this is fulfilled by the host, who had the responsibility of inviting participants to speak, and providing the necessary feedback, in order for participants to discuss and learn from their tasting experiences. Results show that only few participants had the opportunity to share their experiences, which in these cases led to interactivity and hence, involvement and engagement. An important aspect that should not be overlooked is the tendency of people to stay anonymous in online settings. Respondents indicated that a feeling of anonymity decreased their engagement, which also worked the other way around in a negatively reinforcing relationship. Hence, the host played a crucial role in involving participants, and making sure they felt safe and comfortable enough and were willing to actively participate in the experience.

#### 4.3.2 EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT

Secondly, interactivity during the educational component was mentioned by 38.1% of the respondents. The online environment is very suitable for conveying this information, as participants are directly behind a screen and on that screen, a lot of information can be displayed, like data/statistics, maps, vineyard photos etc. In many cases, however, respondents indicated that the one-way communication, in which the host spoke, and participants listened, lasted too long. This resulted in participants disconnecting, decreasing involvement, distraction and loss of attention. In these cases, and theory and tasting were out of balance in terms of time.

Another aspect is the virtual background of the host, thus his or her setting. Respondents indicated that the setting of the host was important for their experience. Ideally, it needed to fit the occasion, thus should more or less be in wine-related, but should not distract, when there are too many things going on in the background.

**Table 9***Sub-themes and illustrations of Driver 3: Interactivity between host and participant*

	Resp. (%)	Count	Illustrations
Tasting component	66.7	42	<p><i>“It has to remain dynamic, I would say, because the decisive factor was really the person who presented it, and that was someone who kept an eye on the audience and asked some questions or made a joke every now and then. That made it somewhat interactive, but it didn't become a group discussion, which would have resulted in chaos in such a big session.” (R15)</i></p> <p><i>“We talked about, for example, aging the wines in oak barrels, I mean why do they do that and how does it influence the taste of the wine? Do you recognize it in the aroma, or does it have to do with oxidation? You know, these are the things I want to know, but then there is really no attention for these things and the actual tasting is passed through very quickly. I found that disappointing.” (R19)</i></p>
Educational component	38.1	21	<p><i>“And now someone is responding or giving an answer to the host’s question and you might also want to say something about it, while in between, an answer from another person is already there, you know, so that makes it a bit more complicated.” (R22)</i></p> <p><i>“The experience that they had in mind beforehand, which was that you are actually going on a wine trip, holiday theme. So, when you follow the story building up to going on an adventurous wine trip, and then in fact you are sitting in a cellar and you are looking at a screen, so that is what I found not adding up.” (R16)</i></p>

#### 4.4 THE HOST

The fourth driver of flow was the host, as defined in Table 10. The host contributed largely to the participants’ experiences through his or her knowledge on the wines and enthusiasm. Quotes illustrative of these sub-themes are presented in Table 11.

**Table 10***Driver 4: The host*

Resp. (%)	Count	Definition
42.9	13	The expertise and enthusiasm of the man or woman who led the virtual wine tasting.

**4.4.1 EXPERTISE AND ENTHUSIASM**

42.9% of the respondents indicated the importance of personal aspects of the host in the virtual wine tasting. First of all, a sufficient level of knowledge about wine in general was important, to be able to educate the participants. Besides, his or her ability to transfer this information in an interesting and attractive way was crucial. By sharing his or her personal thoughts about the wines served, participants stayed involved in the wine tasting. Moreover, the host needed to be inviting towards participants to stimulate their active participation.

Furthermore, various respondents indicated that it would have been of added value to have multiple people hosting the online wine tasting, as that would enhance dynamics. They noticed that it was quite a lot for an individual to host the meeting, give explanations about the wines, look at incoming questions and multitask like that.

**Table 11***Sub-theme and illustrations of Driver 4: The host*

	Resp. (%)	Count	Illustrations
Expertise and enthusiasm	42.9	13	<i>“The reason we paid attention, was because this host was just fantastic, very clear in his explanations and telling little stories. You could tell he is very passionate about wine. It was great fun listening to him.” (R15)</i>

**4.5 GAMIFICATION**

The fifth driver of flow was gamification, as defined in Table 12. Having a quiz in the program of the online wine tasting was important for 23.8% of the respondents. Some examples are presented in Table 13.

