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Title: Impulsive buying behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Impulse buying is mostly considered as an unplanned spot purchase which is decided upon during the shopping experience from an internal or external stimulus. During the past years, many researchers have attempted to explain the importance and root cause of impulse buying behavior. The aim of this paper is to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the impulse buying behavior of consumers in Sweden and examine the factors that may influence impulse buying behavior. Countries across the world have implemented lock down strategies to reduce the risks of the pandemic, yet Sweden opted not to, using a “softer approach” by providing health recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The strategy chosen by Sweden may have a different effect on the impulse buying of consumers.

In this study, relationships between impulse buying behavior, emotional state, product positioning and product characteristics have been researched whilst Sweden is in the pandemic COVID-19 situation. In order to determine the relationship between these above-mentioned factors, an interview guide was designed, and interviews conducted with Swedish consumers to gain a deeper understanding of their impulse buying behavior.

The results of the study are summarized in the titled sections of the paper. It is found that impulse buying has been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby consumers have spent less money on purchasing goods, due to the reduction in the number of public and social activities. The results indicate a lower consumer spending trend on purchases as consumers save more money than previously. The impulse buying behavior of consumers have changed since the start of pandemic as a noticeable shift has taken place from buying offline to more online purchases. In addition, the purchasing activity has become more structured in the form of shopping lists.

Keywords: Impulse Buying Behavior, Crisis Situations, Consumer Decision Making Process, Emotional Traits, Situational Factors
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Impulsive buying behavior in the retail environment has become a major leisure and lifestyle activity for consumers in the modern day (Virvilaitė & Saladienė 2012). Initial definitions of impulse buying have generally been synonymous with the concept of unplanned purchases (Brici, Hodkinson & Sullivan-Mort 2013). Rook (1987) states that an impulsive purchase happens when a consumer experiences a sudden urge to purchase, an emotional feeling that is powerful and often consisting of one or several emotions. According to the author, the emotional feeling that occurs during these situations is hedonistic, often stimulating emotional conflicts whereby the circumstances may reduce senses of self-control. Nordfält (2007) argues that factors affecting impulse buying behavior differ among individuals and situations. Consumers do not have the same purchasing patterns as each individual reacts differently to factors or situations that appear.

Xiao and Nicholson (2013) state that impulsive buying is one of the many topics within marketing and consumer behavior, where previous research have gained hugely contradictory results. Earlier studies, discussing crisis influences of consumer behavior concluded that consumers adjust their consumption to the circumstances, which decreases the materialism and overall spending (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton 1997; Roberts, Manolis & Tanner Jr 2003; Sneath, Lacey & Kennett-Hensel 2008).

Currently, the world is in a crisis faced with a global pandemic caused by a virus called COVID-19, which originated in the city of Wuhan, China and was reported on 31 December 2019 (The World Health Organization [WHO] 2020). The virus causes a severe acute respiratory effect in humans, which vary in severity from a mild cold to a fatality and has been spreading globally through human contact and interaction. In efforts to slow the spread of the virus, many countries have entered into lock down scenarios where governments have forced their citizens to stay at home.

In general, the consumption of high end or luxury goods is highly affected by crisis, whereas buying the necessities is less so. Moreover, consumers tend to be less materialistic oriented, switching from known brands to generic brands and buying in bulk (Ang, Leong & Kotler 2000), as well as people tend to repair and maintain things themselves instead of purchasing that service or a new product (Milanova, 1999). According to Guion, Scammon, and Borders (2007); Sneath, Lacey and Kennett-Hensel (2008); Baker (2009); Kennett-Hensel, Sneath and Lacey (2012) there are not many studies done in order to find out how consumers react in crisis situations.
In contrast to other European countries, the Swedish population has kept increasing their consumption even in recent years, when other countries have not (Sveriges Konsumenter 2020.). According to Folkhälsomyndigheten (2017) as much as 19 percent of the Swedish population somehow feel down or depressed, 12 percent experience a big amount of stress, but Swedish consumers also spend more money than planned on consumption, which reduces well-being related to their economic situation (Dagens industri 2018).

A study conducted before the pandemic by ICA Banken (2018) indicated that Swedish respondents assumed themselves to purchase more than the norm on impulsive buying. Approximately 35 percent of the participants stated that their impulsive buying was due to their emotional feeling of anxiety towards a crisis situation. According to the study, the main factor influencing those impulse purchases were social pressure, particularly among respondents between the ages 18-29 years. Many responded that they often feel a need to buy, in order to avoid being seen as sneak or boring. However, Dittmar (2005) and Dey and Srivastava (2017) argue that impulsive purchases among younger people have risen significantly, which increases their expenditures. Dittmar (2005) explains that by stating that materialistic persons strive after an ideal identity, which can be achieved by purchasing certain products or brands. Those symbolic values lead to emotional happiness, something that thereby increases their impulsive buying, and so their debts (IBID). Since Tauber (1972); Lejoyeux et al. (2005); Sneath, Lacy and Kenneth-Hensel (2008) show a correlation between experienced stress and amount of impulse buying, the phenomena suits well to be further investigated during a crisis situation, such as the global pandemic from the Covid-19 virus.

1.2. Problem Discussion

According to the World Bank Group (2020), the Covid-19 virus exposes risk to contract the global economy by three percent during 2020, even more so in China and developing countries. In Sweden it is forecasted due to the Covid-19 pandemic that reduced growth and rising unemployment will occur when companies retrench employees or close their door permanently (Svenskt Näringsliv 2020).

The Swedish government has implemented several financial support packages in attempts to rescue the economy. Possibilities to short-time permissions, postponed payments of debt and taxes for companies, are some of the concessions made by the Swedish government (Dagens industri 2020). Svenskt Näringsliv (2020) estimates the spread of the Covid-19 virus could only be under manageable control during the summer of 2020. The pandemic will result in an unemployment increase to 10 percent, with the lowest point of the economic situation to take place during the autumn 2020. The Swedish BNP is considered to decrease by five percent and increase back by eight percent only during 2021, where unemployment rates are then still expected to be higher than before the spread of the virus.
Though, Svenskt Näringsliv (2020) describes an alternate scenario, where the spread of the Covid-19 intensifies during the autumn, unemployment rates reach 15 percent and the Swedish BNP decreases by nine percent 2020, which is followed by a two percent increase during 2021. Realtid (2020), on the other hand, forecasts that employment rates possibly risk reaching 40 percent and concludes by comparing the economic costs of putting the country into a lockdown against versus not doing so. Consideration is given to the possibility in the loss of lives when a lock down is not introduced.

Svensk Handel (2020) indicates that the retail shopping and the service sector are those most negatively affected by the global pandemic. These industries suffer from people reducing the risk of exposure to the virus by not leaving their homes, resulting in a decrease in consumer spending in an unsure future. Many supply chains that originate in other countries are broken, as loops in the chain fail to deliver, resulting in difficulties with producing final products on time (Gothenburg Research Institute 2020). Moreover, people do not visit the stores as often as they did before, thereby sales do not get the desired outcome.

In particular during this crisis, people do not want to leave their homes, which slows down the retail business, that in turn leads to decreased revenues and ultimately fewer jobs, a “catch 22” (Gothenburg Research Institute 2020). Though, Aftonbladet (2020) shows a parallel scenario, where the consumption of cheaper “unnecessary” products has increased, despite the overall reduced consumption, which is motivated by a will to entertain yourself by purchases that are affordable in such a period of time. According to Aftonbladet (2020), Swedish online retailers state this trend is even more notable in countries where lock downs were undertaken.

Thus, online retailers are now well positioned with a clear advantage, which offline retailers have to work on in order to remain competitive if they want to survive this unique period (Gothenburg Research Institute 2020). One fact all economical experts and analysts agree upon, is that the future is uncertain (Svenskt Näringsliv 2020; Realtid 2020; Dagens industri 2020). Even though the phenomena of impulse buying have been experienced through different disasters previously, this Covid-19 virus is a totally new phenomenon to humanity, the global economy and the world.

The recognition of the research gap is based on the fact that earlier investigations have considered natural disasters in various countries other than Sweden. In addition, Covid-19 is a totally new experience for the Swedish people, which simply means there are no previous studies on this specific topic. Furthermore, Sweden is a unique country in this new situation compared to most of the developed countries around the world, as Sweden has not imposed a lock down strategy (The Spectator 2020).
Large gatherings and events have been cancelled, people are advised to stay at home and not meet in large groups, yet most of the economy, such as shops, still remain open (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020). Thus, the possibilities to consume remain unchanged, except for the external circumstances, which may influence people’s willingness to purchase. The appearance of the Covid-19 virus, together with the unique strategy Sweden has taken in an attempt to survive the global pandemic, has led to a recognized research gap, which this study will attempt to reduce.

1.3. Purpose
The main purpose of the paper is to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the impulse buying behavior of consumers.

1.4. Research Questions
Q.1 – What impact does a pandemic have on consumer actions related to impulsive buying behavior?

Q.2 – Which factors have the strongest influence on making an impulsive buying decision?

Q.3 – How do consumers perceive the impact of COVID-19 on their impulsive buying behavior?
2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for this study. Peer reviewed articles containing earlier research within the field of impulse buying are used in order to establish an understanding regarding the topic.

2.1 Defining Impulse Buying

Consumer impulse buying attracted the attention of scholars about 60 years ago (Li & Jing 2014). At that time, the research focused on the definition of impulsive buying behavior. In the 1990s, researchers began to study the factors influencing consumer impulse buying. According to Stern (1962), impulse buying are purchases that are not planned for, but even though they take place when a visit to a store ends up in consumers leaving a shop with one or more products bought, despite the intention was not to buy. Belenger et al. (1978) defined impulse buying as being divided into planned and impulse purchasing, depending on where the decision to buy happened (Duarte et al. 2013).

According to Rousseau (2008) The planned purchase happens when the decision to buy took place before entering the store, whereby impulse buying takes place within the store as a result of in-store stimulation at the point of sale (Duarte et al. 2013). The three main factors distinguishing this phenomenon was found to be external environmental stimulation, personality traits and situational factors (Rook 1987). More recent studies of impulsive buying behavior attempt to uncover the internal mechanisms of impulse buying and explain the different psychological perspectives behind these purchases (Li and Jing 2014).

A common impulse purchase takes place when a person picks a package of chewing gums or candy while standing in line waiting for their turn to pay in the supermarket (Mossberg & Sundström 2011). This type of purchase may be what people associate with impulse buying, but this phenomenon occurs in a variety of other ways. Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) stress that impulse buying is affected by actions before the purchase, but depending on the form of impulse buying, these tend to skip certain stages in the traditional buying process. Thereby, Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) mean that impulse buying is in some extent built upon prior understanding and involvement.

According to Rook (1987) consumers engage in impulse buying behavior when they experience a sudden but powerful and persistent urge to buy a certain product offering immediately, with diminished regard to the consequences of making the purchase happen. The decision tends to be unplanned, thereby happening in less than a second. Buying decisions based on impulse have been defined by Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) as having an affective, cognitive and reactive elements in them. Many people wrongly assume that impulse buying is associated only with low-value and low-involvement purchases, but Rook (1987); Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) argue that this behavior may also take place when high-value and high-involvement products are purchased.
Rook (1987) means that our minds think that impulse buying is exciting, that this behavior is emotional rather than rational and is likely to be perceived as bad rather than good. Thompson et al (1990) additionally argue that impulse buying gives people the opportunity to feel they have control over their lives, as well as these purchases allow people to reinforce their self-identity, which is clearly shown when clothes and other products with a symbolic value are bought on impulse. Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) further state that impulse buying is a hedonistic (i.e., pleasure seeking) action, both because of the product the purchase brings, but also since the impulse buying process contributes a sense of adventure and excitement.

Every person’s amount of strive after thrill and adventure is depending on personal traits, which makes the impulse buying behavior more common among people who possess impulsiveness traits that make them more open and receptive, which in term encourages purchasing spontaneously, unreflectively, immediately and kinetically (Rook & Fisher 1995).

