



SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT

What is in a physical store?

A study on identifying customer interactions with in-store touchpoints within retail industry

by

Adrae Alaoui

Priyanka Belel

Master's Programme in International Marketing & Brand

Management

May 2020

Supervisor: Ulf Johansson

Abstract

Title: What's in a physical store? A study on identifying customer interactions with in-store touchpoints within retail industry

Course: BUSN39 Business Administration: Degree Project in Global Marketing - Master Level

Authors: Adrae Alaoui and Priyanka Belel

Supervisor: Ulf Johansson

Keywords: Customer experience journey, Touchpoints, high involvement products, Generation Z, Physical store.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify the in-store touchpoints that influence customer experience and motivates a customer to visit a physical store.

Theoretical perspective: This study focuses on reviewing previous literature on customer experiences in a physical store, and building a frame from the identified in-store touchpoints to create thematic statements on which we analyze customers' interactions with them.

Empirical data: Eight semi-structured interviews with participants from Generation Z based on thematic analysis to collect the empirical data.

Conclusions: The main conclusion highlights the combination of in-store touchpoints that bring a customer to the physical store. The study offers a deep understanding of the customer experience journey in the physical store which will help retailers to improve the customer experience at these individual touchpoints. It also illustrates the different factors within the in-store touchpoints that Generation Z expect with respect to a positive experience: a good store ambience that facilitates browsing merchandise process and fun in-store atmosphere; convenient in-store technology that provides value for time and money; hassle free navigation process to avoid any kind of distress; and lastly, a valuable interaction with the store employees to feel more confident about their buying decision. The expected evolution of this retail format from the customers perspective was also provided.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone involved in our master thesis process:

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to our supervisor Ulf Johansson, for his guidance and advice throughout all the period of the construction of the thesis. His help has always been most valued. Furthermore, we would like to thank all the interviewees for taking the time to share their valuable information, thoughts and emotions with us that enabled us to complete the thesis. Last but not least, we would like to thank IKEA who has helped us with all the important documents required for this study.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	7
1.1 Background	7
1.2 The Current Retail Scenario	9
1.3 Customer Experience	10
1.4 Touchpoints	10
1.5 Problem Formulation	11
1.6 Purpose	12
1.7 Contributions	13
1.8 Dispositions	13
2. Literature Review	14
2.1 Theoretical Review	14
2.2.1 Customer Journeys	14
2.2.2 Customer Experience Touchpoints	15
2.2.3 Multichannel Customer Behavior	15
2.2.4 Notion of Attitude and Satisfaction	16
2.2.5 The Physical Store Within Multichannel Retail	16
2.2.6 The In-store Customer Experience	17
2.2.7 Digital and the human element of the customer service	18
2.2 Theoretical Review Summary	19
3. Methodology	22
3.1 Research Philosophy	22
3.1.1 Ontology	22
3.1.2 Epistemology	23
3.2 Research Approach	25
3.3 Research Strategy	26

3.4 Case Company	26
3.5 Overall Methodology	27
3.6 Thematic Analysis	28
3.7 Interviews	28
3.7.1 Execution of Semi-structured Interviews	29
3.8 Selection Criteria and Sampling	30
3.9 Finding the respondents	30
3.10 Data Analysis	31
3.11 Reliability and Validity	33
4. Findings	35
4.1 Ambience	37
4.2 Technology	39
4.3 Navigation	42
4.4 Employee – Customer Interaction	43
5. Discussion	46
6. Conclusions	51
6.1 Theoretical Implications	53
6.2 Managerial Implications	54
6.3 Limitations	54
References	55
Appendix	69

1. Introduction

The introduction chapter introduces the study and its background. The research problem is also being formulated along with the purpose of the study.

1.1 Background

Imagine you feel like you want a new set of sofa for redecorating your home. You decide to go online to a well-known furniture retail website. After hours of searching through online you finally find the perfect sofa set you like and add it to your cart. But wait, now you start thinking how comfortable the sofa would be that you saw online? You are unsure about the dimensions and you need advice on your queries but you don't trust the online responses. You wish that you could at least try and test the product before spending a heavy amount for it. You start wondering that all these could have been possible if you were in a physical store. You feel that you could experience the product better in a store, there are store employees who could help you with their suggestions and also you can immediately buy and take the product home. This is when you realize that a physical store would be an ideal place to buy the sofa. This was one such example of a customer deciding to visit a physical store. So what exactly happened in this scenario? Here, the customer imagines traveling through all the touchpoints that it may encounter during a shopping journey and differentiates how a physical store can make a difference in its customer experience.

There could be several other customer stories who prefer shopping from a physical store but does a retailer really know the exact reason? Retailers must be attracting many customers on a daily basis but more importantly do they even know how to keep those customers coming back for months and years? A physical retail store faces many challenges in the age of amazon. For example, does a retailer know what would make customers visit a physical store more often? What has to happen to give your customers a seamless shopping experience so that they become your virtual brand ambassador who would talk to others about your store?

Despite the rise of online and mobile shopping, physical stores remain at the heart of the retail enterprise, with 90% of sales are still carried out in a physical store (Business Leader, 2019). This shows that most customers still prefer physical stores over online shopping. So what is it that brings a customer to a physical store? Is it the merchandise, store ambience, customer service, etc.? As we go further, we will talk about this in depth. Moreover, it would be interesting to know what are the factors that a particular segment of shoppers gets influenced to visit a physical store who has grown up with smartphones and are tech-natives. Due to their growing numbers and dominance in the global market, Gen Z are an attractive target audience for retailers (Tunsakul, 2018). This highly educated and technology savvy generation were born between 1995 or later in the era of digitalization (Tunsakul,

2018). The question still remains for retailers as to what could be improved in a physical store to enhance the customer experience for this young generation. We choose to study products that need consideration when buying and makes customers highly involved. It might be very useful for retailers to know the areas which need improvement that consist of high involvement products purchase.

Today's connected customers engage with brands at any touchpoint they choose from Web, Mobile, Social Apps, In-store and more (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick; 2019). As a result, customers expect seamless and consistent experiences wherever they go. Consumers have evolved and have also modified their shopping behaviour. Consumers today are more educated, informed, demanding, and reasonable and are more likely to use multiple devices and screens while shopping (Cook, 2014). They are more likely to be involved and engaged with brands. Due to the rise of online shopping through smartphones, laptops and tablets, customers nowadays can easily access a variety of channels to shop instead of going to the traditional retail stores. It is therefore imperative to provide customers with a seamless shopping experience in an omni-channel distribution (W.T. Lim, Wang, Srai; 2017). The objective is to create a physical and digital shopping experience meeting customer's demands in the best suitable channel.

This points us to the first distinct focus of our thesis, which is the touchpoint that brings customers to a physical store despite the advancement in online channels. There is growth in the number and complexities of customer touchpoints and with this it is expected to deliver positive and strong customer experience enhancing ultimate performance of the company (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). However, it is still difficult to find what is impacting a customer's experience that leads to customer satisfaction, retention, brand engagement and purchase attitudes with respect to physical stores. The Consumer Experience is a multidimensional system that includes emotional, cognitive, affective and physical responses to the retailer. This system involves all interactions between retailer and consumers that are direct and indirect during the customer journey. Different touchpoints impact differently in each stage depending on the nature of the product or service (De Haan et al. 2015). Therefore, understanding touchpoints is a key challenge for retailers who want to maximize customer experience and the customer experience journey (Baxendale et al., 2015) .

Going more into detail, this research will use Generation Z as its target audience since the recent researches by Puiu (2016) and Desai and Lele (2017) identified that Gen Z demonstrates different consumer values, preferences and ideas from previous generations; therefore it is important to understand the consumer characteristics of Gen Z. Gen Z also known as iGeneration, Post-Millennials, Gen WII or NextGen, is the generation after the Millennials (Raphelson, 2014 and Turner, 2015). According to a recent study, this generation is "the next big disrupter for the retail industry" and have been reported to have a strong buying power due to the expanded opportunities provided by the digitalisation and globalization of economies (Lanvin & Evans, 2016). Therefore, we opted for research on Generation Z as they seem to be a potential segment and there is a lot to explore about them. To make our study even more valid, we narrow down to choose furniture type of products with regards to high involvement products. Hopefully, this study will aid furniture retailers in getting a clear picture as

to what is essential to make these high involvement product purchases better in a physical store. This will also help other retailers with high involvement products to maximize better customer experience in-store.

Through this study, we seek to explain the consumer journey to an extent through which we can provide a clear analysis of the idea and provide valuable insight particularly into the area of physical touch points and customers' experience. First we will get a little deeper into the subject by finding insights on retail industry, customer experience, touchpoints and then formulate the research problem.

1.2 The Current Retail Scenario

The retail industry has gone through a massive change in recent years. Through the 1990s, retail became associated with the selling of items in a physical store, whether in a small business or in a supermarket store in a mall. The advent of e-commerce has brought the idea of multi-channel retailing into line with a modern non-physical channel of sales that will follow mobile, mail and television channel of sales (Cummins, Peltier, and Dixon 2016; Yurova et al. 2017). In this way, customers can use multiple channels, irrespective of the channels functioning independently. Now that the internet has democratized and smartphones have been developed, customers have started increasing their online shopping while also perceiving inconsistencies arising from the independent channels (e.g. for the physical and online shops have separate promotions for the same product). This convergence was the next step in retail evolution and led to the omnichannel retailing, a retail which has maximum integration and collaboration between and through the channels which all businesses pursue and most importantly, that customers are expecting and demanding for. (Cummins, Peltier, and Dixon 2016; Yurova et al. 2017)

According to a study of Harvard Business Review (HBR), in order to meet customer expectations and demands, organizations should unleash the power of their customer data within their channels and take action on smart insights to deliver the most personalized experience for each individual in real time. By doing so they can enhance the value of their Omni-channel shopper while increasing sales, engagement and retention (Sopadjieva, Dholakia and Benjamin, 2017).

According to the book, *The Brand who Cried Wolf* (Demning, 2010), one of the main aspects of creating a retail experience is to create a memorable one. Retailers should be able to provide customers with sufficient reasons to invest their time and money (Demning, 2010). The author also mentioned that many retailers experience business as pretty transactional and impersonal. But brands that grow understand that each and every modern consumer interaction is a chance not just to sell, but to connect with its customers. It's an opportunity to produce value that drives loyalty by treating people like human beings with real wants and desires.

1.3 Customer Experience

According to Bierling and Hagman (2018), Customer Experience plays a very crucial role in retail success. Quality customer experiences are sustainable and provide a competitive advantage to companies influencing its financial impact (Halvorsrud, Kvale and Følstad; 2015). At present, the customer journey approach has risen, whereby the process of delivering service is mapped from the customer's point of view (Halvorsrud, Kvale and Følstad; 2015). Thus, researchers identified customer journey mapping supports in what “an organization plans for a customer, whereas touchpoints and journeys represent what actually happens from the customer's point of view”(Halvorsrud, Kvale and Følstad; 2015). Since we need to understand the customer journey, it is essential to gain insights on the touchpoints that occur throughout the customer journey.

1.4 Touchpoints

There are several ways in which touchpoints has been conceptualized: an episode of direct or indirect contact with the brand (Baxendale et al., 2015); synergistic use of all firm tools to capture consumer's attention (Wind and Hays, 2016); it is a mean or a point of contact of the customer for the company and the customer interaction (Neslin et al., 2006) or an opportunity to reach the customer for them to meet the brand or the product, and also the subsequent experience of use or actual purchase, a personal or mass communication (Kotler, 2017). Froehle and Roth (2004) identified five ways in which the customers can be reached depending on the degree of interaction with the technology: touchpoint without technology, in-store services for customers while in-store sales staff are offering customer care and with out any technology support; touchpoints with supported technology; communication with facilitated technology; Consumer contact via technology; and technology-based consumer contact that consists of fully automated environment for self-service, in which technology replaces the role of sales staff in service delivery.

Recent studies show a growing trend towards digitizing in-store service with a widespread adoption of digital touchpoints, as the first point of interaction between retailers and customers can replace traditional human touchpoint (Hagberg et al., 2016; Willems et al., 2017). While the human touchpoints play an important role in evaluation of customer service, influencing both shopping experience and buying behaviour (Lim et al., 2017), many retailers implement digital touchpoints with virtual interactive front-end windows right outside the physical store (Pantano, 2016). Retailers develop digital touchpoints, in particular, to give customers access to additional product details to help them search, compare, locate and buy products while improving their shopping experiences with enjoyable and relaxing services (Van Kerrebroeck et al., 2017).

1.5 Problem Formulation

According to Mosquera, Olarte-Pascual, Ayensa, Murillo (2018), technology is vital in making an integrated experience between channels, making the shopping experience both engaging and memorable in a multiple channel environment. The authors also mentioned that physical stores continue to remain the primary choice for its purchase and play an important role in successful customer relationships. However, we believe that a physical store is not just an area where customers buy the products but also an area to get attractive in-store experiences, irrespective of any channel they shop. Although the authors (Mosquera, Olarte-Pascual, Ayensa, Murillo; 2018), state that interactive in-store technologies are implemented with the aim of skyrocketing customer satisfaction and enhancing their shopping experience, the need to focus on the human element of customer service is absent.

Previous literature study shows that the role of the physical store is evolving towards a more connected shopping experience, where the role of the experience within the physical space, the use of technologies, and the integration of different channels play a crucial role. However, academic research fails to provide a comprehensive view that incorporates the consumer's perspective in order to determine if there is any consistency between the experience offered in physical stores and the experience expected by them.

Nowadays, due to the rapid diffusion of added channels for shopping and with so much clutter in the market, retailers face challenges to contend in a very complex environment to avoid the problem of consumer cross-channel free riding (Pantano and Viassone; 2015). According to Bäckström and Johansson (2017), there is no doubt that the physical stores are meeting changes from a consumer and a retailer perspective, however the insights of what this indicates are still constrained.

Nevertheless, previous studies have identified that the increased adoption of digital touch points facilitates more changes from online / mobile and retail settings to omnichannels (Dacko, 2017; Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014; Hilken et al., 2017; Inman and Nikolova, 2017; Papagiannidis et al., 2017; Rezaei and Valaei, 2017). The combination of physical (human) and digital touchpoints, however, leads to somewhat different approaches. Digital touch points in some cases provide the same service as physical (human) ones, while in others, companies provide only digital touchpoints as a point of sale, stressing the possibility of replacing employees by technology in the workplace (Huang and Rust, 2018).

Previous research also emphasizes to a large extent the option for customers to choose from the various digital touchpoints during shoppings (Gelderman et al., 2011), which contributes to the generalized adoption of digital touchpoints as a primary point of contact between retailers and customers. Nowadays consumers select one starting channel, but may switch channels through the decision-making process (Madahi & Sukati, 2014). This is demonstrated by practitioners who say that brands are sold

today "from customer service to physical locations to online check-out"(Kitewheel, 2018a). Further, studies also show how much consumers value the opportunity to choose between various touchpoint typologies. However, these studies did not conclusively identify how much value does a consumer give to physical stores. In reality, the customer journey seems to be composed of touch points which exist across a range of different channels (Kitewheel, 2018a). Consumers, however, often put emphasis on human experiences in their shopping experience (Immonen et al., 2018).

In other words, the existent literature shows that new in-store digital technologies drives more shoppers reducing the boundaries between classical in-store atmospherics and e-atmospherics and possibly increasing sales but there is a gap in identifying that organizations who rely on digital may be abandoning the human personalization, one of the important touchpoints of a physical store that leads to excellent customer service experience enhancing the sales of the company.

In an era of increasingly complex customer behavior, this study evaluates customer experience from initial contact, through the process of engagement into a long-term relationship with retailers. Going further, this paper will be based on a case study as we found that previous literature lacks empirical research on this area to provide a basis for further implications. This thesis has the aim to enrich the understanding of how physical stores influence customer experience journey especially on Generation Z. By understanding how Gen Z perceive customer experience journeys in a physical retail environment as impulse buying is not a strong driver for their behavior (Lauring and Steenburg, 2019), this study will help retailers to tailor the next generation customer shopping experience.