**Table 12**

*Driver 5: Gamification*

Resp. (%)	Count	Definition
23.8	14	Game-playing in the form of a quiz, where participants answered wine-related questions with the aim of stimulating involvement and interactivity.

4.5.1 QUIZ

The form of gamification mentioned by respondents was a quiz. A relatively low number of respondents experienced a quiz during their virtual wine tasting. However, they were very enthusiastic about this element and explained that the online environment makes it fairly easy to organize a game-playing element like this. Prerequisites for elements of game-playing like a quiz seem to be its interactivity, accessibility, and function without obligation for everyone to participate.

**Table 13**

*Sub-theme and illustrations of Driver 5: Gamification*

	Resp. (%)	Count	Illustrations
Quiz	23.8	14	<i>“Well look, normally, you don't work with a digital system, so you won't work with something like Kahoot, when sitting around a table with each other, you just wouldn't do that. Online however, it's fairly easy, because people are behind that screen anyway.” (R18)</i>

*“I thought it was a nice addition, because in general, the tasting was very one-way in terms of communication and in terms of talking. It was mostly him talking, us listening, us drinking wine.” (R15)*

## 4.6 SUMMARY TABLE

The five drivers of flow as described above, are summarized in Table 14.

**Table 14**

*Summary of drivers of flow*

Drivers	Resp. (%)	Count	Definition	Sub-themes
Social interaction among participants	90.5	97	<i>The degree to which participants interact with other participants, both online in the meeting and in the physical environment.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online</li> <li>• Offline</li> </ul>
Offline factors	90.5	84	<i>The participant's physical environment, in which he or she participated in the activity, including the (received) tangibles.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Tangibles</li> </ul>
Interactivity between host and participant	90.5	63	<i>The degree to which the communication, both verbal and non-verbal, between host and participant is two-way. Hence, the degree to which participants actively contribute to the experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tasting component</li> <li>• Educational component</li> </ul>
The host	42.9	13	<i>The expertise and enthusiasm of the man or woman who leads the virtual wine tasting.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise and enthusiasm</li> </ul>
Gamification	23.8	14	<i>Game-playing in the form of a quiz, where participants answered wine-related questions with the aim of stimulating involvement and interactivity.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz</li> </ul>

## 4.7 ADDITIONAL FINDING

Lastly, an additional finding arose that did not directly drive flow but was of importance for the overall customers' experiences. 57.1% of the respondents indicated to have had some form of an extended activity. This means that because customers participated in the online wine tasting from home and, in many instances, also with acquaintances, the end of the online meeting did not indicate the end of the wine tasting activity. In other words, these respondents continued the activity of drinking wine in each other's company or took some time to evaluate their thoughts and experiences together afterwards. Other respondents, for example, indicated



that they did the wine tasting again in following days with friends, because usually, they did not open several bottles of wine simultaneously and they wanted to share the experience again. Because of this, it was not just the provided service that determined their experience, but because something more was built around it, this added to the overall experience.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to explore potential drivers of flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences. In this final chapter, the drivers found in this research are interpreted and discussed in light of extant literature, leading to three key findings that contribute to theory. Moreover, practical implications are discussed, and the study's limitations and future research directions are given.

### 5.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Prior research on flow is mostly focused on achievement content (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, McGinnis, Gentry & Gao, 2008). The present research is first to explore drivers of flow in context of virtual wine tastings, hereby addressing it through a non-achievement context appointed by Drengner et al. (2018). By evaluating flow predominantly through concentration and enjoyment, the contributions are closely related to the hedonic stream of CX literature. The theoretical contributions of this study are outlined by means of three key findings of this study. The themes of the host and gamification are grouped into the theme of interactivity, since these themes held less support separately.

