

# The Impact of Covid-19 on the Change of Customer Buying Behaviour

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**Key words:** Covid-19, pandemic, buying behaviour, customer behaviour, e-commerce, retailing, online stores, offline stores.

## **Abstract:**

**Background:** The retail sector is rapidly developing over the past years. Retailers are investing more efforts and resources to provide a seamless experience through multiple channels. These developments led to significant changes in customer behaviour. Customers buying activities and way of selecting the products and retailers faced different changes and developments. The online retailing sector is entitled to continuous development. The latest development was due to the Covid-19 global pandemic that came without any previous notice. The customer behaviour starts adopting the digital online channels in most of their needs and wants. The appearance of new customer behaviour patterns due to Covid-19 lead to the emergence of new customer behaviour.

**Purpose:** This study is of an exploratory and constructive nature. It is concerned with deepening the knowledge about the change in customer buying behaviour brought by Covid-19 on the retailing sector. The aim of the study is to identify and test new behavioural patterns that would influence the Swedish millennials' in selecting between online and offline stores for shopping and buying fashion products.

**Method:** An abductive approach was followed in this paper. Mixed methods of both qualitative and quantitative were used to fulfil the purpose of this exploratory research. The research followed a sequential exploratory design of two data collection phases. The ii empirical data was conducted from focus groups sessions with a total number of interviewee, and relevant responses from a web-based survey.

**Conclusion:** The study has revealed two significant findings and contributed to propose a conceptual model. The fruitful results of this study are: (1) there is a vast customers' migration towards online stores. (2) there are new behavioural patterns related to Covid 19 that are influencing the customer buying behaviour. (3) A proposed conceptual model which is concerned with the factors influencing the customer buying behaviour in selecting between online and offline fashion stores.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

The retail industry significantly plays a major role in determining and developing different countries' gross domestic product (GDP). As an industry, retail is considered as a crucial employing source. The retail industry connects the customers with their needs and wants. Since the 1930s, marketers attempt to understand customer purchasing behaviour (Waguespack & Hyman, 1993) to predict the customers' actions and future purchases (Srivastava & Barmola, 2010). However, during the last few decades, the retail industry has undergone great development. Different channels were created that made the customers act differently. In the 21st century, new options for buying and shopping rather than the brick-and-mortar stores were developed and been available for the customers.

A noticeable cultural shift was witnessed due to the rapid technological development; hence, the retailing sector experienced more development that provided new retailing channels, rapid growth as e-commerce and digital marketing (Rita et al., 2019). The digital transformation encouraged customers to shift from the brick-and-mortar stores and led these stores to gradually shut down and shift to e-commerce due to the change in the customer way of behaving (Verhoef et al., 2015). Customer behaviour is a psychological part that refers to the customers' personalities and their way of purchasing (Srivastava & Barmola, 2010). Customers buying activities and way of selecting the products and retailers stem from their own buying behaviour (Priest et al., 2013). Coinciding with the increase of the offered services and options provided by the online channels, a significant attraction of more new and existing customers toward the newly developed online retail solutions and alternatives increased (Rita et al, 2019).

### **1.2. Problem Statement**

The retail sector has rapidly developed over the past years as the different retailers invest more efforts and resources to provide a seamless experience through multiple channels. The developments in the retail sector led to significant changes in customer behaviour and evident transition of the customer activities toward the online channels. Correspondingly, the pandemic of Covid-19 have come without any previous notice and dictated new regulation that has hindered the social interaction. These hindrances led to numerous consequences on both online and physical channels. On the first hand, the pandemic has increased the demand on the online channels that coincide with the transition of retailing, which could positively impact the retailing sector. On the other hand, the pandemic might have led to demand reduction on the physical channels, which can negatively impact the retailers.

### **1.3. Research Purpose**

This study is concerned with deepening the knowledge about change in customer buying behaviour brought by Covid-19 on the retailing sector. The focus of this study is limited to the Swedish millennials' buying behaviour for fashion products with respect to the selection between online and offline stores. More precisely,

this study aims to identify and test new behavioural patterns that would influence the Swedish residents in selecting between online and offline stores for shopping and buying fashion products. This study is conducted from the customers' side via having focus groups and a web-based survey.

In light of the current theories in customer buying behaviour, this study will dig deep into the Swedish millennials' buying behaviour to explore and examine the role of Covid-19 in influencing the selection process between online and offline stores. However, the expected fruitful outcome from this study is to deliver a set of new behavioural patterns that would expand the theoretical knowledge in regard to the current customer buying behaviour.

#### **1.4. Scope and Delimitation**

This paper focuses on the change in customer buying behaviour during the era of the pandemic of Covid-19. The scope of this study is limited to the millennials' buying behaviour in Sweden; however, this study will not be observing any other customer segments rather than the millennials in Sweden. Furthermore, to get a higher sufficient data, the study has limited the data collection on the Swedish millennials living in Sweden before and after the pandemic of Covid-19. More precisely, the data collection has been limited to those living in Sweden before the outbreak of Covid-19.

Moreover, the scope of this study is limited to fashion retailing only, where these retailers are concerned with products such as clothes, footwears, and accessories. Other products such as cosmetics and care products are excluded in this study. Additionally, other kinds of retailers out of the fashion industry are also excluded from this study.

#### **1.5. Contribution**

This paper is of an exploratory and constructive nature. The paper is aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the change of customer buying behaviour during the pandemic of Covid-19.

On the first hand, this paper is expected to deliver a set of new behavioural patterns that would expand the theoretical knowledge concerning the current customer buying behaviour. On the other hand, the findings of this paper are expected to serve organisations in the fashion retailing sector in order to deeply understand the change of the customer buying behaviour during Covid-19, which will assist the retailing organisations in exploiting the current and future opportunities as a response of the change in the customer behaviour.

#### **1.6. Disposition**

This section provides an overview of this paper. Figure 1 below illustrates the disposition of the chapters of this paper. This paper consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1, provides a background concerned with the phenomenon under study; this chapter addresses the research gap, as its highlight the purpose of the study. Chapter 2, contains theories and literature studies of the previous scientific papers. Chapter 3, the Method chapter, is concerned with the research philosophy, research approach, research design, research quality, and research ethics. Chapter 4, this chapter is concerned with the data collection methods about the planning, sample selection, and the execution of the two empirical methods. Chapter 5, is concerned with the analysed results generated from both the focus group and the survey. Chapter 6, is concerned with analysing the empirical results in line with the previous literature. Chapter 7, is concerned with the proposed conceptual model and the discussion of the concept. Chapter 8, is concerned with the conclusion of this paper, in this chapter the purpose of the study is answered, as the implications of the study are highlighted.

## 2. Literature Review:

### 2.1 Retailing Transformation

The expansion and growth of the internet are leading the retailing sector to more developed channels and rapid growth as e-commerce and digital marketing (Rita, 2019). The transformation in the retailing sector and the transitions that happened over the last decade provided the customer with more features and power in the market. The several options that appeared in the market created an unstable situation which led to different results and implications and more complexity in the customer attitude and the retailers' performances.