1.6 Purpose

No matter how great a product or service is and how effective their advertising and marketing have been, companies won't be able to make their customers happy if they don't understand what they experience when they come in contact with the organization. Happy Customers will come back, rave about the brand or company to all their friends and family, and stay with the brand for a long time. In short, happy customers lead to happy profits (Sukhraj, 2017).

The purpose of this study is to identify the in-store touchpoints that influence customer experience and motivates a customer to visit a physical store. As mentioned earlier, this study will be conducted by taking in account Generation Z as a target group of audience to understand what brings them to a physical store in this technology enriched-settings. This research will help retailers to develop new capabilities creating competitive advantage in this retail environment.

The second part of our study will focus on areas of importance that help in what an organization can do more and areas not valued by customers, so costs can be optimized. It will also determine key

requirements such as skills, systems and procedures to develop and improve cross functional alignment across the organization.

1.7 Contributions

The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the customer experience journey regarding high involvement products and touchpoints that influence the customer experience in a physical store. This study serves as an extension to previous academic research as they focused on convenience goods with a different target group (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Furthermore, the research conducted has several managerial implications that can be put into practice. Companies within the retail industry will be able to use the results for improving their customer experience journey in a physical store with respect to Generation Z. By using this knowledge, they can create improvements in the areas of customer journey and respond to changing requirements of the industry. The study helps in understanding how customers interact with touchpoints in a physical store and what influences a positive customer experience. In addition, it also supports theoretical and managerial implications thus making sure this research is highly relevant to conduct.

1.8 Dispositions

Following the above introduction and problem discussion, the reader should realize the importance of conducting this study after understanding the concepts of customer experience and touchpoints as an area of research. In addition, the purpose of the study explains what is being examined. Furthermore, in the theoretical review chapter, we will present underlying theories and concepts in our field of study. We will discuss the methodological choices, sample and interview designs in the methodology chapter. In the empirical findings chapter, we will describe the responses collected from the interviewees. After that, we introduce the discussion chapter where we aim to analyze the responses combined with our theoretical base to find differences and similarities. Following this, we present our main conclusions followed by theoretical and managerial implications. The thesis ends with a brief discussion on limitations.

2. Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first one presents the theories and concepts by previous researchers that are relevant to our study, the second part is a summary of the theoretical review with a matrix to show the important studies that we looked up.

2.1 Theoretical Review

In this section we provide an account of the large stream of literature on multi-/omnichannel retail settings and shopping behaviors with the aim of highlighting determinants of customer journeys, and understanding the role of physical stores in customer experience. Other research was done about how this retail setting is a challenge for retailers and how they could improve their customer experience.

The complexity of the competitive market grows up, by soliciting retailers to perform simultaneously in different retail settings (i.e. the physical, online and mobile scenario). For these reasons, multichannel retailing occurs as a hot research topic as it stresses retailers' ability to integrate different channels for shopping (Jin and Kim, 2010), by identifying the channel choice as a fundamental step for competing (Neslin and Shankar, 2009, Hsieh et al., 2012). And understanding the specific determinants of shopping journeys in this context may allow marketers to strategically intercept consumers at each particular stage of the shopping process and maximize customer value. So our review shall start with a definition of customer journeys which Zomerdijk and Voss (2010) refer to as a series of touchpoints that involve all activities and events related to the delivery of a service to a customer. The concept has then been further developed by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) who split this journey into three linearly sequential stages (i.e., pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase), which transpire during the current journey and also during past and future shopping experiences.

2.2.1 Customer Journeys

The development of technology and the rise of customers' rights to select the convenient route for them made customer journey a complex subject to tackle (Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014). Despite the various challenges, creating a seamlessly integrated digital and physical experience is critical for the brands, because consumers expect to reach retailers in every touchpoint available (Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014). Clark (2013) explains the customer journey as various touchpoints that describe one's interaction with the interest in products, services or brands. Behavioral, cognitive and emotional factors play a role within the interactions experienced in the channels and its processes, thus the structure of customer journeys cannot be described as a linear process (Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014).

Recent research has determined the importance of inspecting the customer journey in order to deeply comprehend customer experience. Mapping customer journeys from a firm perspective has long been a valuable tool for improving customer experiences (Bitner et al. 2008; Dhebar 2013; Edelman and Singer 2015; Rawson et al. 2013), and is likely to remain so. Yet, as Lemon and Verhoef (2016) explain, only some of these touchpoints are controlled by the firm, and firms need to deepen their understanding of both the ones they control and those they don't. Increasingly, theory and research call for advances in customer journey mapping, moving toward more adaptive and customized mapping, done less from a strictly firm perspective, and incorporating more of the pre- and post- components of the customer journey with the firm (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Voorhees et al. 2017; Rosenbaum et al. 2017).

2.2.2 Customer Experience Touchpoints

In the light of the above, we can define touchpoints as all the interactions that occur between the customer and the company with in-store technologies or sales personnel within the journey that the customer makes; in other words during his/her dynamic customer experience or the purchase cycle across different touchpoints (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). These interactions ignite a sort of communication window between brands and customers. While literature on consumers' interactions with sales personnel is an established topic in retailing literature, consumers' interactions with in-store digital services are only recently emerging as a new line of inquiry (Bertacchini et al., 2017; Cano et al., 2017; Dacko, 2017; Gelderman et al., 2011; Immonen et al., 2018; Pantano and Gandini, 2017; Willems et al., 2017), thus pushing toward a deeper understanding of both digital and human touchpoints.

Customer experience develops throughout all touch points and episodes encountered during the service delivery process (Jüttner et al., 2013, Frow and Payne, 2007). These touchpoints may exist pre- and post-purchase (e.g., Meyer and Schwager (2007), Zomerdijk and Voss (2010) and Tynan and McKechnie (2009)) and occur in different retail channels (Martin et al., 2015, Verhoef et al., 2009). Meyer and Schwager (2007) point out that touchpoints may not be linked necessarily or directly to a company, suggesting that indirect interactions also emerge during unplanned encounters with representatives of a company's products, service or brands (e.g., recommendation or criticism conversations, news reports, reviews etc.). From this perspective, touch points occur at all stages of the customer journey including the search, evaluation, purchase and after-sale phases of the experience (Verhoef et al., 2009).

2.2.3 Multichannel Customer Behavior

Technological advancements have increased the options that companies can employ to communicate and deliver marketing offerings to customers. In addition to the traditional physical store, firms can also

serve their customers through virtual or remote technology (e.g. internet, mobile phone, kiosk). With the advances in channel innovation, consumers have become multichannel shoppers because they can enjoy the different advantages of online and offline channels. Multichannel shoppers are defined as customers who use more than one channel for a shopping task regardless of being in the information-seeking stage or the product-procurement stage (Kumar and Venkatesan, 2005). To obtain the utmost utility from the shopping process, many consumers will take advantage of different channels at different purchasing stages (Burke, 2002; Louvieris et al., 2003; Van Baal and Dach, 2005). Schröder and Zaharia (2008) demonstrated that customers spread the “information” and “purchase” stages over the channels of a multichannel retailer according to different shopping motives.

2.2.4 Notion of Attitude and Satisfaction

It goes without saying that satisfaction is a crucial part and outcome of the customer experience, it is a human feeling, a sort of overall pleasure emerging from a past experience (Taylor and Strutton, 2011). It is based on the disconfirmation of multiple attributes that influences the subsequent behavioural intention (Finn et al., 2009). In retail settings, it refers to consumers' evaluation of in-store experience as a sort of affective response towards the shopping experience (Wallace et al., 2004, Van Riel et al., 2012; Marques et al., 2013).

In many cases the waiting time and the limited access to the service (for instance caused by the absence of shopping assistance, or by the high number of other consumers) reduce the perceived quality of a service, the slow service limits consumers' satisfaction (Li et al., 2009, Noon and Mattila, 2009, Van Riel et al., 2012, White et al., 2013). Thus, consumers perceive the service quality on the basis of their personal experience in the physical store through the evaluation of several elements such as time for assistance, salesperson ability to respond to their requests, products offer and availability, familiarity with in-store technology etc.. Their positive perception of the in-store store service is considered an important antecedent of satisfaction (Lombart and Louis, 2012; De Canniere et al., 2010; Marques et al., 2013), retention and purchase intention, which leads to repeat the patronage behaviour (De Canniere et al., 2010).

2.2.5 The Physical Store Within Multichannel Retail

Traditionally, a store is a single (physical) marketing channel, which supports firm-consumers (and *vice versa*) interactions (Hsieh et al., 2012). Nowadays, this channel is no longer only a face-to-face contact point where consumers access the firm's services, but it further provides interactive touch-points also to create and accomplish the service. Business experts use the term multichannel to describe a form of retailing that allows customers to use different channels for different purposes either within the same product category or for different products according to their preferences, perceived convenience and

product availability which can be different in the different shopping phases, providing them with a unique, complete and seamless shopping experience that breaks down the barriers between virtual and physical stores (Beck and Rygl, 2015; Lazaris and Vrechopoulos, 2014; Levy et al., 2013; Melero et al., 2016; Rigby, 2011; Verhoef et al., 2015). Advances in information technology and communication have led to an increase in the number of retailing formats through which consumers can contact a company. In addition to traditional physical and online stores, new channels and touchpoints, such as mobile, social media, smart TV and smart watches, are changing consumer habits and shopping behavior, transforming the buying process (Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2016; Melero et al., 2016; Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2015). This fact has made selling to consumers truly complex (Crittenden et al., 2010) due to consumers' simultaneous evaluation of all channels and the resulting need for retailers to integrate all channels seamlessly to prevent cross-channel free-riding behavior (Chiu et al., 2011; Heitz-Spahn, 2013; Neslin et al., 2006; Pantano and Viassone, 2015).

The integration of physical and virtual channels due to the emergence of internet-based marketing channels is considered one of the most significant changes in retailing (Brynjolfsson et al., 2013; Galipoglu et al., 2018; Huré et al., 2017). Retailers have evolved from being single-channel to embrace multi-channel and lately, cross-channel and omnichannel strategies (Verhoef et al., 2015). If all channels are connected, customers can start their shopping journey in one channel and finish it in another, creating a seamless experience that increases convenience and engagement (Alexander and Alvarado, 2017; Eaglen, 2013). Digital disruption has created empowered consumers with heightened expectations in terms of convenience, speed, efficiency, flexibility and consistency across channels inducing greater complexity in channel arrangement (Blázquez, 2014; Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson, 2014). The majority of retail sales take place in the physical store though (Hagberg et al., 2017) and for many retailers is still the most important and prominent channel (Huré et al., 2017; Kent et al., 2016) as retail stores are "... unique in allowing consumers to touch and feel merchandise and provide instant gratification" (Brynjolfsson et al., 2013). The availability of online connectivity and mobile devices to get access to the Internet makes the information about the product readily available (Mehra et al. 2013). As a consequence, the use of the physical store as a purely information channel has increased and the role of it is being redefined as it becomes part of a larger and more connected experience.

2.2.6 The In-store Customer Experience

Customer experience is a collection of feelings left by the various touch points during the customer journey (Bordeaux, 2019). Managing customer experience requires identifying clues that create a customer experience (Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002). These can be drawn from the service or the product, however the physical setting includes, for example, interaction with the employees. The clues found in physical settings provide more information as the comments and gestures of the employee all imply something to the consumer receiving the message (Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002).

Grewal, Levy, and Kumar (2009) suggest that in a retailing context, customer experiences can be categorized along the lines of the retail mix (i.e., price experience, promotion experience). The design, delivery, and management of the customer experience can be viewed from multiple perspectives: from the firm's point of view, with the firm essentially designing and crafting an experience for the customer to receive (Berry, Carbone, and Haeckel 2002; Stuart and Tax 2004); from the customer's point of view (Schmitt 2011); or from a co-creation perspective, in which the customer experience is deemed a culmination of a customer's interaction with other actors in a broader ecosystem, while recognizing the customer's role in the coconstruction of the experience (Chandler and Lusch 2015; De Keyser et al. 2015; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2003). In general, scholars and practitioners have come to agree that overall customer experience is a multidimensional construct that involves cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social components (Schmitt 1999, 2003; Verhoef et al. 2009).

2.2.7 Digital and the human element of the customer service

Despite the continuous growth of e-commerce, physical stores are still the primary choice for purchasing new clothing, as they provide the instant gratification of buying the product and play a central role within the development of a successful customer relationship (Blázquez, 2014). However, the physical store is not just an area where consumers can see, feel, touch and try the products but also a place to provide them with attractive personal experiences, irrespective of the channel used (Avery et al., 2012; Medrano et al., 2016). Previous research has highlighted the importance of design to communicate brand stories and deliver experiences within the omnichannel scenario (Kent et al., 2015). With respect to human variables, it is also necessary to consider the employees. Digital in-store installations, smart technologies, cannot only be used by the customer alone but also by a front-line employee or by both parties to enhance the customer journey (Marinova et al, 2017). The authors argue that the service interaction can be more enjoyable, customized and hence valued through technology incorporation. Therefore, it is not productive to replace the employees but to provide them with smart technology to facilitate service and sales in the mentioned ways (Marinova et al, 2017).

Other authors are supporting the view that employees cannot be substituted by technology (Larivière et al, 2017). They describe employees, amongst others, as innovators. Human capital remains a non-substitutable source of creativity and service employees, directly and indirectly, observe customer behaviors and reactions (Larivière et al, 2017). This makes employees highly valuable assets in that they can serve as a barometer of the customer environment and actively pinpoint areas for service improvement (Larivière et al, 2017). Furthermore, the authors argue that technology is not loyal, and can often be copied easily. Service employees and their skills, however, are less replicable (Larivière et al, 2017). Authentic human touch can help differentiate offerings in the marketplace and display unique brand-building behaviors (Bolton, Gustafsson, McColl-Kennedy, Sirianni, & Tse, 2014).

Differently than the existent literature which adopts a typical physical (offline) vs. digital (online) channel dichotomy, our research is set to investigate the specific drivers in consumer behavior that influence the selection of shopping journeys that are still finalized through the personal and traditional channels, in other words the implications of our research are of the utmost importance for retailers by knowing how different customers engage in the physical store and what is its role in the customer experience despite the evolution of channels and the pervasive introduction of digital technologies and media to support the customer.

There's no question that digital has disrupted customer behavior at a fundamental level and seismic scale but we believe that although digital systems can improve retail's service efficiency as previous literature has argued, the real profit actually depends on finding the optimal mix of both digital service and human service offerings in a no longer "physical real estate" in which companies house products but spaces where the brand can transact in experiences based on economic choice theory which assumes that individuals choice behavior is generated by maximization of preferences or utility. Louviere (1988) defines utility as "judgements, impressions, or evaluations that decision makers form of products or services, taking all the determinant attributes into account.

2.2 Theoretical Review Summary

Although some retailers started being aware of the importance to develop new practices for handling the in-store touchpoints, there is still a gap in the literature concerning consumers' response towards the emerging retail settings and management practices, and what still brings them to a physical store in the existence of technological facilities. In this paper we refer to a multichannel environment IKEA in particular we explore, through the interviews conducted that are presented in the next chapter, the interactions between customers and in-store touchpoints on the emerging retail settings in order to examine the extent to which an exploratory sample of participants is still willing to adopt this multichannel environment for purchase.

As such, the most relevant conclusion from this part of the theoretical framework is the in-store touchpoints that are believed to be relevant to the customer experience in our study, which we use for empirical testing. The identified in-store touchpoints also enable us to arrive at thematic statements which represent the frame to work on with our interviewees.

In the table below we list the most relevant studies with a summary of their findings that contributed into gathering pertinent information required for our research.