Crawford and Melawar (2003) argue there are environments that are more likely to encourage impulse buying. For example, airports are suggested to reduce stress levels, anxiety, and normative traits. The fact that many people at an airport wait for their flight are typically surrounded by an environment that offers restaurants and shops in whichever direction they look, increases the likelihood to purchase something (IBID).

According to Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) the impulse buying has increased significantly since the beginning of the 90’s. The authors mean that impulse buying may be assumed riskier, but since people nowadays seem to be more time hungry, it is more common to shop without shopping lists, thereby the economic risk is accepted because of the possibility that the impulse purchase saves time.

2.2. Motivation and Needs

2.2.1 Decision-Making Process

There are many different models widely used attempting to explain consumer behavior, the process from recognition to how a customer perceives a purchased product, and what effect those feelings have on the consumer’s behavior towards that product or brand in the future. The consumer decision-making process is one of the mainly used models attempting to explain the different stages a consumer generally experiences during a purchase process (Solomon et al. 2013). The process is generally composed of five stages that a consumer passes before, during and after a purchase. According to Kotler and Keller (2012) the steps are problem recognition, search for alternative solutions or information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post purchase behavior.

According to Kotler and Keller (2012), the process commences with the problem recognition. Here, the consumer faces a problem or a need either caused by internal or external stimulus
which triggers the thought of making a purchase. According to the model, the second step takes place when the consumer starts seeking solutions for the recognized need. The search for information starts from prior experiences and advice from friends and family. If the customer requires more information for the decision, use of external sources such as marketing messages and mass media are considered.

Kotler and Keller (2012) furthermore mention the third step as the “evaluation phase”. Then the consumer considers the information and different options that the information search has led to. The two last stages of the model are the purchase and post-purchase. After the purchase has happened, the consumer starts to evaluate the product. If the satisfaction exceeds the expectations, the consumer is happy, and is more likely to repeat buying that product (Söderlund & Rosengren 2004).

The consumer decision making process has received critics, for instance, Kacen and Lee (2002) as well as Evans, Jamal and Foxal (2009) argue that the process skips important aspects, particularly when talking about impulse buying. That critic is based on the assumption that impulse purchases skip certain steps in the decision-making process (Evans, Jamal and Foxall 2009).

Kacen and Lee (2002) mean that the information search and evaluation of various options do not exist in impulsive buying. In order to estimate consumers response to marketing messages, Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) introduce the “hierarchy communication model”, which contains seven stages: exposure, attention, perception, learning, attitude, action and after-purchase. Exposure means that people select what marketing activities they take part of. For example, choice of TV-programs and zapping away from commercials makes people avoid many marketing messages.

Even though people are exposed to a certain market communication, this is not a guarantee for paying attention to it. Therefore, marketers have to find ways for people to notice the advertising message, so that they can perceive and interpret it. According to Harrell (1986) consumers recognize, select, organize and interpret the message during the “perception phase”. They may not do so in the way marketers would like them. However, Harrell (1986) continues with the stage of learning, when the consumer stores the message in the memory, which leads to a more or less favorable attitude on the marketing message.

This attitude may induce an action, which is followed by an after-purchase phase, when the purchase is evaluated (Harrell 1986). According to Peck and Childers (2006), all different marketing communications that are aimed to influence consumer behavior are relaying on the five senses that makes people become aware of their environment. These senses are sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Eyesight notices colours and logotypes, whereas sound perceptions may be affected by soundtracks in TV advertisements or by which type of music is played in stores (Peck & Childers 2006).
According to Verplanken (2001) from the company’s point of view, it is favorable to reach multiple of the consumer’s senses at the same time. Such success leads to a stronger experience for the customer, and thereby increases the possibility to differentiate the brand and reach something that appeals to the consumer. Moreover, Peck and Childers (2006) argue that if the consumer is allowed to physically touch the product it would increase the likelihood of a purchase. Furthermore, an in-store experience can have a greater impact in the mind of the consumer, if he or she thinks the sound, appearance of the product and the overall atmosphere within the store are in symbiosis (Peck & Childers 2006).

2.2.2 Consumer Behavior during Crisis

According to Mathur et al. (2008) changes in consumption occur as a result of response to life events and psychological and financial strains. Consumers adjust their consumption to the current circumstances, which decreases the materialism and overall spending (Rindfleisch, Burroughs & Denton 1997; Roberts, Manolis & Tanner Jr 2003; Sneath, Lacey & Kennett-Hensel 2008). In general, the consumption of luxury goods is highly affected by crisis, whereas buying of necessities is less affected. Moreover, during unsure periods consumers tend to be less materialistic oriented, switch from known brands to generic brands and buy in bulk (Ang, Leong & Kotler 2000), as well as repair and maintain things themselves instead of purchasing that service or a new product (Milanova 1999).

Consumption patterns reflect the willingness to conserve resources in order to keep an economical equilibrium because economical resources play an important role in people’s living situation and well-being (Krause, Jay & Liang 1991; Prawitz et al. 2006). According to Szmigin (2003), consumers need financial resources, both to fulfil basic physical needs but also because people are attracted by the temptations the marketplace has to offer. Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012) stress that those who experience higher levels of fear about the disaster will be more likely to engage in a shopping behavior that only has a hedonic purpose, during the time the crisis is ongoing. This is because fear is a powerful emotion that is researched to have a huge impact on perceptions, thoughts, and behavior (Izard 1991). A consequence of those feelings leads to preparatory shopping becoming a high priority in for many consumers. Therefore, factors such as how accessible a store is and how easy it is to complete transactions will influence consumers even more during a crisis (Izard 1991).

2.2.3 Maslow’s Theory

Maslow’s theory (Maslow 1943) is arguably the most widely cited theory of motivations. It is represented by a hierarchy of needs pyramid. The proposition is that one of the five levels of needs is to be at least partially met before the needs of the next level become relevant in determining the consumers’ next action (IBID). According to Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) the hierarchy has been criticized, because as a society develops, people tend to move further up the ladder. Some though argue that everyone will not move up the stages in the same manner or time (Evans, Jamal & Foxall 2009).
Yang (2003) means that some persons may jump levels up to self-actualization or some may move down to physiological needs, which makes the model influenced by culture. As seen in western countries, where satisfaction of the higher hierarchies nowadays is commonly pursued. Yang (2003) at the same time states that development of a society leads to concerns as well. For instance, people become concerned about their safety and security, because of terrorist threats and natural disasters.

2.3 Types of Impulse Buying

Many researchers have defined impulse buying simply as unplanned buying, but according to Stern (1962), there are four types of impulse buying behaviors. The first mentioned, is the pure impulse purchase, where the customer totally breaks the normal shopping behavior and just decides to buy that particular product, motivated by inspiration or escapism. Secondly, as per the model, there are impulse purchases that comes from reminding, when the consumer recognizes some kind of promotion or the product itself. In turn, that reminds the consumer of the need of the brand or the product, and a forgotten willingness to try the brand or the forgotten need of the item, something that leads to a purchase.

Thirdly, Stern (1962) means that one type of impulse purchases are suggestion impulse purchases, where the customer buys the product the first time when recognizing it. Thus, before the purchase the consumer has never seen or experienced the product. Factors such as price and quality are evaluated rapidly in the store, those variables satisfy the customer, which leads to purchase. Furthermore, Stern (1962) argues the fourth type of impulse buying as the planned impulse buying. The author means that those purchases occur when the consumer has planned to buy some specific products, but also a couple of unknown items, since the consumer hopes for sale offers, or just inspiration on which dinner or dessert to buy for the evening.

More recently, Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) argued their four different styles of impulse buying, accelerator impulse, compensatory impulse, breakthrough impulse and blind impulse. Acceleratory impulse buying derives from a desire to stock up for a future need. As per the model, compensatory impulse buying occurs when a person feels low on self-esteem and seeks escapism or using the purchase as a reward for an achievement, as well as a surprisingly reward after completing a tedious or difficult chore. Many commercials promoting biscuits or candy use the reward factor as a reason to buy the specific type of product.

Thirdly, Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) mention the breakthrough impulse as a reason for a rapid purchase. This category of impulses often includes high-value products, such as houses and cars. Finally, the last type of impulse buying is the blind impulse buying, which might be the type of buying that many people consider as the typical impulse buying (Mossberg & Sundström 2011). This is a purchase with no underlying purpose to fulfil any need of either a functional, social or psychological nature (Bayley & Nancarrow 1998).
Factors Influencing Impulsive Buying

2.4.1. Fear and Shopping Behavior

The research in the field of consumer behavior aligns to the recommendations taken by Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al. 1997). The parallelism indicates that external events, which have the potential to threaten safety, heighten the compensatory processes and behaviors to alleviate stresses. To relieve the pains and stress of the external event, consumers turn to shopping as a coping mechanism, as observed by many researchers (Arndt et al. 2004; Maheswaran & Agrawal 2004).

In the face of disasters, consumers tend to shop more than the usual, exercising excessive panic buying. This was observed during the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centre, as the US President strongly urged Americans to do so (Arndt et al. 2004). When the hurricane Katrina hit the American coast in 2005, feelings of loss of control linked to the event, resulted in increased levels of stress (Kennett-Hensel et al. 2012). This phenomenon led to undesirable buying behaviors, such as impulsive and compulsive buying (Sneath, Lacey & Kennett-Hensel 2008). As a consequence of the disastrous storm, consumers participated in the purchasing of utilitarian goods, such as tools and material for repairs, personal care items and clothing. Post event, many consumers participated in impulsive hedonic purchasing, such as designer clothes and accessories, in order to reduce stress levels and escape the negative effects of the disaster (Kennet-Hensel et al. 2012). The choice on the type of products purchased, utilitarian or hedonic, is based on the attached shopping experience, as it is known to support people regulate distress and restore a feeling of control over the situation (Rick, Pereira & Burson 2014).

2.4.2. In-store stimulation

Mattila and Wirtz (2008) determined that consumer stimulation in the shopping environment combined with social impacts encourages impulsive buying behavior. In store design is not to be considered in its isolation, but in combination with the interaction staff friendliness and perceived crowding. A highly stimulating and pleasant store environment leads to an increase in impulsive buying of consumers, as the excitement tends to reduce the consumers ability to consciously analyze their action (Virvilaitė et al. 2012). Furthermore, a highly unfamiliar or new environment will create uncertainty and result in more cautious action, inciting increased levels of self-control.

In store promotions can be classified into three categories: in store demonstration, in-store promotion and consumer interest, raised from coupons (Phillips et al. 2015). In-store demonstration takes place when products are physically placed in use or placed on display, such as food for free tasting. This strategy is deemed very effective and often used as a promotional tool to encourage consumers to buy new products (IBID). This type of promotion is also a method to promote products that are not notably observed by
consumers, the product gains more attention as a salesperson is present in most cases showing off the product (Sorensen 2009).

In-store promotion is considered to be the end of aisle display, as it is a highly visible area, since those screens receive the most foot traffic through stores (Suher et al. 2010). The end of the aisle is considered prime real estate space in a supermarket, where manufacturers would like to place their products (Phillips et al. 2015). Furthermore, Suher et al. (2010) and Phillips et al. (2015) mean that consumers also expect the end of aisle products to have discounted pricing or promotional offers.

Coupons work as redeemable vouchers, used for product price discounts. They are offered by retailers and manufacturers to increase sales rather than offering discounted prices (Phillips et al. 2015).

2.4.3. Traits and emotions

Gountas and Gountas (2007) state that mood is the main aspect of individual personality and emotional experience, which significantly affects behaviors and attitudes. Nordfält (2007) argues the emotional aspect has a huge influence on impulse buying as well. Although, previous studies indicate mixed results on the topic as their outcomes differ regarding which mood mostly encourages impulse buying. According to Beatty and Ferrell (1998) it was established that a positive mood facilitated impulse buying, while Rook and Gardner (1993) argued that pleasurable mood states, such as excitement, encouraged impulse buying.