On the first hand, massive transfer toward the digital market and e-commerce encouraged customers to shift from brick-and-mortar stores. On the other hand, several brick-and-mortar stores shut down, and some other retailers shifted to e-commerce due to the higher demand and the rapid growth of the e-commerce market (Verhoef, 2015). Therefore, a high level of competition and high variety and assortments exist in the e-commerce market, differentiating it from the local and brick-and-mortar stores.

However, offline retailers are attempting to interact with different customers by entering the e-commerce world to attract and reach a broader range of customers (Rita, 2019). Wherefore, the customer behaviour and shopping habits are going with the flow and changing accordingly. Customers and consumers utilize digital channels through devices to compare different articles and products by different retailers.

The appearance of digital marketing added additional benefits. The customer got the chance of receiving the desired goods and products by ordering them from the couch while sitting, resting and paying from the bank card. The access to different stores and brands for shopping or comparing requires a minimum cost that attracts many users and buyers.

Furthermore, the transition of retailing into the digital market stimulates the retailers for more development in their process to reach more customers (Verhoef, 2015). For instance, many companies are adopting VR (virtual reality) in their marketing process and services to avoid several existing gaps in the market and increase customer satisfaction. Retailers utilize different unique approaches to gain a competitive advantage in the market and cover a broad customer segment.

Jayawardhena & Farrell (2011) and Rita, Oliveira, and Farisa (2019) stated, the customers' main reasons for moving to the online channels due to its benefits of repurchasing and features of wish lists and recommendations that all based on algorithms of how often the customer visits the website or the application. With additional benefits for the retailers, the customer's loyalty can be understood and the customer attitude and desires based on the method the customer utilises in evaluating the offered services (Jayawardhena & Farrell, 2011). The retailers can evaluate the customer decisions and identify the problems based on a database that contains different information about the online customers' activities, faced problems, and choices. The retailers gain access to several stages of online customer behaviour and can monitor it. That facilitates the process of forecasting and providing the required products upon the customers' expectations.

The ability to satisfy and fulfil the customer order through the online channels and the smoothness in finalizing the purchasing are reasons for changing customer behaviour. The transition of customer behaviour into the digital market positively affected the rate of sales and the customers' satisfaction. The increase in the services on the online channels and the product diversity played a significant role in changing customer behaviour.

## **2.2. Customer Buying Behaviour**

“Consumer behaviour is the mental, emotional and physical activities that people engage in when selecting, purchasing, using and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy needs and desires”.

Customer buying behaviour term mainly focuses on the buying activities of the customers before and during purchasing, which covers the process of product selecting and buying.

Customer behaviour is a significant factor in the retailing industry to predict the customers' actions and future purchases. It is crucial to understand the psychological purchasing part of the customers during the purchasing process to clarify their behaviours (Srivastava & Barmola, 2010). The customer purchasing process differs and can be buying or shopping. Buying is when the customer has previous knowledge of the required product, targeted it, and purchased it directly for a need. While shopping is the term that refers to the enjoyment and desire driven by looking for a product that the customer does not have a need for.

However, customers also differ in their personalities and attitudes, as well as their trust. Online retailing channels and brick-and-mortar stores have different experiences to the customer. Hence, the future customer behaviour changes and adjust accordingly to the present customer shopping experience.

Moreover, online channels face obstacles concerned with the customers' lack of confidence in payment methods, qualities and specifications of the products. Online stores have an advantage in the market since it provides the customers with the possibility to locate and find the proper desired products to persuade them to use the online channels (Juaneda-Ayensa, 2016). Therefore, new customer behaviour appearing upon the market digitalization.

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The customers gain different services and experiences in each channel (Juaneda-Ayensa, 2016). Customer buying behaviour might be affected by the quality of the service and the satisfaction of the previous experiences (Jayawardhena & Farrell, 2011). For instance, on the first hand, the customization option appears flexibly on the online channels (Nguyen, 2018). On the other hand, offline channels provide professional employees with different experiences that provide more satisfaction to several customers.

### **2.3. Influences on Customer Behaviour**

Customers are a significant factor for the continuation of any business, Azad, et al., (2013) stated the impact of customer behaviour on business planning and efficiency in different areas and scopes. Understanding the customer personality and its buying behaviour is crucial for all businesses to influence the customers' performance and planning phases. Customer behaviour can be influenced by different factors that were categorized by Wadera & Sharma (2018) into internal and external influences. The factors can affect the purchasing process periodically in three different stages pre, during, post the purchasing process.

#### **2.3.1 Internal Influences**

The internal influences differ from one customer to another, affecting the buying process and the customer behaviour. These influences caused by different dimensions that refer to the customers, i.e. culture, personal aspects, and customer loyalty (Wadera & Sharma, 2018; Vebrová, 2016; Hoyer & Krohmer, 2020).

##### **Culture**

Culture is inherited from one generation to another; each generation adds, change, and save some of this transmitted culture (Nayeem, 2012). It appears in human actions and behaviour, and it affects the human's decisions and features. People from the same culture share many values, means, and similarities (Tsoukatos & Rand, 2007). All these cultural factors named as powerful influences on customers behaviour and decision making. Therefore, businesses always attempt to learn more about their customers and the different intercultural actors in the market to increase the awareness and the knowledge internally for meeting and exceeding the customer expectation. The influence of the cultural aspects on customer behaviour, attitude, and purchasing activities.

However, the culture was studied from different perspectives by several researchers. On the first hand claimed that the culture that can affect the customer buying behaviour could be generated from the environment that the customer has grown up in. For instance, if the customer has collectivist characters that can be influenced by the family, friends, or colleagues, and would prioritize other collective responsibilities or need than proceeding with self-shopping activity. At the same time, elucidated how the customer with the collectivist background can be affected by society, i.e. prestige and reputation, which impulse the customer to proceed with purchase activities for no personal needs rather than appearance. On the other hand, Lee and Kacen (2008) mentioned that customers with individualist characteristics could behave based on personal predilections that lead to their satisfaction. Consequently, stated that customers from individualist societies peruse and pursue their purchases before taking decisions. However, with both individualist and collectivist backgrounds, customers are aware of different aspects rather than the culture, i.e. price, quality, brand.

##### **Personal factors**

Generally, humans act upon their personalities and personal characteristics that were developed, changed, and affected through lifetime and years (Domic, 2013). The globalization in the current century led to multicultural mixing that developed several characteristics and gave birth to new features. Thus, the global

multicultural human personality have been established (Bird & Stevens, 2003). The complexity of the marketing process increased for the specialists in targeting and predicting their customers' actions and behaviours (Domie, 2013). Many researchers have employed these characteristics, i.e. age and financial situation, and personalities, i.e. desires and enjoyment, in influencing customer behaviour. Customers vary in their ages, and each age has different desires and interests.

Likewise, the customer's financial situation can define its economic environment and how the customer can approach own purchasing decisions. Therefore, young customers can have lower chances to satisfy their purchasing desire due to their financial situation based on their economic resources, financial capabilities, and savings that influence their purchasing decisions.