#### 5.1.1 SOCIAL INTERACTION AMONG PARTICIPANTS

Firstly, findings suggest that customers value social interaction among participants as a critical driver of flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences, which is in line with extant literature that identified social interaction among customers, or customer-to-customer interaction, as a critical driver of hedonic service experience (Collier et al., 2018; Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Gainer, 1995; Hoffman & Novak, 2009; Klaus, 2013; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994; Walter et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2021). In essence, tasting wine is a sensory experience, and respondents indicated they wanted to share tasting experiences with each other and hear other's experiences. Sharing tasting experiences stimulated a sense of collectivity, and the feeling of togetherness, which is supported by Gainer (1995) who state that people define themselves as part of a collectivity. This sense of collectivity, in turn, increased the hedonic value attached to the experience, as supported by Dedeoğlu et al. (2020).

The present study advances the social interaction literature by addressing customer-to-customer interaction (Lin, Gursoy & Zhang, 2020) in the digital servicescape, hereby answering a call by Ballantyne and Nilsson (2017). Results suggest that other participants played a significant role in customers' experiences, because of literally being a part of the digital servicescape. Moreover, in the context of this study, an extra important element revolved

around multiple customers participating through one screen. Naturally, these customers also socially with each other. In a way, they were engaging in multiple activities, which resulted in problems with respect to engagement to the online environment. Because other participants could observe this, it created distance and negatively influenced the collectivity. However, participating together was of value to the experience of participants themselves. This is underlined by McNeill and Mather (2016), who state that customers value being comfortable and at ease with people they trust surrounding them, and by Dedeoğlu et al. (2020), who conclude that this in-person interaction increases the hedonic value customers attach to an experience.

To tackle this problem, when multiple customers participate in a virtual wine tasting, it might be a better option to do it by means of pre-recorded videos. This way, the pace and playing or pausing the videos is to be determined by the customers, which decreases the risk of disconnecting. An example for this was given by respondent 3, who was excluded from the research scope, but had a very positive experience when participating in a pre-recorded virtual wine tasting with five acquaintances. All of the above concludes in the first key finding of this study.

***Key Finding 1: Social interaction among participants is of significant importance for stimulating flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences. By sharing tasting experiences, participants learn from the activity and feel a sense of collectivity, which positively influences the hedonic value they attach to the service.***

### 5.1.2 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND TANGIBLES

Secondly, this research concludes that offline factors, as the physical surroundings and tangibles, are a critical driver of flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences. The importance of place is generally highlighted in servicescape literature (Bitner, 1992; Lock & Pyun, 2020; Zeithaml et al., 2006). Drawing on the principles of servicescape (Bitner, 1992) literature, the present findings extend the understanding of the theory by addressing it through customers' home environments. Despite of being at home, participants still attach meaning to the room and the setting in which they participate, underlining the role of atmospheric attributes as candles or a fireplace (Joseph-Mathews et al., 2009). Furthermore, results show that being home stimulated a feeling of being deeply comfortable and relaxed, which resulted in positive emotions. This goes hand in hand with a sense of autonomy, which was mentioned a few times

by respondents. Autonomy shows similarities with the flow dimension of control (see section 2.3.2) that has been described by Csikszentmihalyi (1975). Similarly, co-creation offers the opportunity to understand the ways in which customers actually extract value from their offerings (McNeill & Mather, 2016). An important additional finding is here the fact that respondents continued their wine-drinking activity irrespective of the service-provider, which was important for their overall experience.

Within this offline theme, notable is that immersion (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Orth et al., 2019; Suh & Chang, 2006) had not been acknowledged in the present study. The setting of video conferencing setting might not generate enough Virtual Reality (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017) for participants to experience immersion. Despite, touchable elements (Hoffman & Novak, 2009) helped to connect the online and offline environment, so that the experience was not solely online.