On the other hand, Lucas (2013) recognized that consumers were also likely to buy on impulse during negative mood states in order to improve their mood or as an attempt to escape daily routines. Shakeel and Fayaz (2017) argue that a little attention has been paid towards the role of internal stimuli, such as personality and its influence on impulsive buying behavior. According to Pelau et al. (2018) extroverted personalities (i.e., outspoken personalities) are also reflected in their willingness to buy new products and by an easier temptation toward new purchases. On the other hand, introverts are more reluctant to buy new products and for them new products are less tempting.

Buying new products is also a thing of intuition, consequently consumers who work out the information about the outer world in an intuitive manner, also have the tendency to buy new products based on a temptation (Dittmar 2005). The author further states that extroverted, feeling-based decision-makers and perception-oriented persons have more frequently an impulsive buying behavior at shopping sessions. Extroverts and intuition-based consumers also tend to be more open to new products and have a materialistic orientation, which makes them more likely to buy impulsively (Japutra, Ekinci & Simkin 2017). A tendency that Richins (2013); Segal and Podoshen (2013) mean is associated with being less happy and less satisfied with life.
Rook and Fisher (1995) divided personal characteristics into five categories: “sudden and imperative desire to purchase”, “a feeling of helplessness”, “feeling good”, “purchase in response to moods”, and “feeling guilty”. Through those traits, they distinguished five factors that trigger impulsiveness: (1) feeling a sudden and spontaneous desire to act; (2) being in a state of psychological disequilibrium; (3) experiencing psychological conflict and struggle; (4) reduction in cognitive evaluation of the product; and (5) disregard for the future consequences.

These reasons to purchase impulsively are mainly supported by Shahjehan et al. (2012) who noticed that impulsive buying was highly associated with emotional instability. The study showed that consumers who go through emotional instability, anxiety, moodiness, irritability, or sadness were more likely to get engaged in impulsive buying behavior, a finding that is supported by Tauber (1972); Lejoyeux et al. (2005); Sneath, Lacey and Kenneth-Hensel (2008).

Šeinauskienė et al. (2015) explain this by stating that impulse buying might serve as an escape from negative psychological states, since general impulse buying tendency was found to be correlated with long-term negative mood and low self-esteem. Thereby, the authors suggest that consumers under difficult circumstances are prone to actively made purchases that are perceived as a self-gift or reward. Therefore, impulse buying could be a rational response of buyers striving to reduce the disappointment and depression associated with stressful events, whereby the purchase gives a positive emotional change.

Moreover, Vohs and Faber (2007) stress that emotional instability leads to lack of self-control, which triggers acting on impulse. Solomon et al. (2010) argue that buying products on impulse is not only based on a desire to have, to own and to consume, it may sometimes be used as a tool to construct a personal image and express or create a personality. Thereby Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) argue that teenagers and young adults tend to be more susceptible to impulse shopping, compared to older people. The statement is supported by Dittmar (2000), who means that persons possessing traits that seek materialism and sensations are more likely to buy unplanned products, which the author means is a common characteristic among young people, who are more sensible for how others evaluate them, which creates a want to shape their own image and personality.

2.5 Marketing and Promotion

2.5.1 Marketing by Business

Supermarket point of sales may be the most obvious example of impulse buying. Many people have probably added a bar of chocolate when standing in the queue waiting to pay. A behavior that Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) explain is a result of the conscious positioning of such products. Dholakia (2000) means that this example of positioning is an outcome of increased emphasize on strategies with focus on adapting store layouts, differentiating
product packaging, and increasing promotion in all channels, attempting to trigger the impulse purchases.

Moreover, Verplanken (2001) argues that providing price offers, multi-packs and “buy one get “one free” sales encourages impulse buying. Peck and Childers (2006) state that it is of big importance for the retailers to consider how to use colours, lighting, aromas and music, which all can work as factors to enhance a “buying mood”. The authors moreover state the opinion that television commercials slowly resonate into the mind of consumers, which suddenly creates a feeling that it would be great to own that specific product, something that in term leads to a rapid purchase. Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) already at the time mentioned the internet with all its different ways of promotion possibilities as a huge marketing channel.

Websites are created in a way to make certain products pop up often, or frequently viewed topics to do the same. Social media platforms along with its “influencers”, together with repeated E-mails and SMS’s from companies where previous purchases have been made, are playing an increasing role on how consumers base their impulse buying decisions (Abdul 2019). Abdul argues that social media marketing also has the ability to track and trace the activities of consumers, using analytical tools. These analytical tools are able to analyze the trends, such as products most viewed, giving greater insight to social media marketers on how to focus their advertising to increase rapid purchases.

According to Zhang et al. (2014) the important impacts on perceived usefulness and positive effect can be demonstrated by online social interaction factors, including source credibility, review quality and observational learning. In a simpler interpretation, social media advertising increases social media interaction, resulting in increased impulsive buying. Thereby, the social media interaction acts as an important consumer generated stimulus (Abdul 2019).

2.5.2 Branding

Keller (2009) states that brand equity (the intangible value a brand brings to an organization) is becoming more and more important. A strong brand equity tends to raise the brand loyalty, response to marketing activities and make consumers less sensible for increased pricing. Furthermore, Keller (2009) implies that brand awareness and brand image are two important components in shaping a strong brand equity. Brand awareness show how likely customers are to recognize the brand, whilst brand image is seen as the perceptions and associations consumers have to a specific brand (IBID).

YiHsin and Chris (2016) suggest that the way of communicating the brand through the product itself, staff working for the company and marketing messages have a big importance. The communication should clearly show unique features and avoid confusion as it may risk harming the status and reputation of the company. According to Šeinauskiene et
al. (2015), a relationship between brand loyalty and the likelihood of impulse buying is found. The brand loyalty enhances a deep commitment to buy the preferred brand repeatedly and continuously, despite the influences of situational factors.

Oliver (1999) found that materialistic consumers are less happy, and therewith establish a strong connection with their brands, as they are in need of the symbolic security that brand connections may provide. However, Ang, Leong and Kotler (2000) stress that during crisis and natural disasters, people tend to switch from known brands to generic once, in order to pursue the lowest prices possible. Podoshen and Rzejewski (2012) noticed that materialistic consumers want to sustain happiness through purchases of certain brands or products. Thus, they are not likely to change brand in order to prevent the disappointment another brand may create. Moreover, Kukar-Kinney, Ridgway and Monroe (2012) state that focus on well-known brands and high-priced brands is induced by the need of recognition that is boosting self-esteem.

2.6. Post Impulse Purchase

Impulse buying usually leads to a mixed emotion response (MacInnis & Patrick 2006). Hsee, Xu and Tang (2008) use the internal evaluation theory where products have different internal evaluation levels, that yield varying post-purchase moods. Although, the product bought on impulse makes the consumer feel satisfied, the fact that spending money may induce negative emotions, such as guilt and regret which commonly occur after impulsively buying luxury goods. The feeling of guilt and regret tends to increase and is more likely to occur after and impulsive purchase has taken place (Kivetz & Zheng 2006). Söderlund and Rosengren (2004) mean that consumer satisfaction is the comparison of the gap between expectations before consumption and how well the consumer thinks those expectations are fulfilled after consumption. Li and Jing (2014) agree with that statement, but also argue that the emotion response in regard to impulsive buying behavior not only originates from the comparison of pre purchase product expectations and actual post purchase product performance.

The post purchase emotions also derive from the comparison of other similar products. Additionally, the authors argue that for impulse buying in particular, consumers lack consideration during the purchase. Thereby people tend to be prone to emotional imbalance after the purchase has taken place. Moreover, the likelihood for comparisons after the feelings of excitement and thrill during the impulsive period of time when the item is bought, will cause aggravation to increase and the happiness of purchasing to decrease (IBID).
3. Methodology

This chapter will describe the qualitative method chosen for the research in achieving the setout objective of deeper understanding towards impulse buying behaviors in the time of Covid-19. The section will also argue why the qualitative method was chosen and how it supports the research.

3.1. Research Approach

The main purpose of the paper has been to assess how the impulse buying pattern of Swedish consumers was affected by the Covid-19, and the unique circumstances the spread of the virus created. The whole world is suffering from this pandemic, including Sweden. Though Sweden chose a different strategy to manage the risks of the Covid-19 virus, since a lock down was not undertaken by the government. Therefore, the impact of the virus on Swedish consumers was considered to be an interesting topic.

Since the aim of the study has been to create a deeper understanding within this area, a qualitative study was chosen that includes fewer respondents, but instead contributes more detailed information than a quantitative study (Bryman & Bell 2017). According to Trost (2012), the alternative strategy of collecting data is the quantitative one. Studies adapting a quantitative approach contain more respondents and searches for information through surveys, utilizing numbers with explanations to present findings through statistical analysis. A quantitative approach would not have been suitable for this study, as it had revealed a more impersonal response and was considered to less likely achieve the objective of gaining a deeper understanding of impulsive buying behaviors (Bryman & Bell 2017).

In contrast, a qualitative approach that includes smaller samples and often adopts interviews encourages the participants to respond in more detail and explain their answers and thoughts. Holme and Krohn Solvang (1997) mean that qualitative studies contribute opportunities to investigations that originate in a want to familiarize in the position of the respondents. Qualitative studies create the possibility for the participants to discuss and motivate their answers, which contributes a bigger knowledge and a deeper understanding (Bryman & Bell 2017).

Moreover, Gyde (2009) argues that impulsive buying is a topic with strong connections to emotions, which supports the choice of in-depth interviews, because the approach allows a deeper insight to the feelings of the respondents. Earlier researchers have found interviews to be effective in developing a deeper analysis from consumer buying stories, even though these studies were based on relatively small amounts of respondents (Thompson 1996).
3.2. Theoretical Model of the Qualitative Approach

Partly because the qualitative interview arose as a method in response to critiques about the “depersonalization” of (then) standard social scientific methods of data collection (Oakley 1981), face-to-face contact between researcher and participant has typically been viewed as the ideal way to collect interview data, since this method considers the ultimate “gold standard” (Braun & Clarke 2013).

Telephonic or on-line interviews are often considered as a weak or poor substitute for face-to-face interviews. However, increasingly in the modern day, telephone, emails and online interviews are regarded as a different type of interview method and used in initial encounters. Online interviews are considered extensions of the traditional process rather than a substitute, which have particular strengths and weaknesses in their own right (Braun & Clarke 2013).

Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2013) stress that the types of interviews are seen to provide the qualitative researcher, in the correct circumstances, with effective data generation tools. This is motivated by the fact that the researcher, in qualitative interviews asks the participant a series of open-ended questions, and the participant responds using their own words.

3.3. Interview Guide and Implementation

For the interview process, an interview guide was created, originating from the purpose of the study and the theoretical framework. The structure of the interview guide was meant to start wider and then narrow down to more detailed questions at the end. The interview guide is attached as appendix 8.1. Through the whole interview process, the ambition was to make the respondents motivate and explain their answers and thoughts. Thereby, as the name implies, the interview guide was seen as a guide for the interview, with open questions, that the respondents were to discuss openly.

In depth semi structured interviews were adopted to fully understand emotions and how the impulsive buying pattern takes place (Kumar. H et al. 2020), which was furthermore limited to grocery and retail products to identify more recent impulsive buying behavior. To avoid unnecessary mistakes and make the collection of data as valid as possible, the interview guide was piloted and tested on 5 friends, and evaluated by them, which led to some minor changes in the formulation of the questions, to avoid ambiguity or misinterpretation.

