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**A qualitative investigation of consumers’
perception of safety towards high streets in Sweden**

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I. Abstract

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore the way that aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety, in order to improve our understanding of how consumers experience safety issues in the high streets. Besides, this thesis aims to understand the role of safety in the consumers' perception towards the shopping environment of high streets and the importance of safety in the retail sector.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, a single data collecting method has been chosen by the author. 17 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with people, who shop in the two main cities of the Skåne Region, Helsingborg, and Malmö.

FINDINGS

The results of this study showed that consumers' perception of safety is formed in several ways from aspects that emerge in the high streets. The presence of people from different social and cultural backgrounds and the presence of the number of people who walk in the high streets are discussed by the participants. To be more specific, interviewees stated that even the presence of people, who come from different social and cultural backgrounds can form their perception of safety. However, the number of people has a twofold role in consumers' perception of safety. The familiarity with their neighborhood is also an important aspect, which people in medium-sized cities such as Malmö and Helsingborg experience and it often overlaps with the familiarity with people. In addition, aspects such as lighting and CCTV have been highlighted. However, some participants seemed to experience them differently due to the limited opening hours of stores in Sweden and the daylighting and some interviewees related CCTV systems to human rights and privacy policy. Finally, they pointed out aspects such as the branded shops

located in high streets and the cleanliness of the shopping areas, which also overlap with the familiarity with the location.

KEYWORDS

Safety, high streets, consumers' perception, criminality, familiarity, attributes of the environment, Skåne Region, semi-structured interview

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IV. List of Abbreviations

- CCTV..... Closed-Circuit Television
CPTED..... Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
RQ..... Research Question

1. Introduction

Over the last few years, it has been witnessed that the greater development of the shopping areas, the more extensive discussion raises regarding safety issues. Especially, due to the need for revitalization of the high streets, it is of paramount importance to study the role of safety in consumers' perception towards the high streets (Karrholm, 2016). Besides, due to the increasing interest in the shopping malls, high streets started to imitate and resemble them in terms of the safety strategies (Zanini, Filardi, Villaça, Migueles, & Melo, 2019). For instance, by installing the CCTV system, which involves camera installation in the shops for reducing the level of crimes in and around the shops (Zanini et al., 2019).

Safety includes several aspects such as criminality, which has been the focus for most of the researchers, familiarity with the people, familiarity with the location, attributes of the external or internal shopping environment, and wayfinding of the public spaces (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). Perceived safety has studied consumers' feelings of safety in shopping environments and consumers' perception of safety (Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018). This theory has been divided into two factors: perceptual factors, which refer to the individuals' values, and socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, etc. (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). This thesis is focused on the perceptual factors of the theory of perceived safety and studies consumers' perception of safety in the context of high streets.

Until the nineteenth century, the high streets have been called "walking cities" with no access to vehicles (Parajuli & Pojani, 2018, p. 142). Meanwhile, the emergence of the automobile cities and the pedestrianization of the cities led urban planners and retailers to start planning cities with decreased traffic and contemporary high streets (Gehl, 2010). There have been used several terms in the research articles, to describe high streets such as pedestrian malls, shopping streets, etc. (Amos, 2019; Gehl, 2010; Parajuli & Pojani, 2018). High streets are defined as the streets, where there is a cluster of retail stores and the access of vehicles are either limited or prohibited (Amos, 2019). The advent of the high streets indicates an endeavor for the revitalization of the pedestrian streets and the retail market (Amos, 2019).

The ever-increasing feeling of insecurity in the cities has alienated many people from shopping downtown, resulting in less lively cities (Pain & Townshend, 2002). It is crucial for people, who visit the city center to feel safe in shopping environments (Gehl, 2010).

Taking measures regarding safety in the cities will attract locals and visitors to patronize the shopping environments of the city center (Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019).

Moreover, it seems that safety has played a fundamental role in the attractiveness of high streets (Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019; Teller, 2008; Teller & Reutterer, 2008). Kohijoki and Koistinen (2019) found that an unpleasant experience in the high street regarding safety can lead to unpleasant feelings and consecutively to non-satisfaction of the customer. To reach the goal of attractiveness, which includes satisfaction, retention, and patronage retention, consumers should form a perception of high security (Teller, 2008; Teller, Elms, Thomson, & Paddison, 2010).

Besides, the literature has shown a great interest in the safety and its relation to public spaces with a focus on the role of the external shopping environment on the consumers' behavior and especially, on the consumer's shopping intentions (Burns, Manolis, & Keep, 2010; De Nisco & Warnaby, 2013; Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995; Riger, Gordon, & LeBailly, 1982; Turley & Milliman, 2000). It has been found that lighting either daylight or night light may play a significant role in consumers' behavior (Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2018). For instance, a bright place can increase the feeling of safety, which drives them to patronage one place, and successively lead to positive shopping intentions (Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2018). Also, consumers' behavior and intentions, and perceptions of safety depend on the criminality aspect (Mower, Kim, & Childs, 2012; Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). To be more specific, consumers, who are more likely to be worried about their belongings such as cars or personal belongings avoid these shopping areas and form a perception of insecurity towards the shopping area (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). Similarly, parents, who are concerned about their children in the shopping locations, where there are plenty of people do not patronage these shopping areas, which leads to an increased feeling of unsafety, forming a perception of insecurity (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). In addition, due to the advent of automobile cities, the accessibility of the streets has changed, leading to avoiding behavior in the public spaces and consecutively making the high street less attractive to the consumers. Especially, the less organized wayfinding in public areas can also form the perceived safety and consecutively consumers' behavior (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). It seems that safety in the cities can determine consumers' behavior not only in the public areas in general but in the shopping environments too (Burns et al., 2010).

Besides, it has been found that the number of people, the previous experiences, a sense of fear towards a certain group of people can form individuals' perceptions of safety

towards the cities (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018). For example, in crowded places, some people believe that interaction with many people can save them in case of an insecure event. However, others think that they can be easily victimized, showing the twofold role of the number of people. Also, the presence of people, who take drugs can lead to fear of crime, shaping a perception that might be victimized by those people (Chebat, Sirgy, & Grzeskowiak, 2010). However, the socio-demographic dimensions such as age, education level, income, sex, etc., may also contribute to forming consumers' perception of safety (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). People who have higher education levels do not form their perception of safety based on criminal activity, in contrast to people with low education who take into consideration safety aspects. In addition, it has been found that women feel insecure in the city, due to the perception that women are not physically strong to defend themselves (Ceccato, 2017).

Also, the lighting in the public areas, the CCTV system, which includes the camera installation inside and outside the shops, are some of the attributes that play a crucial role in individuals' perception and behavior (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). The theory of CPTED, which refers to the spatial design of the place, in order to prevent criminal activities examined the above aspects.

Little has been studied by scholars, consumers' perception of safety towards the high streets. These few studies have shown a focus on the fear of crime, however, there is a lack of research on other aspects of safety such as the familiarity, attributes of the environment, etc. (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). This study focuses on safety with a broader meaning, which includes familiarity with the people, familiarity with the location, and the attributes of the environment. Exploring the role of the above aspects of safety in consumers' perception will improve our understanding of how consumers experience safety in the high streets. What is more, although some studies have examined the perceived safety, there is still a lack of proper understanding. To be more specific, there is a lack of how the above aspects form consumers' perceptions of safety towards external shopping environments.