Moreover, a component that was found to be largely contributing to the offline experience was the pre-sent wine package, that generated pleasure prior to the activity. This is underlined in research that stresses the importance of packaging for CX and marketing outcomes (Rundh, 2013). Moreover, this anticipatory pleasure seems to show similarities to the study of Stephen et al. (2004), who suggest that a delay between choice and consumption, stimulates consumption enjoyment, and the study of Chun et al. (2017), who found that savoring an upcoming experience positively affects ongoing and remembered consumption enjoyment. Despite, it never appeared in research before as an antecedent or driver of flow.

Additionally, few respondents indicated also to be curious on beforehand, to how a wine tasting would be organized online, but it did not appear an important determinant for flow experiences as expected from literature (Drengner et al., 2018; Hoffman & Novak, 2009). However, it might act as a result, since respondents became curious to the possibilities of online experiences. All of the above results in the second key finding of this study.

***Key Finding 2:*** *The physical environment of participants, including the feeling of being home, and touchable elements, determine to a large extent flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences and hence, the hedonic value participants attach to the experience.*

### 5.1.3 INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN HOST AND PARTICIPANT

Thirdly, this study furthers the understanding of buyer-seller interactions (Grönroos & Voima, 2013) and its effects on CX, by indicating the importance of interactivity between host

and participant in the context of virtual wine tastings. Results show that the online environment is particularly suitable for the easy exposition of information, but therefore, entailed the risk of solely engaging in one-way communication. As each person tastes differently, participants can have significant contributions to the experience, thereby co-creating the experience (Kelleher et al., 2019), which is comprised of the involvement of actors other than the firm in generating value (Kelleher et al., 2019). An example that illustrated this importance was given by respondent 5 (excluded from the scope), who participated in a live and private, virtual wine tasting, resulting in a very interactive session. This respondent was so engaged and involved that, at some point, she felt like the host was with them in their living room and forgot there actually was a screen in between them. This supports literature that indicate the importance of the integration of the digital, physical and social domains to create meaningful customer experiences (Bolton et al., 2018).

Subsequently, receiving feedback proved to be important for respondents to discuss their findings, similar to achievement contexts where feedback is an antecedent of flow (Drengner et al., 2018), as shown Figure 2. Participants wanted to know whether it made sense what they experienced in the wines. A lack of providing feedback is a missed opportunity for two reasons. Firstly, increasing the participants' self-efficacy benefits the customer directly because it relates to general well-being, but it also benefits the service provider indirectly because of its positive impact on value (Van Beuningen et al., 2011). Secondly, appraisals of sensory experience (taste, smell) predict feelings of inspiration (Liu, Sparks & Coghlan, 2016). An important role in providing interactivity is the host being inviting towards the participants, being inviting and aware of possible social barriers (Kelleher et al., 2019). The host shows similarities with the remote expert (Parise et al., 2016), who comprises of a real person, located remotely, who is available for immediate service to the customer (Parise et al., 2016). Furthermore, personal aspects of the host as expertise and enthusiasm are determinants for flow experiences, which might be closely linked to storytelling literature, which emphasizes the ability of stories to create positive feelings (Youssef, Leicht & Marongiu, 2019).

Moreover, this study also emphasized the importance of elements of game-playing, particularly in the form of a quiz, as a tool for interactivity, hence involvement and engagement, in the online environment. Gamification was underlined in the *a priori* themes and stimulates a participant's motivation and engagement (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017) through Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The dimensions of this theory, competence, autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985) were all recognized in this research, together with its positive effect on CX. All of the above results in the third key finding of this study.

***Key Finding 3:*** *The level of interactivity between host and participant, as well as the expertise and enthusiasm of the host, determine to a large extent flow in virtual wine-tasting experiences, by means of involvement and engagement.*

## 5.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In addition to the theoretical contributions discussed above, the findings of this study also imply practical implications. Understanding the drivers of flow in an online, hedonic consumption context helps managers to improve their customer's emotional experiences, and hence, their satisfaction, loyalty and behavioral intentions. The findings of this research suggest managers two main factors to focus on when stimulating flow.