A total of 10 respondents were contacted in advance and invited to participate in the study of which further detail is shared in the sampling section. The interviews were held via phone using an interview guide and lasted between 28-40 minutes. The use of the telephone was strongly recommended in the current COVID-19 situation, whereas physical appointments were not an alternative. It has also been extremely important to limit public settings to avoid undue pressure experienced by the participants in achieving information containing quality
(Mittal, Sondhi & Chawla 2017). At the beginning of each interview, the participants were informed they could choose to stop the interview at any given moment and that all information would remain confidential and anonymous. The interviews were recorded, which Spradley (1979) argues, is the safest way to ensure all the data is reproduced in a correct manner. Something the participants were informed about. In order to store as much as possible of the interview’s outcome in the memory, directly after the interview, it was listened through and typed down. All the respondents were offered to participate in the text that was created from the interview, however, none of the participants exercised the opportunity as they were comfortable in the information provided.

According to Bechhofer, Elliot and McCrone (1984) two people interviewing one person, may makes the respondent feel under pressure. Therefore, one person was holding the interviews. That move was also depending on the fact that both the authors do not speak Swedish properly. To reach the most valuable information, the Swedish speaking person was responsible for the interviews and the translation. Moreover, to make the respondents feel comfortable and encouraged to speak out, it was evaluated important to keep a relaxed atmosphere and try to make the interview be shaped as a daily speech.

The ambition has been to not force the participants and give them time to finish their talk before heading on to a new question or make them explain in another direction, which Mirriam (1994) means is favorable. Moreover, every interview has contributed more knowledge on the topic which has been used to improve the quality of the next interviews, such as the follow up questions.

3.4. Operationalization

Blaikie (2009) argues that constructing a model is about creating understanding and knowledge. There are several models to use, but the one in this study is a theoretical one. Blaikie (2009) also argues that a theoretical model emphasizes on the information that is of value for the research. The model shows different aspects of the investigated topic, which leads to hypothesis or as in this case, works as a frame for creating an interview guide. Thus, through the purpose and furthermore the theoretical framework, the interview guide was created. The aim was to connect the literature and the questions, in order to transfer the knowledge that was earned from the theory into the interview guide, to reach as much valuable information as possible from the respondents.

Rook and Fisher (1995) created the Impulse Buying Tendency (IBT) model, to measure the impulsivity of consumers. After analyzing earlier studies within the field of impulse buying, they found 35 variables that influence impulsive buying tendency. Through that, nine questions were created in order to find out how likely a person is to behave on impulse. Since this model has been widely used in studies conducted by many researchers assessing impul-
sive buying (Hausman 2000; Youn & Faber 2000; Jones et al. 2002; Jones et al. 2003; Dawson & Kim 2009; Park et al. 2012), it was used as one of the tools shaping the interview guide.

The nine aspects in the model are usually answered on a scale from one to five, however, in this qualitative study, it seemed favorable to rather encourage people to explain and discuss their answers more deeply. Thereby, the interview guide commenced with general questions about the respondent’s demographics and background, followed by their feelings towards the risks and impact of pandemic. The emotional status is an important factor to take into account in such circumstances (Arndt et al. 2004; Maheswaran & Agrawal 2004). Furthermore, the respondents were asked to explain the situation of their most recent shopping experience. The latter questions were related to the consumer decision making process (Kotler & Keller 2012), during the COVID-19 pandemic and the platforms used during recent purchases. The five-stage model as the process, was assumed to create a clear line of thinking or logic in the interview, starting from recognition and ending by post-purchase experiences.

During the interviews, a few of the questions used in the interview guide were as follows: 1) Has your buying pattern changed over the last month? How so? (spending more or less money), 2) What was your last purchase within the retail industry? Was it online or offline, why did you choose either of the alternatives? 3) Was your recent purchase planned before buying the product? 4) What was your feeling when purchasing the product? Expanding to “how do you obtain information regarding a product that you would like to purchase? (via internet, media or through other channels)”, and “has your buying pattern changed over the last month? How so?” (see appendix one). These questions were utilized to understand the respondent’s behaviors during their most recent purchases.

Moreover, Gountas and Gountas (2007 as well as Nordfält (2007) discuss the huge importance which has been factored into a few of the questions. Rook (1987) means that our minds think that impulse buying is exciting, that this behavior is emotional rather than rational, and is likely to be perceived as bad rather than good. Thus, negatively charged words such as “impulsive” and “materialistic” have been avoided in the questions, in order to not make the respondents perceive the questions in a way that may make them to not answer honestly, because those answers would may not go in line with existing norms or their own considerations of what was the right answer.

3.5. Sampling and Data Collection

The sampling of the study is best known as purposive sampling or selective sampling (Braun & Clarke 2013). This type of sampling is a non-probability sample, since it is based on the characteristics of a population and the objectives of the study. Moreover, the type of purposive sampling used, turns towards total population sampling, since the population has one or more shared characteristics, often used when investigating certain events or
experiences (Braun & Clarke 2013). Because of this, the authors reached the respondents through social media platforms and by asking friends to ask their friends to participate. Thereby, a mix of people, in terms of professions and hobbies were reached, which was viewed to benefit the study.

To achieve a saturation point in reaching a conclusion, in depth semi structured interviews were conducted by telephone, recorded, and eventually analyzed into thematic phases. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2013) in order to utilize the advantages of a semi-structured interview it requires the questions of the interview to remain organized, precise and apprehensible. The manner of the interview is also to be informal and casual to avoid any unnecessary stress on the respondent whilst conducting the interview.

Furthermore, Berg and Lune (2012) argue that this type of interview implies preliminary prepared questions on specific topics, and that the interview passes in a systematic order. Yet, an interviewer may somewhat deviate from the structure in an attempt to obtain responses that go slightly deeper than expected. The interviewer may go as far as asking a fully new question in order to acquire more information from a participant than closed responses such as “yes” or “no”.

The interview guide was composed of two parts (Appendix 1, Interview guide): the first part consisted of general questions about the participant. Their demographics, their emotional feelings and overall consumption behavior during the pandemic, how they perceived themselves as an impulse buyer, and the participant’s thoughts regarding the phenomenon impulsive buying. The conclusive unit of the first interview part was the explanation of the researched concepts with the second part including specific questions that directly answer the research questions related to the literature, focusing on the “decision making process”. For instance, how the respondents realize a need of a product, how they search information, how they perceive themselves influenced of in store factors and what product characteristics they consider important.

The duration of each interview fluctuated based on each interviewee’s general knowledge of impulse buying and the scope of explanations of the answers. The interview questions were created in a way that interviewees could easily understand them, some questions included equivalent word in brackets in order to get an opportunity for the participant to fully understand the question. If the participant did not fully understand what a question implied, examples and explanations were provided to him or her and, thus, the duration of the interview increased. Nevertheless, the approximate average length of the interview made up about 35 minutes.

The collection of literature was based on relevance in relation to the research questions. According to Eliasson (2018), the aim of the collection of literature is that it in some way can answer the research questions, and give an understanding about the investigated topic, as
well as to give an overview of earlier studies on the researched field (Bogdan & Biklen 2007). The authors then recognized that earlier studies investigating how natural disasters had influenced consumer behavior and impulse buying existed. The Covid-19 is a totally new phenomena, therefore no studies were found on this exact topic.

The used literature to base this study upon, comes mainly from the search engines such as Google Scholar and Diva, since these databases provide vast amounts of academic articles. By the use of these search engines, different keywords were used in order to find the most relevant literature possible. The different keywords have had connection to the researched topic and have been extended as the knowledge has increased. To further extend the relevance and not to miss valuable information, the searching was coded to include different keywords, in order to make the searching phrases reaching more articles on the same topic, irrespective of the spelling and order of words used in a certain searching phrase.

Relevant textbooks have also been used, to widen the research and compliment the articles. Moreover, various internet articles were also included among the references, in this case, since they were assumed the best alternative to finding the latest information about the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The addition of internet articles was to include an additional level of understanding about the consumer patterns of the Swedish population, and how the progress of the Covid-19 has impacted on Sweden as a country, as well as how Swedish people perceive their consumption behavior to affect their well-being.

In order to find the most useful sources of information to build the study around, the keywords used were impulse buying, impulse buying during crisis, crisis influence impulse buying, crisis influence consumer behavior, brand and impulse buying.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

The analysis followed an inductive coding (i.e., elements of themes), which allows main themes to emerge from the data that begins to display existing themes, such as in store stimulation (Mittal, Sondhi & Chawla 2017). Thematic analysis assisted in gaining deeper understanding of impulse buying behaviors from the results of the in-depth semi structured interviews.

As per Miles and Huberman (1994), there are three constituents of data analysis which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These constituents follow one another in the process of analysis. Firstly, data reduction followed by data display. The final constituent is a conclusion drawing and verification phase. During this phase, the authors began to draw conclusions based on the patterns and systemic repetition traced from the recordings of the interviews held.

Once all ten interviews were concluded, the authors decided to transpose the recording to Microsoft Word documents, only using the demographic data of interview responses. This
decision was instilled due to the fact that the first part of the interview questions was the more “basic” questions section, which was created in order to track demographics and personality of the participants.

How the interviewees perceive impulse buying and how well they were acquainted with the concept of it was captured in the second part. Detailed answers as a response to the data was transferred to Microsoft Excel for better visualization for the authors.

3.7. Quality

The quality of the interviews also depends on the skill and experience of the researcher, as the researcher would need to have good knowledge of interviewing skills in order to obtain quality data (Braun & Clarke 2013). The researcher will also require relevant and good quality follow up questions to ensure the accuracy of the information. If the interviewing is executed well, information may not be lost and give an accurate and qualitative representation from the interviewer.

Unfortunately, there is no absolute criteria for judging whether a piece of qualitative research is any good, as “quality” is a somewhat elusive phenomenon in quality research (Braun & Clarke 2013). However, it is argued that distinction can be made between a poor and good quality study, even though there are no absolute criteria for that, there are two techniques specifically suitable for qualitative studies.

The two techniques that are best known, yet controversial, are called member checking and triangulation. Member checking refers to the practice of verifying the interpretation of the findings from the interviews with the participants are indeed correct. Triangulation traditionally refers to a process whereby two or more methods of data collection or sources of data are used to examine the same phenomenon, with the aim of getting as close to the “truth” of the object of study as possible” (Braun & Clarke 2013). Both techniques were followed as a guide to ensure a good quality study is conducted for achieving the objectives of this research.

Moreover, Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that avoiding response bias is to be considered. This in particularly in studies that include questions with normative influences. Thus, questions regarding words such as materialistic or impulsive could unconsciously be thought to have a right answer, since the norms usually evaluate materialism to be a word with negative connotations. Therefore, the interview guide was created in a way to avoid specific words and leading questions, which also was considered in the eventual discussions that occurred in relation to an answer.

Since Trost (2012) argues the importance of standardization of the interviews, that factor has been evaluated carefully. The interview process was conducted in the same manner and the questions asked in the same way. However, follow up questions may have differed from
interview to interview, which was dependent of the response or direction of the discussion, which Trost (2012) states is acceptable, as long as the researcher is aware of that. Furthermore, a factor that has complicated this ambition is that the pandemic situation has influenced people differently, in terms of private loss and so on, though that is something that the authors have been aware of, and that fact is actually the reason why this study was undertaken.

3.8. Research Ethical Principles
According to Bryman and Bell (2017), there are four researching ethical principles that have to be considered when conducting a qualitative study with an interview guide (consent claim, information requirements, use requirements and confidential requirements). This research has considered these four principles, in order to ensure that the respondents are threatened ethically correct.

Consent claim has been undertaken since all respondents take part voluntary. Information requirements have been fulfilled, because the respondents have been informed of the purpose of this study. The use of requirements was taken into account, since the collected information is confidential and will not be used in any other contexts or purposes.

The consideration about the confidential requirements came through the fact that the participants have not had to leave personal information, such as personal number, all respondents were anonymous.

3.9. Reliability and Validity
The reliability has been considered when being cautious in qualitative studies, the respondent’s risk to interpret the questions differently, which in turn influences the reliability. This likelihood increases when open questions are asked, where subjective evaluations may give answers that not reply to the intended topic (Bryman 2011; Bryman & Bell 2017).