Nevertheless, the author found out that the qualitative method has been less implemented in the research of consumers' perception of safety towards shopping environments. However, the quantitative method has been preferred so far, which has studied the consumers' behavior and consumers' fear of crime in shopping environments such as shopping malls (Ali & Mubarak, 2016; De Nisco & Warnaby, 2013; Mower, 2012; Turley & Milliman, 2000). Besides, the previous quantitative studies have explored some factors

such as wayfinding, atmospherics, etc. (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019), but they missed out to explore how these aspects form consumers' perception of safety. This thesis utilizes the qualitative method and especially semi-structured interviews, as it seeks to get more insights into consumers' perceptions of safety. Consumers' perceptions can be complex and need to be further explained through interviews.

Several studies have examined safety in other settings such as the shopping malls but there is less focus on the high streets (Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018; Pain & Townshend, 2002). This paper will investigate the high streets in Skåne, Sweden, as safety has raised a long discussion in south Sweden and the existing knowledge on the Swedish high streets is empirically limited. Especially, the high streets in the city of Helsingborg and Malmö will be investigated, which are the two most populated cities in south Sweden (Region Skåne, 2019). There is a high interest in Kullagatan, as it is the first high street in the city of Helsingborg and in the center of a Swedish city (Karrholm, 2016). However, there is a lot of discussion about safety in the city of Malmö, which has affected the safety in the context of shopping.

1.1 Research questions and aim

The above knowledge gap led me to the following question:

How do aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety towards the high streets?

This study aims to explore the way that aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety, in order to improve our understanding of how consumers experience safety issues in the high streets. Besides, this thesis aims to understand the role of safety in the consumers' perception towards the shopping environment of high streets and the importance of safety in the retail sector.

This paper also seeks to contribute to the theoretical field of safety in relation to the shopping environment of high streets. It sought to give more insight into consumers' perception of safety, developing our knowledge of safety-related issues in the external environment of high streets.

Understanding the way that consumers' perception of safety is formed towards the high streets is of paramount importance for the place marketers and urban planners, who want to improve high streets and attract more people to the downtown area.

1.2 Societal relevance of the study

The topic researched is a social phenomenon, as it is aiming to explore the way that safety-related issues form people's perceptions in the shopping environment. In other words, this thesis studies consumers' perceptions that are depending on changes of the social world (Bryman, 2012) such as social interaction and behavior, and the safety strategies applied by the authorities and retailers. Furthermore, according to the existing theory, safety is related to familiarity with people, familiarity with the location, etc., which are also social tasks, as they examine the relationship and the consumers' interaction with other people and places. To be more specific, familiarity with the people involves the way that the social interaction of consumers forms their perception of safety, and familiarity with the location refers to the way the interaction of consumers with the place form their perception of safety, which is depending on the social interaction. Also, Johnstone (2012) and Carmona (2015) mentioned that the high streets involve social dimensions and social interactions and they should be examined as "socio-spatial entities" (Griffiths, Vaughan, Haklay, & Emma Jones, 2008, p. 1155). In this regard, the use of a qualitative method was the most appropriate one, to get a deeper understanding of the topic.

1.3 Outline of the study

The overall structure of the study takes the form of six chapters. Firstly, the literature review examines the terms of safety and high streets. Also, the role of safety on the attractiveness of high streets, the role of the external environment on consumers' perception of safety and behavior, and the role of safety on the consumers' perception and behavior are discussed. In the second chapter, the perceived safety and especially perceptual factors, and the CPTED are used as a theoretical framework. Next, the semi-structured interview that has been used in the research process is analyzed. In the chapter of results and analysis, the data transcribed are presented and examined, to answer the research question and fulfill the research aim. To sum up, the discussion of the results and

the conclusion of this study are analyzed, including the managerial implications and future recommendations.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, the safety and the high street are discussed, and some classifications are presented, in order to understand the key elements of the study. Besides, the role of safety on the attractiveness of high streets is explained. Finally, the role of the external attributes on the consumers' behavior regarding the safety and the role of safety on consumers' perception and behavior are presented, to understand what has been discussed by the scholarly community.

2.1 Understanding safety in external shopping environments

Safety has become one of the greatest demands nowadays by consumers as well as by retailers in the context of shopping environments such as high streets (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). Over the last years, retailers have paid a lot of attention to safety issues by investing in the development of security throughout the shopping experience (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). Safety has been characterized as one of the most important determinants of the shopping experience for the customers (Singh & Sahay, 2012). Most scholars have related safety with the fear of crime and the criminal action in the shopping environments such as shopping malls and high streets (Burns et al., 2010; Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010b; Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). However, some scholars have studied safety broadly including other aspects that may put into risk customers' safety such as way-finding, familiarity with the location, and the attributes of the environment (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). These are some of the aspects that fewer scholars have focused upon, but it seems to be directly related to the safety issues. It is of paramount importance nowadays to be studied, in order to understand their role in the consumers' perception of safety towards shopping environments like high streets, shopping malls, etc. (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019).

Furthermore, perceived safety refers to the consumers' feeling of safety in the shopping environment and the consumers' perceptions of safety towards a public environment, which eventually can lead to satisfaction or non-satisfaction (Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018). Perceived safety has been divided into perceptual factors and socio-demographic factors. The perceptual factors include the individuals' values of the consumer; however, perceived safety can be also shaped by factors such as age, gender, etc. (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). It has been found that the presence of people, safety knowledge, people

who cause fear of crime, familiarity with the location, and the cleanliness of the environment can form consumers' perception of safety in the shopping environments (Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018). These elements will be discussed and analyzed further in the theoretical framework of this study. It seems that more and more people are concerned about safety in the shopping environments and this concern raises especially in new shopping environments, which the consumer has not visited before (Claxton, 1995). Therefore, retailers implement different policies to provide a higher level of security by adding parking lots, lights, security guards, etc. and successively lead to customer satisfaction (Claxton, 1995; Singh & Sahay, 2012). These are elements that have been studied by the theory of CPTED. Especially, this theory has shown that people form their perception of safety by aspects such as lighting and CCTV system in different ways (Cozens, Saville & Hillier, 2005). Especially, it has been found that the bright location during the nighttime and that installation of CCTV systems form consumers' perception of safety. However, the CCTV system may raise privacy issues for the consumers, leading to avoiding behavior (Honest & Charman, 1992).

All in all, safety is not an onefold aspect, but it involves several aspects that can be found in shopping environments and can form consumers' perception of safety.

2.2 What is a high street?

The urban retail areas, which are usually located in the city center of the medium and small-sized towns that consist of retail stores and restaurants are either called high streets or commercial streets or pedestrian malls or shopping streets by most of the scholars (Amos, 2019; Carmona, 2015; Teller, 2008). However, the commonly used term is high street (Carmona, 2015) and this will be used in this study. To be more specific, high streets have been defined as "a street where private motorized traffic has been permanently eliminated and pedestrians have priority" (Amos, 2019, p. 12). However, high streets should not be confused with the pure pedestrian streets, which refers to the "neighbouring spaces between buildings and urban space which is open for public access including retail bazaars, streets and pedestrian walkways" (Hosseini, Maleki, & Azari, 2012, p. 646). High streets or pedestrian malls that allow the entrance of some vehicles are called semi-mall (Amos, 2019). High streets usually include traditional retail stores, department stores, chain stores, restaurants, banks, supermarkets, etc. (Gibbs, 2012). However, the high

traffic called for parking areas and easy accessibility to the high streets, leading to the accommodation of public transportation and on-street parking (Gibbs, 2012). Besides, high streets often consist of non-commercial places such as “city halls, courthouses, libraries, and post offices” (Gibbs, 2012, p. 35). Due to the emergence of the automobile cities, the parking lots have been an integrated part of high streets, usually placed behind the stores or at the end of the street (Southworth, 2005). Among many facilities that have been established into the high streets, streetlights, flowers, and street cafes are those which have been used by place marketing, to promote the stores and attract customers (Southworth, 2005). Most of the high streets in Sweden were constructed after World War II, so the buildings represent an old and simple design (Robertson, 1991).

