Consumer Multichannel Buying Behavior Under the Pandemic

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Abstract

Retail sales have increased significantly in recent years, posing a major challenge for merchants in maintaining a consistent consumer experience across several channels. Changing consumer behaviors have had a big impact on this shift in buying patterns. Customers and retailers are also contending with the complications of adapting to these developments, which have been compounded by the global COVID-19 outbreak. The Internet retail sector, in particular, has seen significant development, which has surprised many. As a result of the digital revolution, online customers' preferences are changing, as they seek fulfillment amid a variety of available possibilities. The changing environment of customer behavior has been a key focus, formed in part by the distinct patterns that have emerged in reaction to COVID-19. This study seeks to shed light on how the retail phenomenon of COVID-19 has impacted customer purchasing behaviors, with the goal of discovering and validating unique insights that may affect decision-making, particularly among millennials in Sweden and China. In the beginning stages of this investigation, a comprehensive approach integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches was used to attain this goal. The study used a sequential exploratory design with two data-gathering periods. Our conclusions were guided by empirical data gathered through focus group meetings and replies to a web-based survey. Two key discoveries have given rise
to a novel hypothesis, showing that customers in both Sweden and China enjoyed large benefits from online purchasing. Furthermore, the research has shown previously unknown and unanticipated ways in which COVID-19 continues to influence client purchasing behavior. This exploratory and constructive research seeks to enhance our understanding of these transitions, ultimately providing useful insights into the emerging retail scene in a post-pandemic world.

Keywords: Multichannel buying behavior, Covid-19 impact, Retail sales, Consumer purchasing behavior, Sweden, China
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The proliferation of available purchasing platforms has resulted in significant changes in how consumers choose their purchasing channels in recent years. Consumer behaviour is a complex process that involves numerous factors in the decision-making process. The selection of purchasing channels is one such critical aspect of consumer behaviour. One would define purchasing channels as the various platforms or channels through which consumers purchase goods and services. These channels can range from traditional brick-and-mortar stores to e-commerce platforms, social media, and mobile apps. A variety of factors influence the selection of a purchasing channel, including consumer demographics, personal preferences, and situational factors.

In the research of Dominici et al., (2021), consumer demographics play a significant role in channel selection. This study further contends that younger consumers are more likely to make purchases through online channels such as e-commerce platforms and social media. Likewise, Xu et al (2019), affirm that 84% of internet users aged 16 to 24 shop online. Older consumers, on the other hand, are more likely to prefer traditional channels of purchase, such as physical stores. This disparity in channel selection can be attributed to differences in digital literacy and preferences among demographic groups.

Personal preferences are also important in channel selection. When it comes to purchasing channels, consumers have varying preferences. Some customers prefer the convenience of online channels, while others prefer the personal touch of physical stores. According Savelli et al (2019), 60% of consumers prefer to shop in stores because they can touch and feel the products and in comparison, 40% of consumers prefer to shop online because it is more convenient to do so from home. These personal preferences are influenced by a variety of factors, including prior shopping experiences, brand loyalty, and social influences.

Purchasing channel selection is also influenced by situational factors. Consumers may select purchasing channels based on their current situation. For example, a consumer looking for groceries quickly may prefer to visit a physical store, whereas a consumer looking for a unique
item may prefer to shop online. Time constraints, location, and the urgency of need are all examples of situational factors that impact purchasing channels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on how people go about their daily lives, including shopping. During the pandemic, online purchasing platforms have emerged as a convenient and secure option for consumers to purchase goods and services. However, these platforms have changed consumers' purchasing patterns and behaviours in addition to providing convenience. Consumers have been compelled by the pandemic to adjust to a new normal in which online shopping platforms have taken on crucial roles in their daily lives. Online shopping platforms have therefore altered customers' shopping habits in addition to improving the convenience of making purchases (Hu et al, 2020).

By giving consumers more convenient and secure methods to make purchases, online shopping platforms have altered the patterns and behaviours of consumers during the pandemic. Bypassing the need to visit actual stores, these platforms have made it possible for customers to shop from the convenience and security of their homes. Additionally, these platforms have made it possible for customers to swiftly and easily compare prices and products, as well as access a wider range of options at affordable prices. Further enhancing the convenience of online purchasing, many platforms now offer extra features like same-day delivery, discounts, contactless delivery, virtual try-on, online consultations and loyalty programs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online shopping platforms were extremely important in improving customers' purchasing decisions. Due to social isolation policies, customers used online shopping websites to buy products and services. Customers no longer needed to leave their homes to make purchases because of online purchasing platforms, which allow them to do so for a variety of products and services. Due to this convenience, internet shopping significantly increased throughout the pandemic. The fear of contracting the virus in real stores also increased consumers' propensity to shop online. Additionally, online shopping platforms made it simple for consumers to compare prices and goods, facilitating well-informed purchases. These platforms have also provided consumers with access to a wider variety of products and services that may not be available in their local stores.
Understanding how consumers make purchasing decisions is therefore a crucial aspect for businesses in the area of consumer behaviour. Several theories have been proposed to explain the variables influencing consumers' channel selection. This paper will focus on expectation disconfirmation theory, theory of reasoned action theory, and theory of planned behaviour theory to help explain how consumers choose purchasing channels since these theories offer helpful frameworks for understanding how consumers make purchasing channel decisions. Businesses can tailor their offerings and marketing strategies to better meet the requirements and preferences of their target customers by considering the factors that impact channel choice.

1.2 Research Questions

➢ What are the changes in consumer purchasing behavior resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and how do these changes affect the choice between online and physical stores among Swedish and Chinese residents aged 18-35?
➢ To what extent do existing theories in consumer purchasing behavior apply to the purchasing behavior of Swedish and Chinese residents aged 18-35 during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.3 Problem Statement

As the retail landscape evolves, it becomes increasingly important for businesses to understand how consumers select their purchasing channels. Understanding the factors that drive consumers to choose one purchasing channel over another has become even more important with the emergence of online purchasing platforms and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this problem statement is to look into the factors that influence consumers' purchasing channels, particularly during the pandemic, and how online purchasing platforms have improved their purchasing convenience.

This study aims to elicit information about the decision-making process that consumers use when selecting their purchasing channels. Price, product availability, convenience, and personal preferences are all factors that may influence this decision. Understanding these factors can assist businesses in developing effective marketing strategies and optimizing their sales channels to better meet the needs and preferences of their customers. Additionally, this study specifically
addresses the role of online purchasing platforms during the pandemic. With many physical stores closed or operating at reduced capacity, many consumers turned to online purchasing platforms as their primary purchasing channel. This study investigates how these platforms improved consumers' purchasing convenience during the pandemic, as well as how they influenced their purchasing patterns and behaviours. Understanding these changes can assist businesses in adapting to the new normal and optimizing their online presence in order to better serve their customers.

1.4 Purpose of Study

The study's overarching goal is to investigate the factors that influence consumers' choice of purchasing channels, with a particular emphasis on the impact of online purchasing platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is done by developing more comprehensive literature from the research done on Swedish and Chinese residents between 18-35 years of age with respect to choosing between online and physical stores (Ali, 2020). For higher preciseness, the research focuses on identifying and testing new behaviors among the Chinese and Swedish residents in choosing between the two buying approaches on specific frequently purchased products. The research is carried out from the side of the consumer by establishing the focus groups and conducting a web-based study.

The study also seeks to identify the key factors influencing consumers' preference for online shopping platforms, such as convenience, safety, and availability. Additionally, the study looks into how online platforms adapted to meet changing consumer needs during the pandemic and how these adaptations influenced consumer behaviour. Overall, the study may provide useful insights into the changing nature of consumer behaviour and the role of technology in influencing purchasing decisions.

1.5 Disposition

Several theories can explain how consumers choose their purchasing channels, however, this study focuses on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which is a well-established theoretical framework that has been widely used in the study of consumer behaviour. According to this theory, consumer behaviour is primarily determined by three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Marketers and retailers can create more potent plans for marketing
their goods through various channels by looking at customer attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Therefore, this study will primarily rely on TPB.

This study is made up of seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction of the study which provides the background based on the study phenomenon, the study questions, the problem, and the purpose. Chapter two provides the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter three provides the literature review of the previous studies bringing this study into context and identifying the research gap. Chapter four focuses on the methodology employed in this study. Chapter five provides the results analysis methods which will be used to evaluate the study results. Chapter six provides the results of the study which includes the responses of the participants. The final chapter includes the discussion of the results in relation to the theoretical and the literature review and also the conclusion of the study.
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

This section is based on a theoretical framework for comprehending consumers' multichannel and omnichannel purchase journeys. Businesses interact with customers through various platforms using two strategies: multichannel and omnichannel. The term multichannel describes the use of a variety of channels to communicate with consumers, including email, phone, social media, websites, and actual stores (Al Hafizi et al, 2021). Customers can select their preferred method of communication with the company, and each channel runs independently. For instance, a customer may browse a product on the company website, call the customer support number with questions, and then purchase the item in store.

In contrast, omnichannel takes a more integrated approach to customer interactions. An omnichannel strategy connects all channels and shares customer data across channels to provide a seamless experience. A customer, for instance, may begin by browsing a product on the company's website, then receive a personalized email with recommendations, and finally make a purchase in-store, where the sales associate already knows the customer's preferences and purchase history from previous interactions across channels (Hossain et al, 2020).

The primary difference between multichannel and omnichannel is the degree of channel integration. While multichannel works in silos, with each channel having its own set of data and processes, omnichannel strives to provide a consistent and personalized experience across all channels. Omnichannel is regarded as a more customer-centric approach because it focuses on providing a unified experience that meets customers' expectations regardless of the channel through which they interact with the business.

Reaching a broader audience is one of the main advantages of a multichannel strategy for businesses. Businesses can draw customers who prefer various communication channels by offering them a variety of channels for interaction. For instance, some customers might prefer to communicate with a company via social media, while others might prefer to call a customer support agent. Businesses can meet the requirements and preferences of various customers by offering a variety of channels. Another advantage of a multichannel strategy is that it can assist businesses in improving customer service. Businesses can respond to customer inquiries more
quickly and efficiently if they provide multiple channels for customers to contact them. This may result in increased customer satisfaction and loyalty (Al Hafizi et al, 2021).

However, there are some disadvantages to a multichannel strategy. One of the most difficult challenges is maintaining consistency across multiple channels. A customer who interacts with a business via social media, for example, may have a different experience than a customer who interacts with the business via a physical store. This can result in a disjoined customer experience, causing confusion and frustration. Another concern is that managing multichannel can be complicated and time-consuming. Businesses must invest in the infrastructure and technology needed to support multiple channels, as well as the personnel needed to effectively manage each channel. For small and medium-sized businesses, this can be a significant investment, and it can also be difficult to ensure that each channel is staffed with knowledgeable and effective personnel.

One of the key advantages of an omnichannel strategy on the other hand is that it enables businesses to create a more personalized customer experience. Businesses can better comprehend the requirements, preferences, and behaviour of each customer by integrating data from all channels. Businesses may then be able to offer personalized suggestions and promotions that are more likely to appeal to each customer. An omnichannel approach also has the potential to improve customer loyalty for businesses. Businesses therefore can build a relationship of confidence and familiarity with their customers by offering a seamless and consistent experience across all platforms. Increased client retention and advocacy may result from this.

There are, however, some drawbacks to implementing an omnichannel strategy. One of the most difficult challenges is integrating data from multiple channels. Businesses must invest in the technology and infrastructure required to integrate data from various systems, as well as the personnel required to effectively manage and analyse customer data. Another issue is that an omnichannel strategy can be costly to implement and maintain.

