Digital beauty customers and Financial resource scarcity

How does financial resource scarcity affect the beauty customers online pre-purchase journey of beauty?
Master Thesis in Business Administration
Title: Digital beauty customers and Financial resource scarcity

Authors: Natalie Lindgren
Tutor: Clarinda Rodrigues
Date: 2023-08-17


Background: In an era where technology is deeply intertwined with commerce, consumer behaviour reflects both positive and negative aspects of technology-driven interactions. As customers navigate numerous touchpoints and channels throughout their journey, the digital transformation shapes their experiences, particularly evident in the beauty industry's online pre-purchase decision processes. Amid a current cost-of-living crisis, beauty consumers are re-evaluating their spending habits.

Research problem: This research addresses the contemporary shift towards online sales, particularly in the cosmetics sector, and its influence on consumer behaviour amid economic fluctuations. Focusing on the thriving European cosmetics market and the growing online beauty product sales, the research delves into how consumers respond to financial constraints and its impact on their decision-making in the online shopping realm.

Research purpose: This research aims to delve into the relationship between economic downturns and beauty customers' spending patterns. With a focus on digital channels due to the increasing prominence of online shopping, the study will explore how financial constraints shape beauty customers' behaviour. The findings are expected to shed light on the complex interplay between financial resource scarcity and the online pre-purchase journey, potentially offering insights for beauty companies to tailor their marketing strategies to diverse financial scenarios and customers in this setting.

Research question: How does financial resource scarcity affect the beauty customers online pre-purchase journey of beauty products? RQ1.1: What are the main behavioural changes occurring in the journey when the beauty customer is experiencing financial resource scarcity?

Method: This study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach, using interviews content, analysed through thematic analysis. Grounded in interpretivism, it aims to explore how financial resource scarcity impacts beauty customers' online pre-purchase journey. Abductive reasoning guides the study, investigating surprising facts such as increased beauty consumption during economic downturns. Qualitative research is chosen to deeply understand behavior, using semi-structured interviews with purposively selected young women aged 25-30 in Sweden.

Conclusion: The findings clearly reveal that financial resource scarcity triggers a multitude of behavioural changes among beauty customers. Increased thoughtfulness, need-driven purchasing, planned behavior, awareness of trade-offs, and increased research of product information. Meanwhile, the findings also reveal barriers against adopting new behaviour within the context of financial resource scarcity.
Acknowledgements:

I would like to start by saying thank you to my supervisor, Clarinda Rodrigues, for supporting me through this process, the feedback and seminars have been of great value to make this from start to now, finish.

A thank you to all interviewees for setting of time to participate in my study and share your thought and experiences which has become the insights of this research.

A thank you to all my seminar colleagues for reading and suggesting valuable insights to make the best out of my thesis. And the learnings I have taken from you letting me read yours.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, close family and friends who has supported me these two years, especially during this chapter of the program. Thank you!

Jönköping, August 17th, 2023.

- Natalie Lindgren
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Problem discussion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research purpose</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Research question</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Delimitation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literature Review</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Digital customer journey</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Pre-purchase in the digital journey</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Digital Touchpoints in the Pre-purchase Stage</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3 Pre-purchase process of cosmetic products</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Economic downturn</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 Consumer behaviour responses and copings in time of financial resource scarcity</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Theoretical framework and Summary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Method</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Research philosophy</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Research Approach</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Research Design</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Primary data collection</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Secondary data collection</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Data analysis</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Thematic analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Research Quality</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1 Credibility</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2 Transferability</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3 Dependability and confirmability</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4 Ethical implications</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Findings</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Research purpose</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 General findings overview</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Behaviour changes</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Thoughtfulness</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Increased “need” driven purchases</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3 Planned behaviour</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.4 Trade-offs and Opportunity cost</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3 Increased time in the pre-purchase stage making research</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Barriers against change</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1 Risk</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2 Loyalty</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3 Quality</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Analysis .................................................................................................................................38

5.1 Behaviour Change ...............................................................................................................39
  5.1.1 Thoughtfulness and Mindset-Action Disconnection......................................................39
  5.1.2 Increased "Need" Driven Purchases ..............................................................................40
  5.1.3 Planned Behaviour and Trade-offs ..............................................................................40
  5.1.4 Increased Time of Information Search .........................................................................41

5.3 Barriers against adopting new behaviour of beauty consumption ..................................42
  5.3.1 Risk Aversion and Familiarity ......................................................................................42
  5.1.2 Brand Loyalty and Trust ..............................................................................................43
  5.1.3 Quality Over Price and Non-negotiable Aspects ..........................................................43
  5.1.4 Complex Consumer Behaviour ....................................................................................43

6. Discussion ..............................................................................................................................45

6.1 Theoretical Implications .....................................................................................................45

6.2 Managerial Implications .....................................................................................................46

7. Conclusion ..............................................................................................................................48

8. Limitations and Further Research ........................................................................................49

  7.1 Limitations ........................................................................................................................49

  7.2 Further research .................................................................................................................49

Reference list ..............................................................................................................................51
1. Introduction

This chapter is setting the foundation of the thesis, the chapter consisting of the background, research purpose and research question.

1.1 Background

Technology is becoming more and more ingrained in human activity, especially in commerce, customers are browsing, shopping, interacting with brands or discussing them with other users online (Kozinets et al., 2017). While there are many contradictions between technology and how it affects consumer behaviour. Most consumers see technology as fun and enjoyable where they feel more in control, productive, adaptable and more socially integrated when utilizing technology. It still, however, appears negative perceptions of technology-based interactions, they might make relationships less effective and may raise customers uncertainty, weariness, and frustration (Del Bucchia et al., 2021).

With the adoption of technology, customers encounter more touchpoints and channels to research brands and products before making a purchase. Touchpoints are described as direct or indirect interactions with businesses or their products that can take place through different channels in the customer journey (Santos et al., 2022). The customer journey is containing customer behaviour and experiences which are appearing in a sequence of awareness, familiarity, consideration, purchase and loyalty which also can be defined as phases of pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Følstad et al., 2018). The stages of the journey have in recent years become more complex due to the diffusion of technology which brought on both benefits and challenges because of the accessibility to information online as well as the increased customer-to-customer interaction (Lemon et al., 2016).

Mobile browsers, online reviews, and social media are frequently added touchpoints to the more traditional channels such as online brand and retail websites. With the digital technology diffusion, mobile devices have become particularly significant in decision-making processes. The steps in the process are no longer tied to any time or place (Santos et al., 2022). Customers use their mobile devices to search for, receive, share, and manage
information on products, companies, and retailers from any location (Rapp et al., 2015). They switch and combine channels seamlessly, from diverse platforms, sources and move between competitors during their decision-making with the help of their devices. This can result in cross-channel free-riding, jeopardising customer loyalty and profitability for businesses (Chou et al., 2016).

The technology driven customer activity is mirrored in the beauty industry, various online channels are used before making any purchase related decision (Kriauciunaite et al., 2022). Beauty products is the definition of cosmetics use of products on the human body for cleansing, beautification, enhancing attractiveness, or altering the appearance (Lewis, 1998). Cosmetics are mostly utilized for three purposes: 1) to increase personal appeal through body decorating; 2) to conceal faults; 3) to change or improve upon once looks (Milstein et al., 2001). Consuming personal care goods is a purchasing activity to satisfy ones’ desire for attractiveness and general appearance maintenance (Kim et al., 2011).

Beauty consumers regularly examine brand associated representatives and collaborations on social media channels in addition to brand website in the customer journey. They anticipate receiving expert guidance of the highest quality through the various digital channels rather than only in person, to examine product ingredients, read reviews, and select items by desired results (Kriauciunaite et al., 2022).

Despite beauty being traditionally one of the more resilient industries during economic tuning-down, the cost-of-living crisis is already causing consumers to re-evaluate their beauty and personal care purchases. Anxiety about the cost of living day-to-day is increasing, causing people to cut back on nonessential items or make swaps that deliver value on multiple levels (Varga., 2022). In the midst of the cost-of-living crisis, having the option to make smart purchasing decisions and swaps will be vital. With saving money at the forefront of their minds, shoppers are assumed to adopt a 'dupe mindset', trading their beauty staples for cheaper alternatives with comparative results (Piccioni et al., 2022).

In accordance Sarmento et al., (2018) explain that people facing scarce financial resources are more prepared to cut costs and choose less expensive options, benefit from
promotions, as a result of the increasing price sensitivity. In times of economic turndown, the risk dimension is overlooked in favour of actions that promote utility maximization and rational decision-making, such as those in the price dimension (Sarmento et al., 2018). Consumers adopt new habits in the name of economic logic in order to adjust to scarcity of resources, cut back on spending, boost saving, and exercise greater caution (Carroll et al., 1992).

1.2 Problem discussion
Multiple markets have been moving toward online sales for the past 20 years (Roggeveen et al., 2020). A significant transition from physical to online selling has been caused by the lockdown of several retail industries in 2021 and 2022 (Verhoef et al., 2022). The significant shift saw online players' growth rates skyrocket. Consumer behaviour may change more significantly as a result of these changed experiences. They desire greater convenience, a wider selection of options, and technology that is simplifying their customer journey in an online setting (Verhoef et al., 2022). According to Kuehnl et al., (2019) previous research has investigated customer journey design in the digitalized market as an important factor for practitioners, but less research is made on the digital customer journey design from a consumer perspective. Due to the increased focus on the digitalization of the customer journey and limited research of a customer perspective it is relevant to extend the research in the online customer journey.