Also, apart from the atmospheric and functional factors, high streets involve social elements (Johnstone, 2012; Johnstone & Conroy, 2008). Specifically, it is stated that the high street is handled as a “complex and dynamic socio-spatial entity” (Griffiths et al., 2008, p. 1155). Carmona (2015) claimed that high streets encompass the cultural elements of the neighborhoods and consecutively, the high streets have a high impact on social identity. Even though the high streets create commercial hubs, there is high social interaction, for instance, when professionals come across or parents come along with children (Carmona, 2015).

The rise of shopping malls on the outskirts could compete with the development of the traditional high streets (Southworth, 2005). The high streets have imitated the shopping malls in terms of the design, being “malled main street” (Southworth, 2005, p. 163). Southworth (2005) stated that the high streets in Europe could be more successful than in the US, due to the short and narrow pedestrian streets in the former and the long streets of the latter.

2.3 The role of safety on the attractiveness of the high streets

Scholars found that safety plays a fundamental role in the attractiveness of the city center (Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019; Teller, Reutterer & Schnedlitz, 2008). Even though Kohijoki and Koistinen (2019) did not find any answer related to consumers’ personal experience, their participants stressed that they have an increased fear of being victimized.

The high streets are characterized as retail agglomerations. Knobon and Oerlemans (2006) defined the agglomeration as a group of businesses within a geographical entity.

The scholars have divided the retail agglomeration into two types: 1) evolved retail agglomeration and 2) created retail agglomeration. The former refers to the “inner-city locations or main streets “(Levy and Weitz 2006 as cited Teller, 2008, p. 381) and the latter is related to the “shopping malls, factory outlet centers, strip malls” (Teller, Alexander, & Floh, 2016, p. 8). This study is focused on the evolved retail agglomeration.

The attractiveness of the city has alarmed the place marketers. According to Teller and Elms (2012), Teller and Reutterer (2008), and Teller, Reutterer, & Schnedlitz (2008) three goals can be reached by the attractiveness of the location: 1) satisfaction 2) retention proneness, and 3) patronage intention. The satisfaction in the high street describes the extent to which the customers are satisfied by the location of the retail stores, the retention proneness refers to the time that the customer spends in the high street and the pleasant feeling of being in the high street, and the patronage intention involves the customer loyalty (Teller & Elms, 2012). Safety can affect the three goals of attractiveness and in turn consumers’ behavior and perception (Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019).

However, changes or improvements on the accessibility, the infrastructure, the atmosphere and non-retail factors such as safety and security can contribute to the attractiveness of the place (Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019; Teller et al., 2010). For example, easier access to the shopping environment can attract more visitors to the downtown area and consequently lead to customer satisfaction (Arranz-López, Soria-Lara, and Pueyo-Campos, 2019). Even though the above factors play a crucial role in the high streets, this paper places in the center of the attention the aspects of safety and security, which are characterized as non-direct factors of the attractiveness of the place (Teller & Elms, 2012).

2.4 The role of external shopping environment on consumers’ perception of safety and consumers’ behavior

The literature has studied the exterior atmospherics of the retail stores and retail areas and has mentioned the role of the atmospherics on the customers’ behavior (Bloch & Kamran-Disfani, 2018; Burns et al., 2010; De Nisco & Warnaby, 2014; Mower et al., 2012; Nghiêm-Phú, 2017; Turley & Milliman, 2000). The exterior atmospherics refers to the “design, materials, color, lighting, music, and scent” that can affect the customers’ buying intention (Bloch & Kamran-Disfani, 2018, p. 198). The exterior atmospherics can

influence, to a great degree, the customers' behavior, and perception of safety in the public spaces (Burns et al., 2010). Bloch and Kamran-Disfani (2018) divided the outdoor atmospherics into two groups: 1) location and surroundings and 2) exterior store architecture. The former includes the imageability, walkability, and ambient factors and the latter refers to the colors, lights, windows, architecture (Bloch & Kamran-Disfani, 2018; Mower et al., 2012).

Many scholars have studied the impact of lighting on the consumers' behavior (Ali & Mubarak, 2016; Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019; Turley & Milliman, 2000). Kohijoki and Koistinen (2019) found that customers relate the lighting to safety and convenience. To be more specific, consumers have an increased sense of security when the place is brightened. However, lighting also creates pleasant feelings and makes the place more attractive (Bloch & Kamran-Disfani, 2018). The above scholars mentioned that lighting seems to be taken into consideration over the nighttime. Consumers visit places, which are bright during the night-times, which in turn increases their intention to visit a particular shopping environment (Bloch & Kamran-Disfani, 2018).

The outdoor atmospherics of the retail location seems to have gained the attention of the scholarly community, which has found that the elements such as the surroundings, lights, windows, and architecture have a great impact on the consumers' behavior (Mower et al., 2012; Nghiêm-Phú, 2017). Especially, consumers tend to patronize places, where there are many lights or exceptional window display or there is a special architecture, which in turn improves the customer experience (Mower et al., 2012).

A considerable amount of studies have been investigating the role of the functional factors of the external shopping environment on consumers' behavior (Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2018; Rahman & Sakip, 2014). The emergence of the automobile cities has played a crucial role and has brought accessibility to the retail areas up (Handy, 1993; Karrholm, 2016). The accessibility is defined "as the intensity of possibility of interaction" (Hansen, 1959, p. 73). The accessibility can be affected by other elements such as the location of the retail agglomeration (Handy, 1993). It seems that consumers tend to visit a shopping area because it is close to their neighborhood and easily accessible by walking (Geurs, Krizek, & Reggiani, 2012). Besides, it has been mentioned that accessibility in the retail environment is very much depending on the socio-cultural aspects such as age, education level, and income. For instance, Arranz-López et al., (2019) showed that young unemployed and low-income people do not use vehicles, but they prefer walking or biking.

All in all, the existing literature review has been focused on the aspects of the external shopping environment such as exterior atmospherics and functional factors which have determined consumers' behavior in the shopping environment. These aspects are also related to the safety issues of external shopping environments.

2.5 The role of safety on the consumers' perception and behavior

Even though safety in the shopping environments has not been studied extensively, implementing a qualitative method, there has been some quantitative studies that have found factors with a connection to safety that is related to the consumer's shopping intentions (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Burns et al., 2010). Especially, they found that consumers' intentions and choices of the shopping environment based on safety reasons are strongly related to the perception towards certain attributes such as the "cleanliness, sufficient lighting, vagrancy" (Burns et al., 2010, p. 53). However, they added that consumers' behavior is less affected by factors such as drugs, street vendors, loitering, a solicitation. Besides, other studies showed that consumers tend not to park their vehicles far within the parking lot, as they feel more secure when they can keep track of it (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). Consumers also tend to avoid shopping during late hours and when there is no light outside, shopping without company, and carrying cash for the purchase (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). However, the same study revealed that people are not very much worried about going shopping along with children to shopping malls. Zanini et al. (2019) explored safety in both shopping malls and high streets and they found that security may play a significant role in the customers' intentions and choices. For instance, they mentioned that it is more likely to shop in the shopping malls than in the high streets because there is an increased feeling of safety in the shopping malls (Zanini et al., 2019).