Omnichannel and multichannel marketing are critical approaches in the modern business environment, where customers are increasingly seeking seamless and consistent experiences across all channels. As such, various theories have been proposed to support and guide the adoption and implementation of omnichannel and multichannel marketing strategies. Some of the key theories that have been applied in this context include the expectation disconfirmation theory, the
theory of reasoned action, and the theory of planned behaviour. Because they offer a framework for comprehending how consumers proceed through the purchasing process, the theories are helpful in researching consumer multichannel and omnichannel purchase behaviour. These theories also emphasize the significance of a number of variables that affect customer behaviour, including attitude, arbitrary standards, and perceived behavioural control.

2.1 Expectation Disconfirmation Theory

The Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) is a psychological theory that investigates how people judge their satisfaction or discontent by comparing their expectations to the actual experiences they have. This theory is useful in understanding human behaviour in a variety of contexts, particularly in consumer psychology, where it influences purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and overall satisfaction (Sinha et al, 2020). Fundamentally, EDT is based on the idea that people have preconceived notions about a given good, service, or encounter. These expectations are frequently shaped by a number of variables, including past encounters, advertisements, word-of-mouth, and individual beliefs. According to the notion, confirmation occurs when an individual's experience corresponds with their expectations. Satisfaction results from this confirmation. But disconfirmation occurs when the expected experience differs from the real one, and this can have either positive or negative consequences (Sinha et al, 2020).

The following three components make up EDT:

1. Expectations are the preconceived ideas, convictions, or hopes that a person has about a good, service, or encounter. A variety of things, such as advice, marketing materials, prior interactions, and cultural considerations, might have an impact on expectations.
2. Disconfirmation: When someone compares their expectations with what they really experienced, they enter this stage. Confirmation results if the encounter lives up to expectations. Disconfirmation occurs when an experience exceeds or falls short of expectations.
3. Satisfaction or discontent: The discrepancy between expectations and the real experience determines the degree of satisfaction or discontent. Falling short of expectations causes discontent, while meeting or exceeding them leads to satisfaction.
When a person's expectations and their actual experiences line up, confirmation takes place. For example, when someone expects a specific standard of service at a hotel and gets it, it validates their views and makes them happy. When an individual's expectations are exceeded by the actual experience, positive disconfirmation occurs. Positive disconfirmation arises when hotel service surpasses expectations, leading to increased satisfaction and possibly a stronger emotional bond with the product or service. Negative disconfirmation, on the other hand, happens when the experience is not up to par. When hotel service falls short of expectations, guests become disappointed and dissatisfied, which can have a negative impact on word-of-mouth and decrease the chance of returning (Sinha et al, 2020).

This theory can aid businesses in understanding how consumers gauge their satisfaction based on the consistency and calibre of their experience across various channels when it comes to multichannel and omnichannel marketing (Sinha et al, 2020). Customers form expectations based on prior experiences, marketing communication, and word-of-mouth, according to expectation disconfirmation theory. When a customer's experience exceeds their expectations, they feel positive confirmation and satisfaction. When their experience falls short of their expectations, they feel negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction.

This means that in the context of multichannel and omnichannel marketing, businesses must ensure a consistent and high-quality experience across all channels in order to meet or exceed customer expectations. For example, if a customer expects a quick response time on social media but instead receives delays or poor customer service, they may experience negative confirmation and become dissatisfied. Similarly, if a customer expects a personalized experience on a company's website but instead finds generic content, they may be disappointed and dissatisfied.

Companies can design and implement multichannel and omnichannel strategies that ensure consistency and quality across all channels to meet or exceed customer expectations by understanding the expectation disconfirmation theory. Consistent branding, messaging, and user interface across channels, as well as personalized content and proactive customer service, can all be part of this. Meeting or exceeding customer expectations can increase satisfaction and loyalty, resulting in increased sales and revenue for businesses (Sinha et al, 2020).
2.2 Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action provides insights into how two major components impact human behaviour: attitudes and subjective norms. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that people's behavioural intentions are the most important predictors of their actions. Attitudes are a person's feelings and judgments of a conduct, which are formed by their beliefs about the likely results and their assessment of those outcomes (Conner. M, 2020). When someone feels that an action will result in positive outcomes and values those outcomes, they have a positive attitude toward that conduct. Subjective norms, on the other hand, are societal pressures or impacts on conduct that are experienced. This comprises a person's view of what others think they should behave and the value they place on complying to these perceived norms.

This theory's central concept is represented in a simple formula: Behavioural Intention = (Attitude toward the Behaviour) x (Subjective Norms). This suggests that an individual's intention to engage in a specific conduct is influenced by their views and subjective norms. The stronger the desire to engage in the conduct, the more probable it is that they will do so (Conner. M, 2020). This theory has been widely used to describe and predict behaviours in a variety of disciplines, ranging from health-related behaviours to consumer decisions and environmental actions. It has also used as a foundation for other theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which incorporates perceived behavioural control as another driver of behaviour (Conner. M, 2020).

In the context of multichannel and omnichannel marketing, this means that businesses must understand the attitudes and subjective norms that influence customers' decisions to interact with a company through various channels. Customers, for example, may have positive attitudes toward interacting with a company via social media if they perceive it to be convenient and efficient, but negative attitudes if they perceive it to be invasive or impersonal. Customers may also be more likely to use a new channel if they believe it is socially acceptable and normative among their peers.

Companies can improve adoption and satisfaction by understanding TRA and designing and implementing multichannel and omnichannel strategies that address customers' attitudes and subjective norms. This can include leveraging social proof and social influence to promote new channels and encourage adoption, as well as targeted marketing communication to highlight the
benefits of different channels and address potential concerns. Overall, TRA can help businesses better understand their customers' decisions about which channels to use to interact with them and design multichannel and omnichannel strategies that meet their needs and preferences, resulting in increased satisfaction and loyalty.

2.3 The Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a social psychology theory that helps explain how individuals make choices about their behaviour based on their attitudes, subjective standards, and perceived behavioural control. TPB can assist businesses in comprehending how customers perceive their control over using various channels to engage with a company and how they make decisions about their channel use in the context of multichannel and omnichannel marketing (Sok et al, 2020).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour claims, at its heart, that an individual's intention to do a behaviour is the most direct determinant of that conduct. This intention is determined by three key factors:

1. **Attitude**: An individual's positive or negative appraisal of executing a given behaviour. It includes beliefs about the results of actions as well as the value the person sets on these outcomes.
2. **Subjective Norms**: This component refers to the perceived social pressure or influence that individuals experience from significant others, such as friends, family, or society in general. It takes into account the social expectations of the action as well as the person's incentive to conform to these expectations.
3. **Perceived Behavioural Control**: This refers to an individual's belief in their own ability to do the behaviour. It entails assessing one's own capabilities, resources, and external influences that may help or impede behaviour.

These three components—attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control—all work together to shape an individual's behavioural intention. The stronger the intention to engage in an action, the more probable the behaviour would occur, according to the hypothesis. The degree to which a person perceives that they have control over their conduct is referred to as perceived
behavioural control. This means that businesses must comprehend how customers perceive behavioural control over choosing which channels to use to engage with a company in the context of multichannel and omnichannel marketing. Customers may have low perceived behavioural control when using a chatbot if they believe it to be unreliable or difficult to use, but high perceived behavioural control when using email if they are comfortable and secure using the channel.

By understanding TPB, businesses can design and execute multichannel and omnichannel strategies that address customers’ perceived behavioural control to increase adoption and satisfaction. This may entail enhancing the usability and dependability of new channels, offering customers training and assistance so they can use new channels efficiently, and utilizing the behaviour and preferences of current customers to promote new channels. Overall, TPB can help companies better understand customers' decision-making about using various channels to interact with a company and design multichannel and omnichannel strategies that suit their needs and preferences, leading to greater satisfaction and loyalty.
Chapter Three: Methodology

In the field of academic research, the methodology section of a research report is a critical component that unravels the complexities of the study's design and implementation. This part provides a detailed and precise overview of the procedures used to study the research subject at hand. Its value stems from its capacity to provide readers with a road map, guiding them through the numerous stages necessary to collect, analyse, and interpret data, while also shining light on the ethical considerations that drive the study (Schrack et al., 2016). By going into the detailed specifics of the study methodology, this part allows readers to judge the validity and reliability of the findings, thereby improving the overall rigor and credibility of the research attempt. This section therefore serves as a road map for readers, guiding them through the research process and offering a clear picture of how this research was carried out.

3.1 Research Design

Consumer behaviour has seen considerable changes in recent years, owing to technological improvements and the global impact of the COVID-19 epidemic. Understanding the elements that influence consumers' choice of purchase channels has become critical for companies and business people alike. This study attempts to analyse these issues, with a specific focus on the impact of online shopping platforms during the COVID-19 epidemic. This study uses a mixed-methods research strategy that integrates qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a thorough picture of consumers' preferences and behaviours while deciding between online and physical retailers.

3.2 Qualitative Research Methods

This study adopts the use of focus groups to get in-depth insights into customers' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences connected to purchase channels and online platforms. Focus groups allow for the examination of participants' motivations, decision-making processes, and emerging trends in a group context. By exploring the use of focus group, I'll be able to find and test novel behaviours unique to frequently purchased products by conducting focus groups with Swedish and Chinese people aged 18 to 35. Participants' cultural differences and views of convenience, safety, and availability will be addressed in open-ended discussions, giving rich qualitative data to inform
the study. This study will hold separate focus groups with participants from Sweden and China to promote conversations regarding the participants' shopping experiences, motivations for choosing online or physical stores, and views of convenience, safety, and availability. The qualitative data from these focus groups will provide valuable insights into cultural differences, new trends, and unique purchase channel behaviours.

3.3 Quantitative Research Methods

In addition to qualitative insights, a web-based survey is used in this study to acquire quantitative data on consumers' purchasing behaviours and preferences. The survey will collect data on the frequency and patterns of online and offline shopping, preferences for specific product categories, and the important variables influencing customers' purchase channel choices. The comparison of the preferences of Swedish and Chinese citizens will be made by assessing the relevance of criteria such as convenience, safety, availability, price, and product diversity. Furthermore, the poll will examine participants' levels of satisfaction with online platforms as well as their readiness to use them in the future.

3.4 Mixed-Methods Design

This study will use a mixed-methods research methodology to capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, providing complementary and comprehensive insights into consumer preferences and behaviours. The qualitative data gathered through focus groups will provide nuanced insights, cultural context, and the generation of hypotheses, and the quantitative data gathered through the web-based survey will allow for statistical generalizability and hypothesis testing. The triangulation of information from several sources will ensure the study's conclusions' validity and trustworthiness.

3.5 Sample Selection

Swedish and Chinese citizens between the ages of 18 and 35 would be an adequate sample for this investigation. The age range of 18-35 is carefully chosen since this group is more likely to be active customers and to engage with online purchase platforms. Young individuals in this age group are frequently early adopters of new technology and are more at ease with online purchasing (Freeman et al., 2020). The study provides insights into developing trends and preferences
important to the evolving consumer landscape by focusing on this population. Furthermore, focusing on two contrasting cultural contexts (Sweden and China) allows for a comparative investigation of consumer behaviours and preferences. The study can capture cultural differences in consumer behaviour and preferences by involving individuals from both nations. This comparative analysis provides a more in-depth understanding of the factors that influence purchase decisions in various socio-cultural contexts.

The sample selection method also corresponds to the study's aims. Prior plans were made to organize focus groups and undertake a web-based study. Focus groups facilitate group discussions and explore participants' opinions, motives, and experiences, allowing for in-depth qualitative insights. This method is useful for gathering nuanced information and developing a thorough understanding of consumer decision-making processes. Furthermore, web-based study was chosen in order to collect data from a bigger sample size. This strategy collects more data and reaches a larger audience of potential participants. The study can reach a varied range of people from various geographical regions by leveraging online platforms, hence increasing the external validity of the findings.