Furthermore, in Europe, cosmetics create a thriving market, the consumption value of cosmetics and personal care goods reached more than 80 billion euros in 2021 where skincare was the most popular category reflecting a current global craze (Statista, 2022). According to an analysis of both offline and online sales, the growth in the sale of beauty items is nowadays being driven mainly by online shopping (Lee et al., 2019). The online environment is allowing consumers to access more information about beauty items through advertisements as pop-up ads, blogs, influencers, and friends on social media platforms. The online connectivity as well posed an increase of beauty trends on social media which stressed customers to view beauty items as "necessities in daily life" (Lee et al., 2019; Rapp et al., 2015). With cosmetics standing for a growing market segment driven by the online sales it is selected as the scope of research to build on the existing research of the online customer journey.
Meanwhile the research in marketing of customer journey is mainly developed in a context where the customer (1) has the opportunity to choose among their desirable products and (2) has access to resources allowing them to choose freely, limited literature is established on the customer journey where the customer is facing scarce resources to fulfil their needs and wants (Hamilton et al., 2019a). Kuehnl et al., (2019) suggest for further research to investigate and empirically test each stage of the customers' decisions journey related to resource allocation during times of financial resource scarcity. Arguing that it is essential for managers and marketers to understand customers behaviour when they are faced with conditions such as scarce resources (Kuehnl et al., 2019).

Consumer shopping pattern normally decreases during economic downturns, however observations made from the financial crises in 2008 found that women's spending on lipsticks may rise during these times a phenomenon known as the "lipstick effect" (Hill et al., 2012). Findings showed that customers had a decreased interest for most products (e.g., electronics, household items etc) during economic turn-down. The opposite was found regarding cosmetics, the cues consistently boosted women's demand for cosmetics goods which coined the phrase lipstick effect. The choice to not exclude the purchase of lipstick was found connected to the accessible luxury item that still can be afforded without too many compromises (Hill et al., 2012).

The future is predicted to continue being characterized of the boom-bust waves (Griskevicius et al., 2013), it is therefore essential that marketers understand when their customers are facing any kind of scarcity connected to the decision-making process (Hamilton et al., 2019a). Marketers would be advised to use other strategies when marketing to customers who are suffering financial shortages, such as e.g., highlighting the benefits of the product to the target. Also, be aware of how customers react to scarcity to better communicate and predict how customers will prioritize their purchases (Hamilton et al., 2019a).

Beauty products being considered everyday necessities, together with findings of the lipstick effect, in addition to the growth of the beauty market, it is assumed that the
consumption of beauty products is not decreasing during economic turndown. It is however, assumed that customers will adopt new behaviours, such as adopt a 'dupe mindset', or just be more thoughtful of their spendings on beauty items. Therefore, this thesis will aim to delve deeper into it.

1.3 Research purpose

Previous research has found that beauty customers may increase their spending on cosmetics during economic downturns. This study aims to build on this knowledge by exploring more about how financial resource scarcity affects the beauty customers behaviour during their pre-purchase journey of beauty products. Given the rise of online shopping and e-commerce, this research will take a digital approach and limit the focus to online channels as well as the pre-purchase phase of the customer journey of beauty products.

By using an abductive and qualitative approach, the study will investigate behaviours that beauty customers employ to cope with financial resource scarcity during their online pre-purchase journey. And, identify the most significant changes that influence the online pre-purchase journey. The findings of this research will contribute to a better understanding of the complex relationship between financial resource scarcity and the online pre-purchase journey of beauty together with the customers behaviour. Meanwhile it might provide valuable insights for beauty companies to develop more effective marketing strategies that cater to the needs of beauty customers with different levels of financial resources.
1.4 Research question

To help guide the research the following research question has been developed,

RQ1: How does financial resource scarcity affect the beauty customers online pre-purchase journey of beauty products?

To help answer the main research question additional sub-question has been added:

RQ1.1: What are the main behavioural changes occurring in the journey when the beauty customer is experiencing financial resource scarcity?

1.5 Delimitation

The study is set around a number of limitations, including a focus on the cosmetics industry, particularly beauty products such as make-up, skin-, body-, and hair care. The research primarily examines the pre-purchase stage of the customer journey through an online approach. The target audience is limited to female consumers, aged 25-30, has a beauty interest and live in Sweden. The author has chosen to ensure a homogenous sample of financially independent individuals affected by the increased cost of living. Control questions were asked to confirm the participants' financial situation, as the objective of the research is to investigate financial resource scarcity. These limitations aim to maintain focus on the research objectives.
2. Literature Review

The following chapter is summarizing some of the previous literature within the digital customer journey, the pre purchase journey of beauty products, together with financial scarcity and its effect on customer behaviour. The literature is serving as a foundation for analysing and answering the research question.

Approach to Literature Review

The literature review has been developed from secondary data mainly discovered and collected from Science Direct and Scopus. The search was made with keywords connected to the thesis topic starting broad with “Digital/online customer journey”, where the search later was specified with related keywords to narrow the search e.g., “intention”, ”pre-purchase”, “customer behaviour”, “financial constraint” “economic turndown” and “scarcity”. Due to the limited research in financial resource scarcity, articles discussing the topic was reviewed to find related references in the topic. The number of citations per article was considered but not decisive since many of the publications were published in the last couple of years.

2.1 Digital customer journey

The emergence of mobile technology is causing a significant upheaval in the existing retail environment. The market's abundance of shopping channels has transformed how customers shop, resulting in a variety of information-seeking, product-comparison, and purchase habits (Nam et al., 2020). This shift, facilitated by the widespread adoption of mobile devices, has enabled consumers to access information seamlessly at any point along their shopping journey, contributing to the rise of online shopping and its paramount significance (Hall et al., 2017). As the digital landscape widens, the process of online purchasing has evolved into a dynamic and adaptable experience, opening up a multitude of unique journeys tailored to each individual's choices (Karimi et al., 2015). This enhanced range of purchase options available to online consumers has extended the potential scope and duration of their journeys, ushering in a new era of shopping possibilities (Hall et al., 2017).
2.1.1 Pre-purchase in the digital journey

The pre-purchase phase summarises the consumer's journey before acquiring a product, as discussed by Rosenbaum et al. (2017), this phase initiates when individuals recognize a need or challenge, spurred by both internal and external cues that induce shifts in their present or desired states. Subsequently, customers actively engage in seeking information from a variety of sources, encompassing personal, commercial, public, and experiential realms, aligning with their specific demands. Within this phase, consumers navigate through a process of judgement, utilizing rational thinking and spontaneous judgments, as highlighted by Christos et al., (2022), ultimately culminating in a purchasing decision. This pre-purchase journey can be deconstructed into distinct stages: problem recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives, as discussed by Lemon et al., (2016) and Puccinelli et al., (2009).

In the problem recognition stage, the consumer is compelled to bridge the gap between the desired condition (fulfilment) and the actual state (deprivation). Running out of stock or restocking, people's financial situations, and marketing stimuli, such as sales promotion campaigns or new product announcements, can all serve as internal or external triggers for problem/need recognition, also defined as touchpoints (Kang, 2018).

In the information stage research on information processing motivate customers to look for knowledge to improve their judgment, to later be satisfied with their purchases, and lower their risk exposure (Zhang et al., 2017). The digital consumer may first choose a brand before searching more websites for the greatest offer, or first choose the best channel for purchasing a product before using that channel to choose the brand (Neslin et al., 2014). It is generally found that buyers base their ultimate purchasing decisions on the opinions of others, including family, friends, and other consumers. Where online customer reviews have become one of the most useful information sources in the contemporary retail environment, particularly for the younger generation of shoppers (Hall et al., 2017). Customers are used to switching between retail channels on a desktop/laptop and mobile device in their customer journeys to obtain information (Verhoef et al., 2015). The perceived ease and quickness with which consumers can find product information online is represented by online search convenience (Verhoef et al., 2007). Due to the convenience, it provides, including the simplicity of navigation, price
comparison, and individually tailored suggestions, online channels have been positively evaluated as a search channel both for information search and evaluation (Dekimpe et al., 2020).

When evaluating alternatives, trust and confident in product information are ensured, products are evaluated in comparison to alternatives using criteria for purchasing evaluation before making a purchase. Consumers compare products at this step using their purchasing assessment criteria, which may include price, value, usefulness, and aesthetics (Kang, 2018). Pricing is one of the dominant factors in evaluating alternatives and has a significant impact on consumer behaviour in the marketplace (Aw et al., 2021). Consumers who place a high priority on price comparison are more likely to conduct comprehensive online research before making a purchase. The Internet makes price comparisons simpler and faster, and the knowledge gained helps consumers make subsequent purchase decisions (Santos et al., 2019).

2.2.2 Digital Touchpoints in the Pre-purchase Stage
Each touchpoint in the customer journey signifies a distinct stage, known as the "touchpoint stage" (Kranzbühler et al., 2018). The pre-purchase stage encompasses all interactions previous a purchase, including need identification, information gathering, and evaluation (Puccinelli et al., 2009). In this phase, consumers actively seek brand and product-related information to mitigate purchase risk, with credibility and clarity being dominant (Erdem et al., 2001). Signal clarity measures how effectively a company's communication aligns with its intended message, while signal credibility hinges on the reliability of brand-related information, delineating the source's trustworthiness (Erdem et al., 2001). Companies strategically control communication efforts for credibility and clarity, with paid media offering clarity but lacking credibility, and peer-driven earned media, like electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), often conveying credibility while being less clear (Ho-Dac et al., 2013).
2.1.3 Pre-purchase process of cosmetic products

The research about the purchase journey of beauty products is rather limited where Wolny et al., (2014) & Lee et al., (2019) has explained the journey as the following. At the first stage of problem recognition the beauty customer does not consider themself as a shopper, they are scanning whether it is consciously or unconsciously the market (Wolny et al., 2014). In this stage beauty customers need to be drawn into the journey by a need or advertisement, pay attention to it, and be encouraged to look up and learn more about the beauty items before making a purchase (Lee et al., 2019). The primary channels that form an interest in this stage are information from family and friends, influencers such as bloggers, product information e.g., product reviews, as well as other social media networks (Wolny et al., 2014).