Several studies have also paid attention to the concerns related to safety in shopping environments (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995; Pain, 1997). To be more specific, most of the people are concerned about their children and if they get lost in the shopping mall or streets (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). The same study revealed that getting stolen in the shopping environment or getting robbed in the parking lot are also concerns that have been mentioned by the majority (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995).

The socio-demographic characteristics such as age, income, gender, education may affect

the consumers' perception of safety and behavior in the shopping environment (Pain, 1997; Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018). Women's perception that they may be attacked in public places has been raised over the patriarchal era (Pain, 1997). This perception may be depending on the women's perception that are not physically able to defend themselves (Ceccato, 2017). Income and education are other socio-demographic attributes that have affected individuals' perception of the safety of the public spaces. People with low levels of education believe that there is high victimization in public places than people who have higher education (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018). Finally, it seems that age seems to have played a crucial role in consumers' behavior, as old people tend to feel less safe than young people (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019).

To sum up, the existing literature that has examined the consumers' perception of safety towards the shopping environments using the quantitative method, pointed just aspects such as cleanliness, lighting, etc. and tried to understand what it is important for the consumers. Besides, socio-demographic factors may affect consumers' perception of safety and scholars have been focused on gender and age, in order to understand the role of them in the consumers' perception of safety. However, this study is focused on the way that aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety and for that reason, a qualitative method is utilized.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, safety-related aspects, which form consumers' perception of safety, the theory of perceived safety, and CPTED are described in order to be used as a ground in the analysis of the findings of the study.

Due to the development of the city centers, the increasing number of retail stores and the ever-increasing attractiveness of the city centers brought up qualities such as safety. According to Burns et al. (2010), the most significant issue is not the level of criminality in the cities but the consumers' perception of safety towards the streets.

The feeling of intimidation and unsafety can have a great impact on the consumers' experience and in turn shape consumers' perception of safety towards the shopping environment (El Hedhli, Chebat, & Sirgy, 2013). Scholars have studied the customer experience in the retail context and have mentioned the importance of safety in the customer experience (El Hedhli et al., 2013; Singh & Sahay, 2012). Singh and Sahay (2012) found that one of the determinants of the customer experience is safety and security. Customer experience has been defined as a "holistic in nature and involves the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical responses to the retailer." (Verhoef et al., 2009, p. 32). It was witnessed that customer experience can have different shapes and attributes in the retail sector such as promotion experience, pricing experience, brand experience, supply chain management experience, and location experience (Grewal, Levy, & Kumar, 2009). In this study, location experience is more relevant, however, other experiences can also form consumer's perception of safety indirectly. Retail scholars have highlighted location as a fundamental element that has a great impact on the consumer's perception of safety (Grewal et al., 2009; Singh & Sahay, 2012). In turn, consumers' perceptions will determine the shopping environment that consumers will patronize (Grewal et al., 2009).

The journey of customer experience is filled with several points, where the retail stores and the customer interact (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). These points have a significant impact on consumers' perception of safety, consumers' choices, and satisfaction. In this study, it is worth mentioning the brand-owned touchpoint, as it includes two aspects that can also form consumer's perception of safety, word of mouth, and media (Stephen & Galak, 2012). The brand-owned touchpoint is controlled by the managers and the retailers and designed for the customers, to shape and enrich their customer experience (Lemon &

Verhoef, 2016). This touchpoint consists of conventional advertising such as media, social media, and loyalty programs (Baxendale, Macdonald, & Wilson, 2015; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Stephen & Galak, 2012). However, it is noticed that media can form consumers' experience by exposing them to unsafe events or creating the conditions of safety (Milam, Furr-Holden, & Leaf, 2010). Stephen and Galak (2012) divided the media that form customers' perceptions throughout the customer experience into three categories: 1) paid 2) owned and 3) earned. The paid media include the marketing activities that are planned by the firm such as e-mail, social media, the owned refers to the marketing activities that are also organized by the company such as visual merchandising, etc., and the earned media is related to activities that are generated by the customers itself such as e-word of mouth and reviews (Stephen & Galak, 2012).

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the criminal activity in the cities has a great impact on the reputation of commercial areas. Many famous incidents in the world caused brand relocation such as the event of September 11th in the US (Coaffee & Rogers, 2008). Such events can form consumers' perception of safety in a certain area and in-turn to have a great impact on the attractiveness of the area (Coaffee & Rogers, 2008). Merrilees, Miller, and Herington (2009) found that safety is an issue that has been considered in low-income cities more than in high-income cities, which have already a brand attitude. Cities that have had popular events invest in placing brands in commercial areas, to strengthen the stores' image (Coaffee & Wood, 2006). Also, it has been mentioned that the brand location is an important aspect of the cities' image and vice versa (Kavaratzis, 2004). It seems that safety and security can impact commercial areas in many ways, formulating people's perception, cities' image, and stores' image, placing safety in the epicenter of the discussion among retailers and local authorities.

Finally, Burns et al. (2010) mentioned that the consumers' perception of safety does not always represent what happens in reality. However, there are different opinions and perceptions of what safety consists of (Pain & Townshend, 2002). Several aspects form consumers' perceptions regarding safety in the cities such as knowledge about the area, familiarity with the area, neighborhood, etc.

3.1 Perceived Safety

Consumers' perceived safety can be formed by individual attributes such as age and

gender, previous experiences, familiarity with the environment, present people, etc. (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018; Ferraro & Grange, 1987). The perceived safety is divided into two main categories: 1) perceptual factors 2) socio-demographic factors (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). Perceptual factors will be used, to answer the research questions. Socio-demographic dimensions are taken into account in order to understand the variation of the opinions.

3.1.1 Perceptual factors

Perceptual factors seem to have played a significant role in the formulation of people's perception of safety and security, as they are based on individuals' values (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). For example, individuals' perception that certain locations are criminogenic may form individuals' perception of safety towards that location (Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018). This perception is shaped by aspects such as the presence of people. The presence of people in the location can form individuals' perception of safety, however, the absence of people may lead to insecurity (Chebat et al., 2010). Individuals think that when they are surrounded by many people, they can ask for help in case of being victimized (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). Especially, females avoid visiting retail areas, when the peoples' flow is low (Kuruvilla & Joshi, 2010). However, the presence of people in the shopping areas may also be seen by the consumers as an aspect that might expose them to unsafe events during the shopping journey (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). This aspect depends on an individual's behavior and characteristics (Chebat et al., 2010).

The consumers' perception of safety is also depending on the number of victims of crimes or the information about victims, (Peiser & Xiong, 2003). Especially, the high population from different countries and backgrounds in the cities as well as the non-stable crime rate can also determine consumers' perception towards the city, even though there might not be crime cases (Peiser & Xiong, 2003).

As mentioned above, there are certain groups of people, who may cause the fear of crime or non-safety, depending on those people's reactions and individual characteristics (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Chebat et al., 2010). To be more specific, "gangs, panhandlers, and homeless people" can also determine and form consumers' perception of safety based on those peoples' reactions (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019, p. 253). However, new people can also be part of the formulation of the consumers' perceptions, who already

have been visiting the place repeatedly (Sandercock, 2005 as cited Badiora and Odufuwa 2019).