Name of the Article and First Author (Year)	Source	Domain	Research Design	Participants	Key Findings
Engaging consumers on new integrated multichannel retail settings: Challenges for retailers; Eleonora Pantano (2015)	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services 10.1016	Consumer Behaviour	Experimental	Customers 237	Consumers purchase intentions are linked to factors: Store Atmosphere, Channels availability, Service quality perception Attitude, Satisfaction.
Improving service quality through customer journey analysis; Ragnhild Halvorsrud (2015)	Journal of service theory and practice 26 (6), 840-867	Marketing	Descriptive	No Participants	Customer journey analysis is an effective tool that reveals unidentified problematic service delivery leading to unfavorable customer experience
An exploration of consumers' experiences in physical stores: comparing consumers' and retailers' perspectives in past and present time; Kristina Bäckström (2017)	The International Review of Retail Distribution and Consumer Research vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 241-259	Business Administration	Empirical	270 Persons 47 Students of aged 23-35 years	Customers are knowledgeable leading to a demand on personnel to add more to their experience. Thus, there is a requirement to increase staff competency.
The role of technology in an omnichannel physical store; Ana Mosquera (2017)	Spanish Journal of Marketing – ESIC 2444-9709	Marketing	Experimental	628 Omnichannel Customers	The findings show that consolidation of new technologies in the physical store emphatically

					influences purchase intentions.
Futurising the Physical Store in the Omnichannel Retail Environment: Common Expectations and Diverse Realities, Bethan Alexander (2019)	In book: Exploring Omnichannel Retailing, pp.197-223	Retail	Exploratory	6 Industry Informants	The results show that it is necessary to implement technology as an enabler that enhances the services without replacing the in-store experience.
Store of the future: Towards a (re)invention and (re)imagination of physical store space in an omnichannel context, Bethan Alexander (2019)	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Retail	Exploratory	20 industry informants, representing senior directors within retail	Findings show that most of the respondents acknowledged more about their best practices related to physical stores and less about the consumer facing technology.
Customer experience in the omni-channel world and the challenges and opportunities this presents; Glenn Cook (2019)	Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing 15, 262–266	Marketing	Descriptive	No Participants	The role of the physical store is a significant bit of the Omni-channel jigsaw that requires improvement of the organization and the role of the store to satisfy the needs of its customers.

Table 1. Literature Review Matrix

3. Methodology

This chapter will outline the research philosophy as well as the methodological approach towards the research. More specifically, the method chapter will address how the study has been conducted and what material that is the root of the study.

3.1 Research Philosophy

A very high number of students experience uncertainty and difficulties in understanding when it comes to research philosophy classification and its debate (Mkansi and Acheampong, 2012). Based on the research philosophy that is implemented, the research approach and strategy underlie a range of critical assumptions (Saunders et al., 2008). Therefore, an analysis and understanding of the subject matter is even more essential. The way researchers interpret and interact with the environment in order to understand and gather information is strongly linked to the way the research problem is developed as well as the selection of the methodology (Barinaga, 1999). There are two major ways of thinking in this philosophical field: Ontology and Epistemology. These two kinds influence the thinking of researchers in various ways to think about a research process (Saunders et al., 2009). We will explore these two kinds of thinking philosophically while at the same time supporting our perspective on our research problem.

3.1.1 Ontology

The ontological point of view refers to “claims regarding the nature and structure of being” (Rawnsley.,1998). It engages in the questioning of what exists within the nature around us (Urmson & Rée, 2005). A simplifying definition of ontology would describe it as “the view of the world” (Barinaga, 1999). Within the field of ontology there are two different positions that can be discussed regarding how researchers see the characteristics of reality - namely objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders et al., 2009).

Objectivism adopts a perspective where “social structures exist in practice external to social actors” (Saunders et al., 2009). Objectivists claim that facts which can be repeated and examined in public are important for the proper application of scientific methods (Diesing, 1966).

In contrast, subjectivism is a very broad philosophical term that "maintains that the truth of a certain group of statements depends on the mental state or reactions of the individual making them" (Urmson and Rée, 2005). It has the goal to understand the meanings that individual actors are connecting to social happenings and considers that subjective realities are constantly changing (Saunders et al., 2009). Long et al. defines this as a situation in which "[reality] is constructed on an individual basis,

subjectively and cognitively." ” (Long et al., 2000). By explaining many scientific or theoretical positions, Diesing argues that in order for empirical findings to be sufficient from a subjective point of view, it is important to "understand behavior from the actor's point of view, as a process of identifying the situation, assessing alternatives in terms of priorities, expectations and predictions, and deciding to act" (Diesing, 1966). He further claims that subjectivists differentiate natural and social science by arguing the nature of human behaviour, which means that science must understand and take into account the subjective significance of human behaviors to be true (Diesing, 1966).

In order to answer our research questions properly, we concluded to follow the notion of subjectivism. We reach this conclusion based on the character of this research and how it is highly subjective in approach, also qualitative methods are here suitable and necessary to acquire valuable results. While it could be possible that the customer journey can be viewed objectively as well, we think this to be incredibly hard to do – if not impossible. The nature of the customer journey and its intimate relationship to customer experience logically binds it to the realm of subjectivism. While one can objectively determine or design a journey, the actual experiencing of the journey falls to the customer. As such customers can interpret their experiences within the customer shopping journey in many ways, influenced by their own personal views of the world (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, the objectivist position would be inappropriate to apply to our research and so we choose to adopt the subjectivist position instead.

3.1.2 Epistemology

On the other hand, the epistemological approach touches upon “what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study” (Saunders et al., 2009). It addresses “the basis of knowledge and how it can be can be transmitted to others.” (Long et al., 2000). Epistemology therefore answers the issue of how information can be acquired and how to analyze the aforesaid truth (Long et al., 2000). "Theory of Knowledge" is a common synonym for epistemology since it is derived from the Greek word "episteme" which means “Science or Knowledge” (Urmson and Rée, 2005). In epistemology the primary question to be answered is whether or not the criteria for justifying belief and rejecting skepticism are necessary and adequate (Rawnsley, 1998). There are three different theories to classify when digging into the area of epistemology: positivism, realism and interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2009).

Positivism constitutes primarily a natural scientific view, in which reliable evidence can only contain observed phenomena (Saunders et al., 2009). This theory denies theoretical concepts that are primarily aimed at identifying the phenomenon encountered by empirical measurements and monitoring (Trochim et al., 2016). Here, the social reality is seen as fact, where researchers may gain more insight into these realities (Walliman, 2011). The hypotheses are thus developed typically by using similar

theories that already exist (Saunders et al., 2009) and researchers are considered to be unbiased and free of value (Walliman, 2011).

Realism views reality as occurring and identifiable as it is (Walliman, 2011). The advocates of philosophy claim that the experiences that the senses of researchers convey to them are true, and that the world is totally disconnected from those in the human mind (Saunders et al., 2009). Saunders states that there are two kinds of realism within this philosophical branch: direct and critical realism. Direct realists argue that their experienced viewpoint of the world is correctly interpreted by their senses whereas critical realism assumes that senses may be delusional and one can only experience sensations of truth that may not be morally right (Saunders et al., 2009). In this way, the previous established concept of subjectivism can also be noted to be a kind of realism as claims of truth on subjective grounds, of which some are likely to be right and evident (Sayre-McCord, 1988).

The third philosophical concept is interpretivism, which states that our conception of mind is the way we view the world around us (Walliman, 2011). Interpretivists condemn the positivism approach by highlighting the situation of the people as social actors in various ways (Saunders et al., 2009). Saunders et al., (2009) mentions that the interpretation of their social roles in their everyday life is consistent with the feeling that they undertake these roles. Since the interpretation of a researcher is conditioned by his own values and beliefs and since it is used to experience the world, researchers can not be free and unbiased of meaning (Walliman, 2011).

Since the analysis of our research problem is based on a qualitative approach the positivist philosophy emphasizes numerical or statistical evaluations and quantifiable findings will not serve the academic purpose of this research paper. In addition, positivism draws on the already developed knowledge and since a narrower emphasis on the journey of the customer is very seldomly taken, positivism in this context would not be sufficient, either. Moreover, we believe that one cannot directly observe thoughts and emotions (Trochim et al., 2016) and considering that our goal is to explore the customers' world and to cast light on the complex and unique customer journey, we choose interpretivism as our philosophy. This one claims that the way we see the world around us is the conception of our mind (Walliman, 2011). And it is in line with Saunders et al. who indicate that The interpretivist approach may be quite appropriate in the marketing field, amongst others. (Saunders et al., 2009). This is sensible, because when individuals experience events or touch points, one can not define the reality in which they live. Interpretivism is the only logical approach, since the customer journey applies to each individual.

3.2 Research Approach

There are three important approaches when it comes to creating and developing theories in research that is Deduction, Induction and Abduction (Rodrigues, 2011).

In the deductive method, one uses theories of speculation to solve perceived problems by analyzing and testing experiments (Walliman, 2011). When using deductive reasoning, limited conclusions are drawn on the basis of rational premises, where general established ideas are used to formulate hypotheses that are instead more precisely examined, tested and validated or negated by empirical evidence (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010 and Trochim et al., 2016). Researchers who support positivism use deductive arguments to formulate hypotheses that can be assessed and if their conclusions cannot project reality, the theory revision may help them forecast reality more accurately (Trochim et al., 2016). Researchers therefore use falsification to build a trial and error approach where the most suitable theory remains (Walliman, 2011). One of the challenges with this approach is that the content of truth depends majorly on whether the underlying assumptions are valid (Walliman, 2011).

Inductive reasoning rather develops from clear observations to more general theories thus having a more exploratory and open-ended character particularly in the initial stage (Trochim et al., 2016). This suggests that what we understand and learn from the world around us leads to assumptions that can then lead to generalizations or even to legal laws and beliefs (Walliman, 2011). Its generalization may be problematic with this approach. The exact number of observations is difficult to know for researchers; the real number of situations as well as the conditions for such observations to draw accurate conclusions (Walliman, 2011).

As mentioned before, less work is being done in this particular field of marketing of the in-store touchpoints of the customer journey. Deduction may therefore be excluded as an appropriate research approach, since conclusions can not be derived from non-existing theories. After analyzing our empirical information, which was based on theory, we had to add more theory in order to get a bigger picture and greater understanding of the topic. Therefore, we adopted an abductive approach in line with our chosen path of interpretivism to conduct our research. In this abductive approach, the researcher goes back and forth between theory and empirical data. Thus, an abductive method works as a combination of the above two primary approaches (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

3.3 Research Strategy

The field of customer experience journey is fairly developing as we discovered before. Although the fundamental definition of a customer-centric company is not new, there are signs that this newest evolution of the customer experience is a broader one that is considered more complex by the rapid growth of information and communication technologies like digital media (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This modern aspect of our research deeply motivates a qualitative research approach. In this study, our intention is not to test hypotheses that would jump over what is currently offered in this particular field. Qualitative research allows one to study “phenomena in the environments in which they naturally occur and uses social actors’ meanings to understand the phenomena” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1995). It especially allows one to “describe processes” (Gephart, 2004). In particular, qualitative research has the potential to “understand social processes that underlie management” and to “rehumanize research and theory by highlighting the human interactions and meanings that underlie phenomena and relationships between variables that are often discussed in the field” (Gephart, 2004). The focus of interactions is important and critical in our study, as we are concerned with our research problem to understand how customers communicate with touch points in a physical store during their shopping journey and how this has an effect on the customer journey experience. Our aim is to obtain a deeper understanding of the customer experience journey in a physical store, which will advance both the academic field of customer journey and provide practitioners with an insight into how the customer communicates with touch points in a natural environment to help in management decisions. While the advancement of retail formats is a research priority with strong functional consequences, academic research does not describe thoroughly what brings the customers especially Generation Z who are seen as the digital natives to the physical store in the rapidly evolving technological retail landscape, nor does it include a detailed view of the future for in-store retail from a multichannel perspective. Therefore, we have chosen a qualitative research methodology, so that we can combine the extensive information gained from an updated literature review with a thorough understanding of the interviews.

3.4 Case Company

To achieve our purpose, we conducted a case method to aid as an empirical example for future research. We believe this empirical analysis would lead to a greater understanding of what brings the customers to the physical store based on their interaction with touchpoints, role of technology and customer’s expectations of the future of this important retail format. We have chosen to build our study on the world’s largest retailer and the global destination for home furnishing IKEA and selected it as our case company in order to conduct empirical analysis with respect to the customer experience journey within the retail industry.

The main reason for this choice is due to the strong connection that customers generally feel towards the brand, the sense of home, and particularly the Swedish customers from Gen Z. Around the world,

the company was able to keep its overall ambiance and business model consistent while adapting it to local taste levels and cultures which allowed the firm to compete with well-run local competitors. It's like the main name when customers think about furniture and a visit to IKEA is synonymous to a nice week-end trip. And even with the change in trends that shaped the way today's customers think, behave and shop, and the existence of digital touchpoints that facilitate the complex lifestyle, 90% of sales still happen in the store and this is when the purpose of this study comes into play.

IKEA, a 75-year-old Sweden-based global company and one of the largest furniture retailers of the world, follows a mission "to create a better everyday life for the many people" (IKEA, 2020). The company fulfils this vision by focusing on satisfying its customers and solving their problems.

IKEA are the initiators as they were able to bring in the DIY aspect (do-it-yourself) to the shopping experience with a great pricing (Lee, 2007). So experience is what they really brought to the table before any other retail stores that existed, as IKEA was doing this for over a decade. Today, pricing has become one of the worst strategies to keep customers in. Pricing is the strategy to get shoppers but not the loyalty from customers (Peppers and Rogers, 2016). Concerning the rapidly changing world and changing customer needs, IKEA is transforming the customer shopping experience by incorporating new digital experiences with the traditional in-store functions in this Omni-channel retailing (Coppola, 2018).

IKEA have currently implemented some new initiatives like mobile applications to enable online shopping experiences that allow its customers to choose, select and design the homes for themselves by using augmented reality techniques (Joseph, 2017). In-store customers can also use touchscreen configurators at the digital kiosk for browsing the catalogue, customizing furniture and finally ordering with a single 'click and collect' option (Davis, 2018). Therefore, our research study is in line with IKEA as they concentrate on the value of physical stores. Customer experience is a large investment for any organization. It is a strategy that increases growth, deepens customer relationships, encourages customer satisfaction and also improves the brand leading to innovation (Morgan, 2019). For big brands like IKEA, it is all about customer experience and how to continuously develop it (Sharma, 2017).

Initially, we conducted digital meetings with representatives from IKEA, specifically who deal with customer experience or market development. We first wanted to gain insights about the retail industry followed by their ideas on customer experience management and the current challenges they face today.

3.5 Overall Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the objective of this research project is to be able to find empirical solutions to our research problem, which are linked to our research purpose. In order to enable this, we will need a systematic research strategy that is capable of generating high-quality results in line with the standards of reality that we will cover at the end of our thesis. Since our interest and ambition is to identify the

in-store touchpoints that influence customer experience a qualitative study is the most suitable. A qualitative study should be applied while a researcher is seeking to understand why and how (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2015). Talking to people is the best way of knowing people's feelings and opinions (Kvale, 1997). Moreover, the difference between qualitative and quantitative research is that quantitative research tries to understand what happens while qualitative research attempts to find out why something takes place (Eisenhardt, 1989).

We chose to structure our research sequentially in order to achieve our aim of the study:

To begin with, we performed a detailed analysis of the existing literature on concepts of customer experience journey and role of physical store in customer shopping journey. This gave us a concrete theoretical framework to build upon.

In order to get a clear view of customer's thinking, experience and decision-making, we performed semi-structured interviews with Swedish customers belonging to Generation Z. Based on this step, this leads us to the third stage.

Comparing information and findings from both the first and the second stages, to obtain final insights into identifying the in-store touchpoints that influence customer experience and motivates a customer to visit a physical store.

3.6 Thematic Analysis

The analysis of the data gathered from literature review is a crucial part of our research study. In particular, since we are trying to gather a large amount of knowledge present in the field of customer experience journey, a method of understanding all this information is important. In this context, we have chosen to use themed based analysis to "identify trends ('themes') through qualitative datasets" (Braun et al., 2018). Moreover, in order to arrive at themes we aim to thoroughly analyze knowledge gathered from the literature review that we consider has common patterns. In this way, we captured the implicit ideas underlying the knowledge into one theme which suits our existing viewpoints since previous studies have different methods, perspectives and conclusions (Braun et al., 2018).