Pre-purchase scenarios is a time-consuming process which require gathering and comparing products meanwhile it is difficult to understand the complexity of product specifications (Lee et al., 2019). When the customer is considering themselves as a shopper they actively searching for information on a desired product (Wolny et al., 2014). Beauty products are requiring a high degree of customer involvement where one have to spend an extensive about of time collecting and comparing information on the desired products from difference sources. The information could contain things such as product information, ratings, swatches, word-of-mouth, reviews together with the personal preferences (Lee et al., 2019.; Wolny et al., 2014). However, the reality versus online articles is frequently illogical and do not accurately portray how customers are actually feeling about products. Which is again stating another reason for the complexity of the journey of beauty. Customer knowledge and information requirements automatically increase when a product's specifications (such as those for moisturizer, blush, lip liner, foundation, eyeliner, mascara, lipstick, etc.) get more complex (Lee et al., 2019).

Moving over to the next step, when enough information is collected the customer move to the stage of evaluating the different alternatives, the consumer is narrowing down their choices for their desired purchase (Wolny et al., 2014). Customers starts looking into price, physical attributes of the product and look for available purchase channel, here transactional behaviour is observed for finding the different factors needed to proceed with the purchase based on individual purchase criteria (Wolny et al., 2014). In addition,
at this stage it might still be hard to determine whether one really understood the specification of the products from the information collected, which is enacting a stress on the movement in the journey. The last step often included a second evaluation after coming to sense with the product. This concern whether the quality of the product is reasonable to the product price (Lee et al., 2019).

2.3 Economic downturn

Economic downturn is characterized by resource scarcity which can be investigated on an individual level (e.g., financial deprivation) or bigger (e.g., nation-wide recession) (Hamilton et al., 2019a). Consumers react by feeling worried and a lack of control when they experience financial restrictions due to the uncertainty of their financial resources. They attempt to regain control and increase certainty as a means of coping, particularly through their shopping decisions (Hamilton et al., 2019b).

Economic downturns are "periods of transformation," causing people to rethink and adjust their buying habits. Consumers modify their behaviour in this situation to use fewer resources. Under certain situations, customers become more price sensitive and the human side of the "rational man" takes control (Hamilton et al., 2019; Sarmento et al., 2018). Economic downturn is typically poising structural changes in people's lives, whereby behaviours acquired during these times are assimilated and become a part of consumers' daily lives (Sarmento et al., 2018).

Further, discovered by Hill et al. (2012), customers have a tendency to keep buying little luxury products like cosmetics, which is known as the "lipstick effect" in economics. Despite having limited resources, they may still spend some of them on these little indulgences in order to retain their feeling of normalcy, improve their mood, or raise their self-esteem. Because of the frequent stability or even growth in lipstick sales during economic downturns, the phrase "lipstick effect" was coined (Hill et al., 2012).

2.3.1 Consumer behaviour responses and copings in time of financial resource scarcity

When experiencing scarce monetary resources consumers emphasises new behaviours, such as increased organization and planned behaviour; more frequent shopping; reduce stocking behaviour; and preventing waste, in addition to maximizing utility and switching to less expensive options (Sarmento et al., 2018).
2.3.1.1 Price Sensitivity and Tunnelling

When there is a shortage of a resource, consumers react by becoming more aware of the actual resource, sharpen their attention on finances and the price of products and services (Hamilton et al., 2019). Customers commonly disregard other information as a result of tunnelling of attention (Zhu et al., 2018). Financial hardships might eventually raise the motivational value of money and make thoughts about money constantly top-of-mind (Hamilton et al., 2019). In an experiment by Shah et al., (2018), participants were instructed to visualize visiting a doctor and expect fully recovering. It was discovered that even when there was no explicit mention of money in the experiment, participants who were financially restricted were more likely than participants who weren't to bring up costs as their top-of-mind factor (Shah et al., 2018). Individuals experiencing scarce financial resources are less concerned about the actual product and more concerned with the price of it. This increased emphasis on price may have unfavourable effect that leads the individual to neglect offers or beneficial information given in written text related to product as a part of tunnelling (Hamilton et al., 2019).

2.3.1.2 Evaluation Strategies

Consumers develop a more consistent view on how to value goods and services as they experience financial constraints over time, which helps people think about opportunity costs and constrained budgets (Hamilton et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2015). People who are struggling financially, the focus on money can have positive effects. According to research, impoverished consumers are frequently less vulnerable than wealthy consumers to hidden taxes and other pricing gimmicks, such as "quantity surcharges," in which the per-article cost of an item increases when a bigger quantity is purchased (Goldin et al., 2013). According to Shah et al. (2012), customers use noticeably different amounts of time and effort to make a decision dependent of their access to resources. With limited resources people take substantially longer to decide and receive a better result than when they have abundant resources. In other words, people who struggling financially are more aware of how they use their resources and use them more effectively (Shah et al., 2012).

Moreover, consumers with abundant resources often move in an individualistic direction as a result of this confluence of increased freedom and control, greater independence, and
decreased reliance on others in the decision-making process. This leads to self-focused patterns of social cognition and behaviour as well as increased attention to the unique, independent self (Piff et al. 2010). The opposite is found from customers with scarce financial resources in the decision process, less resources, less personal control, and a greater susceptibility to risk lead to heightened social environment alertness and dependence on others to make a decision to attain desired results (Piff et al. 2012).

2.3.1.3 Innovativeness
One of the first responses customers have to resource shortage are linked to unfavourable outcomes, consumers frequently find solutions to the problem by coping. Looking for strategies to mitigate the effects of a resource limitation after trying to eliminate it (Cannon et al., 2018). A usual strategy is to "stretch" resources and use them more effectively (Shah et al., 2012). This often encourages product usage innovation, whether it is persistent or situationally driven. The lack of resources is found to eliminate product functional fixedness (Mehta et al., 2016).

2.3.1.4 Demand for Options
Goldsmith et al., (2020) argue that consumers demand a wider range of options as a result of economic constraint. They contend that this happens because customers' freedom of choice is threatened by financial scarcity, which larger choice sets can assist to mitigate (Goldsmith et al., 2020). Moreover, consumers who feel financially "trapped" frequently look for diversity in their selections (Yoon et al., 2018), and are likely to adapt by switching to store brands, which are less expensive than name brands (Ailawadi et al., 2001). Hence, consumers who grew up in more financially restricted situations are often able to appreciate a substitute more thanks to the devaluation. However, consumers who were raised in wealthy circumstances often depreciate the alternative when they cannot purchase the one product they initially wanted (Thompson et al., 2018). Those who have dealt with financial limits for a long time display stronger resilience when adjusting preferences away from their original selections because choice restriction is less unpleasant and causes less psychological reaction (Thompson et al., 2018).
2.3.1.5 Opportunity cost

Customers often pass through the whole customer journey ignoring the actual opportunity costs and trade-offs they unconsciously make, this may be less true for those who are struggling financially (Hamilton et al., 2019). Opportunity costs may be more psychologically prominent for consumers who are experiencing a shortage of finances. They cope by paying closer attention to opportunity costs when money is scarce (Hamilton et al., 2019; Spiller., 2011). Hill et al. (2012), found that people might postpone making larger, more expensive purchases during a period of economic hardship but still reward themselves with small luxury things that make them feel good right away. This behaviour can be interpreted as a coping method or a means of regaining control over ones’ situation.

2.3.1.5 Delayed gratification

Consumers' perception of control in relation to economic downturns have focused on signs such as customers' ability to postpone gratification, which was previously linked to lifetime income and educational attainment. However, awaiting gratification may be an adaptive strategy adapted in stressful and unexpected circumstances (Hamilton et al., 2019). Delayed rewards may not be available or may never materialize in such environments, it might be deemed proactive for people to act impulsively instead of delaying satisfaction (Hamilton et al., 2019).

2.3.1.6 Trade-Offs and Long-Term Value

When choosing how to spend limited discretionary income, consumers still is posed with make significant trade-offs. Customers often become more concerned about the long-term value of their purchases as a result of feeling financially constrained, which may lead them to choose experiences over tangible products. The trend away from material purchases, however, reverses when a material good has an extremely short lifespan, supporting the theory that concern longevity is the main factor causing the effect (Tully et al., 2015). A consumer with limited financial resources is more inclined to favour a purchase that offers consumption utility both now and, in the future, hence lowering ones anticipated need to make another purchase again in the near future. Hence, the choice is not when to make a purchase but rather how long it will be profitable (Tully et al., 2015).
2.3.1.7 Reaction

Customers' behaviour during financial constraint has been defined as a reaction phase when faced with financial limitations. The scarcity of resources can have effects on customers becoming more aroused, reflexively increasing their demand for the limited option and the consumer feels frustrated. Some cope with this restriction by appreciating everyday events and coming up with more inventive ways to use their products (Hamilton et al., 2019).

In summary, economic downturns and financial resource scarcity lead to changes in consumer behaviour. Consumers become more price sensitive, prioritize price over other factors, and develop evaluation strategies to make the most of their limited resources. They also become more innovative in their product usage meanwhile demand a wider range of options in the market. In addition, those who have dealt with financial limits for a longer time may have a greater appreciation for substitutes and are more likely to adapt by switching to store brands. Overall, economic downturns can cause a transformation in people's behaviour, leading to assimilation of new habits and perspectives in their daily lives.

2.4 Theoretical framework and Summary

In this thesis, the role of financial resource scarcity is central, which relates to consumers' monetary resources. The research aims to unveil its impact on the pre-purchase journey of beauty consumers. To enhance clarity, the author has organized the gathered literature into six distinct clusters, facilitating an organized approach to understanding consumer behaviour during financial resource scarcity. Noted that the previous findings related to customer behaviour in time of financial scarcity has been developed from research in analysing different types of consumption.

The literature review encompasses several dimensions: the digital customer journey, the pre-purchase phase of beauty, and the profound influence of financial resource scarcity on consumer behaviour. Additionally, the review delves into the transformative effects of economic downturns and financial constraints on consumer behaviour, which include “heightened price sensitivity and tunnelling, new evaluation strategies, innovativeness,
demand for options, awareness of opportunity cost, delay of gratification, trade-offs and long-term value, and lastly, new reactions”.