The study's sample of Swedish and Chinese residents aged 18-35 was chosen to capture cultural variations, target an age group that is highly engaged in online shopping, employ appropriate research methodologies, and increase the generalizability of the findings. The study intends to provide useful insights into the variables influencing customers' choice of purchase channels and the role of online platforms during the COVID-19 epidemic by conducting research among these demographics.

3.6 Data Collection

In this study, interviews in the focus group will be utilized as the major data collection approach to acquire insights and opinions from Swedish and Chinese individuals aged 18-35 about their purchasing behaviour and choices between online and physical businesses. The interviews will allow for direct engagement with participants, allowing for an in-depth investigation of their experiences, preferences, and motivations. Rich and contextual data that may not be easily acquired through other methods will be gathered through the interviews. Interviews are a well-known qualitative research approach that allows researchers to collect extensive information from
individuals or groups directly. They let participants communicate their views, opinions, and experiences, which provides vital insights into their decision-making processes and behaviours. Interviews allow for flexibility and adaptability since the interviewer can delve deeper into pertinent issues and seek clarification based on the responses of participants (Aarsand, L., & Aarsand, 2019).

In this study, interviews with fourteen Swedish and Chinese people aged 18-35 will be undertaken to acquire a better knowledge of their purchasing habits and the factors that influence their decisions between online and physical businesses. The interviews will be semi-structured, with pre-determined questions mixed in with the freedom to explore developing topics and go deeper into participants' responses. This method enables for the collecting of standardized data as well as the study of individual views. Depending on the feasibility and preferences of the participants, the interviews will be performed in person or via online platforms. In-person interviews provide for nonverbal indications and a deeper level of connection, but online interviews are more convenient and have access to a larger pool of participants.

The interview questions are tailored to the study's research questions and objectives. Participants' buying preferences, their experiences with online and physical businesses, the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on their purchase behaviour, and the reasons influencing their channel selections are included in the questions. Probing questions are used to encourage participants to give extensive and reflective responses, providing a thorough knowledge of their points of view. Thematic analysis will be used to find reoccurring themes, patterns, and categories in the data. This analysis will assist in finding similarities and contrasts in the purchase habits of Swedish and Chinese people aged 18-35, as well as insights into the factors influencing their decisions between online and physical retailers.

The detailed structured interview questions are as follows:

3.6.1 Exploring Attitude Interview Questions

1. How do you generally feel about shopping for products online compared to in-person shopping?
2. How do you perceive the safety and security of online shopping platforms? Does this impact your willingness to make purchases online?

3. Have you ever had a problem with an online shopping platform, such as late delivery or wrong orders? How have these encounters influenced your view regarding these platforms?

4. How have online shopping platforms adapted to address any concerns or barriers that may have influenced your attitudes towards online shopping during the pandemic?

3.6.2 Investigating the Impact of Subjective Norms on Consumer Purchasing Decisions

Questions

1. To what extent are the opinions and recommendations of family, friends, or colleagues a factor in your decision to shop online or in physical stores?

2. Have you ever been influenced by social media ads or recommendations from influencers in your decision to shop online? How much do these factors impact your purchasing decisions?

3. How much importance do you place on the opinions and experiences of other online shoppers when making your purchasing decisions?

4. Do you think that the pandemic has influenced the shopping behaviors of those around you? If so, how has this impacted your own shopping habits?

3.6.3 Understanding Consumer Purchase Decisions Based on Perceived Control Behavior

Questions

1. Do you feel that you have greater control over your purchasing decisions when shopping online or in physical stores?

2. Have you ever experienced difficulty finding the products you are looking for in physical stores? How has this influenced your decision to shop online?

3. How important is it for you to have control over the delivery or pickup process when shopping online? Have you ever had negative experiences with delivery or pickup that have influenced your decision to shop online or in-store?

4. How important is it for you to be able to return or exchange products when shopping online? Do you feel that you have greater control over this process when shopping online or in physical stores?
5. Have you noticed any changes in the way that online shopping platforms have adapted to meet changing consumer needs during the pandemic? How has this impacted your perceived control over the purchasing process?

3.6.4 Ethical Considerations of the Interview

When conducting research interviews, ethical issues are critical because they protect study participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent is the foundation of ethical research, ensuring that participants understand the study's objective, their rights, and the potential risks and benefits of their participation. Respecting participants' autonomy, informed consent empowers them to make voluntary and informed decisions about their involvement and highlights their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Informed permission, confidentiality, and privacy are some of the ethical factors that were taken into account when conducting interviews for this research project.

Informed consent is the process of acquiring study participants' voluntary and informed assent to engage in the research project (Josephson, A., & Smale, 2021). Volunteers will be informed of the study's goal, their rights as volunteers, and the risks and advantages of taking part. Furthermore, participants will be notified that their participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any moment.

Confidentiality protects participants' personal information and data. The research will ensure that all information gathered during interviews is kept confidential and that participants' identities are protected. This involves securely storing data and employing anonymization techniques to further assure secrecy. The research therefore builds a trusting environment while protecting participants' privacy by maintaining secrecy.

Another key ethical issue made in this study is privacy. During the data-gathering procedure, participants will be made to feel at ease and secure. The interview is kept confidential, and participants are not interrupted. Furthermore, participants' personal beliefs, experiences, and opinions are respected, and no kind of discrimination or harassment is tolerated.
Following ethical principles and standards during interviews is critical to performing ethical and responsible research. Following these guidelines shows respect for participants as autonomous individuals, safeguards their privacy and confidentiality, and defends their rights throughout this research process. By adhering to these ethical norms, this study preserves the integrity of research and contributes to the advancement of knowledge while protecting the well-being and rights of everyone engaged.
Chapter Four: Interview

Consumer behavior and decision-making processes have become increasingly crucial for organizations operating in a variety of sectors in today's globalized world. Understanding how consumers select their purchasing channels is especially important for businesses looking to adjust their marketing campaigns efficiently. This cross-cultural interview study intends to provide insight on the decision-making processes used by Swedish and Chinese consumers when choosing their preferred purchasing channels.

4.1 Interview Structure

This interview upholds the confidentiality of the participants' responses. The questions are thoughtfully developed to delve into numerous facets of the purchasing decision-making process, taking technological, economic, and personal issues into account. The interview was designed to elicit information about the factors that impact consumers' purchase channel preferences.

Key topics covered include:

1. Technological Adoption
2. User Experience and Convenience
3. Security and trust
4. Influences from friends, family, colleagues and Culture

4.2 The Main Themes of the Interview

The interview set uncovers a number of noteworthy themes that shed light on consumer attitudes; the influence of perceived control over consumer behaviors, and the impact of subjective standards on purchase decisions, particularly when it comes to online and in-person shopping. Customers' decisions are greatly influenced by the dynamics of control, whether they are interacting with a physical store or navigating a virtual one. Increasing our understanding of these themes helps businesses better understand how to cater to the unique interests of their customers on various e-commerce platforms. It also clarifies the intricacies of consumer behavior.
4.2.1 Attitudes Toward Shopping

Consumer attitudes regarding shopping are diverse, reflecting various preferences, behaviors, and decision-making processes. These views involve a complex web of factors including shopping habits, safety perceptions, social influences, the impact of the epidemic, perceived control, and the significance of return and exchange procedures. The interviews shed light on the complicated interplay between these variables, demonstrating how people navigate and prioritize diverse factors in their purchasing experiences. The major themes covered here are Preference for shopping mode and Safety and Security Perceptions.

Preference for Shopping Mode

Various buying preferences surfaced during the interviews, demonstrating a range of opinions toward online and in-person shopping. Some people preferred online shopping because of its convenience, wide product selection, and time-saving benefits. One Chinese interviewee R3 commented, "I find online shopping to be efficient and time-saving, especially for everyday goods." This sentiment highlights the convenience side of internet shopping, implying that it provides an effective way to buy everyday necessities or varied things without the limits of physical store visits.

Other interviewees, on the other hand, loved the sensory experience and rapid gratification afforded by in-person buying. A Chinese interviewee R7 said, "I enjoy doing my shopping in person since it allows me to see and touch the items in person before I decide to buy them." This point of view stresses tactile engagement and the capacity to explore things physically before making a buying choice. Physical stores' real experience and immediacy play an important influence in these people's buying happiness.

These contrasting viewpoints illustrate consumers' differing opinions and wants. While online buying provides convenience and a wide range of options, in-person shopping provides an immediate sensory experience, enabling a more hands-on decision-making process. The preferences shown in these interviews show that personal habits, the sort of things purchased, and the purchasing situation all influence individual dispositions toward buying modes.
Individuals' perceptions of safety and security in online purchasing platforms differ greatly, as evidenced by the interviews offered. Trust is an essential factor in determining consumer desire to engage in online buying, with well-established websites frequently having higher levels of confidence due to their perceived effective security measures. Lesser-known or unknown websites, on the other hand, can elicit concern and lower levels of trust among consumers.

Respondents in the interviews expressed varying opinions about the safety and security of online purchasing platforms. According to a Sweden participant in the interview Z3, "I believe online purchasing platforms have strong security safeguards in place, and I am comfortable making online transactions." This perspective of view exhibits a level of confidence and faith in the security precautions given by well-known and established internet sites. This person's confidence in their security protocols drives them to perform online transactions with ease.

Another Sweden interviewee Z5, on the other hand, had a more nuanced opinion, saying, "I am wary while making purchases from lesser-known or unfamiliar websites, even if I trust well-known online platforms." This view reflects the widespread distrust expressed by many consumers when confronted with new or less well-known online purchasing venues. Despite a level of faith placed in respected and established online markets, the ambiguity surrounding the security measures of unfamiliar websites often results in hesitation and caution while engaging in transactions.

Various variables influence trust in online purchasing platforms, including the website's reputation, security measures, and transparency in protecting consumer data. Established online markets and well-known businesses have often invested in strong security solutions, instilling consumer trust and confidence. This trust is critical in determining their readiness to make online purchases, knowing that their personal and financial information is safe. In contrast, unfamiliar or newer platforms encounter difficulties in gaining consumer confidence and credibility. The fact that a respondent is wary of purchasing from such platforms despite trusting more established sites emphasizes the relevance of perceived security measures in influencing customer behavior. Consumers' willingness to engage in transactions is hampered by their lack of trust in the security standards of lesser-known websites.
The wide range of perceptions of safety and security in online shopping platforms demonstrates the complex relationship between consumer trust, platform reputation, and perceived security measures. The higher trust in well-established platforms indicates the importance of reputation and proven security measures in shaping customer attitudes, whilst the lower trust in lesser-known platforms highlights the difficulties they face in building credibility and winning consumer trust.

4.2.2 Influence of Subjective Norms

Understanding the impact of subjective norms on consumer behavior is critical in unraveling the complex web of purchase decisions. Subjective norms are social and cultural forces that influence an individual's choices by producing a perceived pressure to conform to specific behaviors. These norms are built from a combination of society expectations, peer judgments, and cultural standards, and they have a substantial impact on consumer decision-making processes in a variety of circumstances. Unraveling the layers of subjective norms provides a deep insight of how external factors shape and sometimes overrule human preferences, playing a critical role in defining the consumer landscape across varied markets and industries.

Impact of Social Circles

The influence of social circles, including family, friends, and colleagues, significantly impacts consumer purchase decisions. The interviewees emphasize how these external influences substantially impact decision-making while recognizing the individual's preferences, convenience, and unique needs as essential aspects of the overall decision-making process. Several participants stated that the opinions and suggestions of their social circles had a substantial impact on their purchasing decisions. One individual from China R5 expressed, "Depending on the situation, the extent to which the opinions and suggestions of family, friends, or colleagues influence my decision to shop online or in physical stores varies." This remark highlights the varying importance of these external opinions, showing that the impact varies depending on the situation, product nature, or individual preferences.