3.7 Interviews

The interviews are the next step of our research after literature review. As mentioned earlier, in our research we adopted a semi-structured interview design, where the objective was to enable interviewees to freely explore the customer experience journey. As Bryman and Bell (2015), describes semi-structured interviews, allows researchers to be flexible. We conducted semi-structured interviews since it consists of a range of planned questions, but the methodology allows for more questions in the

process (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). We also thought of conducting Focus Groups, where a group of people talk about a topic, in which the facilitator asks and the participants speak about the topic (Carson et al., 2001). However, since our goal is to gain insights on customer touchpoints and how customers view a customer experience a ‘Focus Group’ does not contribute to the understanding. We consider semi-structured interviews to be an appropriate choice for our research as it has no constraints and has enabled us to explore thoroughly into each of the respondents data. The data gathered from semi-structured interviews will add more value to our research compared to Focus Groups. We were also assured that semi-structured interviews would make participants feel safer and willing to share with us their own personal details. Furthermore, the responses would be honest if people don’t have to know what others think about their beliefs.

3.7.1 Execution of Semi-structured Interviews

For this, we divided the interviews in two separate parts, one aiming to allow the customer to detail his/her observations on customer journey and other focusing on themes in customer experience journey. We also sought to collect data that could cover a wide range of products or services. However, due to time and quality purpose, we choose to start this area of research with a focus on high involvement products specifically furniture type of products as we theorize that these products need a more cognitive approach to a buying decision that enable us to visualize the customer experience journey more clearly.

In the first part of the interview, we gathered data from interviewees who answered our questions without any prior knowledge that could affect the credibility or reliability of the data. Our interview was structured in such a way that interviewees come to a conclusion on their own, rather than directing them in a particular way. Furthermore, efforts were made specifically to explain the intent of each question that is relevant to the analysis, for example, connecting each question with a certain part of the theoretical outcomes.

The second part of the interview was more on encouraging interviewees to comment on important topics of our research in the form of themes. We did this in a way that we do not disclose the focus of our research or our findings. Interviewees were shown a specific theme on which we needed answers instead of allowing them to freely react. Here, our objective was to allow us to first collect data about a customer's journey before collecting “expert” data from those individuals who are expert in this area. Customer behaviour is always better known by the customer themselves. Hence, we collected data that is new, original and informative supported by some though not all knowledge on the research area.

Through the individual semi-structured interviews, we sought to obtain as much as possible insight into a comparable quality from various character profiles.

3.8 Selection Criteria and Sampling

The current research aims to investigate the recent and evolving trend of digital versus human contacts. The research study will use an abductive qualitative approach to achieve a complete understanding of the research context (Pantano and Gandini, 2017). By taking the research purpose into consideration, it was natural to include interviews with consumers, especially people who have retail shopping experience. Since, this thesis focuses on Generation Z, a non-probability convenience sample was involved in this research, where the target population fulfills the requirements of easy access, geographical proximity, availability at a specific time, the willingness to participate (Dörnyei, 2007; Etikan et al., 2016) also their purchasing behavior and attitudes towards in-store retail (participants should access a physical retail store for shopping at least once a month).

We are mainly interested in learning and gaining insights from the subjects represented by a semi-structured method of interview (Gephart, 2004). It is true that these insights would have ideally come from a fairly wide variety of demographic characteristics. However, we made it clear that our focus is on Generation Z, who are predestined to embrace the new trends in retail, so demographic variance in terms of different generations may not be highly relevant in our study. Our contribution is instead enhanced with respondents showing a demographic variance within the age group of Generation Z, because we firmly believe that it would not be right to assume that all people from this same generation have the same perceptions. Owing to time and resource constraints, we choose to include interviewees from our direct circle of acquaintances. However, interviewing acquaintances may result in taking things for granted and neglecting the ideas or constructs which arise from these types of interviews (Daymon & Holloway, 2005). For this reason, we made sure to take the role of ‘cultural strangers’ or ‘naive interviewers’ by asking the respondents to articulate the meaning of their answers and to clarify their ideas. The sampling method therefore used in our study was judgement sampling as the most suitable sample to respond to our research purpose was actively selected. It was essential to reach young customers that have a recent experience of buying a furniture type of product.

3.9 Finding the respondents

To gather data for our research we needed to find the most suitable respondents for interviews that will fulfill our selection criteria. One of the alternatives of reaching the appropriate respondents was through IKEA. We planned on sending an email to IKEA customers. This email included some information on the research topic, the length of interviews and how the interviews were planned (telephonic or face-to face). We would have then moved forward with customers willing to participate in this interview. Another option was to reach out to the respondents who are in our direct circle with an experience in retail shopping and especially at IKEA. Due to time constraints and the pandemic situation, IKEA was unable to provide any customer data for the interview. Therefore, we proceeded with our second option that was to reach out to our acquaintances for the interview. In a critical-case

sampling, our respondents answered the interview questions considering their role of a customer. We considered Gen Z customers who use both online and offline channels as an expert in our study. Eventually, we provided information in the process of our interpretation of themes that respondents support and on which they do not support. When using judgement sampling, this is considered one of the important steps while interpreting data.

We conducted eight interviews each of them ranging between 30 to 45 minutes. Our respondents were between 19 to 25 years old which represents the age range for Generation Z, we have specifically chosen our target to be of Swedish participants considering how IKEA have a significant relevance upon their shopping experience more precisely when it comes to high involvement products like furniture. In semi-structured interviews, data saturation is a typical justification for the sample size (Francis et al., 2010). The data saturation in our research was assessed by determining when we felt that a repeated relevance has been reached that would give us enough necessary insights that could enable us to establish our findings, which is how the choice of 8 interviews occurred.

Interviewees	Age	Gender	Duration
Informant 1	22	Male	35 min
Informant 2	24	Male	40 min
Informant 3	23	Female	32 min
Informant 4	23	Male	37 min
Informant 5	24	Female	30 min
Informant 6	20	Male	36 min
Informant 7	25	Female	40 min
Informant 8	22	Female	40 min

Table 2. Interviews with Generation Z customers

3.10 Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, we have used thematic analysis for our approach to data analysis, as it is a method to identify, analyze and interpret patterns of themes within the qualitative data (Clarke and Braun, 2017). We have chosen this method owing to its efficiency and flexibility, which is extremely beneficial in research that restricts exploratory research, similar to research described in this paper. Clarke and Braun (2017), describe flexibility as a unique characteristic of thematic analysis and furthermore, this analysis can be used “within a variety of theoretical frameworks and even research

paradigms”. They also demonstrate that thematic analysis is a strong method that helps researchers to interpret data and identify trends through data obtained from the interview participants' experience (Clarke and Braun, 2017) and hence it is very useful in our research. We have taken a different approach to thematic analysis, firstly, by developing a broad theoretical framework, we have defined the broader themes, then we have supported those themes through empirical evidence which lead to keywords that form these themes. It in fact contains all the elements needed for a thematic analysis, because the keywords represent the most important sections of the data and are the codes that lay the groundwork of the broader themes (Clarke and Braun, 2017). We approach the level of agreement of interviewees by enabling them in two ways to react to the themes: Strong support or No Support . Therefore, generally, it can be assumed that the “No Support” tag should be appended if the interviewee made no clear claims that might support the theme. When an interviewee strongly agrees to the theme without any dispute or argument, we will tag it as “Strong Support”. We will then compare the data and highlight which elements are validated by both literature and empirical findings.

Given that this study was conducted to identify the in-store touchpoints that influence the customer experience and motivates the customer to visit a physical store through qualitative data as mentioned before, we used an abductive approach to work from the words of each participant's responses to associate keywords to their related themes of customer experience touch points.

We selected the terms of the identified themes from the existing literature and obtained from the data as well. The table below shows the chosen themes, their respective keywords and some extracts from the interview.

Themes	Keywords	Sample
There is more than just buying a product in a physical store	Store atmosphere, Merchandise displays, Store Amenities	“The atmosphere of the store usually sets the mood for me, I like it when the product assortment is visually pleasing, with a fun ambiance. The physical surroundings definitely have an influence on my experience, it will either make it convenient or not. I like IKEA’s design approach but sometimes the amount of products displayed can be overwhelming”
The in-store technologies are making the shopping experience more convenient	Self-check out, Technology ease / convenience, Waiting time	“In-store technology for me can facilitate my experience, as much as it can be visually stimulating, its importance relies on the value it adds to me as a customer as in making my experience convenient by lessening the waiting time for instance or giving me access to see a furniture in a home-like space like AR technology does”

The store’s navigation needs to be a sharp process to allow for a smooth customer experience	Seamless navigation, Store design	“Getting lost in a store makes me lose interest in shopping. So, a store needs to have proper store design and navigation which leads me to the place where I want to go without wasting much time and not getting tired.”
The employee-customer interactions set the tone for a positive or negative customer experience	Salesperson assistance, Welcoming staff, Salesperson advice, Salesperson suggestions / recommendations	“30% of my final decision is influenced by the salesperson. A salesperson knows all of the products in store, and is knowledgeable about the product more than I. He must have met a lot of customers over the years and got plenty of feedback to know which product will suit my needs best.

Table 3. Themes and Keywords

3.11 Reliability and Validity

Validity regards the link between two different variables, trying to answer the question if the relation between those two variables is causal or not and if the research results really mean what they are indicating (Saunders et al., 2009). So, when talking about valid measures, it means that they are actually “capturing what they are supposed to capture” (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 78). Reliability on the other hand is focusing on the consistency of the findings that researchers will obtain through using certain data collection methods and measurement techniques (Saunders et al., 2009). It is mostly referring to a measurement's stability (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2010). As one can see when reading these described characteristics, they mostly seem to have an underlying quantitative nature, because their focus seems to lay mainly on the topic of measurement. However, we have chosen to focus on the concept of trustworthiness which was used by authors Lincoln & Guba (1985) as a synonym for validity and reliability, together with authenticity as alternative criteria for assessing the quality of a qualitative research study (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

This notion of trustworthiness includes four sub-criteria: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In order to reach high credibility, we made sure that the interviewees have received the results of our study to confirm that us as researchers have perceived the interviewees correctly. Additionally, all interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure high transparency. Finally a semi-structured interview design was chosen to allow us to ask follow-up questions that could clear up any misunderstandings.

To ensure reliability, we attempted to conduct interviews separately from one another to guarantee the same level of data quality would be obtained. Moreover, the respondents would be answering from their

role as a customer in a critical-case type sampling. As such, one could consider any insight to be relevant and provide rich data as respondents answer to their own subjective interpretation of the customer experience. In our thesis, we consider that any respondent that is an IKEA customer who has used both offline and online channels is ideal in the field of customer experience. Finally, during interpretation of the data we provided information on which interviewees gave support to the themes we collected through our literature review and which interviewees do not support on these themes. This is considered to be important in data interpretation when using judgment sampling (Marshall, 1996, p. 523).

Regarding transferability, we have documented demographic characteristics of the interviewees that would allow for replicability or comparability, while still maintaining the privacy of the interviewees. We made detailed explanations, and included rich extracts from the interviews in order to maximize the possibility of transferability, so that people can evaluate our study and assess it to other environments and situations. Furthermore, the literature review and the design of the interviews was presented in a manner that ensures possible reconstruction in future research.

To achieve dependability, the research was reviewed by external parties before submission. But from our side, we formulated the research purpose, we then selected our interviewees, conducted the interviews while recording and writing down essential comments, we transcribed the interviews and have chosen a suitable method for analyzing the gathered information. Through this procedure we made sure that dependability was prevalent because all variances were documented and can therefore be comprehended, reviewed and reconstructed by other researchers at any time.

By creating transcriptions of all the interviews and using a mix of rich quotations in our text, identifying which informant's interview we are basing our statements on and by aiming overall to have results and statements sourced directly from the data gathered from the respondents we were striving for high confirmability. Also we made sure that relevant literature and the experience of our interviewees are the basis of this study and the conclusions drawn without allowing personal opinions to affect the purpose.

4. Findings

In this section, we will present the empirical results from the interviews that have been carried out with IKEA customers belonging to Generation Z.

In the beginning of the interview, the interviewees were asked to recall their recent purchase of any furniture type of product at IKEA. Then, they were requested to describe what makes them think that this certain product requires more consideration. This was aimed towards understanding their perception as to why a furniture type of product needs an extensive thought process and a consideration of different variables before making the purchase decision as compared to any other purchases. In the findings section, we sought to analyze the responses according to the thematic statements on which the respondents commented followed by the questions supporting respective themes, rich quotations from the interviews were selected to better represent their experience.

Firstly, we wanted to gain an insight on whether our respondents prefer buying a furniture type of products from a physical store. Most of the respondents involved in our study explained that they would like to buy a furniture type of product from physical stores as they feel more confident and trust it more than an online channel. There's always anxiety amongst the customers about the product they are buying especially when it comes to investing on a product that is related to their comfort, usage and also price. One of the big reasons that they prefer physical stores is that they want to try and test the product. An informant described that:

“Yes, I prefer to buy furniture type of product from a physical store rather than online as you don't always get what you see. I don't know how it will turn up when it is in front of me for real. When I'm at physical stores, I get to touch the product, sit on the couch, I get more information in a face-to-face conversation and it reduces my purchase anxiety.” (Informant 8)

This is similar to another respondent, who mentions that physical stores reduce the risk of refurbished products along with products that do not look the same in case of online channels.

“Yes, I would have the satisfaction of trying out furniture in person and just do not have to compromise on what I get online. Online being the most opted in these days, but there are issues like the product not looking the same when delivered, damaged products, to name a few. These issues can be avoided in a physical store.” (Informant 3)

Likewise, another respondent adds that customization of products is possible in a physical store better than an online channel. Customers prefer to personalize the product they want as per their needs and desires. They would like to make it exactly the way they want. Therefore, physical stores provide a better platform for customizations of the product.

“For furniture, I would always visit the store. I am not a fan of buying furniture and electronics online because we may never know what would be delivered. A plus point is that in a store the furniture can be customized according to the needs of your surroundings.” (Informant 4)

Also, when it comes to buying a furniture type of product, customers feel that there are factors like touch and feel, dimensions, comfort, durability of the product that play a major role. At the same time, it gives them the assurance of the product they are investing in. The ability to ask sales people about their queries also adds to positive customer experience.

“For me it is important to touch and feel the product that I am buying. Also, since it is a furniture type of a product, a physical store gives me a better & immediate visual idea of the furniture dimensions more than the online channels. I need reassurance to avoid that vague sense of regret and buy only after I am sure of buying. Also, when I am at a store, I can always ask the associates to help me out with their suggestions or recommendations.” (Informant 1)

Interestingly, one of the informants described the physical store as giving them a sense of belongingness and also refers to stores as a source of inspiration. Large sections of furniture physical stores have creative windows and displays that draw customer’s attention.

“I believe that physical stores give me more ‘at home’ feel. It helps me visualize the product better when I am physically present there and not virtually. The creative home displays at IKEA inspires me and gives innovative ideas on how I can decorate my home.” (Informant 2)

Although, majority of the respondents show strong support towards buying furniture of type of products from a physical store, there was one who stated that he would prefer buying products from an online channel instead of physical stores. He emphasizes that online channels have revolutionized the way customers shop. Adding to this, he states that, best price deals offered in online channels are the most motivating factor in his shopping journey.

“I don’t like crowded places like in a store. I feel we are moving into an era where people will buy more furniture’s online. Online channels are convenient for me as they give me better deals and also I can compare prices easily. In a store I feel more pressured to buy a product and may end up buying something that I don’t need.” (Informant 5)

Overall, the findings from the extracts, it is clear that physical stores offer distinguishing features that eventually facilitate customer experience. The ability to try and test the product and immediate buying of the products ranks the highest when it comes to a physical store. Primarily, in a store a customer wants to touch and feel the product, enjoy in-store experiences and gain inspiration.

When asked about what they do before buying a product and how it helps which represents the pre-purchase stage, search engines were the most popular answer. Whether it’s on IKEA’s website, application or online reviews from other customers, the interviewees prior to making a visit to the

physical store, collect information on product features, price offers, customer reviews, payment methods, delivery options, and alternatives available. Therefore, a channel could be selected based on the richness of the information provided for the shopping decision – i.e., a channel which provides the right quality, quantity, and accessibility of information and helps comparing alternatives is preferable for consumers. One respondent says on this:

“I pre-research the products online usually on IKEA’s website before making a purchase in-store. There are now a wide variety of products, it’s not easy to make a decision just like that. Pre research gives me some background on the product, which most likely means I won’t regret my purchase. Since I’ve already determined my preferences, compared product specifications and price.” (Informant 3)

This shows that customers might be using two or more search channels before finalizing their purchase decision, starting product searches from digital channels to end up with the actual purchase in a physical location. Another informant says.