This literature review serves as the foundation for investigating the intricate relationship between financial resource scarcity and the pre-purchase journey of beauty products. By contextualizing potential shifts in consumer behaviour, the review establishes the theoretical foundation for effectively addressing the research question and its associated sub-question and to potentially find additional behaviour changes or contradictions to existing literature.
3. Method

This chapter is outlining the selections of methods and techniques that has been implemented through the construction of the thesis.

3.1 Research philosophy

The research philosophy, which refers to a set of beliefs and presumptions about the growth of knowledge, is defined as the first step in constructing the methodology (Saunders et al., 2015). Assumptions are formed about human knowledge and the nature of the facts encountered during research at every stage, which inevitably shapes how research objectives, techniques, and interpretation of findings are all understood (Crotty 1998). Your presumptions about how you perceive the universe can be viewed as your research philosophy. There are five major research philosophies, positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism (Saunders et al., 2015). The most suitable philosophy for this thesis was the interpretive perspective as the author wanted to explain beauty consumers behaviour in the pre purchase journey during financial difficult times.

The goal of interpretivist research is to develop fresh, fuller interpretations of social settings and worlds (Saunders et al., 2015) This thesis is truly interpretative from an ontological and epistemological standpoint since the emphasis is on meanings and the character of reality (ontology), and knowledge is dependent on perception (Saunders et al., 2015). Overall, the interpretivist research philosophy aligns well with the objectives of the thesis, as it allows to explore and interpret the complexities of beauty consumer behaviour and during financial difficulties in a meaningful and contextual way.

3.2 Research Approach

There are three main research approaches: deduction, induction and abduction. The last-mentioned form of reasoning has been selected for this thesis, abductive reasoning, which starts with the ground in a ‘surprising fact’ being observed (Ketokivi and Mantere, 2010). The resilience of beauty consumption in economic turndown has been identified as the
surprising fact of this thesis. Consumption of beauty products in financial hardship increase in opposed to other consumer products. This surprising fact is the conclusion rather than a premise. This conclusion leads to a set of potential premises that are thought to be sufficient or almost sufficient to explain the conclusion. It is argued that if this set of premises were true, the conclusion would logically follow as well. This gives reasons to think that they are likewise true because the set of premises is adequate or nearly sufficient to yield the conclusion (Saunders et al., 2015). Abductive reasoning can also be a subject about something which there is a wealth of research in one area but far less in the scope which is selected to be researched. Abductive approach enabling the author to add wealth in the less researched area or modify an existing theory in the more researched topic (Saunders et al., 2015).

Applying an abductive approach to the research on the beauty customers pre-purchase journey would mean obtaining data that were sufficiently detailed and rich to allow us to explore the phenomenon and identify and explain themes and patterns regarding behaviour. We would then try and integrate these explanations in an overall conceptual framework, thereby building up a theory of beauty customers pre-purchase journey in a financial resource scarcity. This explanations and themes would be tested in the discussion against previous research.

Exploratory research is the methodology used in this study. Exploratory research focuses on a problem for which there is lacking a definition rather than offering definitive or final solutions it aims to explore a something (Saunders et al., 2015). Exploratory research may not be representative or appropriate in a larger context, but it permits additional study in the field since it aims to investigate the research question (Dudovskiy, 2013). In summary, exploratory research is used in this study because it allows to explore the relatively unexplored phenomenon of beauty consumer behaviour during financial difficulties. It provides the flexibility to uncover new insights, generate research questions, and lay the groundwork for more comprehensive research in the future. While it may not provide definitive solutions, it serves as an essential first step in understanding the dynamics of this particular research problem.
3.3 Research Design

The research design, which includes elements like methodological choice and research strategy, is decided on once the research philosophy and approach have been established. The research design establishes the parameters for how the research project will be developed and how the research questions will be addressed, like a blueprint (Saunders et al., 2016). The aim of the research is to explore and understand the participants' experiences, perspectives, and behaviours in-depth, opposed to measuring or quantifying them. Therefore, the research has a qualitative method approach to obtain the primary data. The goal of qualitative research is to study and comprehend complex phenomena in-depth by looking at the varying experiences, viewpoints, and behaviours of individuals or groups aiming to comprehend the underlying significance, drives, and explanations for behaviours, and experiences (Saunders et al., 2015).

The research questions focus on understanding how financial resource scarcity impacts customers' online pre-purchase journey of beauty products. They also seek to explore the behavioural changes that occur, and the coping mechanisms customers employ during this journey. To effectively address these questions, a qualitative research method is the most suitable approach. Qualitative research allows for in-depth exploration of the subject, capturing the unique perspectives and experiences of individual customers in the context of financial constraints.

Moreover, qualitative research contributes to theory development by generating new insights and frameworks based on the data collected (Saunders et al., 2015). Ultimately, the study aims to shed light on how beauty product customers navigate their online pre-purchase journey amid financial resource scarcity. Where the goal is to find informing strategies and interventions to better serve marketers meeting customers facing similar challenges together with adding to research in the subject.

Once the research design was decided upon the data collections needed to be outdrawn. Data can be divided into two categories: primary data and secondary data. While secondary data have already been collected for another purpose, primary data are new data that have been collected for a particular new purpose (Saunders, et al., 2015).
3.3.1 Primary data collection

Primary data are newly obtained data that researchers have gathered from sources, such as observations, focus groups, or interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The primary data collection method aims to generate new insights into the research performed by the author (Saunders et al., 2015).

This thesis selected a qualitative design using primary data obtained from interviews which were long and semi-structured. According to Saunders et al. (2015), semi-structured interviews are preferable for conducting exploratory research since they allow for probing questions where the researcher wants the respondents to elaborate or expand on their replies. The significance and depth of the information gathered will rise if the meanings of quotes are investigated.

3.3.1.1 Semi-structured interview

When applying a semi-structured technique interview to interview will vary, the researcher has a list of themes and some essential questions to cover throughout the interviews. In this setting the interviewer may omit some of the questions from a particular interview as well depending on how the conversation is going, the order of the questions may also change (Saunders et al., 2015).

The interview schedule for this type of interview will most likely include some opening remarks, a potential list of prompts to promote and further discussion, and some closing remarks in addition to the list of topics and questions to be covered (Saunders et al., 2015).

The researcher and participants both spoke Swedish as their first language during the interviews. This prevented potential language obstacles and allowed the respondents and researcher to communicate freely without any limitations that would come from conversing in a second language. Although the interviews and transcriptions were obtained in Swedish it was necessary to translate the quotes used in the thesis into English.
3.3.1.2 Sampling

The sampling technique implemented in this thesis was based on the method by Robinson, (2014) which is constructed in a sequence of (1) setting a sample universe, (2) selecting a sample size, (3) devising a sample strategy and (4) sample sourcing.

(1), Sample universe, a set of inclusion criteria or exclusion criteria is selected, or a combination of them (Luborsky & Rubinstein 1995).

To justify the number of interviews obtained for this thesis the group of respondents has been selected as homogenous as possible.

The study will focus on young women between the ages of 25-30 who live in Sweden, frequently follow beauty trends, actively purchase beauty items online, and are impacted by the increased cost of living. The sample will consist of 7 individuals that are matching the inclusion criteria.

Increased cost of living: The study aims to explore how the increased cost of living impacts the online purchasing behaviour of young women in Sweden who are interested in beauty products.

(2), Sample size used for qualitative research is influenced both by theoretical and practical circumstances (Robinson, 2014). There are no rules defined rules on sample size, but it is crucial to consider the logical connection between your sample selection strategy and the objective and emphasis of your research (Saunders et al., 2015). If the research aims to explore a fairly homogenous group and conducting semi structure/in-depth interviews 4-12 interviews should be adequate (Guest et al. 2006).

Homogeneity of the sample: The fact that the sample consists of women between the ages of 25-30 who are active online shoppers of beauty items and living in Sweden suggests that they may share similar experiences and perspectives related to the impact of financial resource scarcity on their online pre-purchase journey. This homogeneity may make it easier to achieve data saturation with a smaller sample size.

Additionally, in-depth exploration: since the research questions focus on understanding the pre-purchase journey of this specific group of women, conducting semi-structured or
in-depth interviews with 7 participants allow for achieving a thorough analysis of their experiences and perspectives.

(3), Sample strategy, when a sample universe is decided, and sample size is set the strategy needs to be determined. The options are (a) random sampling and (b) purposive sampling (Robinson, 2014). Non-probability sampling technique known as purposeful sampling was selected for this thesis. Researchers can use various criteria to choose the instances that make up the sample and form their own judgements (Saunders et al., 2015).

Since the specific research questions are focused on understanding the pre-purchase journey of a specific group of women who are active online shoppers of beauty items in Sweden, and who are impacted by financial resource scarcity. Purposive sampling allows to select participants who fit this specific criteria, making it more likely to obtain data relevant to the research questions. Additionally, purposive sampling can save time and resources compared to random sampling, which involves identifying and selecting participants from a larger population (Robinson, 2014).

(4), Sourcing sample, after choosing a sample universe, a preliminary sample size, and a sampling technique for an interview study, the next step is to source the sample; that is, the researcher must go find the participants in the real world. (Robinson, 2014).

Social media was used to approach potential participants, where an explanation of the research was provided as an introduction. After the potential participants showed interest in participating in the study the researcher asked control questions related to the inclusion criteria to secure the right participants. In total 7 interviews were performed illustrated below (Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee ID</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Words Transcribed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.04.2023</td>
<td>43 Minutes</td>
<td>4173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.04.2023</td>
<td>67 Minutes</td>
<td>8121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.04.2023</td>
<td>51 Minutes</td>
<td>5891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.04.2023</td>
<td>48 Minutes</td>
<td>5364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.04.2023</td>
<td>50 Minutes</td>
<td>7883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.04.2023</td>
<td>44 Minutes</td>
<td>5401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>24.04.2023</td>
<td>55 Minutes</td>
<td>7183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Interview participants
3.3.2 Secondary data collection

Data that have already been gathered for other purposes are referred to as secondary data. Secondary data comprise both quantitative and qualitative information which include both published summaries and raw data. It is employed to offer extra or alternative information, interpretations, or conclusions to a study (Saunders et al., 2015). The secondary data of this thesis was collected from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Science Direct and Scopus in addition to academic journals data was retrieved from platforms WGSN, Statista and Euro monitor to support the background and relevance of the research.