### **2.3.2 External Influences**

External influences rely on aspects the customers cannot control it; these influences are generated by external factors that directly affect customer behaviour and decisionmaking. For instance, it might be operated by the product/service provider. However, both the controllable and uncontrollable factors can have pros and cons on both the businesses and the customers, i.e. society, motivational impacts, social media, and crisis.

#### **Motivational impacts**

Individual behaviours are motivated by several aspects to seek a need or internal satisfaction (Kian, 2014). Hence, customers behave upon certain motives to perceive and fulfil a need. The motivational aspects that derive the customer to behave in the way they do, differ from one to another based on several factors that researchers named complex. The mission of the marketing strategies in establishing impulsive purchasing behaviour that led the customer to purchase and buy products and goods based on moment decisions. Impulsive purchasing and buying sum different types of conducted purchases, for instance, unplanned or unexpected purchases that the customers do not need. Impulse buying is distinguished with moment decisions that return happiness and satisfaction for the customer at the moment.

An external factor rather than the customer him/herself might be a motive or influence that persuade the customer to conduct such purchasing process, i.e. a friend, family member. Customers have different personalities and cognitive which affect this type of purchasing. Hence, social aspects can influence the impulse. The customer's financial situation can determine the type of buying, i.e. impulsive buying might be affected by the settled budget of the customer regardless of whether the product is attractive or convincing and vice versa.

### **2.4. Covid -19 in Retailing**

The Covid-19 pandemic, the global catastrophe of 2020, came with unpredicted catastrophic effects on humans' health and economy. The impacts of Covid-19 forced the people to change their behaviour in entertaining, purchasing, working, studying, and many other daily life activities that people had them before. Covid-19 brought a global panic and stressful situation for all the customers over the world, a born of a new unusual customer behaviour was recognized. At the beginning of the pandemic, when the globe faced

significant stockpiling of the customers for specific products, i.e. food, was a sign of the pandemic's impact on changing the customer behaviour toward a new phase of purchasing that did not really exist in the past. In the late stages, the customer behaviour starts adopting the digital online channels in most of their needs and wants especially in the countries that faced lockdown and strict restrictions.

The conducted developments from the retailers' and the organizations' side was an Literature review 15 encouraging factor for the customers to feel more safe and perceived trust from the online purchasing method due to necessity. The overall consumption and general customer behaviour were changed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and more people started to utilize the online channels for reaching their needs (Alaimo, 2020). However, the pandemic has led the general global situation to change the people attitude and way of behaving due to the new legislation, which showed a significant change in the people's trust, way of integrating and social awareness.

## **2.5. Case of Sweden**

### **2.5.1 Covid-19 Restrictions in Sweden**

Ludvigsson (2020) referred to the Swedish Constitution since 1974 that "Swedish citizens have the right to move freely within Sweden and leave the country". Wherefore, Sweden is the country that did not enforce the lockdown on its land since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Swedish government had announced some laws that mainly rely on the people's responsibility to protect the public and limit the transmission of the virus (Ludvigsson, 2020). However, Löfgren (2020) mentioned several procedures and regulations that were implemented by the government that lead to change in the Swedish street. For instance, a limited number of people can exist indoors (i.e. store, shops, gyms) based on the area's size. Four people can gather at the same table in a restaurant. After 20:00, no alcohol is allowed to be sold, and many other regulations with no limitation for the people's freedom rather than protect the public health.

### **2.5.2 Millennials**

The fashion market is considered a significant market worldwide, which witnessed a remarkable increasement over the last two decades. The fashion market is a market that provides a high number of employment opportunities. In the fashion market, high competition exists to serve the customers' needs with the lowest prices by taking sustainability into consideration (Wang, 2019). However, this market mainly targeted by the millennials' generation. Pyöriä, et al., (2017) claimed that the most numerous generational populations in the globe are the millennials generation. In Sweden, millennials are the most active users in this market, according to Statista (2020). The majority of the millennials have a high purchasing power that makes them capable of conducting some purchase activities with high demand since they more independent (Castellini & Samoggia, 2018).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Research Philosophy

In order to establish the basic logic for this research and clarify the research design of this paper, it is essential to go through and explain the research philosophy that was employed during this study. The term research philosophy refers to how the researchers are embarking on the research when developing knowledge in a particular area of an investigation and the nature concerned with this knowledge.

Concerning ontology, there are four different ontological positions that are: realism, Internal realism, relativism, and nominalism, these four different ontological positions differ in the way they view reality. The most contradicting positions are realism and nominalism. Realism assumes that there is only one single truth for a specific phenomenon where facts exist and can be revealed to support the truth of the phenomenon. In contrast to realism, nominalism assumes that there is no truth for a particular phenomenon at all, and all facts around the phenomenon are made by human. Furthermore, Relativism assumes that truth is plural, and there are many truths. What is true can vary from time to time and from a place to another because the truth is related to the observants' point of view concerning the phenomenon; thus, there is no single truth. However, in relativism, a phenomenon is to be defined, experienced and previewed differently by different people. Moreover, Internal realism assumes that the truth exists, but it's unclear in meaning, and facts are concrete but are not reached directly.

In terms of philosophical underpinning, the pragmatism philosophy allows the researchers to reach appropriately sufficient data to achieve the research purpose. In other words, pragmatism is a philosophical movement that facilitates the process of answering the research questions and fulfilling the research purpose by providing a unique method by mixing the philosophical and methodological approaches. Pragmatism robust the research by providing the researchers with the opportunity of utilizing an appropriate method for studying and understanding the phenomena.

#### 3.2 Research Approach

“Research approaches are plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. It involves the intersection of philosophical assumptions, designs, and specific methods.”

#### 3.3. Mixed Methods

Qualitative and quantitative research approaches are the mostly common for the researchers. According to Creswell (2003) the strategy of mixed-method is barely known by the researchers, and the strategy was founded in 1959 by Campbell and Fisk. The mixed methods research was developed over time by mixing methods from the same research approach, i.e. interviews and focus groups,

qualitative methods, and kept on improving by mixing different methods, approaches, and philosophies.

Conducting mixed methods research requires a complete understanding of the both mixed methods the qualitative and the quantitative methods (Easterby-Smith, 2018). Currently, the mixed methods research provides more advantages and strength for a study than using a monomethod approach. The process of conducting mixed methods research differs depending on the studied field and the need of utilizing different methods.

### **3.4. Research Design**

“Research designs are important because they provide road maps for how to rigorously conduct studies to best meet certain objectives”.

The research design can be considered as a blueprint that guides through the research and demonstrates the decided decision for each taken stage. However, mixed-method research requires more attention and evaluation for the selection of the research design.

Accordingly, the research design of this study clarifies the topic of the research and provide a holistic view of the progress of conducting this research. The process of determining the research purpose and the interface with the empirical data are addressed in the design of the research to facilitate the progress of fulfilling the research purpose.

The determined research design is the exploratory design since the purpose of the research is to explore a phenomenon. The research design will be separated into two different phases. Additionally, this research’s aim is to come with valuable information that can be utilized for academic and professional purposes. Therefore, the first phase will be the qualitative method that will support and facilitate the process of establishing and identifying new valuable variables for the second quantitative phase to improve the research’s outcomes.