Besides, the perception of the crime rate in the cities is also depending on the familiarity with the location (DuBow, McCabe, & Kaplan, 1980; Ferraro & Grange, 1987). To be more specific, when people live for a long time in an area that is considered that there is high criminality, people believe that cannot be victimized, however, these people tend to believe that other areas that are not acquainted with are dangerous, shaping their perceptions accordingly (Ferraro & Grange, 1987). Besides, the knowledge of the shopping area may form consumers' perception of safety (DuBow et al., 1980). In other words, the rumors or the reputation of the shopping area can shape consumers' perception and successively consumers' behavior towards the shopping area (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Ferraro & Grange, 1987; Kajalo & Lindblom, 2011). On the other hand, familiarity with the environment can also contribute to the formulation of the consumer's perceptions about the public space, which can be determined by the repeated visitations (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2011).

Finally, another element that might form people's perception of safety in the cities is the exterior environment. For example, in areas where there are "litter on streets, vandalism, run-down building, or few neighborhood communication networks" (Peiser & Xiong, 2003, p. 580), people believe that they might be victims of any crime. This is also related to the cleanliness of the shopping environment. As Burns et al. (2010) found, the cleanliness of the shopping environment is very much related to the fear of crime and in turn to the consumers' perception of safety. A clean as well as a non-clean shopping environment can determine consumers' perception of safety (Burns et al., 2010; Warr, Feldman, Tacticos, & Kelaher, 2009).

To sum up, the previous research on the perceived safety is of importance for this study, as it has focused on aspects related to perceptions and safety, which will be needed to answer the research question and fulfill the research aim of the study.

3.2 Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The concept of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) was introduced in the twentieth century by Jacobs, Jeffery, Newman, and Appleton (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). This concept involves the relation between safety and environmental

design, more specifically, a pleasant environment may result in a high “sense of safety” (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019, p. 250). The CPTED refers to “territoriality; target-hardening; defensible space; access control; image and management/maintenance; activity support; and surveillance” (Ekblom, 2011, p. 8). The CPTED is a critical concept for this study, as it studies the relationship between safety and environment that will be investigated further in this study.

Territoriality is provided by designing the spaces and giving the “sense of ownership” (Cozens et al., 2005, p. 331). Individuals react as if they are guardians (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). Even though it is difficult to define the territoriality and it may vary based on the “culture, neighborhoods and individual groups” (Cozens et al., 2005, p. 331) and it contributes to the dominance of safety. In this study, territoriality is being mentioned in order to have an overview of what CPTED theory consists of.

What is more, surveillance is divided into three groups: 1) informal/ natural 2) formal/ organized 3) mechanical (CCTV) 4) mechanical (lighting) (Cozens et al., 2005).

The natural surveillance refers to the natural signs or informal guardians that can avert potential criminals (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1999). Among the natural signs, trees, windows, doors, buildings, lighting has gained interest (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019).

The formal surveillance refers to the planned measures and actions that can be taken by the “shop keepers and security guards” (Cozens et al., 2005, p. 332). However, it also includes parking lots, where have been traced to many crime cases (Cozens & Love, 2015).

Besides, mechanical surveillance refers to the CCTV system and lighting, which have been extensively studied by scholars (Honest & Charman, 1992; Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010c). It has been found that CCTV is a significant tool that has been mostly used in shopping centers, to prevent any unpleasant incident (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010c). The CCTV system can formulate consumers' perception regarding the safety in the urban commercial centers and especially, women and elderly's perception, who believe that CCTV system is an important precaution in the urban cities (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). According to Honest and Charman (1992), there is a high acceptance of the CCTV system by people as well as authorities. People are concerned about the criminal activities, but the installation of CCTV would minimize the fear of crime in the shopping areas and in turn shape consumers' perception of safety (Bennett & Gelsthorpe, 1996; Sedat, 2015). However, not everyone agrees on the CCTV installation. There are people, who believe that might be misused, lowering the quality of life (Honest & Charman, 1992). These

consumers believe that their life is being controlled and watched, affecting their rights and liberties (Honest & Charman, 1992). Besides, that could also lead to the misinterpretation of social activities (Sedat, 2015). For instance, if someone talks with a wanted person, the police might consider that person as involved in criminal activities too.

Lighting is another aspect that has been mostly mentioned as a tool that can attract consumers to the shopping centers (Burns et al., 2010; Kohijoki & Koistinen, 2019), however, lighting can be used as a guard in the nighttime as well as in the daytime (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). The daytime lighting and the lighting in the nighttime, which is a necessary tool, seems to contribute to the forming consumers' perception of safety (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). What is more, the study of Painter (1996) showed that lighting can contribute to the prevention of unsafe events in public areas. It is worth mentioning that lighting installations can determine the perception of safety in the public area (Painter, 1996). However, the role of lighting during the nighttime is more crucial, as it can attract people to visit the high street during the evenings (Cozens et al., 2005). Furthermore, lighting is also related to socio-cultural dimensions. Especially, women feel that lighting is a major need in the public areas, however, both women and men started visiting more often places after the lighting installation (Painter, 1996).

To sum-up, CPTED is a system that includes many important aspects of shopping environments such as CCTV and lighting, to ensure safety during the shopping experience. In addition, these aspects seem to be relevant to one of the themes that are sought to be researched, the attributes of the environment, fulfilling the research aim of this study.

4. Methodology

This chapter aims to analyze the philosophical perspectives of the study, the research approach that was followed, and the sampling that was chosen by the author. Besides, it provides in-depth information on the data collection and data analysis of this study. This chapter ends with ethical considerations and limitations.

4.1 Research philosophy

The philosophical considerations are critical in the research of the social sciences. The epistemological perspective in social science examines what is considered as acceptable knowledge and it arises questions from principles and procedures (Bryman, 2012; Jessor, Colby, & Shweder, 1996). The aim and the research questions of this study are associated with the epistemological position that leans towards the interpretivism, where the natural science and the social science are split, and the social action is placed in the epicenter of the discussion (Bryman, 2012). This study focuses on the consumers' perceptions of safety towards the shopping environment of the high streets, interpreting and trying to understand humans. At this point, it is important to mention that the author seeks to understand the consumers' perception of safety with a sociological interest. For that reason, the results of this study show the main focus on the consumers' perception in relation to safety issues, placing humans in the epicenter.

On the other hand, the ontological perspective delves into whether the social phenomena, such as the safety in the shopping environments, are independent entities that have an existence external to social actors or they are made up of perceptions (Bryman, 2012). This study follows constructivism, which supports that social actors are contributing to the continual achievement of social phenomena (Bryman, 2012; Tuli, 2010). In this study, constructivism implies that the social interaction between the consumers and other people or places will contribute to the social phenomena of the consumers' perception of safety towards the shopping environment of the high street. Additionally, that helped the author to fulfill the research aim of the study and to understand how different aspects form consumers' perception of safety towards the high streets.