According to Bryman and Bell (2017) qualitative studies risk to be influenced by the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent. This factor may reduce the interviewer’s ability to stay neutral, which decreases the reliability of the study, though the authors state that it is impossible to stay totally neutral as a researcher. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2017) state that qualitative studies are less structured, and none of the interviews are alike, making qualitative studies more difficult to repeat for other researchers. Quantitative studies are more generalizable due to the large number of participants required to participate in the study.

Qualitative studies are sometimes also criticized because the researcher is in a larger extent able to influence the investigations. This criticism has been considered carefully when the interviewed persons at most had a small connection to any of the authors.
In order to reduce the risk of a relationship influencing the interview, no family members or persons from the same university were included in the study. However, the questions do not seek sensitive information, which should decrease the risk of a relationship influencing the collection of data negatively. Moreover, the Swedes were interviewed in their native language, in order to make them feel free in their talking, and not be limited in their answers and explanations because of language skills.

This has led to one of the authors conducting the interviews, and the same person had to translate the interviews into English, which also may be seen as a risk, since it has been of importance to ensure that the interviews were translated properly, in order to not lose the explanations and underlaying statements. Thereby, emphasize was put on the translation part, to make sure that the highest possible validity and reliability was achieved. Moreover, the authors are aware of the difficulties regarding the transferability factor, because Sweden is now in a unique situation, that will not exist for a longer period of time, something that will make this study difficult to repeat. Instead we hope that this research can work as a tool for people to use if similar circumstances occur, or as a comparison to other studies within the field of impulse buying behaviors.

3.10. Limitation

Impulse buying is a wide topic, which thereby has forced us to limit the research. First of all, it was decided to only focus on offline shopping in the retail industry. Along with the outbreak of the Covid-19, the situation led to an interest in how this may influence the impulsive shopping behavior during such a unique period of time.

The research consists of Swedish people between 24 and 44 years of age. Since there were no other studies within the same exact topic, Swedish nationality was set as the only limitation regarding demographics. The purpose of that was to research this area in a broader spectrum, to get an overview of the field, which in another study may be extended with limitations regarding other demographic factors. Moreover, the impulsive buying researched was limited to retail and grocery shopping, both offline and online.

One limitation of using interviews referencing to previous buying behavior, may be that the participants might find it difficult to remember their actions, what they actually did, and what led to it. To reduce the risk of not remembering the purchase, respondents who had made a purchase recently were sought and preferred.
4. **Empirical Findings**

All 10 respondents who participated in the study had conducted shopping online and offline during the past month, whereby an impulse purchase was completed on one or more occasions. The respondents were asked to share their most recent shopping experiences, online or offline. The purchases were mostly focused on retail products such as fashion items or food products. When describing the purchases, the respondents had not made a conscious decision to purchase the product when entering the store or accessing websites online.

All respondents reside in Sweden and under the age of 45 years old with various working professions, ranging from self-employed, banking consultants, medical support staff to fitness trainers, providing a wide range as possible perspectives. All interviews were conducted in Swedish and translated to English to provide an easier flow of response by the participants. The length of the interviews ranged from 28 to 40 minutes per respondent. Included in the table below is the profile of the respondent who participated in the study with a summary of the empirical findings (Table. 1)

Table 1 – Summary of respondents and empirical findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Josef</th>
<th>Robert</th>
<th>Tobias</th>
<th>Tanja</th>
<th>Kristina</th>
<th>Albin</th>
<th>Evelin</th>
<th>Johanna</th>
<th>Anders</th>
<th>Hendrik</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Self Employed</td>
<td>Chef</td>
<td>Care giver</td>
<td>Physiotherapist</td>
<td>Finance advisor</td>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>Customer Service Advisor</td>
<td>Self Employed</td>
<td>Banking sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of the Interview</td>
<td>31 min</td>
<td>34 min</td>
<td>36 min</td>
<td>28 min</td>
<td>40 min</td>
<td>33 min</td>
<td>32 min</td>
<td>31 min</td>
<td>35 min</td>
<td>38 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Impulse Buying</td>
<td>Unplanned purchase</td>
<td>Happens faster than planned buying</td>
<td>Unplanned purchase</td>
<td>Associates negative connotations to “Impulse”</td>
<td>Products added to planned purchases</td>
<td>Products added to planned purchases</td>
<td>Unplanned purchase</td>
<td>Associates negative connotations to “Impulse”</td>
<td>Associates negative connotations to “Impulse”</td>
<td>Lacks self control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion to pandemic</td>
<td>Negative due to economic impact</td>
<td>Positive outlook, more family time</td>
<td>Positive outlook, it will soon be over</td>
<td>Neutral &amp; Bored</td>
<td>Slightly negative, economic consequences</td>
<td>Negative due to economic impact</td>
<td>Negative due to economic impact</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Internal stimulus</td>
<td>Internal &amp; External stimulus</td>
<td>Internal &amp; External stimulus</td>
<td>Internal &amp; External stimulus</td>
<td>Internal &amp; External stimulus</td>
<td>Internal &amp; External stimulus</td>
<td>Internal stimulus</td>
<td>Internal stimulus</td>
<td>Internal &amp; External stimulus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing factors</td>
<td>Product Quality</td>
<td>In store influences</td>
<td>In store influences</td>
<td>Product Quality</td>
<td>In store influences</td>
<td>In store influences</td>
<td>Product Quality</td>
<td>Product positioning</td>
<td>Product positioning</td>
<td>Product Quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1. **Defining impulsive buying**

All of the respondents define impulsive buying and unplanned purchases to have the same basic meaning. These purchases take place despite no actual need or intention of buying it before noticing the product. Though, Robert (34) means that impulsive purchases happen
much faster when compared to planned purchases and highlights that one type of impulse buying may be when purchasing a birthday gift. The idea is formulated that something would be bought, however the respondent does not know which product it would be. Moreover, Kristina (41) and Albin (24) mean that impulsive purchases may also take place when one or a couple of products are planned to be purchased, but more products are added during the shopping trip. Tanja (44), Johanna (24), Anders (36) and Henrik (41) argue that the word impulse buying has a slightly negative connotation, compared to unplanned purchases. The statement is motivated by “it shows lack of self-control if it happens to often” as per Henrik (41), or that “those purchases tend to be expensive and ending up in regret” (Tanja 44).

Moreover, four of the ten respondents see themselves as rather impulsive when shopping retail products (Robert 34, Tobias 41, Tanja 44, Albin 24), whilst all the respondents assume themselves to use a mix of planning and impulsiveness in the grocery store. Though, some seem to be more planned then others, and both of the two respondents who have been practicing more grocery shopping offline since the pandemic started (Robert 34, Henrik 41) indicate that they have been more structured in their approach to grocery shopping. According to the respondents, offline shopping encourages more impulsive buying, because offline “you walk through the store and thereby you are exposed to more of the products, which is not the case when shopping online” (Tobias 41).

Though, two respondents state they are more likely to act on impulse when shopping retail compared to grocery products (Tobias 41; Albin 24). Despite six of the “last purchases” were completed online (Henrik 41, Johanna 24, Robert 34, Albin 24, Kristina 41, Tanja 44), where four indicated the purchases were not planned before visiting the website, compared to two out of the four last purchases that were undertaken offline. Lastly, two out of the four respondents older than 40 years, state that they were more likely to buy on impulse when they were “younger” (Kristina 41, Tobias 41). Kristina (41) explains that “when the kids were babies, this behavior brought more fun”. Whilst Tobias (41) said “back then it often happened with friends related to football matches, but now I am getting old and do not care as much, at least not enough to just react on impulse in those situations”.

4.2. Emotions and consumption during the pandemic

Seven of the respondent’s state that they are neutral to the situation the pandemic has brought, gathered by the fact that their working situation has not been affected at all. Robert (34) is positive, because the situation has given him more time with the family, and given opportunities to prioritize other things than work, despite that his working situation has been influenced negatively. Tobias (41) has stayed slightly positive to the overall situation, motivating “it is soon over”, though some anxiety is defined, because of the job he does and the industry he works in. Whereas Kristina (41) has been slightly negative, mostly considering eventual economic consequences. That respondent is the only one who has been stock-
piling in any extent, “in terms of the family would get sick and not be able to or allow to leave home”. Albin (24); Johanna (24) and Henrik (41) were thinking about it but gave it a miss as they thought this behavior in the society was overdriven. Except for the dominating neutral feeling, three respondents state that the situation has made them bored (Evelina 25; Josef 25; Albin 24).

Several respondents mean that their view towards the pandemic had switched from neutral to negative if their job and income was at risk, for instance, Josef (25); Evelina (25). Albin (24); Evelina (25); Josef (25) mean that a positive feeling encourage consumption, whereas one respondent stated that boredom sometimes influences such behavior (Johanna 24). Tanja (44) means that boredom is the most common dominating feeling when purchasing, whilst the rest of the respondents usually go shopping in a neutral mood.

Furthermore, five respondents mean that shopping somehow creates a kick or excitement, with varying motivations, from “the fast purchase creates that feeling (Robert 34), to “the expected satisfaction the purchase brings” (Evelina 25). Johanna (24); Tanja (44) express that shopping can happen as a sort of escapism, whilst two respondents clearly state that shopping is not undertaken in order to impact their emotional or mental state (Anders 36; Henrik 41).

Moreover, nine of the ten respondents have discovered a reduced amount of spending during the pandemic, a statement that only Evelina (25) does not share. This behavior of less spending is mainly caused from cancelled social events and activities. Thus, it is mostly the purchases within the service sector that have been influenced, not retail and grocery in the same extent. For instance, Albin (24); Josef (25) state that more resources are now spent on grocery shopping when other expenditures have decreased. “Sweets and other products to make more tasty cooking, in order to kind of light up are now purchased” (Josef 25). Though, Robert (34) means that because of more time spent at home, you are less exposed for shopping opportunities, which is a factor to less spending on retail as well, which according to his credit card has led to a 50 percent decrease in the overall consumption January to April 2020, compared to the same period of time during 2019.

On the other hand, Kristina (41); Tobias (41) argue that their consumption only has been slightly reduced. Both these two respondents state a literary anxiety about economic consequences, whereas their reduced consumption is motivated by an ambition to save some extra money if their income is decreasing or the job is lost. A reason which not is mentioned by the other respondents, who describe this behavior as a result of a changed lifestyle.

Six of the respondents argue that their online consumption has increased in relation to the offline consumption during the pandemic, which none of them explain by feeling fear, in-
stead this behavior is motivated as an attempt to follow the norm in the society to keep distance, whereas this behavior also is expected to in some extent be unconscious (Johanna 24; Henrik 41). Two respondents have not changed the ratio of offline and online purchases (Kristina 41; Tanja 44), whilst two respondents have increased their offline shopping in order to support the physical stores (Evelina 25; Josef 25). One of the respondents whose ratio has not changed and one of those who have increased the online shopping, also express a will to support the physical stores (Kristina 41; Albin 24).

Kristina (41) has reduced her online shopping and instead increased her offline shopping by eating out more often in order to support physical stores (i.e., restaurants). Tobias (41) who despite the small decrease of offline spending has the same opinion and emphasizes the importance of “keep the business running”. Thereby, that factor of “supporting the locals” is important when considering whether to shop online or offline. The last purchases within retail were in nine cases out of ten assumed to have been completed in a situation without Covid-19. Only Kristina (41) had a negative post-purchase experience, since the product did not fulfil the expected quality, whereas the other nine explained their satisfaction by the product reaching or exceeding their expectation.