In the first phase, the qualitative data collected by focus group interviews will be analysed according to the qualitative data analysis method. In the qualitative data analysis, the authors will structure the collected data in a proper sequence, transcribe the conversation of the focus groups and organize the materials. Categorization for the common data will be created in order to facilitate the coding process that will be approached to demonstrate the data in a suitable way for interpretation. The process of analysing the qualitative data will follow the process of collecting the data. Along with the coding process will proceed and the authors will thoroughly describe the data based on determined themes that clarify the valuable findings of the operated discussions. This will declare the final qualitative outcomes that provide value for the research and support the development of the quantitative data

(second phase) with new variables and information that can enhance the general results of the research and efficiently achieve the purpose of the study.

Subsequently, following the development phase, the quantitative data analysis will commence following the quantitative data collection in order to gain sufficient information and results that effectively satisfy the aim.

The second phase stages will begin by identifying and summarizing the received data from the conducted developed surveys (quantitative data collection) to illustrate the sample size of the participants. Thereupon, the quantitative phase analysis in this research is descriptive, wherefore it will be analysed to emphasize objective measurements with numerical input. Interpretation of the quantitative data will be attained by different methods to identify evidential data to participate in serving the purpose of exploring a phenomenon in this research.

Finally, the quantitative outcomes will be interpreted in a qualitative context in order to assist the first phase outcomes (qualitative outcomes). Qualifying the quantitative findings will be conducted to facilitate the process of exploring the studied phenomena and generalizing the qualitative outcomes with observing the most appropriate outcome for the study.

### **3.6. Research Quality**

A framework was developed in order to assess the quality of mixed methods research. The developed framework called “bespoke quality framework for mixed methods research”. The framework stages together assess the quality of the research comprehensively. In this research, the authors selected the “bespoke” quality framework as a tool to assess the quality of this paper.

Starting with the first Planning stage, in this research the construction of the study, research aim and design was located based on a critical literature review. The purpose of using the selected mixed-method approach was clarified, and a proper argumentation was provided. In the method chapter, an in-depth explanation was provided about the selected philosophy, research design, data collection methods, and the mixed analysis. Lastly, the research was conducted with the availability of sufficient time and resources.

### **3.7. Ethical considerations**

While conducting a research, different ethical issues can arise that are considered crucial for the researchers to focus on through the entire researching process (Easterby-Smith, 2018). Therefore, in this research, the authors ensured that the voluntary interviewees in the focus groups have received and got informed verbally with all the ethical codes and principles of this study. The

voluntary participants in the conducted survey had to read and agree on the ethical principles on the cover page to start answering the survey.

The ethical considerations in this study were according to Bell and Bryman, 2007 as shown below:

- Making sure that no kind of harm can touch the participants
- The participants' dignity and point of view is respected
- The participants agree on participating voluntarily
- The participants' privacy is protected
- The provided data are confidential and used for research purpose only
- The participants' identity will stay anonymous

Moreover, the authors in this research worked according to ethical principle for protecting the integrity of the research according to Bell and Bryman, 2007

- The purpose of the research presented for the participant with no deception
- The communication about the research done with a high level of honesty and transparency
- The findings and provided data in this research are true with no misleading or false reporting.

## **4. Data Collection Methods**

### **4.1. Focus Group**

Focus group is a valuable method that assists the research in providing an insight understanding on how a group of individuals react to a particular topic, as it will also enable the individuals to express their points of views and to share their experiences regarding the topic under study (Easterby-Smith, 2018). However, the focus groups method is well known in behavioural and psychological studies. Concurrently, there has been a growing interest in using focus groups in organisational and managerial research where marketing studies is not an exception.

There are several advantages of the focus group method. It is a unique opportunity to collect intensive data from the interaction of the interviewees. This method assists the researchers in deeply understanding the area under study and identify potential gaps and hypotheses, not to mention that focus groups play a significant role in accelerating the process of research due to the massive amount of data that is gathered.

However, Easterby-Smith, et al., (2018) highlights that the quality of focus groups is totally based on the discussion between the individuals. Therefore, it can be difficult for the researchers to moderate the discussion if the group participants are not willing to share their experience or opinion. Nevertheless, the major challenge for the moderator of a focus group is to create a comfortable environment where everyone can participate and express (her/him) self freely.

#### **4.1.1 Formulation of Semi-structured Questions**

For the best utilization of the focus groups sessions, semi-structured interview questions have been developed. Before the focus groups sessions take place, the authors have developed a set of questions (appendix 1). The questions are mainly open-ended question with an exploratory nature that would assist in digging deep into the topic. However, the open-ended questions provide the researchers with the opportunity of creating a discussion environment among the members of a focus group (Freitas, 1998). Additionally, focus groups could have different types of questions depending on the nature and the design of the session. However, a typical number of a focus group question could be around twelve questions classified in different categories.

Two sets of questions were developed, first a primary set of questions which consists of eleven questions (see appendix 1), second, a secondary set of questions which consists of ten questions (see appendix 2). The primary and secondary questions are described as the following:

#### **1. The primary questions consist of two categories:**

**Introductory questions**, this category consists of five questions that are warming up questions. This category aims to set the tone for the focus group and introduce the topic to the participants.

**Key questions**, this category consists of six open-ended questions. These questions are the main questions that would plot the study's outcomes; however, these questions are the focal of the sessions that would create the discussion among the participants.

## 2. The secondary questions are categorized into three categories:

**Transitions questions**, this category consists of seven semi-formulated questions that are modified during the discussion. These questions aim to turn back the discussion towards

the key questions. These questions are also used to dig deeper into an idea under discussion.

**Ending questions**, this category consists of two questions. These questions aim to close the discussion. Nevertheless, these questions allow the participants to comment or add on a specific part of the discussion.

**Final question**, is a single question that aims to check if the participants have any recommendations concerning the topic or any advice for improvement.

### 4.1.2 Pilot Testing

The pilot session was executed with one moderator, one note-taker and two additional participants from the same target population as the actual participants. The pilot session assisted the researchers in reconstructing the questions and eliminating the unnecessary questions that were overlapping. The questions were shaped and became more discussion opening questions.

### 4.1.3 Sampling and Selection of Participants

In general, what distinguished focus group from group interview is that focus group is formed by researchers, not by nature. However, many studies have addressed that in order to conclude research, a set of six to eight focus groups are required. In contrast, other studies have shown that outcomes can be generalized with four focus groups if they provide a saturation in data.

### 4.1.4 The Execution of Focus Groups

Concerning the execution, all the sessions were recorded and were led by the two researchers. The first researcher took the moderator role by asking the questions and redirecting the discussion whenever required, while the other researcher took the role of note-taker and was taking notes and assisting in redirecting the discussion. However, both

the moderator and the note taker contributed to asking follow-up questions during all the sessions.