Firstly, findings suggest managers to employ (social) interactivity as a means to stimulate engagement. In social activities such as wine tastings, participants want to share their tasting experiences with others, which is confirmed by 100% of the respondents in this research. Results show that interactivity can be stimulated by dynamically switching between presenting information and tasting the wines, thereby limiting one-way communication to a minimum. Moreover, interactivity is enhanced by maintaining relatively small groups, up to ten persons, in which anonymity needs to be prevented and social barriers need to be beaten (Kelleher et al., 2019). A sufficient amount of time needs to be reserved to taste the wines and share tasting experiences. When customers participate alone, breakout rooms, or similar, can be created. When multiple customers participate through one screen, it is important to provide time and space for them to discuss at home. Furthermore, storytelling and gamification can be employed by the host to stimulate engagement. Ideally, participants are monitored by the host to be able to correspond to their behavior, for example when they lose attention. The role of emotional experience should be obvious given the hedonic nature of wine-tasting experience and being aware of participants' emotions may represent an important instrument for the management (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012).

Secondly, the findings indicate that the home environment of participants can be considered as the servicescape (Bitner, 1992), thus is of importance. Ideally, participants get in the mood for the wine tasting by their surroundings. Providing guidance for the getting the right atmosphere at home is helpful. Another possibility is making sure every participant uses the same virtual background. Nonetheless, the importance of setting or virtual background also applies to the host him- or herself. Moreover, findings suggest to putting emphasis on packaging

and display of the wines delivered. The pleasure prior to the activity by receiving this package add a lot to the experience. Moreover, tangibles are a way to connect offline and online experiences, and in the field of human–computer interaction, online environments will likely engage more of the senses and become more connected with offline environments in the coming years (Petit, Velasco & Spence, 2019). In the context of online services by means of video conferencing, this increasing engagement with the consumer's emotional senses (Petit et al., 2019) is fairly easy to establish, without having to consider factors as technology acceptance, which is a problem for more technical services in the field of Virtual Reality (Hoffman & Novak, 2009).

Lastly, flow experiences from home are not limited to hospitality services. Flow is human experience, and improving flow is improving experience and hence, life. In other words, the concept of flow has great potential, also outside the marketing context. The found drivers are likely to be transferable (Symon & Cassell, 2012) to other contexts, like for example onboarding or other introduction activities. Subsequently, different kinds of organizations can benefit from the findings of this study.

### 5.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Despite its contributions to theory and practice, the present study entails some limitations that offer avenues for future research. First of all, flow is an elusive construct to measure, and not all realize they are in flow. It is important to note that by definition, post-experience self-reports measure an experience after the experiential episode has ended. Therefore, they measure the memory of the experiential episode rather than the experience itself (Zajchowski et al., 2017), which may have adverse effects on reliability, and lead to retrospective bias, as experiences might be remembered differently over time (Tonetto & Desmet, 2016; Wu et al., 2021). Besides, they require a certain amount of reflectivity from the respondents. And the dynamic nature of emotions gets lost through retrospective self-report measures (Verhulst et al., 2020), which results in emotions staying general. Future research measuring flow can have customers report their appraisals and feelings while engaging in a service, better capturing momentary fluctuations.

Secondly, the study explored the new phenomenon of virtual wine tastings solely from the customer's perspective. Respondents indicated to expect that the future potential of virtual wine tastings mainly lies in large groups like business incentives, and for educational purposes like master-classes. This because for customers who participate mainly for the knowledge, attending wine tastings online is more convenient and efficient. Assessing the potential future

value of virtual wine tastings, future research can look at the firm perspective. This entails the service provider's experiences and future plans, which can be studied qualitatively to get a deep understanding. The target market for virtual wine tastings is potentially at global scale, but in terms of profitability, it is still unexplored whether they are commercially interesting. Profitability can be assessed through quantitative measures as a questionnaire.

Thirdly, the research was done during the COVID-19 pandemic, which might have influenced the findings. It is unknown how things will proceed regarding the pandemic. Future research can look at the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the potential drivers found in this research. This might be assessed quantitatively, by means of a sending out a questionnaire to customers directly after future virtual wine tastings.