4.2 Research approach

The research approach refers to the relationship between the theory and the research (Bryman, 2012). This study follows the abductive approach (Bernard & Bernard, 2013). The abductive approach does not comply with the deductive nor the inductive approach explicitly. However, the abductive approach is a combination of elements of the deduction and induction without following them strictly (Lipscomb, 2012). To be more specific, the researcher, who follows the abductive approach, seeks theories that will serve as a guideline, however, the researcher also seeks new themes that will come up throughout the research process (Bryman, 2012). In this study, the author used the theory of perceived safety, CPTED, and themes such as familiarity, attributes of the environments, etc. as a guideline for the research process. However, the researcher conducted and analyzed interviews, to answer the research question and sought to contribute to the theoretical field of consumers' perception of safety towards high streets by bringing up new themes. The abductive approach was considered as the most appropriate one, to further research existing aspects, improving our understanding and the knowledge and explore the way that consumers form their perception of safety. With that said, the author was able to answer the research question and find out the importance of safety issues in the retail sector.

4.3 Research design and quality

Reliability and validity in the qualitative research seem to have been discussed among the researchers but they have not yet concluded to one definition. For that reason, there are alternative criteria such as credibility, transferability, etc. that will help us to understand whether the method used is reliable and valid. Credibility is one of the aspects that make up the trustworthiness of the research (Bryman, 2012). The credibility ensures that the researcher collected the data and conducted the research based on good practice (Bryman, 2012). In addition, credibility implies that the researcher presents the findings of a social phenomenon to the social world to confirm that he or she has fully understood the social phenomenon (Patton, 1999). The technique that has been utilized, to ensure that the research is credible is the respondent validation or member validation (Bryman, 2012; Silverman, 2013). In this study, the researcher informed interview participants regarding what was discussed during the research interview, to ensure that the author understood the

social phenomena.

Furthermore, other criteria that were used, to evaluate the qualitative research are transferability and confirmability. The transferability entails that the researcher provides what Geertz calls “thick description” (Bryman, 2012, p. 392), which means that the researcher should provide a detailed analysis. In this way, the study will be able to be transferred to other similar contexts or the same context that will be applied at a different time. In this study, the author analyzed in-depth the data collected, to ensure that the study can be utilized by other researchers in the future, creating a big database. All 17 interviews were analyzed as will be explained below, starting from coding to creating themes and analyzing each theme by finding relevance to the existing theory.

Confirmability refers to how the researcher stands during the research process (Chowdhury, 2015). The researcher should not involve personal values but should ensure the objectivity towards the research (Bryman, 2012). The author of this thesis kept the personal values and opinions away from the research process, to assure the quality of the research. Also, the researcher of this study provided different opinions and experiences that were collected during the interviews and analyzed both, to assure the confirmability of the study.

Finally, reflexivity is a criterion that ensures the quality of the research used in social science research. The researcher needs to reflect on the “methods used, values, biases, decisions for the knowledge of the social world” (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). In other words, the researcher contemplates his/her background and beliefs regarding the topic, to minimize the subjectivity of the analysis of the findings. To be more specific, the topic was chosen based on the author’s interests in safety and place development of retail. After long research on the official journals, the researcher found that high streets have lost consumers’ attention, due to the ever-increasing focus on the shopping malls. However, this setting has raised a long discussion among the retailers as well as the urban planners. The author was not acquainted with this specific topic before this study, however, after reading several articles on journals, the researcher became familiar with it. Besides, I had little knowledge of retail place development from a previous course attended, which inspired me to further research high streets.

4.4 Data collection

The data collecting method that has been utilized in this thesis is the semi-structured interview. Interviews will contribute to the fulfill the aim of the study, by giving more insight into consumers' perception of safety, which can only be studied through interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study and it was considered as the best fit, as they give the participants the room to elaborate on their answers, bringing up new themes and the interviewer to ask follow-up questions, following the interview guide. The author stands neutral in the study by following standard rules and the interview guide but also giving little room to the interviewees to elaborate on the topic discussed (May, 2011). In this regard, the author of this thesis considered the semi-structured interview as the most appropriate to explore how aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety towards the high street. In addition, the semi-structured interview was chosen, as it gives the flexibility to the interviewer to make comparisons of the participants' answers and understand the content of the interviews (May, 2011). In this study, the author was able to analyze the data and compare the participants' answers in order to explore the way that aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety towards high streets. Therefore, the author would be able to fulfill the aim of the study and get a deeper understanding of how consumers formulate their perception of safety.

Data collection is the most significant part of the research, as it helps us out to answer the research question of the study (Bryman, 2012). For that reason, I wrote 18 questions as an interview guide, however, more questions were asked during the interviews. The interview questions related to the topic were carefully formulated, to cover a wide range of themes. The questions were formed based on the previous theory, using some key elements such as familiarity, crime, attributes of the environments, CCTV, and lighting. As mentioned, the study follows the abductive approach, so I formulated the interview questions, having in mind what the theory has studied regarding the safety issues. However, I sought to bring up new aspects that form consumers' perception of safety. The interview guide was used as a guide in the interview process, but it was not followed strictly, as different follow-up questions were asked based on the participants' answers. However, the interview guide assures that the interviewer collected similar data (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). The interview guide includes some general questions such as personal information (age, background, place of residence), etc. and more specific questions related to the topic researched follow such as how the familiarity with the location affects them and if they had any previous insecure experience, etc. These questions were formulated broadly so

that the interviewees do not omit information that would be valuable for the study and the author would be able to understand how these aspects form consumers' perceptions, and consecutively what it is important for consumers. Narrow questions would restrict interviewees' answers, ignoring important information for the author.

Three pilot interviews were conducted before the data collection, to be sure that the interview questions are in the same line and follow-up each other, developing the discussion and getting gradually into the main concepts of the topic. After the pilot interviews, I noticed that the questions needed to be improved, as they were not fully understood by the interviewees and they often asked for clarifications or they led the discussion to other themes than the topic researched. For that reason, I made the questions clearer by also giving some explanation of the concepts.

Due to the current global health situation and according to the authorities' recommendations, most of the interviews were conducted electronically via Facebook without using cameras, as asked by the participants. Only two of them were conducted face-to-face, due to the proximity of our places. The interviews were recorded by mobile phones. The digital interviews seemed to have some technical issues with recording, by making the process a little bit more difficult, however, without affecting the data collection and the result of the study. Specifically, the connection was sometimes weak, however, the problems were solved by the interviewer at the beginning of the interviews before the discussants get into the main questions of the topic.

The participants scheduled the time for conducting the interviews, to be sure that the participant had the amount of time to participate in a long-lasting interview. The interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes to 1 hour. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher provided the interviewees with a short description of the topic researched and the aim of the study. Also, the interviewer informed the participants that there is no need for previous scientific knowledge, to be able to take part in. By providing detailed information, the researcher tried to avoid any misapprehension with the interviewees. The conversation had a smooth flow and only a few questions were asked for further explanation by the interviewees. Especially, the concepts of the topic such as safety, familiarity with the people, and location, were further explained to the participants, who were not aware of them. The interviewer did not interrupt the participants and let them elaborate on their answers. Few participants led the conversation to aspects of the topic, which according to the interview guide were supposed to be asked later. However, the interviewer followed the interviewees' flow, so that the interviewees do not get distracted

and forget to mention valuable information. Moreover, the interviewer covered all aspects of the topic, however, some participants mentioned more aspects than those included in the interview guide, so the interviewer asked additional questions regarding these aspects such as the role of the brands in safety, etc. For that reason, the interviews differ slightly from each other, however, the main aspects of the study were discussed.