### 4.1.5 Analysis of Focus Group Records (Classical Content Analysis Method)

The transcription and analyses of the data generated by focus groups sessions is a time-consuming effort. However, 1 hour of a focus group audio recording can require around 5-6 hours to transcript, as it would result in many pages of transcripts. Moreover, Classical content analysis is one of the techniques that are used in qualitative data analysis and could be applied in analysing focus groups data. The transcripts are divided into smaller chunks of data in the first phases, and then codes are attached to each chunk. In the second phase, the codes are grouped basing on their similarities.

## 4.2. Questionnaire Survey

Surveys are considered a type of interviews; however, in studies that mainly conduct qualitative data, surveys with questionnaires are commonly used to complement the qualitative data conducted by the other methods.

Furthermore, according to Saunders, et al., (2007), in mixed methods studies, after the in-depth qualitative data have been gathered through other qualitative methods at the first phase of the study, the study can have a second data collection phase where the survey would be a beneficial method. However, in such studies, the survey is conducted to determine if the information gathered by the other qualitative methods could be generalized to a certain predefined population.

Moreover, a questionnaire survey is recognized as a time-efficient method for collecting data, and the data generated by surveys is easily administrated comparing with the other data collection methods.

#### **4.2.1 Formulation of Questionnaire**

After analysing the data from focus groups, a questionnaire survey was developed basing on the analysed focus group output. The aim of the survey is to complement the data that have been gathered from the focus groups and to determine if the factors identified through the focus group can be generalized to the Swedish millennials or not.

##### **1. General questions.**

This category consists of three questions. These questions are of multiple choices questions where the participant can choose only one option. These questions are concerned with the participants' background, age, region, and if the participants have lived in Sweden before the outbreak of Covid-19.

##### **2. Questions related to shopping/buying from stores in-person**

In this category, four multiple choices are provided. All these questions are only concerned with offline stores. All these questions are totally based on the factors that have been identified from the focus group. These questions are all multiple-choice questions. In three of the questions, the participants can select several options as the participants are enabled to add additional options -free text-, while the fourth question is a multiple-choice question where only one option could be selected.

##### **3. Questions related to shopping/buying online**

This category has the same structure as the previous category. The only difference is that this category is concerned with shopping/buying from online stores

##### **4. Questions concerned with the migration from offline to online stores**

This category has three multiple-choice questions concerned with the role of Covid-19 in switching the participants' behaviour towards online channels and the participants' expectation of a future with fewer offline stores.

#### **4.2.2 Sampling and Execution of the Survey**

According to Saunders, et al., (2012), when conducting a survey, the survey cannot be distributed to the entire population concerned with the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the survey will be only distributed to a sample set of the targeted population, and later the findings could be generalized over the

entire target population. Furthermore, the target population is a group of individuals that the research is aiming to study and plot a conclusion basing on their responses.

Moreover, when the researchers are selecting the participants' samples, different approaches could be implemented. In this study, a combination of approaches in targeting the participants of the survey was followed. The approaches are self-selection sampling, convincing sampling, and snowball sampling. Convincing sampling is concerned with the pre-stated criteria of the participants that researchers have identified criteria such as geographical availability, availability at a certain range of time, and the willingness to participate. At the same time, self-selecting sampling occurs when researchers enable the participants to choose to take part in the data collection process freely. However, snowball sampling is when the initial respondents provide sub sequential respondents to the data collection process.

### **4.2.3 Analysis of Survey Results**

When the survey was closed for additional responses on the 18th of May, the total number of participants were 123 participants. After that, the collected data went through 4 phases of filtering and analysing.

#### **1. The filtering phases**

Using the filtering tools at Qualtrics platform, the responses were filtered according to the following diminutions: (1) the uncompleted answers, (2) the responses for participants who did not live in Sweden before the year 2019, (3) the participants who are out of the millennials age were excluded. After these filters were applied, the resulted number of relevant responses became 94 responses.

#### **2. Familiarizing phase**

In this phase, the researchers spent time reading through the generated data of the 94 responses and were going back and forth between the generated data from the survey and the results of the focus groups.

#### **3. Visualizing phase**

In this phase, the generated data from the survey was gathered in tables using the reporting tools at Qualtrics platform.

## **5. Empirical Data**

### **5.1. Results from Focus Groups**

In this part, the qualitative empirical data collected by the focus group interviews are presented. The data are presented, interpreted and divided into several sections according to the questions in the appendix 1. The presenting of the data based on two phases the written expansion and the tables. The tables provide an overall view with a scale from “0” to “5” for each group that elucidates the responses of the interviewees from each group. However, zero “0” in the cells means that none of the interviewees mentioned or agreed on the selected variable. At the same time, from “1” to “5” represent the number of the interviewees in each group that has addressed or agreed on the selected variables.

#### **5.1.1 General motivations and deterrents for online shopping**

This section presents the general factors concerned with the customers' selection for online stores. More precisely, factors in this section are applicable for the periods before and after the outbreaks of Covid-19.

##### **General motivations for shopping at online stores**

However, 12 interviewees have mentioned that what motivates them the most for shopping online is that it is easy to search the products and compare the products in many dimensions such as prices and features. Additionally, 11 have confirmed that online stores provide them with the ability to search products according to specific preferences that are difficult to be searched at offline stores. Moreover, 11 have stated that online stores provide a wider variety of options than offline stores. However, only 8 have mentioned time and effort saving in online shopping, and 5 mentioned that marketing campaigns attract them for shopping online.

##### **General motivations for buying online**

Furthermore, 11 of the interviewees have stated that what motivates them the most to make a purchase from online stores is the unavailability of certain products at the surrounded physical stores or the inexistence of a specific brand in the region where they live.

#### **5.1.2 General motivations and deterrents for offline stores**

This section presents the general factors concerned with the customers' selection for offline stores. More precisely, factors in this section are applicable for the periods before and after the outbreaks of Covid-19.

However, 16 interviewees have stated that their first motive to go shopping at physical stores is to have entertainment and to socialize with people at shopping malls/stores. While 12 interviewees mentioned that they go to physical stores to see the items face to face and check the quality and the size.

### **General motivations for buying at offline stores**

All the interviewee stated that urgent and immediate needs are the significant motive that drive them to make a purchase from a physical store. However, 16 interviewees have confirmed that attractive sales and appealing promotions are what motivated them to pull the trigger to purchase at a physical store. Furthermore, 5 interviewees stated that loyalty to a specific brand or stores is considered as a motive for them to make the purchase.

#### **5.1.4 Post-Covid Expectations**

This section is mainly concerned with the future after Covid-19. This section conducts the expectations related to the change in the customer behaviour after the restrictions of Covid-19 are over.

#### **Orientations between online/offline stores (before COVID19)**

When the interviewees were asked to identify if they were mostly online or offline shoppers before Covid-19, 12 of the interviewees have identified that they were mostly offline shoppers, 3 have said that they were more oriented towards online shopping, while 5 said that they were neutral in between, or could not identify.

### **5.2. Survey Results**

In this part, the data collected from the survey are presented, the data are presented and interpreted into several sections according to the categorization of the survey questionnaires.