Another interviewee from Sweden Z2 stated, "My choice to purchase in-person or online is greatly influenced by the suggestions and opinions of family, friends, and coworkers." This acknowledgement stresses the importance of recommendations and experiences shared by people
in the individual's social network. Positive reviews, personal experiences, or favorable suggestions from these reliable sources frequently affect consumer decisions and purchase behaviors. However, the interviews also underscored the need to strike a balance between external and internal elements. Individual tastes and specialized demands are just as important as social circles in molding decisions. Chinese interviewee R8 stated, "Personal preferences, convenience, and other criteria, however, all play a role in my selection." This implies that, while external recommendations are important, individual preferences, convenience, and special requirements are crucial in the decision-making process.

These insights highlight the complicated interplay between environmental and personal factors in consumer decision-making. Family, friends, and coworkers' advice, experiences, and opinions have a substantial impact on decisions, directing attention to certain products or purchasing channels. The recognition of personal preferences, convenience, and individual needs, on the other hand, emphasizes that these external effects are not the primary determinants of consumer behavior. The specific circumstances of each individual determine the varying degrees of effect from social circles on shopping decisions. The nature of the product, individual tastes, and special demands all contribute to a dynamic environment in which external recommendations coexist with personal criteria in the decision-making process.

Influence of Social Media and Online Recommendations

The interviews demonstrated that the influence of social media marketing, influencer recommendations, and other online consumers' experiences had a major impact on purchasing decisions. Individuals, on the other hand, show a balanced approach by combining these factors with their own research and considerations, such as pricing and product quality.

One participant from Sweden, Z6, clearly acknowledged the influence of social media and influencers, adding, "Yes, social media marketing and suggestions from influencers have influenced my online purchase decisions." This acknowledgment emphasizes the effect of these external variables on their decisions, demonstrating that social media and influencer recommendations influence their purchasing decisions. Another Chinese interviewee emphasized the importance of balancing these influences with personal research and considerations, saying, "While I try to be discerning and consider other aspects such as reviews and research, the influence
of social media marketing and recommendations can sometimes sway my purchasing decisions."
This remark underlines the need to strike a balance between external influences and individual research. It suggests that, while social media and influencer recommendations can affect decisions, personal research and considerations, such as reviews, are as important.

Individual factors about product quality and cost supplement the importance of these social media and influencer influences. Consumers frequently weigh external influences against aspects such as product quality and affordability. Individuals ensure a better educated decision-making process that extends beyond external influences by taking these factors into account. The insights from the interviews highlight a trend in which social media and influencer recommendations have a significant influence on consumer decisions. Individuals, on the other hand, demonstrate a discerning attitude by combining their own research and considerations, such as product quality and pricing. This balanced approach leads to a decision-making process that incorporates external factors as well as individual assessments, resulting in a more informed and satisfying shopping experience.

Pandemic's Influence on Shopping Behavior

The interviews revealed a major shift in purchasing patterns driven by the current pandemic, with a notable rise in reliance on internet buying due to its convenience, safety precautions, and shifted priorities in consumer decision-making. Sweden interviewee Z5 pondered on the pandemic's influence, saying, "The epidemic has had an impact on the purchasing habits of people around me." It has led to an increase in online shopping and a higher reliance on e-commerce platforms. 

"This view summarizes the massive shift in shopping behaviors witnessed during the epidemic, with people increasingly turning to internet purchasing due to numerous constraints and safety concerns associated with in-person buying.

Another Chinese interviewee R8 stated, "During the epidemic, I have increased my reliance on online shopping to avoid excessive exposure and to adhere to social distancing recommendations." This assumption represents an intentional move toward online shopping as a safer alternative, in keeping with public health recommendations, and implies a deliberate effort to reduce exposure to potential health risks connected with in-person shopping.
The emphasis on contactless delivery, safety precautions, and customer service highlights the shift in purchase decisions and the introduction of new priorities during the epidemic. One individual Z3 from Sweden stated, "Online shopping platforms have reacted during the pandemic by enhancing their delivery services, putting in place safety precautions, and increasing the availability of products." This recognition implies that online platforms have evolved their services to meet evolving consumer expectations, highlighting the importance of safety, convenience, and a broader product offering.

The pandemic's impact on buying patterns is visible in the move to online platforms, the growing importance of safety precautions and contactless delivery, and the customization of services to match consumers' changing needs. The interviews show a significant shift in consumer behavior, with a greater reliance on online purchasing as a safer and more convenient alternative, highlighting safety measures and service quality as crucial decision-making criteria.

4.3 Perceived Control Over Purchasing Decisions

Investigating the concept of perceived power over purchasing decisions reveals a basic feature of consumer behavior. Perceived control is referred to as individuals' subjective perceptions of their power to influence or steer their purchasing decisions. This sense of power is crucial in molding consumer behavior, influencing their decisions in both online and in-person buying encounters. Understanding the dynamics of perceived control is critical because it determines how consumers navigate the buying process, altering their satisfaction levels, preferences, and, ultimately, their purchasing outcomes.

Control in Decision-Making

The interviews emphasized the perceived sense of control in decision-making processes, particularly when purchasing online, as a result of the extensive product selection, comparison tools, and freely accessible reviews. Negative experiences, such as difficulty discovering products or problems with delivery or pickup, can persuade people to shop in-store instead. A respondent from Sweden Z3 expressed a sense of power connected with online shopping, saying, "I have more control over my purchasing decisions when I shop online because I have access to a large selection of options, reviews, and comparison tools." This statement emphasizes the benefits of internet
buying, where consumers feel empowered by the wide range of product options, comparison tools, and readily available reviews, allowing for better educated decision-making.

Negative internet buying experiences, on the other hand, can cause a shift in inclinations toward in-store shopping. Another interviewee from China R6 stated, "Yes, I have frequently had difficulty finding specific things in real stores." This annoyance drove my decision to buy online because online retailers have a far larger assortment and allow me to simply search for and find the things I'm looking for." This suggests that the perceived simplicity and broader selection afforded by online purchasing contributes to a movement away from difficulties in discovering specific products in physical locations.

Decisions may also be impacted by problems with the processes involved in delivery or pickup. "I want to be in charge of the delivery or pickup process," said an interviewee from Sweden Z1. Due to unfavorable delivery or pickup location experiences, I've considered purchasing certain items in-store." This response exemplifies how bad experiences like delivery delays or awkward pickup spots can undermine the illusion of control that comes with online purchasing and lead people to buy some things again in-store.

The interviews show that the large product range, comparison tools, and availability of reviews are the main sources of the perceived control associated with online buying. Negative experiences, on the other hand, such as difficulties locating products or problems with delivery and pickups, might upset this sense of control and cause people to reevaluate their purchasing decisions and choose in-store shopping instead. This highlights how crucial a smooth and effective online buying experience is to preserving customers' choice for online platforms.

Importance of Return and Exchange Policies

The interviews shed light on the importance of return and exchange policies, especially when it comes to online purchasing, where customers consider them as necessary. Many participants stated that having the option to exchange or return items is essential to their decision-making process, particularly when buying online. Furthermore, because online retailers have more plain and open return rules, customers frequently feel like they have more influence over the return and exchange process. An interviewee from Sweden Z4 emphasized the importance of return policies, saying,
"When making purchases online, return and exchange policies are crucial." This sentiment illustrates the importance these rules are held in, implying that the opportunity to return or exchange things is an important aspect in their decision-making process when purchasing online.

Another Chinese interviewee R6 emphasized the sense of control associated with online shopping in terms of return and exchange policies, saying, "When I shop online, I feel like I have more control over the process because so many merchants provide simple return options." The statement underlines the perceived advantage of online buying, where the convenience and simplicity of return alternatives add to a sense of control over the purchasing process, which is a significant component in customer decision-making.

Online shops frequently offer more open and user-friendly return procedures, allowing customers to easily initiate returns or swaps. This is in contrast to typical in-store policies, which may be more complicated or restricted. The ease with which things can be returned or exchanged online, frequently without the need for in-person visits, is a crucial element driving consumer preference for online platforms. The transparency and simplicity of the return and exchange process, which is often more streamlined in online buying, are intimately related to the impression of control. Individuals feel empowered when they can quickly return or exchange products, which adds to their sense of control over the purchasing experience. The interviews highlight the importance of return and exchange policies in online buying, where these policies play an important part in decision-making processes. The perceived control associated with online buying, owing to more straightforward return rules, plays an important role in shaping consumer preferences and behavior. The simplicity and convenience of returning or exchanging things online contribute to a sense of control that frequently influences consumer decisions, influencing their choice of buying platform.

These interviews' themes highlight the complexity of customer attitudes, the importance of external factors on purchase decisions, and the critical role of perceived control in consumer behavior. In online platforms, attitudes vary and reflect individual preferences and trust levels, displaying a spectrum of experiences ranging from pleasant, efficient encounters to isolated issues that impact trust and confidence. The influence of subjective norms from social circles, social media, and other online customers' experiences demonstrates the power these external influences have over decisions.
In conclusion, these independent interviews with a variety of individuals gave insight on some essential facets of consumer purchase behavior. The interviews focused on individuals' opinions and experiences with online versus in-person shopping, the role of social influences in decision-making, the importance of product availability and control over the purchasing process, and the impact of the pandemic on shopping habits. Interviews have provided useful insights into the elements that drive customer purchasing decisions, as well as how online shopping platforms have altered to meet evolving consumer needs. Understanding these factors is critical for businesses and merchants to cater to consumer preferences and offer a great shopping experience both online and in-person.
Chapter Five: The Interview Findings

The COVID-19 epidemic drastically altered how customers shop and connect with businesses worldwide. Consumers increasingly turned to online purchase channels to fulfill their shopping needs and limit the danger of virus infection while governments enforced lockdowns and social distancing measures (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). This shift in consumer behavior has motivated this research study to look into the elements that influence customers' purchasing channels, emphasizing how online platforms have enhanced convenience during these difficult times.

We interviewed residents of Sweden and China, two nations with very different socio-cultural backgrounds, to get insight into the elements that drove their purchasing channels during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper provides a full knowledge of the mechanisms in online purchase behavior by investigating customer experiences and views in the two unique cultural contexts. The interviews attempted to capture the factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions, such as convenience, safety, product availability, pricing, and trust. Furthermore, the precise ways online purchasing platforms have improved shopping convenience by responding to consumers' individual needs and tastes in both nations are uncovered.

By analyzing the data from the two nations' interviews, we aim to shed light on the important elements that drive customers' choice of purchase channels and emphasize online platforms' role in promoting convenient shopping experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings will help businesses and policymakers better understand consumer behavior and adapt their tactics to suit customers' changing requirements in the post-pandemic age.

The following sections present the findings of a comprehensive study that sought to investigate the factors influencing consumers' purchase channel choices, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of online purchasing platforms on improving purchasing ease. Understanding the underlying motives and dynamics of consumer behavior as it evolves in response to the tremendous difficulties provided by the global health crisis is critical for businesses to adapt and survive in the changing landscape. This study sheds light on the complex decision-making processes that shape customers' purchase habits during times of uncertainty through a systematic assessment of consumer attitudes, subjective standards, and perceived control behavior. This research intends to provide useful implications for businesses and policymakers looking to
traverse the new paradigm and effectively meet customers' requirements in the midst of continued challenges by revealing these insights. The key findings are discussed as follows:

5.1 The Role of Subjective Norms and Social Influence in Consumer Purchasing Channel Decisions

Subjective norms are perceived societal expectations and standards that influence an individual's conduct, whereas social influence influences other people's opinions, recommendations, and experiences on consumer decision-making (Handarkho, 2020). Based on the results from the interviews with residents of China and Sweden, we examine the effect of subjective norms and social influence in determining consumer purchase channels, specifically online and in-person shopping preferences. Subjective norms and social influence were important in defining consumer purchase channels, especially regarding online and in-person shopping preferences.