3.4 Data analysis

When conducting qualitative research using interviewing for primary data collection, interviews are usually audio-recorded and afterwards transcribed, or reproduced as a written (word-processed) report using the participants' actual words (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Each interview transcript ought to be preserved as a separate file with a name that protects anonymity and confidentiality (Saunders et al., 2015). The transcribing feature in Microsoft Office: Word was utilized to aid in the writing process after all interviews were recorded. All the interviewees were Swedish and spoke Swedish, therefore when the interviews were conducted, each one was transcribed in Swedish. Each respondent was given a Word document to which their answers were dictated each of the interviewees were later given an ID from 1-7 to separate the responds.

This research applied a thematic data analysis process to help make sense of the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is a technique employed frequently by qualitative researchers since it gives a flexible way to evaluate complex data by identifying, analysing, and reporting themes from data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using this analysis technique enabled the move beyond simple description and to generate more nuanced and complex understandings of the experiences, perspectives, and behaviours from the sample who are impacted by the increased cost of living and are active online shoppers of beauty items. Overall, using thematic analysis was a suitable approach to analysing data and answering the research questions in a comprehensive and detailed way.
3.4.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, according to Caulfield (2020), is a useful analytical technique for examining and extracting viewpoints, perspectives, or opinions from, for interview transcripts. Braun & Clarke (2006) provide a six-step guide when conducting thematic data analysis. The process moves from one step to another, but not necessarily in a linear way.

Step 1: Become familiar with the data, which suggest to reading, and re-reading all the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis started by familiarizing with the data and highlighted relevant phrases related to the research question and move the relevant phrases into an Excel sheet.

Step 2: Generate initial codes. This stage involves meaningful and methodical data organization. Coding breaks down large amounts of data into manageable meaningful units (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this thesis coding was made of every piece of data that related to or illustrated an intriguing aspect of the research problem. With that said not all the sentences in the transcripts was coded. However, open coding was employed, which means that the author created and adjusted the codes throughout the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 3: Search for themes, the term "theme" refers to a pattern that capture a key or intriguing aspect of the data or research subject. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), there are no strict guidelines as to what constitutes a theme, the importance of a theme defines it.

The author employed a table as a visual assistance to carry out this challenging assignment. The development of themes was facilitated by the discovery of connections between codes through the table.

Step 4: Review themes. During this phase themes are reviewed, modified, and developed based on the once defined in Step 3 (Bree & Gallagher, 2016). In this stage of the analysis all themes were separated from each other to gather all related to review each defined
theme. When reviewing the themes, it was found that some of the themes was overlapping or belonged to another theme??

*Step 5: Define themes,* the themes final round of revision. The goal now is to pinpoint the core idea behind each theme. What's the theme trying to say? If there are subthemes, how do they relate to the main theme and interact with it? What connections are there between the themes? (Braun & Clarke, 2006) An evaluation of the significance of the potential themes that had been presented, where only those deemed crucial for the study topic were retained. Two themes were supported by the contributors, and from each, subthemes arose.

*Step 6: Writing-up,* the thematic analysis was written up in this last step, after the themes had been decided upon and thoroughly developed which is presented in Chapter 4.

### 3.5 Research Quality

According to Saunders et al., (2015) interpretivist research often applies an alternative construct to measure research quality to the traditional formwork of reliability and validity instead such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Who argue that there are four aspects of trustworthiness which can be considered within trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). For this thesis the Guba framework have been applied to define the quality of the research.

#### 3.5.1 Credibility

In terms of the study's methodology, credibility attempts to determine how the data will be collected and analysed as well as to ensure that no significant data has been ruled out (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Adding that obtaining agreement from other researchers, colleagues, or the informants themselves is one approach to increase credibility. Since the research was conducted by one person there were no co-research that could validate the credibility, however a nuanced step-by-step process of the data has been provided for setting credibility to the research. Moreover, feedback from other thesis authors has been considered to validate that the data has been analysed in a thematic way.
3.5.2 Transferability
According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), transferability refers to the number of research objects and the degree to which the conclusions of this study can be applied to different contexts and circumstances. The more representative the sample, the more generalizable the findings (Krippendorff, 2004). To reassure the transferability of the study the author has provided as throw as possible the steps of the data collection, methodological choices, data analysis in the method chapter. In addition to understand to what extent the research is transferable inclusion criteria has been stated so the reader can understand the possible generalisation of the findings.

3.5.3 Dependability and confirmability
Dependability, which is also referred to as stability, is concerned with how the data gathered may vary over time and how it might change during the time of the research (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Since the study was conducted during a period where the economy of Sweden was in a downturn it would be hard to replicate the study and find the same answers if the economy has recovered. However, the sample is rather homogenic and therefore if the study was replicated on a similar sample during the same economic situation the findings would probably be close to the findings of this research. Another factor that can make it difficult to replicate the study is the semi-structured interview technique which allow for probing questions which is can be improvised during the interview.

Confirmability is referring to the ability of the researcher to show that the responses are unbiased, impartial, and free of the researcher's own bias is referred to as confirmability. (Polit & Beck, 2012). A pilot interview was performed with another thesis writing student to control the formulation of the questions to not ask questions that is leading the respondents to a specific answer. Moreover, quotes that exemplify the many themes discovered in the interviews have been included to increase the confirmability of the research. To extract the quotes from the interviews all interviews have been recorded and transcribed word by word.
3.5.4 Ethical implications

To reassure the ethical implications of the research many steps was taken to secure the participants' right, well-being, and privacy throughout the research (Bos, 2020). Potential interview participants were contacted by the researcher, they were given a brief explanation of the study and requested their voluntary participation. To ensure that no harm was done to participants during the interview, the interview began with the researcher asking the participant again whether they still wanted to participate and explaining the purpose of obtaining the interview for the study. Additionally, the participant was told that the interview was to be recorded and that the interview responses can be withdrawn at any time during the interview.

To protect participant data, the researcher conducted internal analyses of all data and kept transcripts and recordings in a secure location that was only available to the researcher. The interviewees were informed at the start of the interview that the recordings were not to be shared with anyone else than the researcher. At the same time, the participants were informed that their answers will be anonymous, which is a given when the participants share information about their financial assets and purchasing habits.
4. Findings

This chapter is presenting the findings from the empirical data obtained from the interviews, the chapter is structured after the themes and categories that has emerged when analysing and coding the data. The first part is related to behaviour changes and the second part presenting additional valuable findings related to the research showing the barriers to change.

4.1 Research purpose

This research aims to explore how financial resource scarcity is affecting the digital pre-purchase journey of beauty products. It has been found previously that beauty is a rather resilient industry during financial difficult times (Hill et al., 2012). Customers experiencing financial resource scarcity has also been researched previously to a limited extent. It has then been found that customer often adapt by changing their behaviour, priorities, and evaluations of products before making a purchase (Hamilton et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2015; Piff et al. 2012). Empirical data has been collected and presented in this chapter to help answer the following research question:

RQ1: How does financial resource scarcity affect the beauty customers online pre-purchase journey of beauty products?

To help answer the main research question additional sub-question has been added:

RQ1.1: What are the main behavioural changes occurring in the journey when the beauty customer is experiencing financial resource scarcity?

4.2 General findings overview

Beauty products have become an essential part of people's lives,” Beauty is a high priority it makes me feel good about myself and perceive myself as good looking” (ID2). And a lot needs to change for excluding it, "For me to choose not to buy beauty product, economics has to be really bad, really no money left” (ID5). Despite financial resource scarcity, many individuals continue to prioritize beauty products in their monthly budgets.
The findings also showed that the participants do not only spend money on beauty but time, a significant amount of time researching “My expectations are high, I spend a lot of energy and time learning and understanding a product before purchasing” (ID1). The channels the respondent used during the first part of their journey was reoccurring in all interviews, Instagram and TikTok. “I use reviews from retailers sites, combined with skincare influencers and TikTok as well as my friends” (ID5), ”Social media, Instagram and TikTok especially is great for reviewing beauty products” (ID3), ”I look for reviews on products as well as videos on TikTok and Instagram” (ID7). Reviews on websites were also mentioned but occurred more often when evaluation the alternatives. Moreover, it was explained that these channels was not only working for information search but ”they have a way of creating a barrier to reducing the use of beauty as it creates a need that I did not know I had”.

It was also found that the majority of the participants had a low level of price sensitivity, “Price is not decisive, product attributes is more important than price” (ID1). Additionally, they tend to consume one product over time, which make the impact feel less. It needs an incremental increase in price before reconsidering not to buying a favourite product was not an uncommon answer. This span of into some interesting findings which is presented in the second part of the chapter. The participants unwillingness to adopt any major change in their behaviour even due to scarcity of their financial resources.

4.3 Behaviour changes
The first theme that will be presented is the behaviour changes, diving into how the respondents adopting behavioural changes since the financial shift happened. Since the research question is concerned with financial resource scarcity and more specifically how it impacts the customers behaviour in the pre-purchase journey, interview questions related to behaviour change was central. The sub-themes found will be presented below emerged in the coding process.
4.3.1 Thoughtfulness

Upon thorough examination of the gathered data, a prevailing pattern emerged among the participants, a profound shift towards thoughtfulness in their purchasing habits of beauty products. Participants revealed that their previous impulsive buying behaviour had undergone a transformation “I am more thoughtful now, I’m not buying directly, I think to myself do I need this product and if the answer is not obvious, I sleep on my decision” (ID2). Followed by similar statements like, “Today I often initiate a purchase and then remove items from the check out and reconsider to buy only the necessarily which is not how I did before” (ID 4). Respondents explained how they practice increased awareness and thoughtfulness before finalizing a purchase, often taking one or two additional days to contemplate the true necessity and relevance of the product.