Besides, all transcriptions were conducted at first online and where it was needed manually, without having any effect on the result of the study. The digital interviews made the transcription a little bit harder, as the online website cannot transcribe non-clear recordings. To be more specific, all transcriptions were made online on <https://otter.ai/>, however, the website could not transcribe Swedish words such as streets and brands mentioned by the interviewers, and different pronunciations of the interviewees, so these parts were transcribed manually. That did not affect the result of the study, as the author lives in Sweden and is aware of the main shopping districts in the cities of Helsingborg and Malmö as well as of the known brands. Regarding the pronunciations, the author's social circle consists of international citizens and is familiar with pronunciations from people from different cultural backgrounds. However, the transcriptions were double-checked for any misspelling and for other issues that arose, as mentioned above, due to the online recording. Furthermore, the transcribing website used offers up to 3 interviews for free. Due to the financial limitations, the author used different accounts, to have free access.

The digital interviews are more convenient for both interviewer and interviewees, as they do not squander time to meet at a particular place. However, a drawback of the digital interviews compared to the face-to-face interview is that the interviewer is not able to understand when the participant has completed his/her answer or when the participant wants to add information. This caused few double voices in the recordings, however, the transcription of the records was made right after the interviews, so the author could remember the flow of the interview, ensuring that the result of the study will not be affected.

4.5 Data analysis

The aim of the thesis, as it is presented in the introduction, is a deeper understanding of the consumers' perception of safety towards high streets. Especially, a deeper

understanding of themes explored by the theory such as familiarity with the people, familiarity with the location and attributes of the environment as well as the exploration of new themes. The following steps were followed, to answer the research question and fulfill the research aim.

Firstly, after the data collection and transcription, I applied the thematic analysis, for the analysis of the data collected. The thematic analysis is the most frequently used in the qualitative method, to sort the information into themes (Bryman, 2012). I went through the interviews several times, to get an overview of the whole data collected and become familiar with it. Keeping in mind the research aim and the research question, I took some notes from each interview, to make the process of creating themes easier, while being focused on the main aspects that are being explored such as familiarity with people, familiarity with the location, attributes of the environment and searching for new ones. One of the strategies followed in the thematic analysis is “Framework”, which is an index that includes themes and subthemes related to the topic researched (Bryman, 2012). For this study, I made a “Framework”, which helped me to understand and analyze the data collected. Especially, in the index, I wrote on the left side the pseudonyms of the participants and on the topline the themes discussed. Then, on each square, I wrote the relevant quote under the relevant theme. Next, I sorted the data out into relevant themes, based on the answers under the same interview questions and the similar or different perceptions of the same theme discussed. In the thematic analysis, the researcher is recommended to look at “repetitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors and theory-related material” (Bryman, 2012, p. 580). Accordingly, I searched and put similar answers among different respondents under the same theme as well as similar or different answers that are related to aspects researched. The relevant themes were chosen based on the concepts that have been studied by the existing literature as well as based on the research aim and research question of the study. However, themes that did not answer the research question were omitted and considered irrelevant. The answers were organized into themes based on the aspects that this study is focused on and new aspects that were brought up by the respondents. Interviewees’ answers were often related to external aspects and motivations such as the cost of transportation, opening hours, however, I kept the focus on the research aim and the safety issue. To be more specific, I searched and I found sentences, which indicate how consumers experience, what they prefer and believe such as “*there are people who just look like ...*”, “*...It makes me feel somehow worried*”, “*I rather prefer...*”, “*I have been familiar with*”. In addition, I found words related to the

themes researched. First, for the theme of the social background, I found words such as “*like homeless*” and “*intoxicated*”, which indicate the social status of the people and “*they might be people*”, which indicate the familiarity with the people, which is the concept used from the theory. For the theme of the cultural background, I found words such as “*different countries*”, which indicate the diverse cultures of people. For the third theme of the number of people, I found words such as “*fewer people*”. For the next theme of neighborhood, I looked for words such as “*it is close to my apartment*”. For the lighting and CCTV system, I tracked words such as “*more lighting*” and “*comfortable with cameras*”. Also, the cleanliness was indicated by phrases such as “*lots of plastic bags*”. Finally, for the theme of branded shops, I detected words such as “*fast fashion brands*”. Besides, I also found sentences and understood that the interviewee is bringing up a new theme by sentences such as “*Where I go shopping there are many fast fashion brands*”, as they talked about themes, for which they were not explicitly asked. Instead, they were asked by some general questions such as “Do you have any other criteria related to safety issues?”. Differences were traced by sentences, which indicate the opposite opinion from the majority of answers such as “*I have heard rumors, I wouldn't go*”. Finally, the themes are: *Social background, Cultural background, Number of people, The neighborhood is the secure area, Lighting as a security guard, CCTV as a security guard, Cleanliness keeps insecurity away, Brands as security guards*. These categories and their relationship were formed by the material collected. The above process assisted me to summarize and conceptualize the data analysis, in the discussion of findings. After the coding and following the epistemological and ontological perspectives, I present the data, including a description of the summary of the data, quotes of the interviews, grounding on the existing theory, and interpretations of the material collected. The interpretations include the reflections of the author on the material presented. With that said, the author answered the research question and led the reader through the analysis, in order for him/her to fully understand the data collected.

4.6 Sampling

The author of this study chose the purposive sampling. According to Bryman (2012), the researcher does not decide on the sample participants, randomly but in a strategic way. The most relevant participants to the research topic are chosen based on the time they

lived in Skåne Region. I interviewed 17 people, who live and shop in the Skåne Region (10 in Helsingborg and 7 in Malmö) for at least two years. Most of the participants lived two years, however, four of them have lived for over two years. Additionally, the participants study or work in Sweden, and they go shopping in the main high streets in at least one of the cities researched. Some of them live in a different city than the one they usually go shopping in, so they could reflect on more than one of the cities and make comparisons. The participants go shopping regularly in these cities. It was considered that participants who lived for at least two years and they visit often the cities researched, have had the chance to experience safety-related issues to answer the interview question and in turn help the author out to answer the research question. I also chose a wide range of ages, from 24 to 47, as the socio-cultural attributes influence our perceptions, so I could collect different opinions and experiences, which can lead to a variation of themes. In turn, the variety of themes can contribute to the theoretical field and enhance our understanding of the existing knowledge and fulfill the aim of this study. However, even though this thesis is not focused on the socio-cultural perspective, but it is important to keep it in mind when someone studies the topic. The interviewees have similar backgrounds, especially, all of them are at least bachelor's degree holders in the field of Business and Management. So, the interviewees were able to have a better understanding of the concepts discussed.

All in all, the main criteria used were the time lived in Skåne Region, the shopping frequency in the high streets in Helsingborg, and/or Malmö. Additionally, age and gender were taken into consideration. With that being said, the author could collect valuable information from the participants, who have had previous and frequent shopping experiences in the cities researched. It was considered that the participants, who fulfill the above criteria could help the author out to explore the way that aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety, understanding the role of safety in the retail sector.

The author found the participants by asking people in the social network that meet the criteria described above. Also, I contact with the participants via Facebook, due to the governments' instructions regarding the diminishment of the spread of the pandemic. I asked questions such as how many years they have been living in Sweden, where they go shopping, how often they go shopping, and how old they are, to ensure that they meet the criteria. In the table below, the participants' pseudonym, age, residence, shopping location, and the date of the interview conducted is briefly demonstrated.