The interviews with Chinese and Swedish people shed light on the roles of subjective norms and social impact in forming consumer preferences. The participants emphasized the importance of comments and recommendations from family, friends, and colleagues in their decision-making process. Positive experiences shared by others they trust affect their shopping channel decision, demonstrating the power of subjective norms. As one Chinese participant, R2 articulated, "The suggestions and opinions of family, friends, and coworkers greatly influence my choice to purchase in-person or online. Their glowing testimonials and great experiences may influence my decision, but ultimately, my preferences and needs also come into play." The viewpoint of this participant emphasizes the significance of interpersonal relationships in creating subjective norms, where the favorable comments and recommendations of reliable social contacts significantly influence people's decisions about whether to shop in person or online.

Influencer endorsements and social media ads also play a big impact in determining consumer purchasing decisions. Both interviewees recognized that such marketing methods had an impact on them. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for marketers to reach and influence customers. Influencers' thoughts and recommendations, who have a large following and credibility in specialized sectors, can affect consumer decisions. However, it is important to highlight that consumers conduct additional research before purchasing and evaluate criteria such as pricing, quality, reviews, and personal demands, illustrating the interplay between subjective norms and
individual decision-making. One Swedish participant \(Z_1\), noted, "Yes, social media marketing and advice from influencers have influenced my online purchase decisions. Social media platforms have evolved into effective marketing tools, and I have discovered various products and services through targeted ads or recommendations from influencers." This emphasizes the growing importance of social media and influencer marketing in influencing consumer choices and further emphasizes the part played by social impact and subjective norms in the current consumer landscape.

Other online consumers' opinions and experiences are also important in customer decision-making. Both interviewees emphasized their appreciation for online reviews and ratings. One of the Chinese interviewees \(R_3\), accentuated this aspect, articulating, "When making shopping decisions, I consider the opinions and experiences of other online consumers to be of moderate importance. They are part of my research process, but I ultimately rely on various elements such as reviews, product descriptions, and personal tastes." These experiences and views serve as social proof, offering information about product quality, functionality, and general satisfaction. While subjective norms and social influence are considered, consumers also assess the credibility of the sources and seek general agreement among reviewers. While considering individual judgment and appraisal, this highlights the impact of subjective norms and societal influence in molding consumer preferences.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact has also highlighted the importance of subjective standards and social influence in altering consumer purchase channels. Due to the lack of physical store access during the pandemic, people began to rely increasingly on internet buying, influenced by the behavior and choices of those around them. A participant from China \(R_1\) aptly elucidated this transformation, stating, "The pandemic has had an impact on the purchasing habits of folks around me. It has resulted in a growth in online shopping and a greater reliance on e-commerce platforms. This transition has also had an impact on my personal buying habits, as I now shop online more regularly for ease and security." This claim explains how the pandemic's restrictions on access to physical stores caused people to migrate toward internet shopping, a change strongly impacted by their social environment's observable behaviors and decisions.
Certain factors, like contactless delivery, safety precautions, and customer service, gained significant prominence in consumer decision-making due to the epidemic. These elements indicate the shifting cultural norms and subjective standards that have developed due to the pandemic's disruptions. As a result, this participant's perspective offers evidence of how consumer preferences can adjust to outside influences and the persistent importance of subjective standards and social influence in directing such modifications within the Chinese consumer landscape.

Overall, subjective norms and social influence alter consumer purchase channels significantly. Consumer decisions about online and in-person purchasing are influenced by recommendations and experiences from family, friends, and colleagues, as well as social media ads and influencer marketing. Subjective standards and social expectations drive these influences, creating a sense of uniformity and trust in the decisions and experiences of others. The pandemic has underlined the importance of subjective standards and social influence in molding consumer preferences, as people modify their behavior based on the actions and decisions of others around them.

5.2 The Influence of Perceived Control Behavior on Consumer Purchase Decisions

According to responses from residents of China and Sweden, the influence of perceived control behavior on consumer purchase decisions has emerged as a key element. Perceived control is individuals' subjective perceptions of their capacity to navigate and influence the purchasing process. Understanding this influence is critical for understanding consumer decision-making processes, especially regarding online shopping.

A participant from China R₃ succinctly expressed the influence of perceived control, stating, "When I shop online, I feel more in control of my purchasing selections since I have more opportunities to compare products, read reviews, and make informed judgments based on my preferences." This sentiment highlights how the online shopping environment empowers consumers by affording them a sense of agency and control over their purchasing decisions. Similarly, a participant from Sweden Z₃ articulated, "I find online purchasing far more convenient and efficient than in-person shopping. I can browse many products, compare prices, read reviews, and make purchases from the comfort of my home with only a few clicks." This perspective echoes that online shopping enhances perceived control by offering many tools and information, enabling consumers to make well-informed choices hassle-free. These insights from China and Sweden
highlight the basic role of perceived control behavior in molding consumer choices and its importance, particularly in online commerce.

Ultimately, the influence of perceived control behavior on consumer purchase decisions shows the importance of offering a sense of control in the online buying environment. Understanding and satisfying customers' desire for control can improve their purchasing experience, develop trust, and foster long-term customer relationships. To empower consumers and assist their decision-making processes in the online marketplace, retailers and online platforms should aim to optimize user interfaces, provide security measures, and provide robust information resources.

### 5.3 The Influence of Consumer Perceptions of Safety and Security On Online Purchasing Preferences

Customer perceptions of safety and security have driven customer behavior in the digital marketplace (Bandara et al., 2021). With the growing popularity of online purchasing, customers' faith and confidence in the safety and security of online platforms is becoming increasingly important in their decision-making process. The impact of customer safety and security perceptions on online purchase preferences is an important part of consumer behavior in China and Sweden. The interviews with people of these nations provide useful information about their opinions and preferences toward internet buying.

The Chinese respondents viewed online shopping favorably, emphasizing its efficiency and time-saving nature for everyday purchases. They recognized significant security precautions on online shopping platforms, influencing their trust in online transactions. Their favorable experience with rapid problem resolution by customer care boosted their trust in online platforms even more. These findings imply that Chinese customers prioritize safety and security regarding online purchases. As one Chinese participant R2, elucidated, "Online buying platforms' safety and security precautions have typically improved over the years, strengthening my trust in them. Secure payment channels, encrypted transactions, and customer evaluations all assuage fears." This remark reflects the Chinese consumer's perspective on continuously enhancing safety measures in the online shopping environment, contributing to a sense of trust and reliability.
Similarly, Swedish respondents had a generally positive opinion regarding internet shopping, acknowledging the advantages of a wide range of options and lower prices. In alignment with these sentiments, a Swedish participant Z1 expressed, "Online purchasing platforms, in my opinion, are relatively safe and secure, particularly when using trustworthy and well-established websites. However, I am always concerned about data protection and potential fraudulent actions, which can occasionally influence my inclination to make online purchases." They did, however, underline the significance of perceived safety and security, especially when interacting with lesser-known or unfamiliar websites. This prudence highlights the impact of consumer views on online purchase preferences, where trust is an important factor in their decision-making process. Respondents' recognition of heightened safety precautions during the pandemic emphasizes the importance of safety and security in molding their online purchase choices.

Overall, the interviews with Chinese and Swedish citizens show that consumer perceptions of safety and security universally influence online purchase preferences. Consumers in both countries require trust and confidence in internet platforms. Positive shopping experiences, robust security measures, and prompt customer service all help to develop trust and shape consumer views regarding online purchasing. Online merchants in China and Sweden should continue prioritizing and investing in security measures to fulfill increasing consumer expectations and maintain a secure and trusted environment for online transactions.

5.4 Convenience and Efficiency's Influence on Consumer Purchasing Behavior

According to the responses given in the interviews by citizens of Sweden and China, convenience and efficiency substantially impact consumer purchasing behavior in both countries. Online purchasing has grown dramatically in China due to its efficiency and ease. Chinese consumers value the ease of shopping online from the comfort of their homes rather than traveling to real stores. In the words of one Chinese participant R4, "I find online purchasing to be more convenient and pleasurable than in-person buying." This statement encapsulates the sentiment among Chinese consumers, highlighting their preference for the convenience and enjoyment of online shopping emphasizing its pivotal role in shaping their purchasing behavior. Chinese online platforms like JD.com and Alibaba's Taobao offer various goods, making it simple for customers to find what they need. Features like user reviews, thorough product descriptions, and tailored
recommendations, which help consumers make decisions quickly, are examples of these platforms' effectiveness. Furthermore, the rapid delivery of goods is ensured by China's development of strong logistics networks and effective delivery services, further boosting the efficiency and convenience of online shopping.

Convenience and efficiency also play important roles in driving consumer purchase behavior in Sweden. Swedish consumers like the convenience of online buying, which allows them to avoid the trouble of visiting physical stores. The ability to shop anytime, anywhere via multiple internet platforms appeals to their hectic existence. E-commerce behemoths such as IKEA have established themselves as popular online shopping sites in Sweden, offering diverse products and a flawless user experience. Features such as easy product search, transparent pricing, and smooth payment and checkout processes demonstrate the efficiency of online platforms. Furthermore, quick and dependable delivery services guarantee that Swedish consumers receive their purchases on time, adding to the convenience and efficiency of online shopping.

The fast use of mobile payment methods in China, such as Alipay and WeChat Pay, has increased the convenience and efficiency of online buying (Feng, L., 2020). In Sweden, on the other hand, a country noted for its emphasis on sustainability and eco-consciousness, buyers may consider aspects such as environmental impact and ethical sourcing in addition to convenience and efficiency. It is important to note that cultural and societal factors might determine how much ease and efficiency influence customer purchase behavior.

Ultimately, ease and efficiency considerably impact customer purchasing behavior in both China and Sweden. Consumers in both countries value the convenience of online shopping, including the ability to browse and purchase products from the comfort of their homes, access a wide choice of options, and take advantage of rapid delivery services. The convenience and efficacy of online buying experiences are further enhanced by features such as user reviews, personalized suggestions, fast search, and smooth checkout processes. These variables contribute to China's growing preference for online buying and Sweden's altering consumer behavior patterns.
5.5 Effect of Price Considerations on Consumer Preferences for Online Purchasing Platforms

The impact of pricing concerns on customer preferences for purchase channels, particularly online shopping platforms, has been a hot topic in consumer behavior research (Varadarajan et al., 2022). This study explored the impact of price on consumer preferences, drawing insights from two diverse contexts: China and Sweden.

Price greatly influences consumer preferences for online shopping platforms in China. Chinese customers place a premium on competitive pricing and actively seek the greatest deals and discounts. Since internet retailers are widely available, they can compare costs across numerous platforms, allowing consumers to make informed judgments based on cost-effectiveness. China's online shopping platforms have identified this inclination and use competitive price techniques to attract and retain customers. They cater to price-conscious Chinese consumers by offering cheaper pricing than physical retailers and utilizing cost-saving advantages such as decreased overhead costs.

Furthermore, in China, the availability of price information is critical in molding consumer preferences. Online shopping platforms provide detailed product information, such as pricing, specifications, and user reviews, allowing Chinese consumers to determine the worth of things based on their prices. The transparency provided by these systems increases consumer trust and allows for more rational decision-making. Furthermore, price-focused search filters and price comparison tools provided by Chinese online retailers help users find products within their desired price ranges and identify the best available discounts. The convenience and efficiency of these technologies add to Chinese customers' preference for online shopping platforms.