“As the same commodity present in a physical store will be available in the online store. I usually prefer doing online research before going to the store. IKEA’s app helps me navigate conveniently to have an overview of the furniture that I’m looking for. Also, reading online reviews gives valuable insights as there will be comments of people who have already used the products. Pictures uploaded also provide an idea of how the product looks in real space.” (Informant 7)

Searching online is one among various information sources available to customers, in this case interviewees use the digital channels exclusively for their product search and information. Once customers have decided to visit the store, they turn to their mobiles to plan the trip in advance. From getting brand or product recommendations to checking product availability to looking up store hours, customers arrive at the store more knowledgeable than ever before which is why it’s important to make these details easy to find across your online experiences to get customers primed and ready to buy.

4.1 Ambience

“There’s more than just buying a product in a physical store”

As described earlier, the store ambience is an environment that is created by visual communications, lighting, music, colors etc., to generate a stimulus among the customer’s perceptions & emotions that will affect their purchasing behavior. This theme has received strong support across interviews. The informants showed awareness of the environmental characteristics in the physical store that impact their

experience, stating that their interaction with the store's atmospheric dimensions is likely to produce a desirable response. One respondent described it very well:

“For me IKEA’s physical store atmosphere adds value, customer satisfaction is linked to touch and feel of the product and I consider it as an important parameter to make informed decisions at the point of sale. A sense of belongingness for the product is achieved more in a physical store.” (Informant 2)

In fact the positive feelings emerging during consumers' interaction with the environment lead to positive shopping outcomes (i.e. more purchases), pushing consumers to consider some stores as more appealing than others. One interviewee said the following:

“In the physical store one can touch and feel the product. The decor, the ambience and other amenities add value and ultimately influence my buying decision as a customer.” In this case, the store environment is an important factor that significantly contributes to the generation of entertaining shopping experiences and elicits consumer’s passionate attraction towards the store.” (Informant 1)

Even in the presence of digital touchpoints and as the retailer's website continues to experience a meteoric rise in popularity; the respondents highlighted their different satisfaction in offline scenarios rather than an online retail environment where their decision is mediated by the system's interface. The physical ability for customers to experience the tactile nature of a product, in this context a furniture, provides them with a level of reassurance that might not be offered online. One interviewee specifies:

“IKEA’s brick store offers benefits to us that are difficult to facilitate online. It’s more easy-going when it comes to making a purchase decision; it also offers a Rational and an emotional reassurance that this product suits me best.” (Informant 8)

The same respondent proceeded then to give an example of one of their simple experiences online to show the importance to visit the store in order for them to achieve that sense of purchase choice certainty of buying the right product that perfectly match their needs; the respondent continue:

“For instance, a scented candle on IKEA's website caption describes aromas such as it smells like a blended Mandarin Leaf with a Tunisian Orange Blossom and a floral scent, soft and sweet..etc. How am I supposed to reach a scent in my nasal cells that I’ve never smelt before and blend it with other unknown scents, emotions and adjectives to get how the fragrance smells like?” (Informant 8)

It goes without saying that consumers making purchases online cannot touch the product before buying. Only physical stores can exploit the correlation between physical interaction with a product and an increased sense of ownership, which can be a powerful driver of sales.

Moreover, consumers want more than a simple transaction, they are happy to spend time browsing in person. Indeed, many relish the experience of shopping in the physical store:

“IKEA’s physical stores cannot be always replaced because of the added value they give to clients. Buying a product is a whole experience rhythmmed by interactions, environment settings and change of scenery. Going to IKEA’s physical store is like a recreation to me. I totally enjoy looking around the decor, and furniture arrangement. It gives more ideas and inspiration.”
(Informant 5)

In this extract, the informant states that the atmospherics such as the sensory factors and visual aspects is a very important component in their experience.

When asked about what do they appreciate more in a store, ambience including interior and exterior atmospherics, store layout and visual merchandising was the most repeated answer as the interviewees believe it arouse their senses and make them spend more time in the store, one of the respondents state:

“Ambience, entertainment and service process are the features that I appreciate the most. When I go shopping in IKEA I’m looking for inspiration, something that will reveal an unknown need, and showcase products I would not have found otherwise.” (Informant 3)

From the above extracts, it is clear that customers encounter various atmospheric elements during customer journey in the physical store retail channels. Atmospheric elements cover the physical characteristics and surrounding that customers observe when interacting with any part of the retailer. The interviews highlight that in physical channels, atmospheric aspects such as the layout, merchandising displays, product arrangements provide visual and sensory stimuli that customers use to interpret the situation and define their experience.

4.2 Technology

“The in-store technologies are making the shopping experience more convenient.”

Another theme that received strong support concerns the presence of technologies in the physical store, which on the one hand, provides an image of an innovative store able to influence customers interested in technological disruption. In the other, it is believed to enhance products displaying, provide information while proposing facilities and entertainment elements that may engage customers. The

informants showed their interest in the interactive touchpoints integrated in the store to accomplish the firm's service, these systems might act as a guide during the shopping experience and perform some tasks traditionally executed by humans and mediate the shopping experience, such as the automatic cask desks for self-check-out.

“People in today’s world lack the energy to spend unwarranted time waiting. I believe that in-store technologies enable us to avoid long waiting lines, the hassle of finding personnel and save for the shy of us the need to ask for help especially after spending hours roaming in the big store of IKEA. They are a gain of time and certainly make my shopping experience smoother.”
(Informant 7)

IKEA is known for operating massive big-box stores in the suburbs, taking a turn through all its major departments can be tiring so self-check-out technology, in this case, helps customers scan, bag, and pay for products without any need to interact with a cashier. Customers thus gain control; and the firm can possibly enjoy reduced labor costs from the fewer number of cashiers required. These new technologies can change the customer experience by making the shopping experience more convenient, changing how the customer shops, and/or changing their interactions within the store. One interviewee says:

“the less time and effort I spend in a department, the more is convenient. For this reason I’m not only expecting the usual self-check-out systems but more futuristic and innovative technologies such as smart shelves technology, scan and go, interactive touchscreens and more accessibility to AI based stores. This could not only capture our attention but also engage us in a new and practical way, making use of a much more appealing store.” (Informant 3)

Recognizing that customers desire a convenient, easy, frictionless experience can allow retailers to experiment and test new technologies which will enhance the customer experience in the store on these dimensions.

It's safe to say that majority of the answers insisted on the utilitarian factor of the in-store technologies, transaction convenience was a pattern as it involves payment-related tasks, such as standing in line, completing online registration forms, or entering credit card information which represent what the customers were most interested in besides technologies that ensure consumers pay attention to the merchandise and offers, such that they seek ways to make their merchandise stand out from the competition.

“In the past it was about how much money you have, but now it’s about how much time you don’t have: I think this expression perfectly describes me as a customer. It might be fun to wander around the many sections of IKEA but for people like me who don’t necessarily like to spend a lot of time in the store and just directly go to pick up what I went there for I think that it would be great if IKEA make their own wayfinding technologies to improve customer navigation

inside the physical store. The result is designed to enable efficiency in the customer journey; I want to easily find the products.” (Informant 2)

Many customers might pace the aisles of IKEA stores looking for an elusive item or a member of staff who can tell them where to find it. How convenient if they could be guided to it on a smartphone map as easily as using a GPS satellite navigation device when driving. It is evident that the process here is a critical element of customer experience with physical touch points. The above discussion also highlights that various process aspects (e.g., waiting time, service delivery process and navigation) feature across the physical retail channel.

When asked whether they use technologies available in store, the majority of the interviewees were positive about using technology shopping aids, as long as it helps them to achieve an outcome they could not have reached otherwise (or achieve the outcome quickly). In other words, technologies are most satisfactory in cases where they saved time, were easy to use, worked reliably, addressed a salient need or offered a greater control and access. One respondent says:

“I might use the app before visiting the store to be aware of the several options available of a product but importantly I like to use the personal computers when buying a shelf to have the opportunity to customize it or the tablets in-store to scroll through the sofa’s catalogue for instance in order to have an idea on how it can potentially look like when installed, which color look better or which size fits my liking. This kind of technology is very helpful because of its ease.” (Informant 8)

Generally, the interviewees showed interest in using technology that could accurately portray the characteristics of the specific products they were buying. In-store technology that evokes high levels of convenience is expected to heighten the customers’ imagery of the product, it helps them perceive product and service benefits, stimulate their touching and trial, and increase preferences.

However, two respondents felt that instead of technology it is essential to them to find knowledgeable and helpful employees especially when shopping for furniture or any durable good. The informant states:

“Technology is great but if I wanted to rely on it I would have made my purchase online, as someone who likes coming to the physical store, I rarely ever use in-store technology, I instead like to talk to employees, ask for in-depth informations about the product, have their opinions and take into consideration their suggestions. It will also be appreciated if the employees used their own devices to show me more of what I would like to see. This is what might influence my purchase likelihood.” (Informant 1)

From the above extract, in-store technology appears to be playing an important role during customers' encounters with IKEA. In addition to online channels, in physical environments customers are

increasingly using technology, such as point-of-sale terminals, tablets and kiosks in their day-to-day transactions. They are also asking for new innovations that don't necessarily have to be in direct interaction with them and still crave human-to-human contact.

In-store technology might enable consumers to make better informed decisions about which products or services to consume. Yet not all consumer decisions rely on extensive information searches and detailed decision processes. Some decisions are produced by a direct customer service or can be often prompted by strategic visual presentations and merchandise assortments crafted by IKEA.

4.3 Navigation

“The store’s navigation needs to be a sharp process to allow for a smooth customer experience.”

The approach that customers take to achieve a desired purpose has been found to play a significant role in influencing their expectations and perceptions of retail experiences. Navigation in a retail setting includes factors such as how customers move around the store, the service process as well as the waiting time for checkout. Interestingly, the respondents seemed aware of the importance of navigation in a retail store and also showed strong support to the theme. For example, an informant mentioned that ‘Time is money’ and how navigation influences her shopping experiences.

“It all comes back to design, When a customer finds themselves unable to locate a product, there is a serious problem. In IKEA, If I’m buying a Mattress, I will look for it in the Mattress or Bedroom Furniture’s department. If I cannot locate the product in both these departments I would probably leave. Time is money!” (Informant 8)

When asked about their views on *“The store’s navigation needs to be a sharp process to allow for a smooth customer experience”* an informant said that navigation at the store is very crucial for him as it also gives him a chance to quickly reach the products that he wants and save time to look for other products.

“Yes, for a large scale store like IKEA navigation is crucial and it will give me direction to reach the right set of products for shopping and would give me some extra time to look for other related products.” (Informant 1)

Another informant added that her shopping experience will be ruined if the store navigation is very difficult to understand.

“Getting lost in a store makes me lose interest in shopping. So, IKEA needs to have proper store design and navigation which leads me to the place where I want to go without wasting much time and not getting tired.” (Informant 3)

One of the informants strongly supports that store navigation needs to be sharp in a shopping journey for a smooth shopping experience. He further shared his experience while shopping at IKEA that made him annoyed.

“I was at IKEA and as you know it’s a massive area, so the checkouts are very difficult to find. I must say that I did not take much time to find the product that I wanted but finding the way to checkout was quite frustrating. I had chosen the products that I wanted and went ahead to the self-checkout area to pay for them. First of all, there was no signage showing the way to the self-checkout area and I ended up in a maze like situation. Finally, when I made it to the payment area, there was already a huge crowd. Had there been correct sign boards at some intervals of the store, my shopping would have been much quicker.” (Informant 4)

Similarly, another informant described how frustrating it is if the navigation process is not smooth.

“Not being able to navigate in a store or losing time in aisles, wandering aimlessly ruins the customer experience and adds stress and frustration to it which negatively impacts the shopping cart.” (Informant 7)

From the above mentioned transcripts, we can conclude that navigation is a critical factor of customer experience as it occurs right from the entry to exit in a physical store across the customer journey. All the informants agreed to the importance of navigation in their shopping journey and these examples from the informants illustrate that customer journeys are extremely individual in nature and the different things that a customer experiences influences the outcome of their shopping journey. Moreover, on average responses from the interviewees indicate that customers are seeking ways to simplify or ease their shopping process and their customer journey is driven by the experiences they have gathered in this process.

4.4 Employee – Customer Interaction

“The employee-customer interactions set the tone for a positive or negative customer experience.”

The findings from the thematic analysis based on semi-structured interviews indicate interactions between customers and retailer’s employees as an important element of the various customer touchpoints. When shopping from a physical store, the employee-customer interactions were found to be extremely crucial. The respondents expressed a feeling of contentment and comfort when a staff helps them choose and decide on the particular products that they need. They felt more confident on

their purchase decision by getting guidance from the staff as they have more knowledge about the product.

Most of the informants have described that a touchpoint becomes a positive experience depending on the quality of the employee interaction with them. Like one of the respondents clearly indicated that a salesperson has 30% impact on her final purchase decision.

“30% of my final decision is influenced by the salesperson. A salesperson knows all of the products in store, and is knowledgeable about the product more than me. He must have met a lot of customers over the years and got plenty of feedback to know which product will suit my needs best.” (Informant 8)

Informant no. 3 even described how employee-customer interaction could lead to positive or negative experience eventually leaving long lasting impressions.

“I want a positive experience as a whole. For me, employee-customer interaction is important as I seek their help and advice when I am in the store. If they are not reciprocating to my needs, it would be difficult to have a positive shopping experience. For example, I wanted to buy a sofa and I needed assistance in looking for the right product as I was not sure with the dimensions of the product. So I went on asking for help from one of the employees at the store.” (Informant 3)

She further adds,

“I was confused between two products which looked the same but were of different dimensions. I asked the salesperson if he could advise me. The salesperson listed all the specifications for both the sofas and also asked questions to know what kind of taste I have. He pointed out at the perfect sofa set for me telling me about its pros and cons and somewhere in my mind I was actually thinking of buying that particular sofa which he suggested. The salesperson motivated me and cleared my confusion. This obviously had a positive impact on my shopping experience and whenever I visit the store next, I always reach out to the employees.” (Informant 3)

This confirms that employee-customer interaction certainly plays a crucial role in an overall shopping journey. There are also instances where employee-customer interaction had a negative impact on a customer and adversely affects customer shopping experience. When describing the theme, *the employee-customer interactions set the tone for a positive or negative customer experience*, an informant explained about a negative experience she encountered with an employee at the store as she had to wait for a long time at a store for help and was not happy with the response she received.

“Once I was at IKEA and was seeking help from the salesperson. I had to wait almost twenty to thirty minutes looking for a salesperson and that too at a desk called ‘MAY I ASSIST YOU’. I

mean, I can understand that there were very few customers on the floor and therefore there were not any salespeople but I was definitely hoping that someone would come at the desk and help me. But nobody showed up for a considerable amount of time. Eventually, someone came and by then I was already frustrated but the salesperson was also not very helpful as she said that she looks after kitchen amenities and does not have knowledge about the product (Couch) that I wanted advice for. This surely was a negative experience for me in my shopping journey”
(Informant 7)

She continued saying,

“As a customer, I withdraw from purchasing products if the vendor is rude or unpleasant to deal with. They represent the brand's image and human face, which indicates directly the amount of care customers are expected to receive before and after the acquisition of products.”
(Informant 7)

Almost all the informants agreed that personal interactions with employees shapes the customer experiences and thus, this sets a tone for a positive or negative customer experience. In a physical retail setting, it seems that interactions with employees is an only form of personal contact that customers experience. Therefore, it is an element that leaves a lasting impression on the customer.

Informant no. 8 explains the following when asked why employee-customer is important to her:

“In-store staff are the more personalized, more human, and arguably quicker alternative to online shopping. I paid money (Gas money or Public transportation) and Time to get there before even buying a product, I completely expect a positive experience.” (Informant 7)

Thereby, we can conclude with a statement that informant no.1 mentions about interactions with employees enhances the shopping journey:

“Service interactions are required at all the junctions of the IKEA store to facilitate customers with a better shopping experience. And if my experience is good it will help me to buy more products other than my actual. A warm welcome and a smooth exit will enhance my experience at the store. Also, it will uplift the brand perception.” (Informant 1)

Consequently, many respondents said that they interact with employees at the store mainly to find the right product and they expect that the salesperson could acknowledge their queries and advise them. Therefore, the way an employee interacts or acknowledges the customer ultimately creates experiences accompanied by building trust for the brand.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, we will discuss the findings of our research and also provide some interesting insights which could be used in the future research studies.