#### **5.2.1 Concerning Shopping/Buying from Stores In-person**

##### **Q5 - What motivates you for shopping at offline store in-person?**

The participants responded to what motivates them for shopping at offline stores as the following: (58) selected that they go shopping at offline stores to try, touch, and see the product, (39) selected that it's a social activity to meet with friends, (17) selected that it is a an entertainment activity, (9) selected that shopping offline is a stress relive activity, (7) selected Others, some of the interesting comments was “ Not dying hungry maybe?! Other than food, everything i order it online”.

##### **Q6 - What influence you to buy at stores- in person?**

The participants responded to what influence them for buying at offline stores like the following: (62) responded that they are buying at offline stores for urgent and immediate needs, (33) responded attractive promotions, (15) responded brand loyalty, (4) responded Others, some of the interesting comments was “The experience of purchasing at store makes me happy”.

**Q7 - What discourage you from shopping/buying products at stores- in person?**

The participants responded to what discourages them from shopping/buying at offline stores as the following: (32) responded that it is an individual social responsibility, (30) responded it's time consuming activity, (22) responded it is less entertainment due to Covid-19 restrictions, (21) responded low variety, (13) responded I live in a small town, or far from shopping stores, (6) responded Others, some of the interesting comments was "Shop assistant are too annoying sometimes, going in into my change room and ask I don't need your help, i want privacy and I don't want to interact with anyone".

**5.2.2 Concerning Shopping/Buying Online****Q9 - What motivates you for shopping at online store?**

The participants responded to what motivates them for shopping at online stores like the following: (63) responded that it is Easy to search and compare products online, (52) responded Wider variety, (45) responded it is saving time and effort, (30) responded that online shopping provides. The ability to search products according to specific preferences, (5) responded Others, three of these who selected others mentioned discounts codes as a motive factor.

**Q10 - What influence you to buy at online stores?**

The participants responded to what influence them for buying at online stores like the following: (44) responded that online stores Provide cheaper options than physical stores, (37) responded to the Inexistence of specific brands/producers at nearby physical stores, (31) responded that Online stores are just an alternative for physical stores, (27) selected Changing in lifestyle due to Covid-19, (21) responded Online campaigns, (9) responded More time to try products home, (2) responded Others without writing any feedback.

**Q11 - What discourage you from shopping/buying at online stores?**

The participants responded to what discourages them from shopping/buying at offline stores as the following: (66) responded that Inability to touch, try, and check the product, (27) responded Long delivery time, (23) responded Complex process to pick up ant return, (12) responded it is Less entertaining comparing to shopping offline, (9) responded Others, four of these who chose Others addressed in the text that nothing would discourage them from shopping/buying online, one had addressed return payment, while the rest of the (9) did not address anything.

### 5.2.3 Concerning the Migration from Offline to Online Stores

#### **Q13 - Do you think that Covid-19 have encouraged you to increase your purchases online?**

When the participants were asked to choose between four options concerned with the role of Covid-19 in encouraging them to purchase online, (37) participants with an approximate percentage of (39%) answered that Nothing changed, they are online purchasers even before Covid-19, (34) participants with an approximate percentage of (36%) answered Yes, today they are more oriented towards purchasing online due to Covid-19, (21) participants with an approximate percentage of (22%) answered No, they are mainly purchasing from physical stores before and after the outbreak of Covid-19, (2) participants with an approximate percentage of (2%) answered No, before Covid-19 they used to purchase mainly from online stores, but now they are mainly purchasing from physical stores.

#### **Q14 - When the restrictions of Covid-19 are over, to what extent will your shopping/purchases be shifted back towards physical stores?**

When the participants were asked about their expectations concerning shifting back their purchases to physical stores after the restrictions of Covid-19 are over, (14%) of the participants answered that they would Not at all shift back to physical stores, while (6%) answered that they would Ultimately shift back towards physical stores, the rest (80%) of the participants were in between Not at all and Ultimate.

#### **Q15 - What are your expectations about a future with fewer physical stores and shopping centres?**

The participants responded to the expectations of a future with fewer physical stores as the following: (38) responded that The purchases of urgent and immediate needs will be affected, (38) responded that The fun part of shopping process will be lost, (37) responded that the Unemployment rate will be increased, (28) responded that it would be Lower satisfaction, (26) responded that there would be Reduction in social skills, (19) responded that there would be Reduction in unnecessary purchases, (4) responded Others without providing any additional ideas.

## **6. Analysis**

### **6.1. Chang in Orientation Between Online and Offline Stores**

The customers shifted toward digital online channels in most of their needs and wants in the stages of the high epidemic spread. Moreover, other research mentioned the increase in online retail channels usage by more customers and how people adopted such channels to serve their needs. The empirical results have revealed that the customers' orientations towards online stores have significantly increased after the outbreak of Covid-19, and more individuals have shifted their purchasing towards online stores.

The change of the interviewees' orientations between online and offline purchasing, both before and after the outbreak of Covid-19. When the data in table 27 were compared, it was found that there has been a shift in the interviewees' orientations from offline purchasing towards online purchasing. On the first hand, the results show that there is a vast reduction in the number of interviewees who were Mostly offline purchasers before Covid-19. In numbers, the interviewees who identified themselves as Mostly offline purchasers before Covid-19 are (12). In contrast, only (6) have identified themselves as offline purchasers after the outbreak of Covid-19. These numbers show a reduction by (6) interviewees that have shifted from offline stores.

## **6.2. Factors Influencing Customer Buying Behaviour**

This part is concerned with the identified and tested factors that influence the customers in selecting between online and offline stores. The factors at points (6.2.1) and (6.2.2) were divided into internal and external influences. Internal influences vary between the different individuals, and these factors are concerned with the individuals' culture, personal aspects, and customer loyalty.

### **6.2.1 Factors Influencing Offline Purchasing**

#### **Internal factors**

The process of purchasing and shopping is an entertaining activity that provides customers with satisfaction. It has been identified empirically that customers are considering shopping journeys as an entertaining activity. However, regardless of whether the customers need to buy or not, they consider shopping journeys as an entertainment activity to socialize with the surrounding environment. From the focus groups, (16) interviewees have identified that shopping at offline stores is an entertaining activity.

#### **Stress reveal activity**

Additionally, another significant factor has been discovered empirically that shopping is a stress relive activity for some individuals. In the focus groups, (2) interviewees have addressed this factor, while in the survey (9), participants responded that they see shopping as a stress relive activity. This factor has been addressed in the study (2016) that customers can decide to go shopping or purchase in order to boost the mood.

### **6.2.2 Factors Influencing Online Purchasing**

#### **Internal factors**

The empirical results have identified that customers tend to purchase online because purchasing online saves their time and effort. On the first hand, in the focus groups (8), interviewees have addressed that buying online saves their time and effort, while (45) participants have confirmed this factor in the survey. On the other hand, the survey results have revealed that what might deter people from shopping/buying offline that it is a time and effort consuming activity, (7) interviewees have addressed this point in the focus groups, while (30) participants have confirmed this point in the survey. Thus, purchasing online is considered to be

time and effort saving comparing to offline purchasing. It has supported this argument that some customers see offline shopping as a time-wasting activity. Therefore, customers might prefer online stores that seem to be more convenient for them in terms of time-saving.