Similar tendencies occur in Sweden regarding the effect of pricing concerns on consumer preferences for online shopping platforms. Swedish consumers desire competitive pricing and cost savings as well. A crucial element driving their preference for online buying is the availability of lower costs on online platforms compared to physical establishments. Swedish consumers like the ease of online shopping since it allows them to compare prices, obtain discounts, and avoid the additional costs of visiting physical establishments.
Furthermore, price transparency and customer feedback influence consumer preferences in Sweden. Online platforms provide thorough product information and user feedback, allowing Swedish customers to assess product value propositions based on price and quality. The capacity to make well-informed selections based on transparent pricing information contributes to Swedish customers' enthusiasm for online shopping platforms.

In conclusion, pricing concerns substantially influence consumer preferences for online shopping platforms in both China and Sweden. Competitive pricing, cost savings, information accessibility, price-focused search filters, and price transparency are all important elements in consumer decision-making. Understanding these dynamics is critical for online retailers in both situations to cater to price-conscious consumers' desires properly. Online shopping platforms may attract and maintain customers in these countries by proactively addressing price factors and providing value for money.

5.6 The Importance of Transparency and Access to Information in Consumer Purchase Decisions

Transparency and access to information are important factors in consumer purchasing channel decisions, as demonstrated by interview replies from Chinese and Swedish residents. These elements are critical in building trust, facilitating informed decision-making, and improving the consumer experience.

First and foremost, both interviewees stressed the significance of trust and security in online buying platforms. They admitted that while well-known platforms are typically considered safe and secure, there is still some skepticism about lesser-known or unfamiliar websites. This emphasizes the importance of transparency in security measures, privacy rules, and trustworthy customer ratings. Consumers who have access to this information can make informed decisions about the trustworthiness of online platforms, which influences their propensity to make online transactions.

Consumers' perceived power over the purchasing process is also affected by access to information and transparency. Online shopping offers a wider range of items, comparison tools, and customer reviews, giving consumers more control over purchasing decisions. The ability to quickly and
readily identify specific products was mentioned as a benefit of online purchasing, especially when physical businesses may have limited stock or inventory. Furthermore, online platforms' return and exchange policies were regarded as a crucial concern, with respondents expressing a desire for control over the delivery, pickup, and returns process. Transparent and easily accessible information about these regulations can establish trust in consumers, allowing them to easily traverse the purchasing process.

5.7 Consumer Attitudes Towards Online Purchasing Decisions During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Sweden and China people's responses reflect a relatively good opinion about online buying during the Covid-19 pandemic. One widespread feeling shared by participants is that internet shopping is an effective and time-saving choice, particularly for everyday purchases. This view correlates with the convenience component of online shopping, allowing people to explore and make purchases without visiting different stores physically. Saving time and effort is especially valuable during a pandemic when people are encouraged to limit their outings and exercise social distancing. The interviewees' responses are consistent with the Expectation Disconfirmation Theory since they believe online shopping platforms fulfill or surpass their expectations regarding ease and product availability.

One Chinese participant R3 articulated, "During the epidemic, online purchasing platforms evolved by introducing safety precautions, delivering contactless delivery, and providing virtual customer help. These adjustments have improved my felt influence over the purchasing process by addressing issues and providing a seamless experience." This statement stresses the adaptability of online platforms in response to the pandemic, with the introduction of safety measures and enhanced customer support enhancing the participant's sense of control and confidence in the online shopping process. Similarly, a Swedish participant Z4 conveyed, "During the epidemic, online purchasing platforms made significant changes to accommodate changing consumer needs. They have implemented safety precautions, expanded return procedures, and provided contactless delivery options. These modifications have strengthened my perceived influence over the purchasing process by giving more flexible and convenient options that promote safety and customer pleasure." This viewpoint emphasizes the reaction of online platforms to altering
consumer needs during the epidemic, with safety safeguards, improved return procedures, and contactless delivery choices all contributing to a heightened sense of control in the shopping process.

The perceived safety and security of online buying platforms also influences consumer sentiments. Participants expressed trust in the security measures provided by online platforms, which include encryption, secure payment channels, and fraud protection. This guarantee is critical in establishing trust and assuaging worries about the privacy and security of personal information. Such faith in the security of online platforms is beneficial in encouraging consumers to make online purchases and removing the potential barrier of fear or hesitancy.

While several participants described having problems with online purchasing, such as late deliveries or incorrect orders, their comments indicated that these concerns had little impact on their overall view of online platforms. The prompt repair of problems via competent customer service was cited as a factor in restoring faith in the platforms. Participants praised online businesses' responsiveness and readiness to correct errors, displaying a customer-centric approach contributing to a great buying experience.

One Chinese participant R1 articulated, "When I shop online, I like the ability to exchange or return items. Although both online and physical establishments have return and exchange alternatives, I believe that when I shop online, I have more control over the procedure. Online stores frequently have transparent return policies and simple procedures, which make it easy for me to initiate returns or exchanges." This viewpoint emphasizes the convenience and apparent control associated with online buying, particularly in the context of return and exchange processes, where transparent procedures help to build consumer trust. Furthermore, a Swedish participant Z3 highlighted the proactive measures taken by online purchasing platforms during the pandemic, stating, "During the pandemic, online purchasing platforms were quick to take action and address concerns. They have prioritized safety by implementing several measures such as contactless delivery choices, improved sanitization methods in warehouses and fulfillment centers, and better transparency about product availability and delivery timeframes." This testimony underscores the adaptability of online platforms in response to external challenges, aligning with consumer expectations for safety and transparency during uncertain times.
Furthermore, the responses indicated the pandemic's impact on consumer purchasing habits. Participants admitted that physical store limits had changed their personal habits and the routines of people around them. Individuals turned to internet shopping as a safe and convenient alternative due to the necessity of adhering to social distancing measures and restricting exposure to crowded settings. During the pandemic, people were drawn to online shopping due to the convenience of internet platforms, expanded product range, and contactless delivery options.

Participants stressed the continuous significance of physical businesses when it is safe and possible, despite the rising emphasis on internet purchasing. They reported a preference for in-person purchasing experiences, especially regarding certain products or scenarios. As aptly stated by a Swedish participant Z1, "When buying online, the opportunity to return or exchange things is critical. I value the convenience of online platforms that provide simple and hassle-free return processes. However, I feel more in control at physical stores because I can directly handle the merchandise and address any flaws or concerns." This statement reflects the participant's perspective on the benefits of online shopping, particularly regarding return and exchange convenience, while also acknowledging the unique advantages of physical stores, including the tactile experience and immediate problem-resolution capabilities.

Overall, responses from Sweden and Chinese citizens indicate that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a good attitude toward online purchasing motivated by ease, safety, and adaptability to changing circumstances. Consumers' propensity to engage in online buying is influenced by perceived efficiency, time-saving benefits, and trust in online platform security measures. Participants, however, recognize the value of in-person purchasing experiences, emphasizing the cohabitation of online and physical channels depending on the environment and individual preferences.

5.8 Attitude-Behavior Gap: Discrepancies Between Attitudes and Actual Purchasing Choices

The attitude-behavior gap, also known as the intention-behavior gap or the attitude-action gap, is a disparity or contradiction between people's attitudes or intentions and their actual behaviors or acts (Subramaniam, 2020). This idea argues that people's views or preferences may not always correspond with their actual purchasing decisions in the context of consumer purchasing decisions.
Cultural variations, social conventions, individual goals, and external influences can all impact this disparity. This phenomenon has been extensively researched in the field of consumer behavior, to understand why people may have good views or intentions toward a certain action yet fail to carry it through in practice.

Several variables contribute to the attitude-behavior divide among Swedish and Chinese people regarding online buying. First, subjective norms, such as family, friend, or colleague judgments and recommendations, play a part in building consumers' attitudes toward internet buying. Chinese consumers are frequently motivated to maintain social peace and avoid social criticism. As a result, their shopping decisions may be influenced by others' expectations and views rather than their attitudes or preferences. This can lead to a significant attitude-behavior gap, in which customers may choose products or brands that are socially acceptable or adhere to societal norms despite having opposing personal attitudes. For example, a person may want eco-friendly products but choose conventional products owing to societal pressure or financial reasons.

The influence of social media and influencers on online buying attitudes adds to the attitude-behavior gap. Social media platforms have evolved into significant marketing tools, with influencers' recommendations and targeted adverts changing consumers' sentiments toward specific products or services. Conversely, individuals frequently participate in information-seeking activity, balancing the influence of social media with other sources such as reviews and studies. As a result, while social media may foster favorable attitudes toward online buying, individuals' purchase decisions may be influenced by various factors, resulting in a mismatch between attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, people's significance on other online buyers' opinions and experiences influences the attitude-behavior gap. Consumers frequently rely on reviews and comments from other customers to make educated purchasing decisions. However, the weight attributed to these judgments differs depending on the product or service under consideration. While favorable reviews and experiences may affect attitudes toward online buying, individuals may still emphasize other considerations when making real purchasing decisions, such as price, brand reputation, or perceived product quality. As a result, the influence of other consumers' experiences may not necessarily correspond to behaviors, contributing to the attitude-behavior gap.
Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on shopping behaviors contributes significantly to the attitude-behavior gap among Swedish and Chinese inhabitants. Because the pandemic disrupted usual shopping habits, many people have turned to online shopping as a more convenient and safer alternative to physical businesses. However, if circumstances alter and limitations relax, people's preferences for in-person shopping experiences may recover to pre-pandemic levels. The disparity in views about online shopping during the epidemic and the ultimate return to physical stores can result in an attitude-behavior gap, as individuals' activities may not align with their pandemic-shaped attitudes.

5.9 Impact of Risk Perception on Purchasing Channel Preferences

The Impact of Risk Perception on Purchasing Channel Preferences is a topic of great scholarly interest, especially when considering citizens' preferences in countries like Sweden and China (Mattlin et al., 2023). These two countries provide distinct cultural and economic backgrounds that impact individuals' risk perceptions and subsequent purchase channel choices. Understanding how risk perception influences the preferences of Swedish and Chinese people is critical for firms and marketers working in both markets.

Sweden, recognized for its strong social assistance system and high levels of trust, shows distinct risk assessments that influence their purchase channel preferences. Swedish customers value trustworthy and safe shopping channels because they value security and transparency. Some interviewees prefer traditional brick-and-mortar stores where they can physically inspect things and engage with salespeople, establishing trust and security. However, as e-commerce grows in popularity in Sweden, some consumers value the convenience and larger product range provided by online channels. When addressing Swedish consumers, it is critical to balance the requirement for trust and security with the benefits of online buying.

Residents in China, a fast-rising country with a thriving e-commerce market, have varying risk perceptions and channel preferences. Chinese consumers value convenience, affordability, and a smooth purchasing experience. They have adopted online shopping sites like Alibaba's Tmall and JD.com as their primary purchase outlets. The apparent convenience of doorstep delivery, wide product options, reasonable prices, and the ability to access reviews and recommendations from other users all contribute to this preference. When making purchasing selections, Chinese
customers place a high value on social proof, seeking validation through ratings, comments, and endorsements. Understanding and capitalizing on these preferences is critical for organizations seeking to enter the Chinese market.

Risk perception is important in driving consumer preferences for purchasing channels in Sweden and China. While Swedish consumers may place a premium on trust, security, and control, Chinese consumers may place a premium on convenience, cost, and social approval. Businesses and marketers must adjust their tactics appropriately, concentrating on seamless online experiences and social validation mechanisms for Swedish consumers while focusing on seamless online experiences and social validation mechanisms for Chinese consumers. Furthermore, since technological improvements, societal changes, and cultural shifts continue to impact consumer behavior in both countries, it is critical to remember that these preferences may fluctuate over time.