Through this abductive qualitative research approach, we have established an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the touchpoints for customer experience. We have identified four unique factors of customer experience touchpoints based on the thematic analysis, they are: The store ambience also known as store atmospherics, in-store technology, navigation and employee-customer interactions.

Past research found that a greater degree of trust is required for a consumer to shop online vs a physical shop, especially when the quality of the product or seller cannot be assessed online even that online shopping offers both positives and negatives, a customer's belief about a behavioral object becomes the key factor affecting his or her attitude toward performing the behavior (Pikkarainen et al., 2004). Our findings are consistent with Zeng and Reinartz (2003) who stated that if customers are receptive to online store shopping, they are more likely to employ online channels for product search and product procurement because of their belief in or ability to accomplish online shopping (Ajzen, 1991). Hence, customers who are familiar with the company's product and have trust in the firm may search and purchase the product solely through the company's internet store. However, our findings revealed that customers with a positive attitude toward online shopping may not totally abandon the physical store immediately even in the presence of the company's online channel. It is more likely that these customers will use the online channel and physical store interchangeably. For instance, customers may use the digital channels to search for the product's informations, look up the reviews and collect ideas then explore, touch, and feel the product in the physical store to make sure that the product is acceptable to finally place their order in the physical, a process that majority of our respondents go through.

However, this could be analyzed from a multi-channel and omni-channel perspective. The difference, according to Saghiri et al. (2018), is that - in an omnichannel approach - a customer can interact with the product and the firm in all ways and in all locations. Within this perspective, an increasing number of consumers seamlessly move, over their customer journeys, between the available channels, searching for information and making their purchase decisions through the channels that best optimize their purchase needs (Verhoef et al., 2015). In sum, the shift to omnichannel shopping implies that, rather than considering the search and purchase phases as separate moments, customers (and sellers) integrate channel usage along the whole shopping journey. Under this perspective, search and purchase decisions, rather than being independent stages as it was concluded in our findings, become complementary and synergistic moments within the customer journeys.

For the store ambience, our findings go along with Juaneda-Ayensa et al. (2016) who argued that customers use the new technologies to search for information, offer opinions, explain experiences, make

purchases, “talk to the brand” and completing their purchase in the physical store for a real and better experience.

People like to be in a good atmosphere, which in retail is the store ambience. The store atmosphere is about having a look and an environment that suits the target market & invites customers for purchase. Today the stores have become hotspots of entertainment for a major chunk of the population especially the latest generations or as they are often called Generation Z. According to our findings, the consumer expectation for the modern retailing environment is accelerating at a very fast pace. In order to create an unparalleled experience with the retail store understanding the customer preferences is of prime importance. The store ambience is to be designed to make shopping easy and also give a comfortable feeling, as interviewees were mostly looking for convenience. It enhances the shopping experience by assisting the shoppers in what they want from an assortment of products in the store. To create a favorable mindset of the consumer towards the store image and store position it is important to have an ambience that has the potential to make the shopping pleasurable. The mere presence of product and services is no longer enough to give an unforgettable experience to consumers. The retailer must provide additional values to influence the consumer to visit their respective stores. It has been observed through this study that customers' purchase decisions are influenced by hedonic values in addition to the utilitarian values.

Going back to the notion of convenience that was repeatedly mentioned in the findings, this one can be defined in terms of the perceived ease, effort, and speed of a specific channel where customers can gather product information and products can be purchased. Accordingly, Choudhury and Karahanna (2008) define convenience as a customer's perception of the time and effort required to interact through a channel. Frambach, Roest, and Krishnan (2007) claim that the perceived convenience has a positive effect on customer's channel choice.

For IKEA customers, going to the physical store is now much more than mere buying. It is relaxation time, a fun time, an enjoyable experience and much more. They are also exposed to an overwhelming choice of merchandise and offers. The question is how to design and deliver offers that stand out. Understanding this can help retailers decide how, when, and where to display merchandise (and associated offers), according to the channel format (in store or online). Manufacturers also recognize the importance of ensuring that customers pay attention to their merchandise and offers, such that they seek ways to make their merchandise stand out from the competition on the shelf. For that, Kahn (2017) highlights the need for manufacturers and retailers to account for a “visual salience bias” and make assortments easier for customers to process.

As Lemon and Verhoef (2016) said the in-store experience is a part of the customer journey and technologies can serve as important touchpoints to customers, as well as assist and augment employees' tasks. These new and futuristic technologies can change the customer experience by making the shopping experience more convenient, changing how the customer shops, and/or changing their

interactions with employees. However, it is important to recognize that these technologies need to offer high convenience benefits that will enable and encourage customers to explore the product/situation in richer and deeper ways. When a customer visits the physical store, technologies need to produce powerful feelings of being emotionally, physically, and temporally connected to products or the situation. This further brings the product and situation to life. Another aspect to take in consideration is the product dimensions, one common way to classify products and services is based on whether they are more hedonic and utilitarian (Roggeveen et al. 2015). Hedonic products and services are purchased for fun, enjoyment, and pleasure (Childers et al. 2001); utilitarian ones are purchased for practical uses and are based on needs (Khan and Dhar 2006). Customers evaluate products and experiences on both dimensions simultaneously, and any given purchase can have both utilitarian and hedonic elements (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000). Customers tend to be less price sensitive toward purchases with more hedonic attributes, because they offer experiential aspects (Khan and Dhar 2006).

In a related manner, in-store technology may be more useful with hedonic purchases. Hedonic products and services offer more experiential aspects (Khan and Dhar 2006) which is likely to make customers more open to using technology infusions that further enhance that experience. The enjoyment attained from using products and services with more hedonic attributes encourages customers to approach and explore those offerings, as well as the technology associated with it. As a result, they perceive the product and service imagery more clearly due to their physical proximity. In addition, as customers increasingly look at, touch, and explore the product/service, with the help of the technology, they become more involved in the experience.

With regard to the implementation of technological innovations in physical stores, and as our findings show, currently self-service concepts and innovative payment solutions that enable a cashier-free shopping experience are gaining importance in offering a service that requires no help from a salesperson (e.g. automated checkouts) (Bulmer, Elms, & Moore, 2018). In the literature, several in-store technologies in retail are mentioned that have to be adopted to provide customers with the best of both the offline and online worlds (Betzing, Hoang, & Becker, 2018). Our interviewees also mentioned many examples of these technologies such as store-ordering hubs, iPads and display screens, click-and-collect services etc. Betzing et al. (2018) highlighted the service improvements by in-store technologies, which they defined 'as bundles of hard- and software that change or enhance the interface between retailers and customers within the physical retail setting'.

However with the recent research focus on the technological integration in stores, it is easy to forget about the human element of the service in store. Surprisingly, our interviewees from Generation Z, stated their interest in having knowledgeable sales assistance especially when it comes to infrequently purchased durable goods such as furniture, major appliances etc. Further confirming Larivière et al (2017) and Marinova et al (2017) theory about the human capital remaining a non-substitutable source

of creativity and service employees, and how they should be instead provided with technology to facilitate the service and sales.

In retail settings, it refers to customers' evaluation of in-store experience as a sort of affective response towards the shopping experience (Wallace et al., 2004, Van Riel et al., 2012; Marques et al., 2013). Our study also shows that elements like the Navigation process can play a significant role in evaluating the experience of customers at different touch points. As described in previous studies, in many cases the waiting time and the limited access to the service (for instance caused by the absence of shopping assistance, or by the high number of other customers) reduce the perceived quality of a service, the slow service limits consumers' satisfaction (Li et al., 2009, Noon and Mattila, 2009, Van Riel et al., 2012, White et al., 2013). However, it is surprising that limited research on customer experience with respect to store navigation in a store has been investigated. The shopping experience starts with the physical store ambience and its navigation. Interestingly, our respondents who belong to Gen Z also believe that navigating in a physical store influences the time spent in the store and the actual purchase throughout their shopping journey. Our analysis of the findings clearly indicate that navigating conveniently in a store is highly effective in a positive customer experience aiding in a smooth shopping journey. In a physical store, it is the store layout that eases navigation and value to facilitate customer experience. Again, from the above findings we analyse that customers identify navigation as a crucial touchpoint also has a big impact on their shopping journey. Therefore, retailers need to be more alert in this particular touchpoint as it has been overlooked for a while.

The fact that communications are a distinct aspect of touchpoint can be influenced by customers making informed decisions that lead to positive outcomes when the quality of information is relevant to the consumer. (Shankar et al., 2003). Our analysis of the findings also indicates that interactions of customers with retail employees are a significant aspect of what a customer meets at various touchpoints. This relates to previous research which says that interactions between customers and front-line employees plays an important role in customer experience in a retail environment (Brady and Joseph Cronin, 2001). Majority of the respondents also consider interactions with the employees as a positive factor that influences their shopping experiences in a physical store. They stated that they interact with employees as they have more knowledge about the products and could help them in their ultimate purchase decision. This is in line with previous study where the author describes employees, amongst others, as innovators. Human capital remains a non-substitutable source of creativity and service employees, directly and indirectly, observe customer behaviors and reactions (Larivière et al, 2017). Respondents stated that suggestions or recommendations of products from the store employees are very useful. This means that it makes customers more satisfied in their shopping experience as they perceive employee interactions. Like Larivière et al (2017), mentions that this makes employees highly valuable assets in that they can serve as a barometer of the customer environment and actively pinpoint areas for service improvement. Furthermore authors also argue that authentic human touch can help differentiate offerings in the marketplace and display unique brand-building behaviors (Bolton,

Gustafsson, McColl-Kennedy, Sirianni, & Tse, 2014). Therefore, if customers are not satisfied with these employee interactions in a store, it could also lead to negative customer experience resulting in lack of confidence in the brand. In our research, it implies that customers are willing and widely receptive to employee recommendations for furniture type of a product. It is indeed that the role of creating value in customer experiences tends to depend on the interactions between employees and customers. Thus, on the grounds of previous experience a customer carries out repeated purchases or buying decisions. It is the overall experience that a customer gathers and drives their overall shopping journey.

6. Conclusions

In this last chapter, we will summarize the conclusions of our study and also discuss the theoretical and managerial implications followed by limitations for future research.

Our purpose of this research is to identify the in-store touchpoints that influence customer experience and motivates a customer to visit a physical store. What are those factors that bring a customer to a physical store? In our study, we have developed a comprehensive understanding of the customer touchpoints using a thematic analysis technique. Based on the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews, we identified four essential factors of customer experience touchpoints. As we conducted our study in one of the most educated, socially connected and technology influenced generation i.e. Generation Z, we have found that they still prefer to shop from physical stores as they are more convenient, inspiring, problem solving and also appreciate the hands-on shopping experience. Since these 'young adults' prefer shopping from stores, it is important for retailers to know what are those factors that could influence a positive or negative customer experience. Our findings illustrates the different factors within the in-store touchpoints that a Generation Z expect with respect to positive customer experience: a good store ambience that facilitates browsing merchandise process and fun in-store experience; convenient in-store technology that provides value for time and money; hassle free navigation process to avoid any kind of distress; and lastly, they also gave importance to interacting with the store employees to feel more confident about their buying decision. Although being a native of the digital world, it was observed that Gen Z showed strong trust in physical stores when it comes to buying furniture types of products. This is because they want a seamless shopping experience in a trustworthy shopping environment.

Our findings show that customers are not interested in technology for its own sake. When using digital channels they look for accurate product and pricing information. In retail stores, customers want knowledgeable sales help, clean and attractive facilities, fast checkout and convenient payment options. Our responses suggest that it is the technology per se but how it is used to create value for customers that will determine its success with convenience as the top need. In some cases, the respondents were happy with an existing alternative, in others, technology was seen as not sufficiently developed. Many of the innovations that IKEA might want to implement will require significant refinement and customer education to deliver their benefits.

The study also proves that online is not a substitute for the physical store but a valuable complement as it is the first step interviewees took before making their purchase choice. The informants expressed that their interaction with employees of IKEA can be an important aspect, they felt comfortable relying on advice from experienced and knowledgeable employees to help them choose particular products.

In sum, findings reveal the human- and technology-based services which represent a crucial factor that make them go to the store. In fact, customer interactions with available technologies (multi channel/technology-based services) and salesperson (human-based service) have a joint influence on the overall service quality perception. Moreover, the study found the strategic importance of store ambience, the store atmosphere more commonly known as store ambience plays a very vital role in enhancing customer's shopping experience in the physical store. In fact, IKEA should pay attention to the importance of customer interaction with the in-store touchpoints which lead to favourable behaviours.

Concerning the expected evolution of the physical store, integrating channels and the power of big data are not distinctive factors anymore but rather are prerequisites of competitiveness. Where the field goes will depend on even newer emerging forces: The Internet of things, virtual or augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and robots/drones/driverless vehicles (Deloitte 2016). Research into the Internet of things should clarify how it may influence shopping behavior, as well as the role of frontline employees (Rafaeli et al. 2017).

Virtual and augmented reality has offered vast promise for a long time; those promises are just beginning to be realized. The new forms of technology-based reality and applications enhance sensory perceptions (Poncin and Mimoun 2014). For example, fashion retailers use new technology to help customers engage in virtual fashion shows (Deloitte 2016). Apps using augmented reality also are advancing the reality, such as apps for car dealers that allow customers to view how different components look on a car. This could be an example that IKEA can take into consideration, rather than having the traditional showrooms, opting for AI –based settings in-store can have a tremendous positive impact on customers as they shop. Also an application that relies on AI can help them customers, in the huge stores of IKEA, to gather information about where products are physically located, answer questions about the functionalities of a product, and make suggestions about what other products might work well in combination with the purchased item.

For retailers, understanding the factors influencing the shopping behaviour of Generation Z is important. Despite being characterised as tech savvy, this generation is characterised by more variations with regard to technology affinity and store perceptions that have to be considered by retailers. The segments can support retailers to allocate their scarce resources when deciding to implement in-store technologies, improve the atmospherics or the human element. Digitalisation has changed stationary retail to an omnichannel environment with the convergence of offline and online channels (Hübner et al., 2016). Innovative service technology concepts have to be considered for and integrated into all channels to improve the seamless shopping journey to build long-term customer relationships. However, technology is no compensation for personal service. Moreover, the careful selection, further education, training and motivation of new staff and employees continue to be an important, if not the most important, task for fast fashion retailers.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Previous research showed a huge interest towards customer experience in a multichannel environment, by largely focusing on its effect from a brand perspective. Recent work also predominantly considered the new retail settings and the transition to omnichannel with the rapid evolution of technology and newer business models which suggest that the shopping process is on the verge of a quantum leap into an unknown shopping realm. Scholars were particularly focusing on the technologies available to retailers and service providers that have the potential to enhance both their operations and the experience they can provide customers, slowly drifting from the traditional physical store that still survives amid the technological retail revolution. And it's safe to say that our research aim was derived from this particular point, in a world where customers are free to move along different journeys and choose between various channels, while being free to follow - without impediments - their preferences and needs, rather than being subject to the impositions of the retailers, what is still bringing the customers to the physical store and what were their expectations in terms of the development of this format.