4.3. Decision-making and pre-purchase needs

Three of the respondents state that needs occur from internal stimulus only (Anders 36; Johanna 24; Josef 25), whereas three more argue that needs appear either because of internal stimulus or from external factors such as social media. When a consumer reaches the realization that a product is damaged and has lost its function, or a need of a product that has never been used before, is when the internal stimulus is triggered. One respondent’s need is mentioned to depend on mood, that a need is discovered in order to make a purchase happen that can boost positive feelings (Tanja 44). Three respondents moreover clarify that they seldom really need a product, whilst a need therefore most often is realized because they notice a fresh or eye-catching product either offline or online, or it is possessing another appealing characteristic (Henrik 41, Kristina 41, Albin 24).

In the grocery shopping, needs are homogeneously appearing when the respondents are planning what to eat the upcoming week, often with help of creating shopping lists, it though differs in what extent those are followed. One respondent explains that “only the main products are decided when walking into the store and the complimentary items are bought on spontaneity” (Tobias 41), two mean that their children have an impact on the grocery needs (Robert 34, Tanja 44) and a couple are likely to realize new needs in the store.

When information about a product that is considered needed is to be collected, all the respondents claim internet as a source. Four specify this by saying that comments and descriptions of the certain product are mostly evaluated and two mainly use social medias as the
online source (Evelina 25, Henrik 41). Nine of the ten in varying extent also use friends whose knowledge about a specific product is trusted.

Four of the respondents state that friends are the most trusted source (Albin 24, Robert 34, Evelina 25, Josef 25), while Tobias, 41 means that their knowledge is combined with what is found online and those two sources are than correlated to price. Three respondents mean that offline stores may be used as a source to collect information, motivated by “some features could be hidden online” (Albin 24), or visiting several stores may be favorable when pursuing the lowest price (Tanja 44).

4.4. Influencing Factors

4.4.1. Product characteristics

When the respondents are shopping retail, nine of them express quality of the product as the number one factor, whilst one assumes price as the most important factor, hoping that the product brings high quality as well (Tanja 44). The word “quality” seems to be considered as long-term usage and containing the function that the product was supposed to have. Six respondents mention that certain brands ensure quality (Albin 24, Tobias 41, Evelina 25, Josef 25, Kristina 41, Henrik 41). Three assume some brands are more appealing because of the symbolic value they bring (Kristina 41, Albin 24, Henrik 41), whereas two mean that brands communicate a certain level of quality is guaranteed (Evelina 25, Josef 25).

All respondents somehow touch the factor of product appearance or packaging, seven argue the appearance has a clear impact, whereas several mean that higher quality usually means more appealing appearance and that certain brands produce products with a better appearance. Except one respondent, price is evaluated as less important than quality (Tanja 44), four express that the cheapest products are never chosen (Henrik 41, Albin 24, Evelina 25, Johanna 24), whilst some mean that price is a more important factor the cheaper the product cost. In general, the price is said to be correlated with the perceived benefits a product offers.

The grocery shopping is in general seen as relatively habitually, whereas known products and brands are often chosen in order to save time. All attributes are correlated to price, but none of the respondents state price as the most important factor in the grocery store, four clearly mention that price is less important when shopping grocery compared to retail (Evelina 25, Albin 24, Kristina 41, Josef 25). All the respondents argue quality as the most important characteristic for grocery products, eight mean that near produced and environmentally friendly express quality and for that reason are chosen. Four mean that those products taste better and have a benefit, which is further the reason why they are chosen. Two respondents moreover argue that purchasing sustainable products create good emotions, that they are encouraging a better environment (Anders 36,
Henrik 41). Several respondents clearly express that price is evaluated more important regarding products that are just needed and not that appreciated.

4.4.2. In-store stimulation

All of the 10 respondents stated that in store stimulation is able to influence their impulsive buying behaviors. In the retail sector, six of the ten respondents state that the products’ positioning has an influence (Albin 24, Evelina 25, Josef 25, Anders 36, Robert 34, Johanna 24). Evelina (25) means that to encourage “shopping mood”, it is favorable to be exposed to as many pieces as possible when walking through the store. Seven respondents mention the impact of the staff, who are considered to be able to encourage shopping if being dedicated (Tobias 41), well balanced (Kristina 41) and relaxed (Albin 24).

Moreover, factors as discounts (Tobias 41, Josef 25 Tanja, 44, Anders 36) may have an impact, as well as layout and store cleanliness can influence the consumer either positively or negatively when deciding to buy a product (Kristina 41, Evelina 25). Although, Tobias (41), Robert (34), Albin (24), Anders (36) argue that the online advertising is not as persuading especially when they are not “sensible purchases” (Tobias 41).

Online, the external factors are not as commonly highlighted as an influencing factor. Robert (34); Johanna (24) mean that high qualitative photos are evaluated important, Evelina (25) prefers well developed filters, whereas Anders (36); Robert (34) consider an easy navigating webpage as inspiring to shopping, since “shopping shall be easy” (Anders 36). On the other hand, the opposite impression of a webpage reduces that feeling, and risks people to get lost if “there are too many clicks to complete a purchase, you may lose the impulsive feeling that causes the purchase (Albin 24).

In the grocery store, “cleanliness” and “freshness” are considered important, encouraging the respondents to shop at the store. If it was the complete opposite, unclean and dirty, the respondents would seek an alternative place to conduct their shopping. “Overmatured fruits make me not want to buy” (Josef 25). Four of the ten respondents state the position of the products as an influencing factor (Robert 34; Anders 36; Albin 24; Josef 25). Products placed in a central or more noticeable position catch the eye of the consumer, resulting in an impulsive purchase, such as sweets or chewing gums at the point of sale stations (Robert 34), something which is even more likely to happen if shopping when hungry (Anders 36). Moreover, Tobias (41) and Anders (36) are sensitive to overpricing, Tanja (44) appreciates taste booths in the store and Albin (24) evaluates the overall atmosphere in the store as important. Kristina (41) argues that in store stimulation does not influence her when shopping grocery, since “she chooses store depending of what in store characteristics she mostly prefers”, an opinion Johanna (24); Evelina (25) slightly agree upon. Though, the respondents in general express that the in-store factors and their impact are considered less influencing in
grocery compared to retail, homogeneously explained by the habitually consumption pattern in the grocery store.

5. Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical data is analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework. Coding was utilized to deduce specific themes and shopping behaviors such as stockpiling.
Marketing and branding were placed in the same category as they are closely interlinked with one another. As shown in Table 2 below are the main themes identified from the data collected from the participants. These themes are linked to the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.

Table 2 – Summary of major themes, key issues and sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Key Issues</th>
<th>Sub Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining Impulse buying</td>
<td>Their understanding of impulse buying, interpretation, negative connotations, define phenomenon</td>
<td>Interpretation and connotations associated with it, Self reflection, no intention, unplanned, planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions and consumption</td>
<td>Feelings associated with purchasing, I state of emotion, consumption behaviour</td>
<td>Sadness, low, excitement, fear, behaviour change from the norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making and prior research</td>
<td>What the needs was, being aware of wanting the product, Knowledge of the product</td>
<td>Wants, replacement, must have feeling, can’t do without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing factors</td>
<td>Situational influences, in store, prior, marketing influence, product positioning</td>
<td>Promotions, Store presentation, staff contact, product placement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1. Defining impulsive buying

All the respondents agree on how Stern (1962) defines impulsive buying as purchases that take place without any intention to buy prior to recognizing the product, thereby these purchases are influenced by in store factors (Duarte et al. 2013). The respondents also support the opinion that planned purchases are those purchases which are decided before entering the store (Rousseau 2008). However, relating to the four types of impulsive buying that Stern (1962); Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) present, many of the respondents seem to explain an impulsive purchase as a blind impulsive purchase (Bayley & Nancarrow 1998). A pure impulsive purchase is where a consumption pattern is broken or when the buying of a product for the first time is done when immediately recognizing it (Stern 1962).

When interpreting the respondent explanations, the light bulb moment seems to be the most common impulsive purchase, when a promotion or the product itself triggers the memory of the consumer about a forgotten need or the will to try a new product. Thereby, the consumer purchases the product on impulse and possibly together with other planned products (Kristina 41; Albin 24). Tanja (44) means that her impulsive buying is completed in order to boost her self-esteem, which is closer to compensatory impulsive buying (Bayley & Nancarrow 1998). The acceleratory impulsive buying, which according to Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) implies that a consumer purchases on impulse in order to stock up for a future need has interestingly not been mentioned, not even by Kristina (41) who was stockpiling even in a planned way.
Moreover, Rook (1987) argues that our minds believe that impulse buying is an exciting action when the behavior is more emotional than rational and more likely perceived as bad rather than good. These statements are each supported among the respondents, where for example five persons assume impulsive buying to create excitement, from “the fast purchase creates that feeling (Robert 34), to “the expected satisfaction the purchase brings” (Evelina 25). Furthermore, four respondents connect the word impulsive buying to something slightly negative, whereas none of them correlates with the word “impulse” in a more positive context.

Crawford and Melawar (2003) argue there are environments that are more likely to encourage impulse buying. An example used were airports which were suggested to be a place where impulse buying is encouraged. The respondents instead express their perceived difference between online and offline (in-store) shopping environments. That they are more sensitive to situational factors offline, since offline “you walk through the store and is thereby exposed for most of the products, which does not have to be the case online” (Tobias 41).

This is also described when Robert (34); Henrik (41) clarify that their planned shopping for groceries has increased significantly during the pandemic when the shopping has been completed online. However, some of the respondents mean they are more likely to act on impulse in the grocery store, whilst some are more sensitive to such behavior when shopping retail. Thereby, the respondents support the definition of impulsive buying that Stern (1962) stated, since those purchases are perceived to happen without no intentions to do so. To act impulsively when shopping is considered relatively negative, which goes in line with Rook (1987), as well as this behavior is more likely to be encouraged offline, when senses and situational factors are evaluated to have a stronger impact on buying behavior (Verplanken 2001).

5.2 Emotions and consumption during the pandemic

All 10 respondents felt the same emotion, the feeling of uncertainty of what lies ahead during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As an avenue to redirect this concern, two of the respondents have increased their expenditures in the grocery store (Josef 25; Albin 24). Their grocery shopping increased with more snacks and treats purchased on impulsive buying to ease the emotional boredom of the pandemic situation. Many researchers argue these escapism traits of impulse buying are to relieve the pains and stress of the external event, whereas consumers turn to shopping as a coping mechanism (Arndt et al. 2004; Maheswaran & Agrawal 2004).

As Mathur et al. (2008) state, the consumption seems to have been adopted to the changed circumstances during a crisis period. Respondents do not consider the purchases of necessities to be influenced by the pandemic, whereas luxury goods or purchases that are
not directly needed are somehow postponed. This consideration and postponement is supported by theory from previous studies (Rindfleisch, Burroughs & Denton 1997; Roberts, Manolis & Tanner Jr 2003; Sneath, Lacey & Kennett-Hensel 2008). The respondents do not mean that this changed behavior depends on fear, which Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012) stresses. Instead the social norms of keeping distance, spending more time at home, the cancelled events and the overall changed lifestyle the pandemic has led to are mentioned as reasons to this change. The retail consumption is argued to literary have reduced because of the transformed way of life, whereas the grocery shopping is not significantly influenced. Two respondents mean that more emphasize has been put in the grocery shopping when other consumption has decreased (Josef 25; Albin 24).

Milanova (1999) argues that the consumption patterns during crisis reflect the willingness to conserve resources in order to keep an economical equilibrium, an opinion only expressed by Kristina (41) and Tobias (41), who want to prepare for an uncertain future. As for example, if economic losses make them only have money to fulfil basic physiological needs, which may be a consequence during such periods of time (Yang 2003). An action, which a couple of the respondents mean they would also had undertaken if their job or economic status was at risk. However, a couple of the respondents mean that they see the importance of keeping the economy and business running as the whole of society will suffer if all the consumption stops.

Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012) argues that those who experience higher levels of fear about the disaster will be more likely to engage in a shopping behavior that only has a hedonic purpose, an opinion that may be mentioned even though none of the respondent’s express fear. Instead, people seem to stay neutral, have “respect for others” or feel bored. Thus, emotions that have not made them concerned for safety factors, which Yang (2003) states may be the case during crisis. The respondents do not show signs of such anxiety from the pandemic, which thus has not influenced their shopping significantly.

Instead, three of the respondents argue that a positive mood encourages shopping whereas one respondent states a negative mood does not encourage buying. Whilst Lucas (2013) has noticed a correlation between a negative mood state and the likelihood of impulse buying, Beatty and Ferrell (1998) stress the contrary to Lucas with varying opinions in earlier studies on a relationship between the two.

Preparatory shopping tends to increase during such crisis periods of time (Izard 1991), a phenomenon that may make easy accessible stores more preferable, something that is not mentioned by the respondents. Though, the increased online shopping is expressed as a factor that has gained more importance since the Covid-19 started. This change is motivated by a will to fulfil the social norms that have developed during the pandemic.
These norms, however, more than any suggested actions from previous investigations seem to be the main reason to the reduced consumption, since those norms and also a couple of regulations including cancelations of all types of events have decreased the reasons to purchase. This behavior, as well as the increased online shopping, though go in line with the ideas of Mathur et al. (2008) who mean such actions are undertaken during crisis situations, in order to adjust expenditures to a economical unsure period and adopt to the situation.

5.3. Decision-making and pre-purchase needs

Due to extensive shopping recently, three of the respondents state that they seldom have actual needs. Thereby, a need occurs when external stimulus makes a product somehow appealing, which raises a “it would be great to own emotion”, a common reason to purchase according to Kotler and Keller (2012). Moreover, one of the respondents means that a need is caused by a negative mood, whereas three respondents mean they are only sensitive to internal needs, when for example a product became ineffective or redundant, and three mention a mix from internal and external stimulus.

As Kotler and Keller (2012) suggest, the main tools to enhance information are the internet and friends, where four respondents clearly mean family and friends as a source of knowledge is trusted over alternate sources. This knowledge sharing is also used as correlation for the product pricing and benefit. Respondents also seek other alternatives of information during this process, then they are mostly guided by the knowledge received as the product was likely utilized by other consumers before. Though, it seems as the respondents agree upon the opinions that Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) as well as Kacen and Lee (2002) stress about the use of the consumer decision making process related to impulse buying.

None of the respondents mention that they go through any sort of mental process when buying on impulse. A problem recognition is somehow created in all purchases, as well as the point of purchase and the post-purchase take place, but in line with Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009) as well as Kacen and Lee (2002), phase two and three in this process tend to fall away or disappear when acting on impulse during shopping.

5.4. Influencing Factors

5.4.1. Product characteristics

According to nine out of the ten respondents, quality is the main aspect considered when shopping retail and grocery. Six of them mean that specific retail brands ensure quality, and thereby the brand image is somehow significantly evaluated. For example, YiHsin and Chris (2016) argue the brand is communicated through the product, whereas Keller (2009) and Šeinauskienė et al. (2015) emphasize that brand and its values are considered carefully when quality is perceived as one of the characteristics of the product. Three respondents furthermore state that brands are chosen because they possess a symbolic value or because they
produce products with a more appealing appearance, a position that is supported by Oliver (1999) and Keller (2009).

However, the respondents do not express the provided symbolic value as a security, more than a particular brand “in some extent defines you as a person” (Kristina 41). Moreover, in the grocery shopping, the respondents tend to choose known brands in order to prevent disappointments. This behavior is supported by Podoshen and Rzejewski (2012), the behavior is more likely among materialistic consumers, and therefore not during habitually conducted grocery shopping.

Šeinauskiene et al. (2015) argue that there is a relationship between brand loyalty and likelihood of impulse buying. The brand loyalty enhances a deep commitment to buy the preferred brand repeatedly and continuously, despite the influences of situational factors, which the respondents in some extent seem to agree upon. Since the importance of certain brands and their values are preferred and often assessed before turning the attention to the same products from other brands. Though, Johanna (24) does not pay extra for a special label, whereas Tanja (44) never evaluates such characteristics when chasing the lowest prices.

Ang, Leong and Kotler (2000) furthermore argue that people during crisis tend to switch from known brands to generic ones in order to pursue the lowest possible price, which none of the respondents mention as an action during the pandemic. For instance, four of them mention that they never chose the cheapest products to ensure quality, whereas four also mean the price is less considered in the grocery store when compared to shopping in retail.

In the grocery shopping, quality is expressed as local or near produced food, which is healthy and environmentally friendly. Whereas Henrik (41) and Anders (36) mean that choosing those products also brings a feeling of contributing to a cleaner and better environment. A behavior that agrees with Gountas and Gountas (2007) who argue that emotions to a large extent impact consumption pattern.

5.4.2. In-store stimulation

Four of the respondents clearly mention they are more sensible to external factors when shopping offline, which according to Verplanken (2001) occurs when one or more of the human five senses are stimulated in the store. The stimulation tends to increase the likelihood of consumers to purchase on impulse. Peck and Childers (2006) agree that the ability to touch a product physically appeals to customers. Evelina (25) means that to encourage the “shopping mood” it is favorable to be exposed to as many products as possible when walking through the store. Josef (25) means that the smell of grilled chicken is likely to encourage purchases, whilst staff may impact both positively and negatively, according to all respondents.
Virvilaite. R. et al. (2012) argue a highly stimulating and pleasant store environment leads to an increase in impulsive buying of consumers, as the excitement tends to reduce the consumers ability to consciously analyze their actions. All 10 respondents considered in store factors to influence their impulsive buying. For example, the cleanliness of the store and product positioning to be a significant influencing factor for their likelihood of impulsive buying. If stores were unclean or dirty, they would instead avoid the purchase and seek alternate points of sale.

However, the respondents generally argue that they are less sensitive to in store factors when grocery shopping as the activity takes place more often and most likely in a neutral mood. Thus, the mood of excitement that Rook and Garener (1993) argue to be the most favorable mental status when engaging in impulsive buying is not recognized in the same extent when in the grocery store. However, four of the respondents mean that product positioning engages impulsive purchases in the grocery store, not influenced by emotions, but because of easy access to these products.
6. Conclusion and Discussion

The main purpose of this paper has been to assess how COVID-19 pandemic impacts the impulse buying behavior of consumers. Thus, with help of the research questions, this chapter will formulate conclusions and discuss the outcome of this study.

6.1. Conclusion

In reference to the three research questions for this study, the first was aimed to research what impact the pandemic has on consumer actions related to impulsive buying behavior of consumers.

According to the respondents in this study, their consumption has decreased in varying amounts during the Covid-19 pandemic, only one respondent (Tanja 44) stated her spend amount remains fairly consistent compared to before the pandemic. As per this study, the reduction in consumer spending is mainly observed in the service industry, since most public and social events have been cancelled. As a consequence, the retail sector has been negatively impacted as there is less of a need to purchase goods, such as clothes, due to less social events taking place. Consumers are spending more time at home due to social distancing recommendations, thus they are less exposed to marketing exposure of products. Although nine of the ten “last purchases” completed by the respondents took place in retail, they argued the impulsive purchase would still have taken place in the same situation even before the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the respondents, the amount spent on grocery shopping has remained fairly consistent during the pandemic period compared to before. However, some of the respondents stated more financial resources have been spent in this sector. The additional amounts spent on grocery shopping is seen as an escapism, a way to “light up” the daily life”. More expensive grocery products were consumed according to two of the respondents.

Due to the current situation, online consumption to a large extent increased in relation to the offline shopping among the majority of the respondents. Although, two respondents state they are purchasing more offline, in order to support local business by going to the physical store. Respondents who state they usually prefer physical browsing and walking to stores (offline), continue to do so in support of the local economy, however, they too have increased their online shopping consumption during the pandemic. The increase in online buying behavior is motivated by respect to fulfil recommendations of keeping social distance by avoiding unnecessary contact with others as it is considered inconsiderate. The “new norm” of social distancing is still followed, despite the main opinion expressed by the respondents is that they feel more or less emotionally neutral towards the pandemic situation.

When remaining at home respondents experience less amounts of marketing exposure to retail products, the number of impulses to purchase a product before noticing it, are in
general considered to be fewer since the pandemic started. This behavioral pattern is also motivated by an ambition to build financial reserves in the event the pandemic persists for a longer period of time. The likelihood of buying on impulse in the grocery store has slightly increased among those shopping offline. Whereas respondents who have begun purchasing grocery online as a result of the Covid-19 situation stated they have made their shopping experiences more structured than before by using shopping lists. When shopping online they are able to only order what they need, avoiding impulse buying, as they do not have to walk through the store. However, with shopping online there is increased exposure to all types of products which may not be needed but are more likely to be purchased on impulse from browsing online.

The second research question was set to investigate “which factors have the strongest influence on making an impulsive buying decision”. When conducting retail shopping, a combination of two factors are considered, namely brand and quality according to the respondents. The respondents established a links with a certain brand to deliver a good or acceptable level of quality at any given circumstance. As an outcome of this correlation between brand and quality the respondents are willing to pay a higher price with the quality being guaranteed. Similarly, low pricing is also most likely linked to lower quality, but in the case of the pandemic brands are having promotional sales to encourage impulsive buying behaviors and ultimately economic survival. This phenomenon was seen with the sale on jeans that Josef had bought on impulse.

Furthermore, an addition factor that is given consideration is the packaging of a product as the product appearance may induce a feeling of “that product would be great to own” and trigger an impulsive buy. Product position is considered an important factor as items that catches the eye are those which are first recognized, leaving a lasting impression. During the pandemic stores are placing more products that are on sale in central positions or where higher consumer traffic occurs to encourage impulsive buying. The product packaging and position factors are evaluated as less influencing in encouraging an impulsive purchase when grocery shopping is being done as it is structured and conducted in a more habitual manner.

In relation to grocery shopping, the respondents highlighted ecological products and health benefits as the most important factors. Generally, Swedes are considered to live active lifestyle by exercising, running and cycling quite often, thus opt for fresh and healthier eating options in the selection of foods as mentioned by a few respondents. The selection of foods is based on the appearance, fresh and healthy looking when consideration is given to purchase or not. If not, the respondents would not consider it a healthy option and walk away not only from the product but the store as well.

Moreover, the ecological aspect is from most of the respondents mentioned evaluated important when shopping grocery, both because of taste and the environmental advantage those products provide.
The third and last research question was aimed to assess “how do the consumers perceive the covid-19 to impact their impulsive buying behavior?” According to the respondents, the factor most considered to influence an impulsive purchase is whether shopping is being done online or offline. Thus, the respondents mean that they are more likely to act on impulse offline, which is a result of the exposure of more products within the store, compared to the online stores. Offline, respondents are forced into unconscious product exposure when walking through a store, which is not the same experience when shopping online. As a result of the current situation, the offline consumption has decreased, leading to the number of impulse purchases to also reduce.

Moreover, the human senses (touch, smell, see) seem to be more influenced offline, as respondents are in the physical shopping environment and not at home sitting on a sofa browsing online by themselves. The situational factors (store ambiance, product position) combined with the immediate feel of actually touching, seeing and feeling after purchasing the product have a greater influence on the respondents than that of the product characteristics. These impulse buying influencers of activation of the human senses and reaction to buy, remains consistent when compared to before and during the pandemic. The immediate receipt of a product and added excitement of an emotional kick the purchase brings is considered a far better experience when shopping offline compared to online. The exciting emotion of during and the post purchase is lost to a certain extent as more online shopping is done in consideration for social distancing.

Moreover, the ambition to fulfil social distancing recommendation and other norms in the society to avoid gathering in large groups have reduced the reasons to consume. Combined together with an unsure economical future has decreased the consumption, that in term also has reduced the amount of impulsive purchases.