The prevailing scarcity of financial resources acted as a driver for this transformation. The participants, faced with the constraints of economic difficulties, approached the buying process with newfound mindfulness. The temptation to add suggested products to their carts during checkout, a once impulsive practice, now faced resistance. The participants explained how they now steered away from such spontaneous decisions, demonstrating a more intentional approach to their beauty product consumption.

Yet, in the middle of this transformation, some participants acknowledged after answering the interview questions that it might be a disconnection between their mindful mindset and actual behaviour. “I have a more thoughtful way of thinking about general consumption now after facing increased living costs but in my beauty consumption... I’m not sure if my mindset is matching my actions, but I would say I’m more conscious” (ID6). Followed by another respondent, “I would say that I have this mindset but then maybe one doesn’t hold it very well, or you know you can think it but not live by it” (ID3).

4.3.2 Increased “need” driven purchases

By continuing the exploration of the themes of thoughtfulness the focus shifts to how this thoughtfulness translates into intentional buying habits. As the interview sessions unfolded, a shift in the buying habits of beauty product consumers came to light. The participants spoke about thoughtfulness being practised by highlighting need as the factor
for purchase. “mainly that I try to only buy things that I kind of need, and then the other things that you see on ads or commercials you try to completely refrain from” (ID7).

“I often start the process by being tricked in by an ad and later realize I’m not in need of this straightener or this mascara I already have several at home, I try to think about my need more now and not what I would like to have”(ID4).

In the time of changing financial circumstances, their priorities underwent a transformation, moving towards a more needs-driven approach rather than being driven solely by desires. This shift in mindset led to a conscious effort to spend less on non-essential beauty products, “especially when it comes to Make-up, I try to use what I have at home... less buying of substitutes I might have already. Instead, buying after need and of what is out of stock home” (ID5).

Gone were the days of impulsive splurges, instead, the participants revealed that they have become intentional in their buying habits. They now prioritize purchasing products based on genuine need, carefully evaluating whether the item is a necessity before check-out. As a result, the participants reported spending less money on non-essential beauty products, saving for items that truly catered to their need. Beyond the realm of purchasing decisions, the participants also exhibited a conscious effort was made to ensure that items at home were used before considering making additional purchases. The once stocking up behaviourism on products lost its charm. Instead, they adopted a more sustainable approach, replenishing products only when they had truly run out.

4.2.3 Planned behaviour

As the participants delved deeper into their experiences, another new behaviour came to light – a focus on planning the purchases. The shifting financial landscape had triggered a shift in their priorities, prompting them to adopt a more strategic approach to their beauty purchases.

The participants highlighted the significant impact of "increased price awareness and planning" on their buying habits, "I don’t think I shop as much now, maybe I spend same
much in money but not as often, I plan more what and when to buy” (ID4). While their overall spending remained relatively unchanged, the manner in which they approached their purchases underwent a transformation. “You don't buy nearly as much, you plan more, you think before you shop” (ID1).

“I plan my purchases, considering that I do this research before so absolutely, I plan, it's not so much a spontaneous purchase for me” (ID2)

One of the key outcomes of this adapted behaviour was a change in their purchasing approach. Participants shared how they now prioritize collecting items they need and make one comprehensive purchase instead of numerous smaller ones. This buying strategy not only allowed them to save time but also proved to be financially advantageous. By planning their purchases over time and gathering their essential beauty products in one large order, they were able to use the time to consider the purchase as well optimize their spending on one delivery.

“Now when I buy, I want to collect all my products that I would buy into one purchase, but that often fail if it is urgent, haha…” (ID5) But as the quote here stated this occurs only when there is a product which does not need to be replenished directly. The similar patterns can be seen related to offers and planned purchases. “I am not falling for offers like 20% off which occurs every other week, I must have a need to buy and if those fall in at the same time then it is good but I'm not waiting for an offer” (ID 2).

4.2.4 Trade-offs and Opportunity cost

During the interview, the respondents discussed how they are aware of trade-offs and consider opportunity cost when purchasing beauty products today. “If I buy more expensive products, I still think about balancing other things, that you might have to prioritize other expenses for the next month and you might not have done it the same way before. But I would still say that beauty comes quite high on the priority list.” (ID3).

In addition, one respondent emphasized that when they have less money in a particular month, they might prioritize buying a less expensive product and may wait to purchase
back the more expensive product the following month if possible. Meanwhile others explained the priorities as the following:

"If I’m unsure of a product after research, it might be prioritised in another monthly budget" (ID5)

"Base product is a part of the budget”(ID1, as well as "Beauty products is included in the monthly budget” (ID6).

The respondents also stated that they have re-prioritized purchases of other things during the month and are more aware of their priorities and trade-offs when it comes to non-beauty products. They may choose to change their routines or cut back on other expenses to afford the beauty products they want. However, the respondents also noted that it is challenging to change their routines or cut back on beauty products, as society places a lot of emphasis on these products.

In summary they highlighted that behaviour changes have been more significant in other purchase groups. “I think you make much bigger adjustments when it comes to food, for example, but also things like, a little bigger expense too. Maybe you don't prioritize going to the hairdresser, it's like, so much more expensive.” (ID7). Despite considering trade-offs and opportunity cost when purchasing beauty products, the respondents still prioritize these products highly.

4.2.3 Increased time in the pre-purchase stage making research

During the interview, the respondents discussed how they have changed their approach to purchasing beauty products. They previously spent hours researching products before making a purchase, often taking several days to decide before placing an order. The respondents mean that this time and effort has increased due to that the importance of making a successful purchase is higher today than before.

"I dedicated a lot of time before but I would say that I check more information about the product now, I reflect more on not being disappointed and having to buy a new one” (ID1).
“it's a lot of time, a lot, it's hard to say what kind of time, but I always think I browse around every single day on different products. so, I probably look for several days before I decided to say: now I'm buying this” (ID4)

“It is many hours behind, I check more information about the product now before I buy it compared to before, I reflect more on not being disappointed and having to buy a new product” (ID5)

“The time I spend depends a little on the type of product and the price range, if it's cheaper I buy faster but more expensive, definitely more time” (ID7)

“The time you spend is about trying to make sure more that the product you buy does what it promises” (ID3)

The respondents emphasized that they have increased their care of knowledge about a beauty product through their research and now understand more about the products before making a purchase. They also stated that they spend more time researching expensive items compared to cheaper ones, as they want to ensure that the product is meeting the value spent on buying the product. The reason for the research is also to reassure themselves of the product's quality and effectiveness, which is a time-consuming process. They have found that the time they spend researching products is necessary for them to feel confident in their purchases. One participant reflects the sentiment: "If I have to decide to buy something, I will not reconsider not to buy it based on price; I do so much research before so I don't buy something I don't think I need or is worth it" (ID4). This might help shed a light on the following chapter to help make sense of the following findings.

4.4 Barriers against change
As explored in the previous section, the dynamic relationship between financial resource scarcity and the online pre-purchase journey of beauty products reveals a spectrum of responses among the participants. While the initial findings shed light on how individuals adapt their behaviour to align with their constrained financial circumstances, it is equally
essential to recognize that not all participants undergo significant changes in their behaviour. Through their perspectives, we gain a deeper understanding of the barriers that hinder transformation within the online pre-purchase journey of beauty products. These barriers surround: risk, loyalty, and quality considerations, by acknowledging these barriers, we further clarify the multifaceted nature of consumer behaviour during economic downturns.

4.4.1 Risk
Several respondents have stated that they are hesitant to change the products they use for fear of wasting money. They prefer to research products thoroughly before making a purchase to eliminate the risk of a bad decision. This process can be time-consuming, and finding a substitute can also take time, often involving a few bad purchases before finding something similar. Many respondents also stated that their financial situation has not majorly affected their shopping for beauty products more other categories of expenses.

- “I have the tried-and-tested products that work for me, and I stick to them” (ID3)
- “I do not take risks with my skin or hair” (ID4)
- “I believe that it is not worth trying something new and potentially wasting money on a useless product that I would need to replace again” (ID7)
- “The financial situation has not really affected my shopping of beauty. I have my products that work, and I keep them, I don’t take risks with my face” (ID6)

The respondents are aware of the risks involved in trying new products and are not willing to take them. They value their time and money and prefer to stick to products that they know work for them. They are also not influenced by their financial situation when it comes to purchasing beauty products due to changes, they have made in other expenses.

4.4.2 Loyalty
Several respondents pointed out their loyalty to their current beauty products and brands, which is why financial resource scarcity would not influence their intention to purchase beauty products. While they do acknowledge that purchasing beauty products can be a time-consuming process, they remain unwilling to shift to more affordable brands even if the prices of beauty products rise. They place a higher emphasis on skincare and, consequently, feel more committed to their current skincare products. Nonetheless, a few
respondents are open to considering alternative makeup brands, but not when it comes to skincare and hair care. They maintain preconceived about specific brands, which deters them from switching to alternatives based on these pre-judgments or their previous experiences with less expensive brands.

- “I feel that the price of expensive products matches the quality and that they are from a good brand, so I prefer to stick with what I know works.”
- “I don’t really compare prices from different sites; I tend to order from the sites I like and trust.”
- “It's very challenging for me to find replacements for the products I use.”
- “I do compare prices on the sites I'm loyal to, but I don't really go beyond those to find better prices.”
- “I prioritize buying quality products; the price doesn't matter as much when compared to the attributes of the product.”
- “I'm committed to the products I like. It's not worth trying something new after the effort I've already put into finding the ones I currently use.”
- “I have preconceptions about brands, and I wouldn't switch to brands based on those pre-judgments, nor on my past experiences with cheaper alternatives.”
- “I'm loyal to both specific brands and the retailer websites that carry those brands.”

They perceive that their core products remain unaffected, finding an equivalent substitute with the same quality to be excessively time-consuming, and they are not willing to compromise on the quality they are accustomed to. “Time is money.” However, respondents displayed more openness to trying alternative products if the product serves an occasional purpose “A sparkling eyeliner to a Christmas party does not affect any loyalty from me” (ID5)

Overall, their loyalty to preferred brands, websites, and products plays a pivotal role in their journey, and they are not willing to take the risk of experimenting with new products that might notsuit them, as it could result in a waste of both money and time.