Fourthly, this study limits to online, live experiences of wine tastings. To be able to generalize the findings further, future research can apply the drivers found in this study to other online services, by looking into different services offered in a similar setting (through video conferencing), to see whether the results imply in other contexts. Especially interesting is gamification, since all respondents in this research who experienced a form of gamification, obtained positive experiences because of it. Future research can assess this through experiments of online services including gamification and for example, organize a focus group to discuss customers' experiences.



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## 7. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: CALCULATION COHEN'S KAPPA STATISTIC

In this calculation of Cohen's Kappa statistic of inter-rater reliability, all outcomes are rounded off on three decimals.

		Researcher 1		
		Included	Excluded	Total
Researcher 2	Included	71	84	155
	Excluded	114	1957	2071
	Total	185	2041	2226

$\kappa$  = interrater reliability ratio

$P_o$  = the relative observed agreement among raters

$P_e$  = the hypothetical probability of chance agreement

$$\kappa = \frac{(P_o - P_e)}{(1 - P_e)}$$

#### Step 1: calculate $P_e$

First, Cohen's Kappa looks at the articles on which both researchers agreed upon, whether it was to include or exclude. The total number of articles in agreement is  $71 + 1957 = 2028$ . This observed proportional agreement is calculated by dividing the total number in agreement by the total amount of articles. This results in  $P_e = \frac{2028}{2226} = .911$ .

#### Step 2: calculate $P_o$

However, there is always the probability of random agreement, which is why the overall probability that the raters would randomly agree needs to be taken out of the equation. This is the sum of the probability that both raters would randomly include and the probability that both raters would randomly exclude.

The probability that researcher 1 would randomly include is  $\frac{185}{2226} = .083$  and the probability that researcher 2 would randomly include is  $\frac{155}{2226} = .070$ . This results in the probability that both raters would randomly include is  $.070 \times .083 = .006$

The probability that researcher 1 would randomly exclude is  $\frac{2041}{2226} = .917$  and the probability that researcher 2 would randomly exclude is  $\frac{2071}{2226} = .930$ . This results in the probability that both raters would randomly exclude is  $.917 \times .930 = .853$ .

This results in  $P_o = .006 + .853 = .859$

**Step 3: calculate  $\kappa$**

$$\kappa = \frac{(.911 - .859)}{(1 - .859)} = 0.369$$

This result indicates a (relatively high) fair agreement between both independent researchers.

## APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### **Interview guide**

First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Oda Schenkman and I'm currently doing research for my Innovation & Entrepreneurship master's thesis on customers' experiences of online wine tastings. Since social distancing became the norm, people have started to get together online to have some drinks, which hospitality companies have responded to by offering online tastings. Because of my affinity with wine and the hospitality industry, I want to study how consumers experience these online tastings in order to help managers to improve their customer experiences. Therefore, I would like to discover yours in this interview which will take around 20-30 minutes.

Before we start, I would like to ask your consent for recording this interview, for analysis purposes. Please note that all responses will be kept confidential and won't be shared with third parties. Accordingly, any information included in the report will not identify you as the respondent. I will ask about your experiences, which means there are no right or wrong answers. Please, answer me as completely as possible and provide me with your honest opinion.

### **Orientation questions**

- First of all, what was the reason for your participation at the online wine tasting?
  - Do you have specific interest in wine?
- Do you remember how you felt at the start of the tasting?
  - Wat was the situation like?

### **Flow**

*Now we will go into more detail about your experience.*

- Can you describe what the online environment looked like?
  - To what extent did you feel that you were actually there?
  - To what extent did you interact with other participants or the host?
- To what extent were you aware of your physical surroundings during the tasting?
  - Because of what?
  - What role did this physical environment play in your experience?

- To what extent would you say you had full concentration and attention for the activity? Did you experience any disturbing thoughts?
  - Why or why not? What did it cause?
- To what extent did you have the feeling that your mind was in line with your actions?
  - Why or why not? What did it cause?
- To what extent did you experience doubts or uncertainties during the activity? Were you self-conscious in any way?
  - Why or why not? What did it cause?
- Were you aware of the time, did it pass more quickly than usual or not?
  - Why or why not? What did it cause?
- What would you say had more influence on your experience, what happened on the screen (online environment) or your physical environment?
  - In what way?