### **External factors**

The empirical results have revealed that customer might prefer online stores because they can easily search and compare products. (12) of the focus groups interviewees have addressed this factor, while this factor has been approved by (63) participants in the survey. Additionally, it has also been addressed that online stores enable the customers to easily search for products with specific preferences such as sustainable material, a specific brand, or specific criteria.

### **6.2.3 Covid-related Factors**

They claimed that the pandemic and the new generated regulations have led to a change in people's social awareness and way of integrating. The empirical results have revealed a significantly unique factor which concerned with the Individual social responsibility. This factor refers that people got reduced their visits to offline stores to prevent themselves and society from the risk of Covid-19. Concerning this point, (6) interviewees of the focus groups have addressed this point, and (32) of the survey participants have confirmed. Additionally, another factor concerned with Individual social responsibility have been addressed, (7) of the focus groups interviewees have mentioned that being in contact with other individuals from Covid-19 high-risk groups would deter them from shopping/buying at offline stores. This factor has been confirmed by (6) of the survey participants.

The empirical results have revealed that people have got lower entertainment level in offline stores due to the restrictions of Covid-19. This resulted in deterring them from shopping/buying at offline stores. (13) of the focus groups interviewees have addressed this point and been confirmed by (22) of the survey participants. Additionally, the empirical results have also revealed that some individuals consider online stores just an alternative option to offline stores. (8) of the focus groups interviewees have addressed this point, while (31) of the survey participants have confirmed this point. This is in line with previous research by which showed that people were affected by Covid-19 in their entertaining and purchasing behaviour.

## **7. Conceptual Model**

### **7.1. Proposed Conceptual Model**

The conceptual model shown in figure 4 was the backbone that has assisted the authors during this study, “the conceptual framework is the foundation on which the entire research project is based on the theoretical framework and the empirical results from both the focus groups and the survey, this paper proposes a conceptual model concerned with the factors that influence customer buying behaviour in selecting between online and offline stores.

The proposed concept has identified, tested, and developed three categories of factors that influencing customer buying behaviour; the categories are described as the following:

#### **Offline influences:**

These factors motivate the individuals to select the offline channels when the individuals are (pre, during, and post) purchasing fashion products.

#### **Online influences:**

These factors motivate the individuals to select the online channels when the individuals are (pre, during, and post) purchasing fashion products. Covid-related factors: refers to the factors concerned with the restrictions of the outbreak of Covid-19 and have contributed to encouraging or discouraging the individuals in selecting between the online and offline channels.

### **7.2. Discussion of the Conceptual Model**

On the first hand, the proposed factors have been frequently identified by previous studies concerned with the influential factors on customer buying behaviour however, the combined findings of the previous studies constructed the massive cornerstones that the analysis of the empirical results have based on.

On the other hand, empirically speaking, the proposed factors concerned with the influential factors on customer buying behaviour have been addressed and tested by two empirical methods “focus groups and survey”. In the first phase, the focus groups have addressed the factors, wherein in the second phase, statements from survey results confirm the addressed factors. In this research the authors determined the mixed methods strategy as a method to conduct this research to gain a complete picture of the studied phenomena and increase the reliability of the research.

Furthermore, the process of conducting a mixed methods research assist the researchers in fulfilling the research purpose and figuring a solution for the research problem (Easterby-Smith, 2018). Nonetheless, the purpose of the research would be thoroughly fulfilled by combining the qualitative method that will provide the research with an indepth understanding of the studied phenomena and the quantitative method that will ensure a large quantity sample to complete the sufficient research results.

However, in the proposed conceptual model, the addressed factors in the focus groups are confirmed by the survey results using two different approaches: The first approach refers to confirm an addressed factor directly; this was done by using one or several statements from the survey that directly approve the identified

factor. For example, it has been identified in the focus groups that purchasing offline is an Entertaining activity for some individuals, two statements from the survey have directly confirmed this factor. The first statement, Shopping is a social activity as individuals go shopping for entertainment and having good times with friends, this statement was confirmed by (39) participants. While the second statement is that individuals Mostly go shopping alone for entertainment and see people around them, (17) participants confirmed this statement.

The second approach is partially similar to the first approach in term of confirming the factors with direct statements; however, in this approach, the addressed factors are also supported by statements that would confirm the factors indirectly. The indirect confirmation of an addressed factor is done by using statements that exile a factor on the opposite extreme of the addressed factor, resulting in confirming the addressed factor indirectly. For example, in focus groups, it was addressed that individuals might prefer purchasing offline because they can Experience the product at offline stores. This factor was confirmed directly by (58) participants who addressed their motive for shopping offline is to see, touch, and check the products. In contrast, the factor was confirmed indirectly by (66) of the participants who responded that Inability to touch and check the product online deters them from buying online.

## **8. Conclusion and Discussion**

### **8.1. Conclusion**

To conclude, this study is concerned to deepen the knowledge about the change in customer behaviour brought by the outbreak of Covid-19 in the retailing sector. This study explores and examine the role of Covid-19 in influencing the selection process between online and offline channels. The focus of this study is limited to the Swedish millennials' buying behaviour for purchasing fashion products in regard to the selection between online and offline stores. More precisely, the aim of this study is to identify and test new behavioural patterns that would influence the Swedish millennials in selecting between online and offline stores for shopping and buying fashion products.

In line with the social restriction dictated by the pandemic of Covid-19, the changes in customer buying behaviour have been studied on samples from the identified population. This study was conducted from the customers' side by having focus groups, and a webbased survey. (4) focus groups sessions were conducted with a total number of (20) interviewees, where the relevant responses of (94) participants have been analysed from a web-based survey. However, the study has revealed two significant findings and contributed to propose a conceptual model. The fruitful results of this study are presented in the following headlines:

**The first finding: there is a vast customers' migration towards online stores**

It has been confirmed empirically that a vast segment of the study's population has shifted their purchases towards online channels. The survey's results illustrate that (36%) of the previous offline purchasers have shifted towards purchasing online after the outbreak of Covid-19, and today, almost (75%) of the survey's population are oriented towards purchasing fashion products online.

**The second finding: There are new behavioural patterns related to Covid-19 that are influencing the customer buying behaviour**

This study has addressed new factors related to Covid-19 restrictions that are influencing customer buying behaviour. The Covid-related factors presented in this study are concerned with the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. These factors significantly contribute to encouraging or discouraging the individuals in selecting between the online and offline channels. The addressed Covid-related factors in this study are:

**Individual social responsibility,**

It has been confirmed in the study that individuals might choose to purchase online to prevent themselves and the society from the risk of Covid-19 or because they are in contact with other individuals from the high-risk groups.

**Change in lifestyle**

It has been confirmed that changes in lifestyle due to Covid-19 (i.e. today, people are spending more time home, working, studying, and socializing online) have resulted that individuals started to consider purchasing online more than before.