In the light of the above discussions, this study offers new insights into the multichannel customer experience from the customers' perspective, and adds to the previous theoretical framework by identifying the in-store touchpoints in the retail industry that contribute into making the physical store a relevant channel in this era and their influence on one of the most interesting generations who grew up in the digital era and are seen as "digital natives" inside a suitable retail environment which, in our case, was IKEA. By analyzing the critical touchpoints derived from the literature review in isolation, we were able to come up with an overall evaluation of the store based on an accumulation of IKEA customer experiences. Moreover, the research has revealed that physical stores are still a preferable place among customers to interact directly with the brand, be it touching or trying out tangible aspects of the brands or even coming face-to-face with the human aspect of the brand while engaging with store associates, or embracing the technologies to enhance their experience. Additionally, specific findings concerning the expected evolution of this format in the future within retail are clearly stated by offering both the customers and researchers insights regarding this specific area. Thereby, specific contributions to the research topic of customer experience journeys are provided.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study provides managers with an insight of the different touchpoints in a physical store that enhances customer experience in a customer journey. As our study is based on Generation Z, we would like to highlight that this particular group seems to have high expectations in terms of customer experience. Even being digital natives, they give a lot of importance to in-store shopping experience. Therefore, we suggest that meeting their expectations to enhance their customer experience in a physical store is very crucial for organizations as they might act as influencers for the older generation as well. Managers should focus on strategies that give them a seamless shopping experience. This could be achieved by creating personalized experiences addressing customer pain points like a clever store design regarding high involvement products leveraged with technology and making the most by using human touch as a tool of engagement. We also suggest managers develop an application equipped with a store map that helps customers navigate in-store better. Gen Z values experiences that are tailored for them especially when it comes interacting with store staff. If the interaction with the staff is poor, it can easily turn an experience sour. In this case, we suggest managers should ensure proper training of the store staff to provide positive experience. Allow customers to give feedback to your employees by providing them with proper feedback tools. Furthermore, our research suggests identification of touchpoints should be evaluated from the customer's perspective. In this way, managers should be able to carefully consider the identified touch points throughout the customer journey to achieve a deeper and comprehensive understanding of customer experience and ultimately help retailers to curate experiences for its customers and will inspire them to return.

6.3 Limitations

Although we have made clear statements of the limitations of the study throughout the thesis, generalizability is still the main limitation of it. Customer experience journeys concerning high involvement products compared to low involvement products would probably be different. Moreover, since the focus of this study is on Generation Z within Sweden, customers from other countries can have different perceptions and starting points on the customer experience journey. Finally, our findings include experiences of Generation Z from IKEA as the most suitable retail firm for now. However, this cannot erase the possibility of customers having expectations and experiences in the future that differ depending on their choice of the retail company in other geographic locations.

References

- Ajzen, I., 1991. The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 50(2), pp.179-211.
- Alexander, B. (2016). Retail as social experiences: Fashion third places from traditional to the virtual. conference proceedings. Annual Conference, Sponsored by the American Collegiate Retailing Association, Secaucus 13th–16th April 2016.
- Alexander, B. Cano, M. (2019). Futurising the Physical Store in the Omnichannel Retail Environment: Common Expectations and Diverse Realities; In book: Exploring Omnichannel Retailing, pp.197-223; Available Online: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-98273-1_9.pdf [Accessed On 25 January 2020]
- Alexander, B., & Cano, M. B. (2019). Store of the future: Towards a (re)invention and (re)imagination of physical store space in an omnichannel context; *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*; Available Online: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969698919300396#sec3> [Accessed On 28 January 2020]
- Alvarado, D. O. (2014). Blurring of the channel boundaries: The impact of advanced technologies in the physical fashion store on consumer experience. *International Journal of Advanced Information Science and Technology*, 30(30), 29–42.
- Avery, J., Steenburgh, T. J., Deighton, J., & Caravella, M. (2012). Adding bricks to clicks: Predicting the patterns of cross-channel elasticities over time. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(3), 96-111.
- Baxendale, S., Macdonald, E.K. and Wilson, H.N. (2015), “The impact of different touchpoints on brand consideration”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 91 No. 2, pp. 235-253.
- Bäckström, K. & Johansson, U. (2006). Creating and consuming experiences in retail store environments: Comparing retailer and consumer perspectives. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 13(6), 417–430
- Bäckström, K. and Johansson, U. (2017). An exploration of consumers’ experiences in physical stores: comparing consumers’ and retailers’ perspectives in past and present time; *The International Review of Retail Distribution and Consumer Research* vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 241-259; Available Online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316816852_An_exploration_of_consumers'_experiences_in_physical_stores_comparing_consumers'_and_retailers'_perspectives_in_past_and_present_time [Accessed On 24 January 2020]

- Barinaga, E. (1999). Ontology and epistemology, stories of their contexts: implications for research. In: SSE/EFI Working Paper Series in Business Administration, 1999 (14). Stockholm: Centre for Advanced Studies in Leadership.
- Bell, D. R., Gallino, S. & Moreno, A. (2014). How to win in an omnichannel world. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 56(1), 45
- Berry, L. L., Carbone, L. P., & Haeckel, S. H. (2002). Managing the total customer experience. *MIT Sloan management review*, 43(3), 85-89.
- Bertacchini, F., Bilotta, E. and Pantano, P. (2017), “Shopping with a robotic companion”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 77, pp. 382-395.
- Beck and Rygl, (2015) N. Beck, D. Rygl. Categorization of multiple channel retailing in Multi-, Cross-, and Omni-Channel Retailing for retailers and retailing *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, 27 (11) (2015), pp. 170-178
- Betzing, J.H., Hoang, A.Q.M. and Becker, J., 2018, March. In-store technologies in the retail servicescape. In *Proceedings of the Multikonferenz Wirtschaftsinformatik* (pp. 1671-1682).
- Bierling, K. and Hagman, A. (2018). The Age Of Experience: A Qualitative Study of the Revitalisation of the Customer’s Physical Retail Experience based on the Example of IKEA; Available Online: <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/8945308> [Accessed On 29 January 2020]
- Bitner, M. J., Ostrom, A. L., & Morgan, F. N. (2008). Service blueprinting: a practical technique for service innovation. *California management review*, 50(3), 66-94.
- Bolton, R.N., Gustafsson, A., McColl-Kennedy, J., Sirianni, N.J. and Tse, D.K., 2014. Small details that make big differences: a radical approach to consumption experience as a firm's differentiating strategy. *Journal of Service Management*, 25(2), pp.253-274.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., & Terry, G. (2018). Thematic Analysis. *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, 1-18.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2015). *Business research methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brynjolfsson, E., Hu, Y. J. & Rahman, M. S. (2013). Competing in the age of multichannel retailing. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 54(4), 23–29
- Bulmer, S., Elms, J. and Moore, S., 2018. Exploring the adoption of self-service checkouts and the associated social obligations of shopping practices. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 42, pp.107-116.

Burke, R. (2002). Hybrid recommender systems: Survey and experiments. *User modeling and user-adapted interaction*, 12(4), 331-370.

Business Leader, (2019). '90% Of Retail Transactions Are Still Carried Out In Physical Stores' – It's Time For A Dose Of Retail Reality' Available Online: <https://www.businessleader.co.uk/90-of-retail-transactions-are-still-carried-out-in-physical-stores-its-time-for-a-dose-of-retail-reality/75275/> [Accessed on 20 March 2020]

Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. & Gronhaug, K. (2001) Focus Group Interviewing, in: *Qualitative Marketing Research*. SAGE, London. p.113-131.

Cano, M.B., Perry, P., Ashman, R. and Waite, K. (2017), "The influence of image interactivity upon user engagement when using mobile touch screens", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 77, pp. 406-412.

Chaffey, D. & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019). In the book: *Digital Marketing* (Pearson Education Limited), Chapter 7

Chiu, H.C., Hsieh, Y.C., Roan, J., Tseng, K.J. and Hsieh, J.K. (2011), "The challenge for multichannel services: cross-channel free-riding behavior", *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 268-277, available at: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2010.07.002> [Accessed 12 February 2020]

Childers, T.L., Carr, C.L., Peck, J. and Carson, S., 2001. Hedonic and utilitarian motivations for online retail shopping behavior. *Journal of retailing*, 77(4), pp.511-535.

Chopra, S., (2015). How omni-channel can be the future of retailing; Available Online: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40622-015-0118-9> [Accessed On 27 January 2020]

Choudhury, V. and Karahanna, E., 2008. The relative advantage of electronic channels: a multidimensional view. *MIS quarterly*, pp.179-200.

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12 (3), 297-298.

Cook, G. (2014). "Customer experience in the omni-channel world and the challenges and opportunities this presents; *Journal of Direct*", *Data and Digital Marketing* 15, 262–266; Available Online: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/dddmp.2014.16> [Accessed On 27 January 2020]

- Coppola, B. (2018). Ingka: Annual and Sustainability Report: Embracing the digital opportunity, Available online: <https://www.ingka.com/this-is-ingka-group/annual-report/> [Accessed 10 February 2020]
- Cotton, D., Falvey, D., & Kent, S. (2016). *Market Leader: Intermediate. Business English Course Book. Audio CDs 1-3*. FT Publishing.
- Cummins, S., Peltier, J., and Dixon, A. (2016). “Omni-Channel Research Framework in the Context of Personal Selling and Sales Management: A review and Research Extensions.” *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* 10(1): 2-16.
- Dacko, S.G. (2017), “Enabling smart retail settings via mobile augmented reality shopping apps”, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 124, pp. 243-256.
- Davis, B. (2018). Retailers should look to Ikea for tech inspiration, 24 April, *Marketing Week*, Available Online: <https://www.marketingweek.com/retailers-ikea-tech-inspires/> [Accessed 9 February 2020]
- Daymon, C., Holloway, I., (2005), *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications*, Business & Economics
- De Cannière, M. H., De Pelsmacker, P., & Geuens, M. (2010). Relationship quality and purchase intention and behavior: The moderating impact of relationship strength. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(1), 87-98.
- De Haan, J., & Gong, Y. (2015). Accounting for Spatial Variation of Land Prices in Hedonic Imputation House Price Indexes: A Semi-Parametric Approach.
- Deming, S. (2010), In the book: *The Brand Who Cried Wolf*. John Wiley & Sons publications
- Demirkan, H. and Spohrer, J. (2014), “Developing a framework to improve virtual shopping in digital malls with intelligent self-service systems”, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 860-868.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., 1995. Transforming qualitative research methods: Is it a revolution?. *Journal of contemporary Ethnography*, 24(3), pp.349-358.
- Desai, S. P., & Lele, V. (2017). Correlating internet, social networks and workplace—a case of generation Z students. *Journal of Commerce and Management Thought*, 8(4), 802.

- Dhebar, A. (2013). Toward a compelling customer touchpoint architecture. *Business Horizons*, 56(2), 199-205.
- Diesing, P. (1966). Objectivism vs. Subjectivism in the Social Sciences. *Philosophy of Science*, 33 (1/2), 124-133.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007), *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- E. Brynjolfsson, Y.J. Hu, M.S. Rahman (2013). Competing in the Age of Multichannel Retailing MIT Sloan Management Review
- E. Galipoglu, H. Kotzab, C. Teller, I.Ö. Yumurtaci Hüseyinoglu, J. Pöppelbuß (2018). Omni-channel retailing research–state of the art and intellectual foundation. *Int. J. Phys. Distrib. Logist. Manag.*, 48 (4), pp. 365-390
- E. Huré, K. Picot-Coupey, C.L. Ackermann (2017). Understanding omni-channel shopping value: a mixed-method study. *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, 39, pp. 314-330
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. & Jackson, P. (2015). *Management Research*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Eaglen, M. (2013). Omni-channel retail: joining up the consumer experience| Media Network| The Guardian.
- Edelman, D. C., & Singer, M. (2015). Competing on customer journeys. *Harvard Business Review*, 93(11), 88-100.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research, *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 14(4), pp. 532-550.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S.A. and Alkassim, R.S. (2016), “Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling”, *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 1-4.
- Frambach, R.T., Roest, H.C. and Krishnan, T.V., 2007. The impact of consumer internet experience on channel preference and usage intentions across the different stages of the buying process. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 21(2), pp.26-41.
- Frazer, M. and Stiehler, B.E. (2014) “Omnichannel retailing: the merging of the online and off-line environment”, *Global Conference on Business and Finance Proceedings*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 655-657, available at: www.researchgate.net/profile/Cristobal_Fernandez/publication/260364142

- Francis, J.J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M.P., & Grimshaw, J.M. (2010). What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies. *Psychology & Health*, 25 (10), 1229-1245.
- Froehle, C.M. and Roth, A.V. (2004), “New measurement scales for evaluating perceptions of the technology-mediated customer service experience”, *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 1-21.
- Frow, P. Payne. A.(2010). Towards the ‘perfect’ customer experience *J. Brand Manag.*, 15 (2) (2007), pp. 89-101
- Gelderman, C., Ghijsen, P.W.T. and van Diemen, R. (2011), “Choosing self-service technologies or interpersonal services: the impact of situational factors and technology-related attitudes”, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 18, pp. 414-421.
- Gephart, R.P. (2004). *Qualitative Research and the Academy of Management Journal*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47 (4), 454-462.
- Ghauri, P.N., & Grønhaug, K. (2010). *Research methods in business studies*. 4th edition (reorganized and expanded). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Hagberg, J., Sundstrom, M. and Egels-Zandén, N. (2016), “The digitization of retailing: an exploratory framework”, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 44 No. 7, pp. 694-712.
- Halvorsrud, R., Kvale, K., & Følstad, A., (2015). Improving service quality through customer journey analysis; *Journal of service theory and practice* 26 (6), 840-867; Available Online: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/10.1108/JSTP-05-2015-0111> [Accessed On 27 January 2020]
- Hamstra, M (2017). IKEA creates omnichannel shopping experience from favorited items in app, Available Online: <https://www.retaildive.com/ex/mobilecommercedaily/ikea-boosts-content-functionality-for-catalog-app> [Accessed 8 February 2020]
- Hansen, R. and Sia, S.K. (2015), “Hummel’s digital transformation toward omnichannel retailing: key lessons learned”, *MIS Quarterly Executive*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 51-66, available at: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=102933798&site=ehost-live> [Accessed 15 February 2020]
- Harris, E. (2012), “A look at omni-channel retailing”, available at: www.innovativeretailtechnologies.com. [Accessed 9 February 2020]

- Heitz-Spahn, S. (2013). Cross-channel free-riding consumer behavior in a multichannel environment: An investigation of shopping motives, sociodemographics and product categories. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 20(6), 570-578.
- Hilken, T., de Ruyter, K., Chylinski, M., Mahr, D. and Keeling, D.I. (2017), “Augmenting the eye of the beholder: exploring the strategic potential of augmented reality to enhance online service experiences”, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 45 No. 6, pp. 884-905
- Huang, M.-H. and Rust, R.T. (2018), “Artificial intelligence in service”, *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 21 No.2, pp. 155-172.
- Hübner, A.H., Kuhn, H., Wollenburg, J., Towers, N. and Kotzab, H., 2016. Last mile fulfilment and distribution in omni-channel grocery retailing: a strategic planning framework. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*.
- IKEA. (2019a). IKEA: Vision, Culture, Values. Available online: <https://ikea.jobs.cz/en/visionculture-and-values/> [Accessed 9 February 2020]
- Immonen, I., Sintonen, S. and Koivuniemi, J. (2018), “The value of human interaction in service channels”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 78, pp. 316-325.
- Inman, J.J. and Nikolova, H. (2017), “Shopper-facing retail technology: a retailer adoption decision framework incorporating shopper attitudes and privacy concerns”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 93 No. 1, pp. 7-28.
- Joseph, S. (2017). How Ikea is using augmented reality, Digiday, Available online: <https://digiday.com/marketing/ikea-using-augmented-reality/> [Accessed 8 February 2020]
- Juaneda-Ayensa, E., Mosquera, A., & Sierra Murillo, Y. (2016). Omnichannel customer behavior: key drivers of technology acceptance and use and their effects on purchase intention. *Frontiers in psychology*, 7, 1117.
- Jurgulyte, E., & Böhlke, R., (2017). Rethinking Individual Customer Journeys; Available Online: <http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=8921354&fileOId=8921357> [Accessed On 27 January 2020]
- Jüttner, SD. (2013). Customer service experiences: developing and applying a sequential incident laddering technique. *Eur. J. Mark.*, 47 (5/6) (2013), pp. 738-769
- Kahn, L.M., 2017. The gender wage gap: Extent, trends, and explanations. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 55(3), pp.789-865.