4.4.3 Quality
Several respondents have mentioned that the quality of the products is the primary reason why they are not affected by financial resource scarcity when buying beauty products. According to “expensive products are often perceived to be better in quality and are from well-known brands, making them more appealing”(ID3). They also highlighted “the importance of knowing the product ingredients and preferring organic products, avoiding
harmful chemicals that are carcinogenic” (ID1). Following, “They believe that knowing the product attributes and ingredients is essential and that buying cheap products with unknown ingredients is not worth the risk” (ID2).

Furthermore, they emphasized that the importance of product quality has increased over time, and they would rather invest in quality products that they know work for them, rather than experimenting with cheaper alternatives. They also mentioned that they would not compromise on the quality of their skincare products, even in financially constrained situations.
5. Analysis

In this chapter the analysis of the above empirical findings will be performed by interpretation through the literature framework. The secondary data has been presented in the literature review chapter and the primary data was collected through 7 interviews.

The findings on the pre-purchase process of beauty products offer both resonating similarities and illuminating insights when compared to existing literature. Participants' experiences mirror the existing understanding that the journey often begins without conscious shopping intentions, sparked by needs or advertisements, and guided by influencers, family, friends, and product information (Wolny et al., 2014); (Lee et al., 2019). The extensive information search phase, characterized using various sources like reviews, ratings, and personal preferences, aligns with the known complexity of beauty product decisions. Furthermore, participants' evaluation of alternatives through factors like price and product attributes echoes the process of narrowing down choices based on individual purchase criteria.

However, the research also introduces fresh perspectives. It highlights the strong emotional bond between consumers and beauty products, evidenced by their prioritization of these items even in the face of financial constraints. Additionally, the participants' reliance on specific social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok for both information and the creation of perceived needs adds a layer of complexity to the role of online sources in shaping consumer behaviour and their journey. The observation of low-price sensitivity and consumer attachment to favoured products, coupled with their resistance to significant behavioural changes despite financial limitations, underscores the psychological barriers that hinder shifts in consumer behaviour. Together, these insights deepen our comprehension of the beauty product pre-purchase journey and offer a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay of factors influencing consumer decision-making.
5.1 Behaviour Change

Financial constraints often prompt individuals to adapt new behaviours as they navigate their altered economic circumstances (Hamilton et al., 2019; Sarmento et al., 2018). This section delves into the behaviour changes exhibited by participants in response to the changing financial landscape in Sweden. Five prominent themes emerged from the data analysis, shedding light on participants' adaptive strategies: thoughtfulness, need-driven purchasing, planned behaviour, trade-offs, and increased time spent on researching products.

5.1.1 Thoughtfulness and Mindset-Action Disconnection

Literature related to consumers behaviour during financial scarcity stress the tunnelling attention towards price (Zhu et al., 2018). When resources are scarce, consumers tend to become more conscious of their available resources, particularly their financial situation and the prices of products and services (Zhu et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2018; Hamilton et al., 2019). The findings show a more tunnelling approach towards mindset. It instigated a shift towards thoughtfulness in participants' beauty product purchasing habits. Participants demonstrated increased consideration and intentionality in their buying decisions. This shift was driven by a desire to align their purchases with genuine needs. Hamilton et al. (2019b), paint the consumer experiencing difficulties with their finances as an individual that feel out of control and worried meanwhile the participants went into a more considerate mind.

However, a notable disconnection between participants' mindful mindset and actual behaviour emerged, indicating that while intentionality was embraced, it might not always translate into strictly needs-driven purchases. Here the disconnection between mindset and behaviour reflects the complexity of decision-making, where individual motivations, external influences, and personal preferences interact “I often start the process by being tricked in by an ad and later realize I’m not in need of this.” (ID4). Wolny et al. (2014), explains that beauty customers often at the first stage of the pre-purchase journey, the problem recognition; do not consider themself as a shopper, they are scanning whether it is consciously or unconsciously the market. This stage often tricks a customer into the journey so, while participants strive to make mindful decisions, external factors and personal desires can sway their actual actions. This suggests that the
relationship between mindset and behaviour is intricate and might be influenced by factors beyond financial constraints.

5.1.2 Increased "Need" Driven Purchases
Participants exhibited a shift from desire-driven to need-driven purchasing habits. Financial constraints prompted a more intentional approach, where participants focused on purchasing items, they genuinely needed rather than indulging in impulsive buying. This shift underlines a conscious effort to prioritize essentials, reflecting a more sustainable and needs-oriented consumer behaviour. The transition from desire-driven to need-driven purchasing aligns with the literature's focus on consumers re-evaluating their priorities during financial constraints (Hamilton et al., 2019; Sarmento et al., 2018). This change highlights a nuanced consumer response, where participants adapt their behaviour to meet genuine needs while still acknowledging the significance of beauty products in their lives.

5.1.3 Planned Behaviour and Trade-offs
Participants highlighted how they altered a planned behaviour in response to financial scarcity. Strategic purchasing patterns emerged, characterized by only essential items in a single purchase, saving on the delivery. This behaviour aligns with the literature's emphasis on consumers becoming more conscious during economic downturns (Hamilton et al., 2019; Sarmento et al., 2018). However, the findings suggest that while planning increased, the actual reduction in spending might not be as pronounced as anticipated. Participants admitted that the planning was made on some level, but the need of the product is stronger than the planning. “Now when I buy, I want to collect all my products that I would buy into one purchase, but that often fail if it is urgent, haha…” (ID5). This was also recognized by other respondent “I am not falling for offers like 20% off which occurs every other week, I must have a need to buy and if those fall in at the same time then it is good but I’m not waiting for an offer” (ID 2). Which is indicating that the need is stronger than the delayed gratification. Hamilton et al., (2019) found a relation between control and delaying gratification as a strategy for customers experiencing financial scarcity. Postponing the purchase was found to be an adaptive strategy embraced by the costumers while he argued that it before was liked to lifetime income and educational attainment. Based on the findings of the research there might be a link between previous quality of life which is why the respondents were unwilling to
adapt and stick to new behaviours and continuously find a disconnection between mindset and action. In addition, while respondents showed that planning was evident, it might not lead to significant reductions in overall spending due to the society related to the beauty industry, where individual preferences and societal influences play a pivotal role.

The findings further revealed participants' consideration of trade-offs and opportunity costs in their beauty product purchases. Despite acknowledging the need to balance expenses, participants continued to prioritize beauty products high on their list. This highlights the complex interplay between personal preferences and societal pressures in shaping consumer behaviour during financial constraints (Goldin et al., 2013). Further, some respondents explained that they tend to consume one product over time, which make the impact feel less which in turn align with Tully et al. (2015), a consumer with limited financial resources is more inclined to favour a purchase that offers consumption utility both now and, in the future. Hence, the choice is not when to make a purchase but rather how long it will be existing (Tully et al., 2015).

The participants' decision to prioritize beauty products despite trade-offs reflects a complex understanding of personal well-being and societal expectations. Similarly, this is explained by Lee et al. (2019) and Rapp et al., (2015), online connectivity posed an increase of beauty trends on social media which stress customers to view beauty items as "necessities in daily life". Meanwhile, Hill et al. (2012), rationalise that people might postpone making larger, more expensive purchases during economic turn-down but still reward themselves with little luxury things that make them feel good. Same patterns have emerged in the findings, “I think you make much bigger adjustments when it comes to food, for example, but also things like, a little bigger expense too. Maybe you don't prioritize going to the hairdresser, it's like, so much more expensive." (ID7).

5.1.4 Increased Time of Information Search

Participants reported spending more time researching products before making purchases, especially for expensive items. While the literature emphasizes consumers becoming more price-sensitive during economic downturns (Hamilton et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2015), the findings suggest that increased research time might also be driven by a desire to ensure product quality and avoid disappointment. This verification from the surrounding is a explained by Piff et al. (2010), as the following, consumers with
abundant resources often move in an individualistic direction, with greater independence, and decreased reliance on others in the decision-making process. The opposite is found from customers with scarce financial resources in the decision process, less resources, less personal control, and a greater dependence on others to decide (Piff et al. 2012).

Concluding, participants’ responses to financial constraints are multifaceted, driven by a desire for intentionality and the alignment of purchases with personal needs. The findings suggest that while participants strive for mindful decision-making, external factors and varying degrees of constraint might influence the extent to which behaviour changes are implemented.

5.3 Barriers against adopting new behaviour of beauty consumption

The exploration of barriers against changing or adapting behaviours due to financial resource scarcity reveals a complex interplay of factors that shape consumer decision-making within the online pre-purchase journey of beauty products. While the previous section shed light on the transformative behaviour changes driven by financial constraints, this section provides insights into the motivations behind consumers' resistance to change. These barriers encompass risk aversion, brand loyalty, and the prioritization of product quality over price. This analysis uncovers the intricacies of consumer behaviour, demonstrating that responses to financial constraints are not uniform and can be influenced by a multitude of factors.

5.3.1 Risk Aversion and Familiarity

Participants expressed a strong aversion to risk when considering changing their beauty products. Their hesitation stems from the fear of wasting money on products that might not deliver desired results. This apprehension leads participants to favour tried-and-tested products, emphasizing the significance of familiarity and predictable outcomes. This behaviour deviates from the anticipated shift towards price sensitivity during economic downturns. Instead, participants prioritize the effectiveness of products and personal suitability, reflecting a nuanced consideration not extensively addressed by existing literature. The participants' aversion to risk show that the individuals tend to be more sensitive to potential losses than gains. This fear of making an unsuccessful purchase, resulting in financial loss, guides their preference for products they have previous positive experiences with. This behaviour is also supported by the endowment effect, where
individuals assign additional value to products they already possess, contributing to their reluctance to switch.