**Less entertainment due to Covid-19 restrictions**

It has been confirmed in the study that offline purchasing is considered an entertaining activity for the vast majority of the study's population. However, the empirical results have revealed that individuals have got lower entertainment level in offline stores due to the restrictions of Covid-19, this resulted in deterring them from shopping/buying at offline stores.

**8.2. Discussion****8.2.1 Theoretical Implications**

This paper is of an exploratory and constructive nature since the purpose of the paper is to provide a deeper understanding of the change of customer buying behaviour during the pandemic of Covid-19. However, the paper has delivered a set of new behavioural patterns that would expand the theoretical knowledge regarding the current customer buying behaviour. These new behavioural patterns have been identified and confirmed through

this study. Moreover, the paper has proposed a conceptual model concerned with the factors influencing customer buying behaviour in selecting between online and offline fashion stores. All the elements of the proposed concept have been tested and confirmed during this study.

### **8.2.2 Practical Implication**

As the purpose of this study is to deepen the knowledge about the change in customer buying behaviour brought by Covid-19 on the retailing sector. The focus of this study is limited to the Swedish millennials' buying behaviour for fashion products in regard to the selection between online and offline stores.

The findings of this paper have revealed that there is a vast migration of customers towards purchasing online, as the study results have shown that (36%) of the survey's population have switched their purchases after the outbreak of Covid-19 towards online channels. However, almost (75%) of the survey's population are today oriented towards purchasing fashion products online.

These findings will be valuable for firms within the fashion retailing industry and will assist fashion retailers in forecasting the expected demands on their channels. Additionally, the findings will contribute to assisting the fashion retailers in allocating their resources between the different online/offline channels. Not to mention that understanding the customer buying behaviour will assist the retailers in gaining competitive advantages as it would enable the retailers to respond to the changes in the market wisely.

### **8.2.3 Limitations**

The major factor that have limited the findings of this study was the limited number of participants in the survey, the total number of the relevant survey responses are (94). The distribution of the survey was limited to the authors' connections and their network. If the survey could have been distributed to cover the Swedish map, a more comprehensive range of participants would have provided higher accurate data. However, it was not possible to outsource the survey distribution to survey providers due to the limited financial resources.

### **8.2.4 Future Studies**

The study has successfully managed to explore the change of the Swedish millennials buying behaviour caused by the pandemic of Covid-19. A conceptual model was proposed in this study, as the study has revealed new Covid-related behavioural patterns influencing the selection process between online and offline stores. However, further studies are recommended to intensively test and develop the Covid-related factors to discover if there are any additional factors and to conduct if these factors can be generalized to cover the Swedish residence. However, further studies are recommended to study the expected customer buying behaviour after the restrictions of Covid-19 are over.

Additionally, it has been noticed during this study that the overall fashion consumption of the study samples has been reduced due to the migration towards online channels. The empirical results of this study have addressed that most of the customers' online purchases for fashion products are based on actual needs. In contrast, offline purchases are mainly based on the appeal and attractions of the products. Therefore, it is recommended for further studies to conduct the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on the customer buying behaviour in term of reducing the consumption of fashion products and reducing the unnecessary purchases of fashion products.

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## 10. Appendix

### 10.1. Appendix

The primary focus groups questions

#### A. Warmup questions

These questions are open-ended questions aimed at setting the tone for the focus group. 1. Today's topic is concerned with the role of Covid-19 in accelerating the switch of purchasing behaviour from physical stores to online stores. What are your general feelings about the topic?

2. Are you familiar with the social distancing restrictions of Covid-19 on the shopping stores? Is there anything you would like to know more about?

3. Are you familiar with the following concepts: purchasing behaviour, online stores, and physical stores? Is there anything you would like to know more about it?

4. When talking about online stores, what brand or products' categories come to your mind?

5. When talking about physical stores, what brands or products' categories come to your mind?

#### B. Before Covid-19

6. A couple of years before Covid-19, what were your motives to use online stores? And what were your motives go to physical stores? why? (purchase, browse, price, entertainment, loyalty, location, product verity, flexibility, show room, experience, check the quality, no fright costs, other)

#### B. During Covid-19

7. What factors that has or would discourage you from purchasing from physical stores? And what factors that has or would make you more encouraged to purchase online?

8. From your experience, do you think that Covid-19 pulled the trigger to shift or encourage your purchasing behaviour towards the online stores? How has your purchasing behaviour changed over the period of Covid-19?

#### D. The future after Covid-19

9. When Covid-19 is over, do you think that your purchasing behaviour will be shifted back towards the physical stores?

10. When you hear about the migration from physical stores to online stores, what words, phrases, or ideas come to your mind?

11. What are your expectations about a future free of physical stores? Any significant features will be missed?

### 10.2. Appendix

The secondary focus group questions

#### A. Probing (transition) questions

- Could you tell us more about your purchasing behaviour for example: when? How? How often do you use to make online/physical purchases?
- What are the products, products categories that you often used to buy online? - You said that you would prefer to choose online/physical stores over the physical/online stores, why is that?
- Will you please clarify why your usage of online/physical stores has declined/increased during Covid-19?
- Will you please explain why you have those expectations when purchasing from online/physical stores?
- You mentioned X as an important feature of Online/Physical stores, what about Y and Z features in the Physical/Online stores?
- We discussed the online/physical stores at length, but we didn't hear allot about physical/online stores. Any other thoughts on physical/online stores?

**B. Ending questions**

- Is there any specific point would you like to highlight from this discussion to add or expand on?
- Are there any additional opinion, experience, idea you would love to add to the conversation about this topic?

**C. Final questions**

- Do you feel that there are other important dimensions about the topic that has not been addressed?

**10.3. Appendix****The developed questionnaire surveys**

1. This survey is concerned with a study on the role of Covid-19 in changing the customer buying behaviour towards online stores, which means, today we -the customers- are more oriented to purchase online than what we used to be before Covid-19. Participation in this survey is voluntary and completely anonymous. If you decide to participate you will be given a set of questions which you will be answering as truthfully as possible. The data generated from this survey will be analysed and used by the authors of this research paper. However, the data will be stored safely on a secure university server which is unavailable to the public. Please note:- That this survey is only limited to the fashion products such as: clothing, footwear, and accessories. Therefore, please think about your purchases for fashion products when you are answering this survey.

Q2 What is your age?

- 18-23 years old
- 24-39 years old
- 40-55 years old

o 55+ years old

Q3 What motivates you for shopping at store in-person?

- Shopping is a social activity, I enjoy going out with friends to malls and shopping centers
- I mostly go shopping alone for entertainment and seeing people around me
- Shopping is a stress relive activity, I go shopping whenever I have stress
- I go shopping to try, touch, and see the product
- I go shopping to get help from sales assistance -customer service-
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

Q4 What discourage you from shopping/buying products at stores- in person?

- It's less entertaining activity due to the restrictions of Covid-19
- I'm in contact/living with a high-risk group member
- It is an individual social responsibility (to prevent myself and the society from the risk of Covid-19)  Low variety (similar themes and patterns at most of the stores)
- It is an activity that consumes my time and effort
- I live in a small town, or far from shopping stores
- Others \_\_\_\_\_