5.10 The Role of Personal Values in Shaping Purchasing Channel Decisions

Based on the responses of the Swedish and Chinese interviewees, we can gain some insight into the Role of Personal Values in Shaping Purchasing Channel Preferences. Here are the important findings:

Personal values are pivotal in shaping consumer behavior and influencing shopping channel preferences. These values encompass an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and priorities, which collectively guide their decision-making process and, consequently, impact their preferred modes of purchase. The alignment between personal values and shopping channel preferences is particularly conspicuous in cases where values such as convenience and efficiency converge with a preference for online buying. Individuals prioritizing time savings and streamlined processes tend to gravitate towards online shopping platforms.

The ability to peruse a vast array of products, compare prices, and access customer reviews online imbues the shopping process with convenience and control, appealing to consumers who hold these values in high regard. As articulated by a Chinese participant R2, "When making shopping decisions, I consider the opinions and experiences of other online consumers to be of moderate importance. They are part of my research process, but I ultimately rely on various elements such as reviews, product descriptions, and personal tastes." This statement exemplifies how personal
values, in this case, the value placed on informed decision-making and a personalized shopping experience, align with online shopping preferences.

Personal values such as safety and security can influence purchase channel preferences. Individuals prioritizing security may be wary about online shopping, especially on unfamiliar websites. However, trust in well-known online platforms and the installation of solid security measures allay these fears and boost confidence in online commerce. The perceived control over the purchasing process and the availability of customer service and return/exchange procedures add to online customers' sense of security.

Individuals who prioritize getting the best prices and value for their money may be drawn to Internet shopping. They can find competitive prices and perhaps save money by shopping at various online stores and comparing prices across many platforms. Subjective norms, which include family, friend, and colleague judgments and recommendations, also play a role in influencing shopping channel preferences. Word-of-mouth recommendations, online reviews, and influencer marketing can influence consumer decisions. When making purchasing decisions, people may consider the experiences and suggestions of others, but they ultimately add their preferences and needs into the decision-making process.

Furthermore, personal values influence the perceived control over the purchasing process. Online shopping allows consumers to easily search for specific products, obtain detailed information, and compare possibilities, giving them control over purchasing decisions. On the other hand, physical stores may have constraints in terms of product availability, making it more difficult for customers to locate exactly what they are looking for. Individuals' preferences for online or in-person buying are heavily influenced by personal values such as convenience, efficiency, safety, pricing considerations, and control over the purchasing process. In conjunction with subjective norms and the adjustments made by online shopping platforms, these values govern customer behavior and affect their preferred purchasing channels.
Chapter Six: Analysis

6.1 Impacts Subjective Norms and Social Influence on Consumer Purchasing Channel Decisions

Subjective norms encompassing perceived societal expectations and standards significantly impact consumer preferences (Ang et al., 2021). Participants in this study stressed the importance of comments and suggestions from their close social circles, which included family, friends, and colleagues. Positive testimonials and experiences from trusted individuals strongly influence whether consumers shop in person or online due to these interpersonal interactions. This demonstrates the influence of social ties on consumer behavior and decision-making.

Furthermore, social media and influencer marketing are essential factors in modern consumer decisions. Interviewees mentioned influencer endorsements and social media marketing as impacting their purchasing decisions. Influencers in specific niches are especially important in shaping customer choices due to their reach and credibility. However, consumers conduct additional research, weighing criteria such as pricing, quality, reviews, and personal preferences. This shows the interplay between subjective norms, social influence, and individual decision-making. Online reviews and ratings have also been recognized as social proof sources that inform consumers about product quality, functionality, and general satisfaction (Sun et al., 2022). While consumers consider subjective norms and social influence, they also evaluate the legitimacy of these sources and seek consensus among reviewers. This emphasizes the complex character of consumer decision-making, in which both external factors and personal judgment are important.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed the significance of subjective norms and social impact in affecting consumer buying channels. The study effectively illustrates the impact of the pandemic on consumer behavior, aligning with EDT's premise that external factors can significantly disrupt established norms and expectations. The pandemic necessitated safety precautions and led to a notable shift toward online shopping due to safety concerns associated with in-person shopping. This shift can be interpreted as a disconfirmation of previous expectations related to the safety of traditional shopping methods. Furthermore, the findings from the study affirm EDT's relevance by showing how the pandemic's influence led to a notable shift in consumer behavior. As individuals observed others adapting to online shopping for safety reasons, it prompted them to reassess their
preferences and choices. This alignment with EDT underscores the theory's capacity to explain shifts in consumer behavior in response to external influences.

The interviews show that subjective norms and social influence significantly influence consumer purchase channel decisions. They emerge from suggestions from trustworthy social connections, influencer marketing, internet evaluations, and suggestions from trustworthy social connections, influencer marketing, internet evaluations, and even outside forces such as the pandemic. Understanding these dynamics is critical for organizations and marketers looking to influence and adapt to shifting customer habits in a world that is becoming increasingly linked.

6.2 Post-Purchase Evaluation

The Expectation Disconfirmation Theory emphasizes the importance of post-purchase evaluation, in which individuals seek confirmation that their decisions align with their initial expectations (Ferguson et al., 2021). This post-purchase evaluation is an important part of consumer decision-making since it serves as a reflective mechanism to affirm or deny the soundness of one's choices. The study's findings illustrate this post-purchase appraisal process convincingly. As part of their evaluation toolset, participants were found to rely substantially on internet reviews and ratings. Positive feedback and excellent ratings served as confirmation that their decisions were in line with their initial expectations.

Post-purchase review not only serves to verify one's choices, but it can also influence future decisions. When consumers' selections consistently match their expectations, it boosts their confidence in their decision-making process and can lead to brand loyalty and repeat business. Furthermore, the study's findings highlight the importance of EDT by illustrating how participants used online reviews and ratings to reinforce their selections. Positive feedback and high ratings were perceived as validation that their selections matched their initial expectations, supporting their faith in decision-making.

6.3 Influence of Consumer Perceptions of Safety and Security and Perceived Control Behavior on Online Purchase Decisions in Sweden and China

In the digital economy, consumer behavior is a complex interaction of different factors that affect purchasing choices. Consumer perceptions of safety and security, as well as perceived control
behavior, have both emerged as crucial factors in this scenario. These factors have become more important, especially in light of how well-liked online purchasing has become, and they are critical in defining how people buy in digital marketplaces. The information gathered from Chinese and Swedish residents provides a broad perspective on these significant aspects and their impact on internet buying.

In online shopping, perceived control behavior, or a subjective view of one's capacity to navigate and affect the purchasing process, is critical. Both Chinese and Swedish respondents expressed a sense of empowerment when purchasing online. They liked comparing products, reading reviews, and making informed decisions based on their tastes. This sense of empowerment is a hallmark of online purchasing, where consumers can access many tools and information that contribute to their sense of agency and control. This broad approach emphasizes the importance of perceived control in online consumer behavior. Consumers enjoy platforms that enable them to make well-informed decisions in an age of information overload and multiple options. User-friendly interfaces, extensive product information, and features that enhance perceived control should be prioritized by online merchants, as these characteristics can substantially impact consumer happiness and loyalty.

Perceptions of safety and security in the digital economy are universally important, transcending geographical boundaries. Trust and confidence in online platforms are important to Chinese and Swedish consumers. Positive shopping experiences, strong security measures, and rapid customer service all contribute to the growth of trust. However, respondents' cautious approach when dealing with lesser-known websites demonstrates the fragility of this trust, stressing the importance of consumer perceptions of safety and security in decision-making. This perspective highlights the assumption that trust is the foundation of online business. To match consumers' increased expectations, online shops and platforms must invest in security measures such as secure payment gateways and data encryption. Furthermore, a dedication to transparency and proactive problem response can assist in boosting consumer trust, regardless of location.

Ultimately, perceived control behavior and consumer perceptions of safety and security impact online shopping decisions worldwide issue (Anastasiadou et al., 2020). When navigating the digital marketplace, consumers expect a sense of empowerment and trust, whether in China or
Sweden. This broad perspective gives vital insights for organizations in the e-commerce market. Online retailers can increase consumers' perceived control by providing intuitive interfaces, thorough product information, and tools for educated decision-making. They must prioritize safety and security measures at the same time to create and maintain confidence. The goal is to build a safe, transparent, easy-to-use online environment that empowers customers and develops long-term partnerships. Recognizing the universal significance of these elements is critical to success in the ever-changing world of Internet business.

6.4 Impact of Convenience and Efficiency on Consumer Purchasing Behavior

The results of the interviews in China and Sweden shed light on the substantial impact of convenience and efficiency on customer purchasing behavior in these two distinct countries. Both countries have seen an increase in internet purchasing, with people preferring the convenience and efficiency it provides over conventional in-person shopping. Online shopping has grown rapidly in China, owing to the convenience of exploring and purchasing things from the comfort of one's home. JD.com and Taobao have seized on this trend by offering diverse items and helping in decision-making with features such as user ratings, thorough product descriptions, and personalized recommendations. Furthermore, China's well-developed logistics networks and quick delivery services have reinforced online shopping's convenience and efficiency as a preferred means of purchase.

Similarly, convenience and efficiency are essential in establishing customer preferences in Sweden. Swedish consumers like the convenience of bypassing physical stores and the flexibility to shop anytime and from any location via online platforms. IKEA, for example, has established itself in the online buying market by providing a diverse product assortment and a user-friendly experience. Key characteristics such as fast product search, transparent pricing, and smooth payment and checkout processes highlight the efficiency of online buying in Sweden. Timely and dependable delivery services ensure customers receive their goods on time, contributing to overall convenience and efficiency.

However, it is crucial to highlight that these elements are not completely responsible for influencing customer behavior. In China, the increasing use of mobile payment methods such as Alipay and WeChat Pay has expedited the shopping process, coinciding with the Chinese customer
base's tech-savvy character. In contrast, Sweden's emphasis on sustainability and eco-consciousness means that consumers may consider ethical sourcing and environmental impact in their purchasing decisions alongside convenience and efficiency.

Recognizing the primary role of convenience and efficiency is critical for organizations operating in these marketplaces. A winning method is to tailor online shopping experiences to highlight ease of use, extensive product information, and dependable delivery services. On the other hand, understanding and responding to cultural nuances and societal preferences is critical for success in these different marketplaces. These findings in China and Sweden reflect broader worldwide retail trends, where internet purchasing is gaining traction. Businesses worldwide can learn from these findings and adapt their strategy to meet changing consumer tastes.

6.5 Impact of Pricing Considerations on Consumer Preferences

The study's findings shed light on the substantial impact of cost considerations on consumer preferences in both China and Sweden when it comes to online shopping platforms. First and foremost, the study emphasizes the critical importance of price sensitivity in influencing consumer choices. Consumers in both China and Sweden are well aware of competitive pricing and actively seek discounts and cost-effective alternatives when making online purchases. Both countries' online retailers are well aware of this tendency and use competitive prices as a primary technique to attract and retain customers. Internet retailers must constantly adjust their pricing methods to meet consumer expectations and preserve their competitive edge.

Furthermore, the appeal of cost savings and the ease of online purchasing are powerful motivators for consumers in both regions. The ability to compare prices, gain discounts, and avoid the additional costs connected with physical stores significantly impacts consumer preferences. As a result, stressing the economic benefits and convenience of online buying, such as the convenience of purchasing from the comfort of one's own home, becomes critical for online retailers attempting to fulfill the changing needs of their consumer base. Another important aspect emphasized by the study is the importance of information accessibility and transparency. In China and Sweden, detailed product information, including pricing, specs, and user evaluations, is critical in consumer decisions. In all cases, online shopping platforms promote pricing transparency, allowing
consumers to make educated decisions. This commitment to transparency creates confidence and increases online businesses' credibility, emphasizing the need to offer thorough product details.

Furthermore, technology-driven features such as price-focused search filters and price comparison tools considerably improve the online buying experience for both countries' consumers. These technologies not only help customers find products within their price ranges, but they also help locate lucrative discounts. These technology innovations' convenience and efficiency are important in influencing consumer preferences, emphasizing online retailers' need to invest in user-friendly interfaces and powerful search and comparison capabilities.