### **Online experience**

- What would you say are the most important differences between an online wine tasting and a wine tasting somewhere on a location?
  - Did you miss anything online, what is possible physically?
  - Or the other way around, did the online environment bring some advantages that are harder to realize physically?
  - Other pros of online wine tastings?
- What could have been better regarding the online environment, that could have enriched your experience?
  - Or about the online wine tasting in general?

### **Hedonic value**

*Now we will shortly come back to your feelings.*

- Do you recall how you felt once the tasting ended?
  - Did the tasting meet your expectations?



- To what extent did the activity influence how you felt?
- Did you have fun during the activity?
  - Why (not)? What did it cause?
- Did you also enjoy/experience pleasure after the tasting ended?
  - Why (not)? What did it cause?

### **Concluding question**

- Now that you have reflected on your experience, are there still things that come to mind that are important but have not yet been addressed?

### **End**

This is the end of the interview.

- Do you have any questions?
- Are you interested in receiving the results of my research, when I finished?

Once again, thanks a lot for participating in my research.

APPENDIX 3: TABLE OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

<b>Respondent #</b>	<b>M/F</b>	<b>Duration interview</b>	<b>Included</b>
1	M	00:19:48	yes
2	F	00:22:56	yes
3	F	00:18:37	no
4	M	00:28:30	yes
5	F	00:22:47	no
6	M	00:18:16	yes
7	F	00:23:17	yes
8	F	00:27:06	yes
9	M	00:25:50	yes
10	F	00:23:52	yes
11	F	00:12:05	no
12	F	00:15:39	yes
13	F	00:20:43	yes
14	F	00:22:38	yes
15	M	00:30:19	yes
16	F	00:23:03	yes
17	F	00:23:47	yes
18	M	00:28:59	yes
19	M	00:25:23	yes
20	M	00:32:47	yes
21	M	00:31:40	yes
22	M	00:23:39	yes
23	F	00:26:03	yes
24	F	00:37:04	yes

## APPENDIX 4: INITIAL TEMPLATE

### Pre

- Excitement, surprising effect
- Low-key
- Delivery/pick-up of wine
- Curiosity
- Few and/or low expectations

### During

- **Autonomy**
  - You decide when and how much to drink
- **Interactivity**
  - Role of host is important, inviting. Multiple hosts, background of host
  - Few feedback moments
  - No interaction among participants
  - Other participants are part of the servicescape
  - No one pays attention to you
- Communication
  - Harder to make contact
  - Ice-breaking questions
  - Listening for too long, need to ask questions
  - Chat function
  - Educational part has room for improvement
- **Social interaction**
  - Sharing thoughts
  - Fewer people around you mean better attention
- **Offline environment**
  - Setting and/or room is important
  - Touchable elements: booklet, tiny bottles of wine
- **Spontaneity**
  - Opportunity for wine maker to join

## Post

- Positive effect on feeling → hedonic value
- Evaluate/continuing tasting during the night
- Sharing experience afterwards, when seeing other participants in real life again

## Other

- Time of day
- Own planning because of being at home
- More opportunities regarding presentation/information to exploit

## APPENDIX 5: FINAL TEMPLATE

- **Social interaction**
  - Drinking alcohol is social activity
  - Looking for interaction with other participants
    - Anonymity
  
- **Offline environment**
  - Setting
  - Home environment: safe, comfortable, well-known
    - Touchable elements/tangibles: booklet, aroma chart, other wine tasting necessities like glasses and corkscrew
  
  - Autonomy
  - Anticipatory pleasure by receiving wine package
  
- **Interactivity**
  - Communication between host and participant
  - Verbal and non-verbal (virtual background of host)
  
- **Host**
  - Enthusiasm, knowledge and being inviting
  
- **Gamification**
  - Quiz