6.2. Discussion

Despite the global impact of the pandemic situation, it is interesting how emotionally neutral the respondents remain during this time. Their consumption has mostly been influenced by the changed to lifestyle from the risks the virus has brought. The respondents are between the ages of 24 and 44 years old and do not belong to any of the health risk groups. Only two of the respondents’ financial income was slightly affected by the pandemic. Household income is not significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore the responses may have gained different results if the study had focused on a different population.

In our opinion, there is a lack of recognition or awareness by the respondents to the unconscious influence the virus has on their consumption behavior. It is difficult to calculate the reduced amount of consumption that is based on awareness and not. On the other hand, unconscious changes in the shopping behavior may be the first sign of the situation
influencing emotional feelings, or at least a behavior. This issue was not evaluated by this study.

From the clear response that impulsive purchases are more likely to happen offline, it may be natural that this consumption pattern is assumed to have decreased during the Covid-19. The overall behavior has been to move a varying amount of purchases to online platforms, where the respondents do not feel funneled or encouraged to buy on impulse. This is even more underlined when the two respondents who, because of the pandemic has begun conducting grocery shopping online argue that the change seemed to have reduced impulsive purchases when conducting grocery shopping.

Earlier studies indicate that boredom has a significant influence on impulsive buying, which only one respondent states in this study, but that mood is the normal retail consumption mood for the specific respondent, not a behavior as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To the contrary, a few of the respondents expressed they very seldom go shopping to change a state of mood. At the same time, some of those respondents are likely to buy on impulse, but the impulse buy is related to the appearance or functionality of a certain product that appeals to them.

Thereby, the majority of the respondents in this study state that impulsive buying is caused by external stimulus, both when conducting retail and grocery shopping. According to the respondents, it seems as the human sensors, seeing, smell and touch of products, influence consumption to a large extent. The stimulation of touching, smelling and tasting products increases the likelihood of an impulse buy when the consumer is in the store. Therefore, external stimulus offline, combined with the emotions created when visiting a store, seem to be the most effective way to enhance a feeling to act on impulse when conducting retail shopping. A fact that is still considered and remains during the Covid-19, due to the reduced time practicing offline shopping activities and the increased online consumption.

6.3. Theoretical Implications
Due to the unique global situation the Covid-19 has brought, there were no theories found discussing the exact question of how a pandemic influences impulsive buying. Thereby, this study was not strongly based on one or a few theories, instead this paper was based on a wider spectrum of theoretical propositions which shaped the interview guide.

An impulsive purchase is according to the outcome of the study, in varying extent assumed to be defined as Stern (1962) and Bayley and Nancarrow 1998) describe those purchases. Moreover, Verplanken (2001) means that the consumers are more likely to purchase impulsively if multiple of their senses are stimulated when shopping, which is confirmed in this paper, a finding which furthermore is mentioned to be the reason why offline shopping is preferred.
Mood is mentioned to influence the likelihood of impulsive purchases when shopping retail, which Rook (1987) argues to be the case, whereas Gountas and Gountas (2007) state that mood is an important component affecting overall consumption, which is confirmed by this study. As Mathur et al. (2008) argue, the study shows that people adjust their consumption to the current circumstances, which during crisis, decreases the materialism and the overall spending.

6.4. Managerial Implications

This study indicates that consumers tend to buy more on impulse offline, compared to online. This is motivated by the “physical context” when visiting a store as more senses are stimulated, and a larger number of products recognized when compared to the online experience. The physical context or in store factors are considered to influence impulsive purchases. During such a pandemic, when people are spending more time at home, the impulsive shopping therefore is considered to decrease along with the reduced time being exposed for possibilities to purchase offline. This knowledge may be useful when retailers collect consumer insights to stimulate several senses simultaneously, combined with displaying multiple products that appear appealing might have a positive impact on stimulating impulsive purchases.

Moreover, high quality products that raise a feeling of “would be great to own” are factors considered important to impulse buying. If these characteristics where highlighted in the early stages of the in-store experience, it could be a way to create positive connections to preferred products and encourage impulsive buying. The stimulation of the various senses could lead the consumer in wanting to further explore what the store has to offer. Thus, such marketing messages should preferably emphasize on the different aspects of quality, that establish positive connections to the brand, ranging from product features to social actions undertaken by the company, instead of only focusing on “the lowest price”.

Online attempts to increase the impact on multiple senses would be favorable, possibly through sounds or other actions that appeal to senses and emotions through the screen. This is in particularly important when similar scenarios as the pandemic of Covid-19 occur, to be able to catch consumers who prefer shopping offline, because of the various emotions those experiences bring. Thus, focusing on making the consumer appreciate the experience within the store from the first impression, will make them more likely to extend the time spent in the store or on the website. When those positive feelings are stimulated, the likelihood of purchasing on impulse will clearly increase.

6.5. Limitations

Firstly, the authors of this study decided to focus on Swedish consumers, and their impulsive shopping behavior during the pandemic of Covid-19, if the virus has influenced this behavior in any way. After that decision, it was evaluated if any other limitations would be applied.
Due to the new phenomena the Covid-19 virus brings, and the unique situation the virus created, no more limitations were chosen. The decision was motivated by a will to make the study function as a first step assessing impulsive buying during the pandemic.

The authors are aware that a qualitative study may not be applied across the entire population, due to the few respondents included. The qualitative study was considered to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of COVID-19 pandemic on impulse buying behaviors.

Moreover, the interviews took place in Swedish, and since that language is the native language of one of the two authors, one author was responsible for conducting the interviews, translate them and type them down. Being one person interviewing another person, may have its benefits, since if there are two interviewers, it is suggested that it is more likely that the respondent feels pressured and forced, whereas that does not tend to be the case if one person is interviewing.

On the other hand, one person was responsible for the translation and typing, which may have risked the ability to consistently replicate the same quality and reliability, compared to having two pairs of eyes and ears when working with the interviews after words, as well as two persons interviewing may makes them complement each other, which may end up in a more qualitative outcome. Though, this method was clearly assumed to be the best, if achieving a qualitative paper during such circumstances.

As mentioned above, the aim of this paper was to enhance a first understanding of the pandemic’s influence of impulsive buying, whereas a qualitative study was chosen, in order to in detail assess a smaller sample of respondents. The relatively wide study and its findings could therefore function as a guide when shaping other investigations researching the same field. Or this study may work as a comparison to other studies completed in the future, when the world has returned to “normal” again.

6.6. Future Investigations
Because the Covid-19 is a new phenomenon, which the world has not seen for a very long time, no earlier studies were found on this exact topic. Other studies have been conducted in order to assess various types of consumer behaviors during other disasters, such as the “9/11 and hurricanes hitting the USA, and their influence on impulsive buying.

The global spread of the virus, the scope and extent of it, and the consequences it has brought, both economically and physically, may not have been experienced since world war II. Therefore, this study was the first step to see how this pandemic has influenced consumption and impulsive buying. Thereby, there are various other ways to take this investigation further.
Firstly, this study was completed in Sweden, a country which has taken a clearly different approach to the situation, compared to the rest of the world. When lock downs and penalties for leaving your home are actions undertaken in most of the world, the Swedish way has been to give recommendations to not meet in big groups and cancel larger events. Shops are open, which makes the ability to consume almost the same as usual, though reasons to go shopping may have decreased, which the outcomes of the study show. Therefore, life in many aspects is running rather normal in Sweden, compared to other countries. Thereby, similar studies in other countries would be interesting, and probably gain hugely differentiated results, as other countries would have been in lock down scenarios during this period of time.

Moreover, a similar study could have been conducted in a quantitative way, in order to reach more respondents, and be able to draw more general conclusions from the outcomes. It had also been possible to interview another population, for instance people who in a larger extent were influenced of the pandemic, either physically or economically. A follow up study may also go deeper in some areas this study has touched, such as differences between offline and online shopping, or emotionally influences.

It was decided by the authors of the study to include several aspects of consumption and buying behavior in order to widen the scope of the study. Thereby, a future study may research the phenomena of impulse buying even more in detail, without including other aspects of consumption. Thus, this study is considered as a base for future studies within the same topic, that may narrow down to even more specified research.
7. List of References


8. Appendices

8.1 Interview Guide

Topic: Impulsive Buying Behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic

Thank you for your participation in my study. Please give your honest opinion about each question or statement. There are no right or wrong answers, and I am interested to know what you truly feel. Please be as descriptive as possible in your answer. I would love to hear stories and anecdotal examples that you think is related to the topic. All personal information used in this survey will be remain private and confidential and only used for the purpose of the above-mentioned research topic.

Interview questions:

1. Tell us more about yourself, giving a brief description of your demographics (demographics – age, occupation)
2. Has your most recent shopping purchase been completed online or in store? (Why did you choose either of the 2...)
3. Which product/s have you purchased during your most recent shopping experience? (food, hygiene, clothing)
4. How often did you purchase this product over the past month? (frequency – was it planned)
5. Do you often buy planned before entering the store or going online? (If yes, how so...)

5 stage model – decision making process

6. What made you realize the need to purchase the product? (problem – im hungry, need clothes)
7. How do you obtain information regarding the product that you would like to purchase? (google, newspaper, research)
8. What aspects do you take into consideration of the product when deciding to purchase it? (flavor, brand, colours)
9. What were your feeling (excitement, neutral, negative) when purchasing the product?

10. Was the decision to purchase the product influenced in any way (situational factors – music, aroma of foods, staff assistance, product position)

11. How did you feel after purchasing the product (regret, satisfaction?)

Additional

12. Has your buying pattern changed over the last month? How so? (spending more or less money)

13. Do you purchase more product online over the past month? How much?

14. Are you practicing any stockpiling on any specific goods (rice, toilet paper) over the past month? If yes, why?

15. Can you describe your feeling or mood (high spirit, negative, fear) during the past month since the pandemic situation? Explain

16. What do you understand impulsive buying to be? (first thoughts, explain a situation...)

Participant details

Gender:

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<th>Female</th>
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Age group:

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Occupation:

<table>
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<th>Hospitality</th>
<th>Self Employed</th>
<th>Other</th>
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Shopping expenditure per month: average spend

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<th>&lt; 2499</th>
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<th>5000 - 7500</th>
<th>&gt;7500</th>
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Swedish translation


Intervju frågor:

1. Berätta mer om dig själv, ge en kort beskrivning av din demografi (demografi - ålder, yrke)
2. Har ditt senaste shoppingköp slutförts online eller i butik? (Varför valde du någon av de 2 ...)
3. Vilken produkt/vilka produkter har du köpt under din senaste shoppingupplevelse? (mat, hygien, kläder)
4. Hur ofta köpte du den här produkten under den senaste månaden? (frekvens – var det planerat))
5. Köper du ofta planerade innan du går in i butiken eller går online? (Om ja, hur så...)

5 steg modell - beslutsprocessen

6. Vad fick dig att inse behovet av att köpa produkten? (Problem - im hungrig, behöver kläder)
7. Hur får du information om den produkt som du vill köpa? (google, tidning, forskning)
8. Vilka aspekter tar du hänsyn till produkten när du beslutar att köpa den? (smak, märke, färger)
9. Vad kände du dig (spänning, neutral, negativ) när du köpte produkten?
10. Var beslutet att köpa produkten påverkas på något sätt (situationsfaktorer - musik, arom av livsmedel, personalstöd, produktposition)
11. Hur kändes det efter att ha köpt produkten (ånger, tillfredsställelse?)

Ytterligare
12. Har ditt köpmönster förändrats under den senaste månaden? Hur då? (spendera mer eller mindre pengar)
13. Köper du mer produkt online under den senaste månaden? Hur mycket?
14. År du öva någon lagring på några specifika varor (ris, toalettpapper) under den senaste månaden? Om ja, varför?
15. Kan du beskriva din känsla eller humör (hög ande, negativ, rädsla) under den senaste månaden sedan pandemin situationen? Förklara
16. Vad förstår du impulsivt köpa vara? (första tankar, förklara en situation ...)