- Khan, U. and Dhar, R., 2006. Licensing effect in consumer choice. *Journal of marketing research*, 43(2), pp.259-266.
- Kim, R. Y., Jin, J., & Li, B. (2010). Drizzle: cooperative symbol-level network coding in multichannel wireless networks. *IEEE Transactions on Vehicular Technology*, 59(3), 1415-1432.
- Kitewheel. (2018). The state of the customer journey 2018. Available online: <https://kitewheel.com/resources/the-state-of-the-customer-journey-2018-report/> [Accessed On 29 Feb 2020]
- Kotler, P. (2017), “Customer value management”, *Journal of Creating Value*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 170-172.
- Kumar, V., & Venkatesan, R. (2005). Who are the multichannel shoppers and how do they perform?: Correlates of multichannel shopping behavior. *Journal of Interactive marketing*, 19(2), 44-62.
- Kvale, S. (1994). Ten standard Objections to Qualitative Research Interviews, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, vol. 25(2), pp. 147-173.
- Lanvin, B., & Evans, P. (2016). The global talent competitiveness index. INSEAD Business School, Adecco Group and Human Capital Leadership Institute. Fontainebleau, France.
- Lauring, K., Steenburg, E.V. (2019). What Drives Young Shoppers? Comparing Millennial and Generation Z Online Consumer Behavior, Conference: American Marketing Association Summer Educators' Conference, At Chicago, IL
- Larivière, B., Bowen, D., Andreassen, T.W., Kunz, W., Sirianni, N.J., Voss, C., Wunderlich, N.V. and De Keyser, A., 2017. “Service Encounter 2.0”: An investigation into the roles of technology, employees and customers. *Journal of Business Research*, 79, pp.238-246.
- Lazaris, C., & Vrechopoulos, A. (2014, June). From multi-channel to “omnichannel” retailing: review of the literature and calls for research. In *2nd International Conference on Contemporary Marketing Issues, (ICCM)* (Vol. 6).
- Lee, S., (2007), IKEA: A Branded Experience Is More Important Than Customer-Centricity, Available Online: http://customerthink.com/ikea_branded_experience_important/ [Accessed On 20 Feb 2020]
- Lemon, K., & Verhoef, P. (2016). Understanding Customer Experience Throughout the Customer Journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80 (6), 69-96.

- Li, J. G. T., Kim, J. O., & Lee, S. Y. (2009). An empirical examination of perceived retail crowding, emotions, and retail outcomes. *The Service Industries Journal*, 29(5), 635-652.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lombart, C., & Louis, D. (2012). Consumer satisfaction and loyalty: Two main consequences of retailer personality. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 19(6), 644-652.
- Long, R., White, G., Friedman, M., & Brazeal, C. (2000). The 'Qualitative' Versus 'Quantitative' Research Debate: A Question of Metaphorical Assumptions? *International Journal of Value-Based Management*, 13 (2), 189-197.
- Louvieris, P., Driver, J., & Powell-Perry, J. (2003). Managing customer behaviour dynamics in the multi-channel e-business environment: Enhancing customer relationship capital in the global hotel industry. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 9(2), 164-173.
- Madahi, A., Sukati, I. (2014). Consumers Attitudes towards Internet and Brick and Mortar Store Channels Switching Behavior. *Journal of The Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences Y.2014*, Volume 4, Issue 2, pp.137-166
- Marshall, M.N. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13(6), 522–526.
- Martin, J. Mortimer, G. Andrews, L.(2015). Re-examining online customer experience to include purchase frequency and perceived risk. *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, 25 (2015), pp. 81-95
- Marques, S. H., Cardoso, M. M., & Palma, A. P. (2013). Environmental factors and satisfaction in a specialty store. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 23(4), 456-474.
- Mehra, K. K., Boddu, A. R., & Modani, A. (2012). *mobile phone based mobile customer relationship loyalty methodology and servicing system with instant analytics features thereof. U.S. Patent Application No. 13/257,630.*
- Meyer, C. Schwager, A. (2007). Understanding customer experience *Harv. Bus. Rev.*, 85 (2) (2007), pp. 116-126
- Mkansi, M.A., & Acheampong, E.A. (2012). Research philosophy debates and classifications: Students' dilemma. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 10 (2), 132-140
- Morgan, B. (2019). 50 Stats that prove the value of customer experience, *Forbes*, 24 September, Available online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2019/09/24/50-stats-that-prove-the-value-of-customer-experience/> [Accessed On 15 February 2020]
- Mosquera, A., Olarte-Pascual, C., Juaneda Ayensa, E., & Murillo, Y., (2017). The role of technology in an omnichannel physical store; *Spanish Journal of Marketing – ESIC 2444-9709*; Available Online:

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/sjme-03-2018-008/full/pdf> [Accessed On 28 January 2020]

Neslin, S.A., Grewal, D., Leghorn, R., Shankar, V., Teerling, M.L., Thomas, J.S. and Verhoef, P.C. (2006), "Challenges and opportunities in multichannel customer management", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 95-112.

Noone, B. M., & Mattila, A. S. (2009). Consumer reaction to crowding for extended service encounters. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*.

Ozeritskaya, E., (2019). 8 Tips to Help Design Your Customer Journey Map, Available Online: <https://blog.hypeinnovation.com/an-introduction-to-customer-journey-mapping> [Accessed On 25 January 2020]

Panetta, K., (2019). How to Create an Effective Customer Journey Map; Available Online: <https://www.gartner.com/en/marketing/insights/articles/how-to-create-an-effective-customer-journey-map> [Accessed On 26 January 2020]

Pantano, E. (2016), "Engaging consumer through storefront: evidences from integrating interactive technologies", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 28, pp. 149-154.

Pantano, E. and Gandini, A. (2017), "Exploring the forms of sociality mediated by innovative technologies in retail settings", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 77, pp. 367-373.

Pantano, E., & Viassone, M., (2015). Engaging consumers on new integrated multichannel retail settings: Challenges for retailers; *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 10.1016; Available Online: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969698915000466> [Accessed On 26 January 2020]

Papagiannidis, S., Pantano, E., See-To, E., Dennis, C. and Bourlakis, M. (2017), "To immerse or not? Experimenting with two virtual retail environments", *Information Technology & People*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 163-188.

P.C. Verhoef, P.K. Kannan, J.J. Inman(2015).From multi-channel retailing to omni-channel retailing: introduction to the special issue on multi-channel retailing. *J. Retail.*, 91, pp. 174-181

Peppers, D., & Rogers, M., (2016). *Managing Customer Experience and Relationships: A Strategic Framework*, Edition 3

- Pikkarainen, T., Pikkarainen, K., Karjaluoto, H. and Pahnla, S., 2004. Consumer acceptance of online banking: an extension of the technology acceptance model. *Internet research*.
- Piotrowicz, W., & Cuthbertson, R. (2014). Introduction to the special issue information technology in retail: Toward omnichannel retailing. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 18(4), 5-16.
- Poncin, I. and Mimoun, M.S.B., 2014. The impact of “e-atmospherics” on physical stores. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 21(5), pp.851-859.
- Puiu, S. (2016). Generation Z—A new type of consumers. *Revista Tinerilor Economiști*, 27, 67–78.
- Rafaeli, A., Altman, D., Gremler, D.D., Huang, M.H., Grewal, D., Iyer, B., Parasuraman, A. and de Ruyter, K., 2017. The future of frontline research: Invited commentaries. *Journal of Service Research*, 20(1), pp.91-99.
- Raphelson, S. (2014). From GIs To Gen Z (Or Is It iGen?): How Generations Get Nicknames. NPR: Special Series, New Boom.
- Rawnsley, M.M. (1998). Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology: A Clarification. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 11 (1), 2-4.
- Rawson, A., Duncan, E., & Jones, C. (2013). The truth about customer experience. *Harvard Business Review*, 91(9), 90-98.
- Reverte, C., Gomez-Melero, E., & Cegarra-Navarro, J. G. (2016). The influence of corporate social responsibility practices on organizational performance: evidence from Eco-Responsible Spanish firms. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 112, 2870-2884.
- Rezaei, S. and Valaei, N. (2017), “Branding in a multichannel retail environment: online stores vs app stores and the effect of product type”, *Information Technology & People*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 853-886.
- Rigby, D. (2011). The future of shopping. *Harvard business review*, 89(12), 65-76.
- Rodrigues, C. (2011). The Method of Scientific Discovery in Peirce’s Philosophy: Deduction, Induction, and Abduction. *Logica Universalis*, 5 (1), 127-164.

- Roggeveen, A.L., Grewal, D., Townsend, C. and Krishnan, R., 2015. The impact of dynamic presentation format on consumer preferences for hedonic products and services. *Journal of Marketing*, 79(6), pp.34-49.
- Rosenbaum, M. S., Otolara, M. L., & Ramírez, G. C. (2017). How to create a realistic customer journey map. *Business Horizons*, 60(1), 143-150.
- Saghiri, S.S., Bernon, M., Bourlakis, M. and Wilding, R., 2018. Omni-channel logistics special issue. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research Methods for Business Students*. 5th edition. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Sayre-McCord, G. (1988). *Essays on Moral Realism*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press
- Schmitt, B. and Zarantonello, L. (2013), "Consumer Experience and Experiential Marketing: A Critical Review", Malhotra, N.K. (Ed.) *Review of Marketing Research* (Review of Marketing Research, Vol. 10), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 25-61.
- Schröder, H., & Zaharia, S. (2008). Linking multi-channel customer behavior with shopping motives: An empirical investigation of a German retailer. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 15(6), 452-468.
- Sharma, I. (2017). How IKEA Is Redefining Customer Experience, LinkedIn, 3 January, Available online: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-ikea-redefining-customer-experienceishan-sharma> [Accessed 8 February 2020]
- Sopadjieva, E., Dholakia, U.M., & Benjamin, B., (2017). A Study of 46,000 Shoppers Shows That Omnichannel Retailing Works, Available Online: <https://hbr.org/2017/01/a-study-of-46000-shoppers-shows-that-omnichannel-retailing-works> [Accessed On 15 Feb 2020]
- Stuart, F. I., & Tax, S. (2004). Toward an integrative approach to designing service experiences: lessons learned from the theatre. *Journal of Operations Management*, 22(6), 609-627.
- Sukhraj, R., (2017), 4 Best Ways to Keep a Customer Happy & Improve Customer Retention. Available Online: <https://www.impactbnd.com/blog/the-importance-of-keeping-your-customers-happy> [Accessed On 20 Feb 2020]

Taylor, D. G., Lewin, J. E., & Strutton, D. (2011). Friends, fans, and followers: do ads work on social networks?: how gender and age shape receptivity. *Journal of advertising research*, 51(1), 258-275.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2014). Friends of the SEP Society - Preview of Abduction PDF. [online] Available Online: <https://leibniz.stanford.edu/friends/preview/abduction/>

Trochim, W., Donnelly, J., & Arora, K. (2016). *Research methods: the essential knowledge base*. 2nd edition. Boston: Cengage Learning.

Tunsakul, K. (2018). Generation Z's Perception of Servicescape, Their Satisfaction And Their Retail Shopping Behavioral Outcomes. *Human Behavior, Development and Society* ISSN 2651-1762, Volume 19, 2018

Turner, A. (2015). Generation Z: Technology and social interest. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 71(2), 103–113.

Tynan, C. Mckechnie,S. (2009). Experience marketing: a review and reassessment. *J. Mark. Manag.*, 25 (5–6) (2009), pp. 501-517

Urmson, J.O., & Rée, J. (2005). *The concise encyclopedia of western philosophy*. 3rd edition. London; New York: Routledge.

Van Baal, S., & Dach, C. (2005). Free riding and customer retention across retailers' channels. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 19(2), 75-85.

Van Kerrebroeck, H., Brengman, M. and Willems, K. (2017), "Escaping the crowd: an experimental study on the impact of a virtual reality experience in a shopping mall", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 77, pp. 437-450.

Van Riel, A. C., Semeijn, J., Ribbink, D., & Bomert-Peters, Y. (2012). Waiting for service at the checkout. *Journal of Service Management*.

Verhoef, P.C. Katherine, N. Lemon. A, Parasuraman.(2009). Customer experience creation: determinants, dynamics and management strategies *J. Retail.*, 85 (1) , pp. 31-41

Voorhees, C. M., Fombelle, P. W., Gregoire, Y., Bone, S., Gustafsson, A., Sousa, R., & Walkowiak, T. (2017). Service encounters, experiences and the customer journey: Defining the field and a call to expand our lens. *Journal of Business Research*, 79, 269-280.

Walliman, N. (2011). *Research Methods – The Basics*. London; New York: Routledge

W.T. Lim S. F., Wang, L., & Sra, J.S.,(2017). Wal-Mart's Omni-channel Synergy; Available Online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326302770_Wal-Mart's_Omni-channel_Synergy [Accessed On 27 January 2020]

White, R. C., Joseph-Mathews, S., & Voorhees, C. M. (2013). The effects of service on multichannel retailers' brand equity. *Journal of Services Marketing*.

Willems, K., Smolders, A., Brengman, M., Luyten, K. and Schoning, J. (2017), “The path-to-purchase is paved with digital opportunities: an inventory of shopper-oriented retail technologies”, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 124, pp. 228-242.

Williott, L., (2019). Customer Service Stats for 2020; Available Online: <https://www.customerthermometer.com/customer-service/customer-service-and-satisfaction-statistics-for-2020/> [Accessed on 20 January 2020]

Wind, Y.J. and Hays, C.F. (2016), *Beyond Advertising: Creating Value Through All Customer Touchpoints*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ.

Wolny, J., & Charoensuksai, N. (2014). Mapping customer journeys in multichannel decision-making. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice*, 15(4), 317-326.

Wright, P., Wallace, J., & McCarthy, J. (2008). Aesthetics and experience-centered design. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)*, 15(4), 1-21.

Yurova, Y., Rippé, C. B., Weisfeld-Spolter, S., Sussan, F., & Arndt, A. (2017). Not all adaptive selling to omni-consumers is influential: The moderating effect of product type. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 34, 271-277.

Zeng, M. and Reinartz, W., 2003. Beyond online search: The road to profitability. *California Management Review*, 45(2), pp.107-130.

Zomerdijk, L.G. Voss, C. (2010). Service design for experience-centric services *J. Serv. Res.*, 13 (1) (2010), pp. 67-82

Appendix

Interview Questions

In this interview we want you to get into a common everyday scenario. We will sketch and describe this scenario and then ask you some questions relating to various subjects in the next step.

Data protection authorization and details

In order to protect your identity, we will anonymize your responses and will only display basic demographic characteristics which relate to you, such as your sex, age, occupation and nationality. All of the responses you provide today will be integrated in our research and can again be quoted with an anonymous pseudonym in the final version of our thesis. We will give your responses honestly and will not try to tweak them into our research agenda in any way. Finally, we strive for an honest and open conversation with you and will present you with our final thesis so that you can see how we have implemented your answers into our research.

Understanding this, are you willing to participate in our interview and agree to use your responses in our research and to publish any work relevant to this study now or in the future?

Scenario Description

Our scenario today is one where you buy a furniture type of product that usually needs to be considered more thoroughly.

1. Could you think of any furniture type of product like that?
2. How does this product make you feel it needs more consideration when buying?
3. Have you purchased any furniture type of product recently?

As we have now developed the scenario, we will now move into the comprehensive area of questions. Keep in mind that your answers should be based on the scenario and if possible, try to remember the product you bought last time.

1. Do you buy the product (Furniture) from a physical store? Why?

2. Describe what you do before buying a product and how does it help? For example, do you talk to a friend, research online reviews, etc.?
3. Is it easy to shop in a physical store? For example, are the products conveniently located? If yes, what makes it easy? If no, what makes it difficult?
4. What are the main features that you notice when in a store? For example, is it the merchandise displays, decor, Amenities like cafes or leisure etc.
5. Do you usually use the technologies available in the store (i.e. self-service cash desk)? When do you use them? Are you happy with this kind of service? Why?
6. Do you usually like asking salesperson for advice? If yes, when do you do?
7. What influence does the salesperson have on you when you buy a product? Why? (Do you feel the employee had the product knowledge, do they offer pertinent advice?)
8. What do you appreciate more in a store? For example, ambience, in-store technologies, employee interaction, service process etc. Why?
9. If you were offered the chance to change something about your shopping experience in the store, what would you change? Why?

Themes:

- There is more than just buying a product in a physical store. Why?
- The in-store technologies are making the shopping experience more convenient. Why?
- The store's navigation needs to be a sharp process to allow for a smooth customer experience. Why?
- The employee-customer interactions set the tone for a positive or negative customer experience. Why?