5.1.2 Brand Loyalty and Trust
Loyalty emerged as a substantial barrier among participants, their loyalty extended beyond specific beauty products to encompass brands and even online retailers. This loyalty was attributed to perceptions that higher-priced products correlate with higher quality, instilling trust and a sense of comfort. This trust-driven behaviour emphasizes the power of brand loyalty, which can counteract frugality tendencies during financial scarcity, highlighting its potency in shaping consumer decisions. The participants’ brand loyalty might be rooted in their positive experiences and the consistent quality they associate with familiar brands. This offers insights into their loyalty-driven decisions, as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control all play crucial roles. Their trust in specific brands and products influences their intention to stick with them, regardless of financial constraints.

5.1.3 Quality Over Price and Non-negotiable Aspects
Participants demonstrated a strong inclination towards prioritizing product quality over price. They perceived higher-priced products as being of superior quality and were willing to invest in products they trust. This emphasis on quality highlights the significance of product attributes, ingredients, and performance in shaping participants’ decision-making process. Moreover, their unwillingness to compromise on quality even under financial constraints stresses that certain aspects of their beauty routine are considered non-negotiable.

5.1.4 Complex Consumer Behaviour
The presence of these barriers underlines the complexity of consumer decision-making and the diverse ways in which individuals respond to financial resource scarcity. This section illuminates that consumer behaviour is multifaceted, influenced by risk perception, brand loyalty, quality considerations, health-consciousness, and the desire to maintain a particular lifestyle. These findings highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of consumer behaviour during economic challenges and suggest that real-world responses can be more intricate and varied than previously anticipated.
In summary, given that the research delves into a relatively underexplored topic, it has offered valuable insights into the impact of financial resource scarcity on the digital pre-purchase journey within the beauty industry. The conclusions drawn from this study, when compared to existing literature, do not necessarily reveal outright contradictions. Instead, they shed light on potential avenues for additional exploration and nuances in participants' behaviour that may slightly diverge from the established theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature.

Nonetheless, this research holds significance in its potential contribution to the existing knowledge landscape. By offering a more complex understanding of consumer behaviour complexities in the context of financial limitations, it enriches the current body of knowledge on this subject.
6. Discussion

This chapter presents the theoretical and marginal implications that can be drawn from the research.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The previous sections have shown insights into the interplay between financial resource scarcity and the online pre-purchase journey of beauty products. These findings hold theoretical implications that significantly contribute to the existing body of knowledge concerning consumer behaviour within the beauty industry, particularly during economic challenges.

The exploration of behaviour changes under time of financial resource scarcity has clarified the multifaceted dynamics that direct consumer decision-making. Conflicting to the existing assumption of a straightforward shift towards price sensitivity during economic downturns, this study uncovers a more nuanced perspective. Participants showcased a blend of thoughtfulness, need-driven purchasing, planned behaviour, trade-offs, and increased research. These behavioural shifts highlight the intricate relationship between individual motivations and external constraints. The main idea here is that when people have less resources, their behaviour is not just one simple thing. It is mix of what they logically intend to do and what they personally like, along with outside influences. This idea challenges the existing literature of customer behaviour during financial scarcity.

The investigation into barriers against adopting new behaviour in the context of financial resource scarcity has unravelled a more profound comprehension of consumer resistance. The traditional assumption that economic challenges inherently lead to major behaviour changes and price-driven decisions is challenged by participants' risk aversion, brand loyalty, and emphasis on quality. These barriers underscore the complicated layers that influence consumer decisions and unveil the interplay between a number of factors and motivations.
The theoretical implication here lies in the enriched understanding of how consumers navigate their choices when experiencing financial scarcity. This study reveals that consumer in this setting are including elements of trust, familiarity, and personal priorities.

Summarising the theoretical implications, resulting from the exploration of behaviour changes and barriers provide a broader and more accurate understanding of consumer behaviour during economic challenges. These findings exceed traditional assumptions and underline the multidimensional process of consumer pre-purchase journey.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The impact of financial resource scarcity on the online pre-purchase journey of beauty products yields valuable insights that hold significant implications for beauty companies and their marketing strategies. The first step of understanding consumer behaviour under financial constraints provides a foundation for tailored approaches that resonate with various segments of customers.

First, the complicated behavioural changes identified in this study yield a difference from one-size-fits-all marketing strategies. Instead, beauty companies can leverage these insights to develop customized approaches that align with the diverse ways consumers respond to financial scarcity. By acknowledging the diverse behaviours, companies can craft targeted messages that resonate with the needs and motivations of different consumer segments. This implies a shift from generic marketing campaigns to segment-specific strategies. Beauty companies can leverage the newfound understanding of thoughtfulness, need-driven purchasing, planned behaviour, trade-offs, and increased research of product information to craft messages that align with these varied responses. Such tailored strategies not only demonstrate a profound understanding of consumer behaviour but also enhance the likelihood of engaging consumers effectively.

Second, the revelation of brand loyalty as a barrier reveals a strategic opportunity for beauty companies. By nurturing and capitalizing on the trust consumers place in certain brands, companies can enhance their competitive edge. Emphasizing the quality and reliability associated with established brands can resonate with consumers who prioritize
familiarity and consistency during times of financial constraint. This insight directs companies towards nurturing brand loyalty as a long-term investment. Engaging in efforts to enhance consumer trust and consistently delivering on promises can solidify the connection between consumers and brands. Highlighting the value proposition and quality assurances can resonate particularly well with consumers who are hesitant to experiment with unfamiliar products during times of economic challenge.

Third, understanding the prioritization of product quality over price allows for beauty companies to emphasize their product attributes. Companies can highlight the effectiveness, ingredients, and performance of their products, aligning with the consumer desire for value-driven purchases. This shift in emphasis from mere cost to product value addresses the consumer inclination towards maintaining certain aspects of their beauty routine as non-negotiable. This implies that marketing strategies should move beyond price-based incentives and focus on showcasing the quality and benefits of products.

Finally, the managerial implications drawn from this study provide a blueprint for beauty companies to navigate the challenges posed by financial resource scarcity. By tailoring marketing strategies, leveraging brand loyalty, prioritizing quality, companies can effectively engage with consumers facing financial scarcity.
7. Conclusion

This chapter is concluding and summarizing the result of the thesis research and answer the research question.

At its core, this study sought to extend the existing understanding of consumer behaviour within the beauty industry by examining the influence of financial resource scarcity on the digital pre-purchase journey of beauty products. Thereby, this study enriches the subject surrounding consumer responses to economic challenges.

The research’ digital approach and qualitative methodology enabled a nuanced exploration of behaviour changes and barriers encountered by beauty customers. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of how participants navigate their pre-purchase journey and respond to financial resource scarcity. In doing so, this study contributes to bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implications within the realm of consumer behaviour in the beauty industry during their journey.

The central research question, "How does financial resource scarcity affect the customers' online pre-purchase journey of beauty products?" has been addressed through meticulous data analysis and interpretation. The findings clearly reveal that financial resource scarcity triggers a multitude of changes among beauty customers. Answering the additional research question What are the main behavioural changes occurring in the journey when the beauty customer is experiencing financial resource scarcity? The identified themes are, an increased thoughtfulness, need-driven purchasing, planned behaviour, awareness of trade-offs, and increased research of product information unveil the complexities of consumer responses to financial scarcity.

Furthermore, the new findings of barriers against adopting new behaviour within the context of financial resource scarcity provides a comprehensive understanding of consumer resistance. The presence of risk aversion, brand loyalty, and prioritization of product quality over price underscores the intricate interplay of factors that shape consumer decision-making. These barriers clarify the diversity of consumer responses to economic challenges and highlight the need for tailored strategies that cater to the unique motivations of different segments.
8. Limitations and Further Research

This chapter covers the limitations of the thesis as well as the suggestions for further research in the area.

7.1 Limitations

Firstly, this research is conducted in a relatively unexplored domain and is dependence upon societal changes that impact the financial resources of the sample under study. Specifically, the study necessitates data collection during periods when participants are experiencing scarce resources.

Secondly, two relatively unexplored areas, namely, the digital customer journey focusing on the beauty segment, and the interplay of customer behaviour in financial resource scarcity, posed a significant challenge for the author. Given more time, additional empirical studies, such as simulations of customer behaviour, could have provided more comprehensive data. However, due to the constraints of the master's thesis timeline, these supplementary investigations were unfeasible.

Third, determining the exact extent of participants' financial situations presented a challenge. The author relied on participants' expressions of how their living conditions and expenses had changed. However, information whether these individuals received external financial support and how it may have influenced the study's outcomes remains intricate and may introduce ambiguity.

7.2 Further research

The insights gained from this study provide a valuable foundation for understanding the impact of financial resource scarcity on the online pre-purchase journey of beauty products. However, as with any research, several openings for further exploration emerge from the current findings. These potential directions not only extend the knowledge within this specific research area but also offer opportunities to enrich the understanding of consumer behaviour in the broader context of e-commerce and economic constraints.
First, delving deeper into the factors that determine whether consumers adapt their behaviour or stand against changing could lead to the identification of distinct behaviour patterns based on demographic factors, historical occasions, prior consumption habits, and personal values. Such segmentation can enable more targeted marketing strategies that resonate with the specific concerns and preferences of various consumer groups.

Second, exploring how financial resource scarcity affects the pre-purchase journey in industries other than beauty could reveal commonalities and differences in consumer behaviour. A cross-industry comparison might uncover unique challenges and strategies that can inform marketing approaches in diverse sectors.

Third, investigating the influence of social and cultural factors on the relationship between financial scarcity and consumer behaviour can uncover deeper insights into why certain barriers exist and persist. Cultural attitudes toward beauty, and societal norms may interact with economic considerations to shape consumer decision-making.

In conclusion, this study provides a foundational understanding of both the adaptive and resistant responses of consumers to financial resource scarcity within the online pre-purchase journey of beauty products. By exploring the implications of these findings and embarking on further research in the directions outlined above, researchers and practitioners alike can enhance their understanding of consumer behaviour in the evolving landscape of e-commerce and future expected boom-and-bust times.
Reference list