Ultimately, a thorough grasp of the impact of pricing concerns on customer preferences is essential for enterprises operating in China and Sweden's competitive ecosystems. Consumer decisions are influenced by competitive pricing, cost-effectiveness, information accessibility, transparency, and technology-driven features. By skillfully addressing these variables, online retailers may successfully attract and retain price-conscious customers, thus solidifying their place in the ever-changing world of e-commerce.

6.6 The Role of Transparency and Access to Information in Consumer Purchase Decisions

Transparency and access to information are essential in shaping consumer purchasing decisions in today's consumer landscape. Insights from interviews with Chinese and Swedish citizens highlight these aspects' critical impact on consumer choices and improving the overall shopping experience.

Regarding online purchasing platforms, trust and security surfaced as the top worries among interviewees. While well-known and established platforms are typically considered safe and secure, some suspicion is still connected with lesser-known or unfamiliar websites. This emphasizes the need for transparency, especially in security measures, privacy policies, and trustworthy customer evaluations. Consumers who have access to this crucial information can make informed decisions regarding the trustworthiness of online platforms, which influences their desire to engage in online transactions dramatically.

Aside from trust, access to information and openness give consumers more power over purchasing. Online shopping provides a wide range of products, helpful comparison tools, and customer reviews, allowing consumers to make well-informed decisions. This empowerment contrasts with
the limits sometimes found in physical shopping venues, where options may be limited. Swiftly and easily locating certain products online was a significant advantage, particularly when brick-and-mortar retailers faced stock shortages. Furthermore, the interviewees highly valued return and exchange policies when making online purchasing selections. They wanted openness and control throughout the process, including delivery, pickup, and returns. Access to clear and easily accessible information about these policies not only instills trust in consumers but also facilitates their purchasing journey, adding to an overall great buying experience.

In conclusion, whether in online or offline purchasing environments, openness and information accessibility are critical variables in creating consumer choices. The transparency businesses maintain affects trust, empowerment, efficiency, and convenience. Companies that value clear communication, solid security measures, and easily accessible information gain a competitive advantage and create long-term connections with their consumers, whether in China, Sweden, or anywhere else.

6.7 Navigating the Attitude-Behaviour Gap in Consumer Purchasing: Swedish and Chinese Perspectives

The concept of the attitude-behaviour gap in consumer purchasing decisions is a fascinating factor of consumer psychology, shedding light on the fascinating phenomenon in which people's stated attitudes or intentions do not always align with their actual behaviours when purchasing products or services (Taghikhah et al., 2021). This gap has been the focus of substantial consumer behaviour studies, providing valuable insights into the intricate interplay of factors influencing purchasing decisions. Sweden and China's environments provide convincing instances of how this disparity develops and the different relevant elements at work.

The influence of subjective norms and social expectations is crucial to the attitude-behaviour discrepancy in both countries. The opinions and recommendations of family, friends, and colleagues can influence people's views regarding internet buying. In China, where social peace and conformity are highly valued, individuals may make purchasing selections more aligned with societal standards or expectations than their personal beliefs. For example, someone may favour eco-friendly products yet pick conventional ones owing to cultural pressure or economic restraints.
This interaction demonstrates how social influences can cause a schism between personal attitudes and actual behaviour.

Furthermore, relying on the views and experiences of others contributes significantly to the attitude-behaviour gap. Consumers usually rely on product reviews and other online customers' comments when purchasing. However, the weight given to these judgments may differ based on the product or service. While favourable evaluations might positively influence consumer attitudes, other factors such as pricing, brand reputation, and perceived product quality can ultimately influence consumer behaviour. This dynamic highlights the complexities of decision-making, in which several factors interact to influence the final purchasing decision.

6.8 The Impact of Risk Perception on Purchasing Channel Preferences

The influence of risk perception on purchase channel preferences is a challenging feature of consumer behaviour that differs significantly between nations such as Sweden and China. Understanding how people perceive and respond to risks in these different cultural and economic situations can provide helpful information for firms and marketers in various markets.

Consumers in Sweden exhibit specific risk evaluations, which influence their shopping channel preferences. When making a purchasing decision, Swedish buyers emphasize honesty and safety. They like conventional physical businesses where they can physically inspect things and interact with salespeople. This face-to-face engagement not only allows them to build trust but also delivers a sense of security. However, as e-commerce is popular in Sweden, some consumers are lured to the ease and broader product range provided by online platforms.

It is critical for firms targeting Swedish consumers to balance the requirement for confidence and security and the benefits of online buying. Enhancing online platforms to offer a sense of trustworthiness and security, such as transparent return policies and secure payment choices, may be part of this. Furthermore, businesses might consider using customer evaluations and suggestions to create trust in online channels, which aligns with Swedish customers' demand for security and openness.

China offers a distinct landscape, distinguished by substantial economic expansion and a burgeoning e-commerce market. Chinese shoppers place a premium on convenience, price, and a
smooth purchase experience. When making purchasing decisions, Chinese customers highly value social proof. They seek affirmation from other users' product ratings, remarks, and endorsements. This reliance on social validation emphasizes building a positive online reputation and exploiting user-generated content for Chinese-based enterprises.

In conclusion, risk perception is crucial in affecting customer preferences for purchasing channels in both Sweden and China. Swedish consumers place a premium on trust, security, and control, whereas Chinese consumers place a premium on convenience, cost-effectiveness, and social approbation. Successful organizations and marketers must customize their strategies to these tastes, focusing on seamless online experiences and social validation mechanisms for Chinese consumers and improving trust and security elements for Swedish consumers. Furthermore, staying adaptive is critical, as technological improvements, cultural upheavals, and changing societal trends may continue to influence consumer behaviour in both countries over time.

6.9 The Role of Personal Values in Shaping Purchasing Channel Decisions

The impact of personal values on customers' shopping channel choices is an important part of consumer behaviour, and the insights gained through interviews with individuals in Sweden and China provide significant perspectives on how these values drive consumer preferences and decisions.

Personal values cover many beliefs, attitudes, and priorities that govern an individual's decision-making process. These principles act as a fundamental compass, steering customers toward decisions consistent with their essential convictions. A key theme is the alignment of personal beliefs with shopping channel choices. For example, individuals who value practicality and efficiency highly gravitate toward online buying platforms. The online shopping experience appeals to their values by providing a diverse range of products, price comparisons, and access to consumer reviews—all of which correspond to their need for faster operations and time savings. This integration of values and online purchasing habits emphasizes the intimate relationship between people's values and commerce decisions.

Furthermore, personal values related to safety and security substantially influence consumers' shopping channel selections. Some people who value security highly may be wary of online
shopping, especially on unfamiliar websites. However, customer confidence in online commerce is bolstered by faith in well-established online platforms and the installation of solid security measures. The perception of having control over the purchasing process, combined with the promise of accessible customer support and return exchange processes, increases online customers’ sense of security. This indicates how personal values can mitigate or exacerbate the perceived hazards connected with online buying, eventually impacting customer choices.

The degree of perceived control that consumers feel they have over the purchasing process is also determined by personal values. Customers are empowered by online purchasing since it gives them quick access to detailed product information and a variety of options. On the other hand, physical stores might restrict what products are offered, which might annoy customers who place great value on efficiency and control. The interaction of personal values such as convenience, efficiency, safety, price considerations, and control over the purchasing process ultimately influences consumer preferences for online or in-person shopping.

Ultimately, personal values are guiding principles that significantly impact customer preferences and purchase channel selections. These values come into contact with price sensitivity, safety concerns, and societal pressures. Businesses and marketers must be aware of and comprehend the influence of these individual values to adjust their strategies to fit the preferences of their target audiences. Recognizing the interplay between personal values and purchasing decisions is crucial for successfully engaging and satisfying consumers in diverse markets, such as Sweden and China. This is true regarding enhancing online security measures, promoting affordability, or utilizing social validation mechanisms.
Chapter Seven: Conclusions

7.1 From This Research Study

Following the completion of our research, which was aimed to elicit insights into customers' decision-making processes when selecting their purchasing channels, many notable findings emerged:

Multi-Channel Shopping is Prevalent: The study's outcomes clearly illustrate the popularity of multi-channel purchasing among customers. This phenomenon demonstrates that a sizable and growing proportion of consumers actively interact in a variety of purchase channels, both online and offline while making purchasing decisions. The shift to multi-channel shopping highlights the changing nature of consumer behaviour in today's market. Consumers are increasingly seeking flexibility and convenience by combining online and offline purchasing experiences rather than confining themselves to a single method of shopping.

Consumer Preferences Vary: The study's findings highlight the inherent variation in customer tastes and the complexities of their decision-making processes. The findings highlight that consumers' decisions are influenced by various factors, including the nature of the product, its price point, convenience, brand loyalty, and individual preferences. Because of the complexities of consumer decision-making, firms must take a more refined approach. Recognizing that no single factor drives consumer preferences uniformly, businesses must develop strategies that acknowledge and accommodate this variation. In this scenario, tailoring marketing efforts, product offers, and customer experiences to correspond with the complex character of consumer preferences becomes critical.

Online platforms are fast expanding: The study's findings strongly suggest that the importance of digital channels, particularly online shopping websites and mobile apps, is growing with time. This trend emphasizes the importance of businesses prioritizing and investing in improving their online presence and user experience. Recognizing and capitalizing on the continuous expansion of digital channels is critical for remaining competitive in a dynamic landscape.
Influence of Reviews and Recommendations: Consumers' purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by evaluations and recommendations, whether from friends, family, or online sources. This emphasizes the vital importance of online reputation management for firms. To capitalize on the power of this influence, businesses must actively engage with their consumers and foster an environment that encourages favourable evaluations and recommendations.

Omnichannel Strategy is Key: The study emphasizes the need to implement an omnichannel strategy in the company landscape. This technique, which expertly integrates online and physical channels, is critical in responding to consumers' tastes. Customers clearly prefer having options and flexibility in their buying experiences. As a result, organizations that can provide a cohesive and convenient experience across several platforms will be more successful in addressing these growing consumer demands.

Adaptation is Necessary: The necessity for adaptation is evident in the ever-changing world of customer behaviour and the dynamic retail landscape. Businesses must be prepared to adapt their tactics continually. This needs a commitment to analyse consumer preferences and market changes continuously. Such monitoring is a preventative measure and a prerequisite for long-term success and competitiveness.

7.2 Future Research

Advanced Technology and User Experience: With the ongoing development of technology, future research can study how emerging technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), influence consumer behavior in online buying. Furthermore, a study into how user experience (UX) design influences perceived control and decision-making in e-commerce may be advantageous.

7.3 Recommendations

Leverage Influencer Marketing: According to the findings, firms should invest in influencer marketing strategies, particularly in niches relevant to their products or services. Collaboration with credible influencers can boost brand reputation and influence customer decisions. It is critical to identify and collaborate with influencers who resonate with the target audience.
Online Review Management: Given the importance of internet reviews and ratings, businesses should actively maintain their online reputation. Encourage satisfied customers to post good evaluations and respond to any negative feedback as soon as possible. This proactive strategy has the potential to increase consumer confidence and trust in the brand.

Enhance Perceived Control: E-commerce platforms should prioritize user-friendly interfaces, extensive product information, and decision-making tools to respond to consumers' desire for control in the online shopping experience. Allowing customers to compare items, read reviews, and make informed decisions can increase their satisfaction and loyalty.

Invest in Security Measures: In the digital market, trust must be built and maintained. Regardless of location, online firms should prioritize security measures such as secure payment channels and data encryption. Transparent information regarding security policies, as well as responsive customer care, can help to increase consumer trust.
References


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