Order No	Pseudonym	Age	Residence/ Shopping location	Interview Date
1	Thomas	30	Helsingborg	08/04/2020
2	Venetia	28	Malmö	09/04/2020
3	Carolina	25	Malmö	09/04/2020
4	Sebastian	47	Malmö	12/04/2020
5	Ben	38	Helsingborg	12/04/2020
6	Danae	30	Helsingborg/Malmö	29/04/2020
7	Margarita	27	Helsingborg/Malmö	29/04/2020
8	Stefan	31	Malmö	01/05/2020
9	Eric	26	Malmö	02/05/2020
10	John	27	Helsingborg	07/05/2020
11	Adrian	29	Helsingborg	08/05/2020
12	Nova	23	Helsingborg	08/05/2020
13	Sofia	28	Malmö	10/05/2020
14	Sam	27	Helsingborg	13/05/2020
15	Kate	23	Helsingborg	15/05/2020
16	Mela	24	Helsingborg	19/05/2020
17	Maria	30	Malmö	24/05/2020

4.7 Ethical Consideration

Ethics have been taken into account in this study. All participants were aware of the ethical considerations of the interviews. When I contacted the participants, I informed them regarding the ethical considerations of the material collected from the interviews. Especially the ethical considerations of this study consist of the anonymity of the participants, the purpose of conducting the interviews, and the publicity of the material collected. Speaking of ethics, the British Sociological Association mentioned “personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential” (Bryman, 2012, p. 143). Before I initiate the interviews, the participants were also asked whether they would like to take part in the interview process. Also, participants were ensured that their anonymity will be respected in this study. For that reason, the names of the participants are not included in the study, however, pseudonyms are used, to facilitate the analysis process.

Besides, the interviewer informed the participants that the interview is being conducted only for academic purposes. Also, the participants were asked regarding their consent to record the interview and use the data transcribed in this study. In addition, they were aware that their participation in the interviews is voluntary and they can ask to discontinue the interview at any time. Lastly, I informed interviewees that this study will be published on the Lund University's website.

4.8 Limitations

This study is being investigated considering few limitations. Firstly, this thesis investigates the consumers' perception of safety towards the high streets with a focus on the case of Sweden. The country is chosen based on the empirical gap founded by the author as well as the residence of the author. Researching a location, where the author has lived, allows asking follow-up questions and specific questions related to the certain locations in Helsingborg and Malmö. Nevertheless, due to the limited time and financial support, the researcher could not research more Swedish cities, so the results do not reveal the consumers' perception of safety in the whole country, as each city has different characteristics. That means that the results of the study are limited to the cities of Helsingborg and Malmö and cannot be representative of any Swedish city. Exploring consumers' perceptions of residents of many cities could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic in this certain geographical area. However, the researcher was able to research the biggest cities of the Skåne region (Helsingborg, Malmö), which have more developed high streets, where the residents have more influences and probably experiences.

Besides, the number of interviews conducted is limited to 17 and the criteria for the sampling chosen were not many, due to the limited time and financial resources. The interviews were conducted in a short time from the time I contacted the participants, so they did not have the time to prepare for the interview. However, this could not affect the result of the study, as the interview questions did not require any previous knowledge.

Furthermore, for this study, a single data collecting method has been implemented, as the use of other data collecting methods such as observation makes it difficult to fulfill the aim of the study. Specifically, consumers' perceptions cannot be observed. Also, no information was found regarding consumers' perception of safety in the Skåne region, in

the official websites, and official social media webpages of the cities of the Skåne region. With that being said, the document analysis was not possible to be applied to this study. Even though the single data collecting method allowed me to focus on the analysis of the interviews and obtain deep insights, the use of multiple methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Especially, if official online information was available, the study would have covered a wider range of sampling and obtained results that would strengthen the aim of the study.

Lastly, it is also of paramount importance to make clear that this study is focused on both clothing and grocery shopping, as consumers can find both in the high streets. In addition, the focus on one kind of shopping could not change the result of the study, as the focus of the study is safety issues in the external environment of high streets.

5. Results and analysis

To answer the following research question and fulfill the aim of the study, the author analyzed the data collected. **RQ:** *How do aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety towards the high streets?*

The data collected is analyzed to provide an in-depth analysis, answer the research question, and improve our understanding of each theme. To be more specific, as it is mentioned in the introduction, the study purposes to find out and analyze the way that aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety. The themes presented are organized following and keeping in mind the existing theory, which was used as a guideline throughout the research process. This choice also serves the abductive approach, which was followed by the author. Therefore, the themes are ordered as followingly: first, aspects less analyzed by the previous theory such as familiarity with the people (*Social Background, Cultural background, Number of people*), next, familiarity with the location (*The neighborhood is the secure area*) and the attributes of the environment (*Lighting as a security guard, CCTV as a security guard, Cleanliness keeps insecurity away*). Finally, themes that interviewees brought up are presented (*Brands as security guards*).

5.1 Social background

The presence of people from different social backgrounds seems to have played a significant role in the formulation of the consumers' perception of safety towards the high streets. As it is mentioned above, high streets are social entities, where there is high social interaction (Carmona, 2015; Johnstone, 2012). Consumers who visit high streets interact with other consumers as well as with visitors. Commonly, consumers come across people who have a different appearance or social behavior. Those people's appearance or reaction is usually not acceptable by the consumers, who look for a pleasant shopping journey. The majority of the interview participants mentioned that the social background of people, who come across the high streets usually can form their perception of safety towards the high streets. One participant, who lives in Malmö mentioned that some people, who walk or stand in the high streets, make her feel uncomfortable during the shopping journey. She said that it is just their appearance that however, she still goes to the high street for her

shopping, being more careful or changing the way.

Carolina said that:

“if there are people who just look like homeless, I would question the area a different way and it would make me uncomfortable because sometimes they might be people who are intoxicated.” (Carolina, Malmö)

Most of the time, it is people's presence, which can shape consumers' perception of the level of safety of the high streets. In turn, the theory of perceived safety highlights that consumers are usually afraid of people, who have particular appearance or characteristics, they are either homeless or they take drugs (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Chebat et al., 2010). Even though consumers might feel intimidated by their presence and behavior, they still patronize the high street. It seems that consumers perceive differently the social background. Interview participants mentioned several examples in order to describe people who have a different social background. For example, they pointed beggars, people who take drugs, homeless, etc. The distinguishment of people with different social backgrounds depends on the socio-cultural dimensions of the consumers such as gender, age, income, educational level, etc. For instance, women might mention the presence of homeless people, however, men might believe that people, who take drugs are those, who have a different social background, forming their perception based on them. In addition, the socio-cultural dimension can also explain their way consumers form their perception. For instance, it seems that woman feel intimidated in the public areas and believe that can easily be victimized, however, men think that can handle any insecure event because of their physical construction. As it is mentioned by the theory, the socio-cultural aspects can also form people's perception of safety (Pain, 1997). The socio-cultural aspects explain further the way that the presence of people from different social background form consumers' perception of safety.

Furthermore, apart from the socio-cultural dimensions, consumers' experiences can also play a crucial role in the forming of their perception towards the high streets. Consumers who have been witnessed or been part of an insecure event in the high street will form a certain perception of safety towards a certain high street based on their beliefs and individual values. According to the theory of perceived safety, one of the factors that can form consumers' perception towards a shopping environment is the perceptual factors,

which refers to the individuals' beliefs and values (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). Badiora and Odufuwa (2019) and Chebat et al. (2010) stressed that certain peoples' behavior or even individual characteristics can create a feeling of insecurity in the shopping environment. One respondent, who lives and shops in Helsingborg described an insecure event. He said that when he was walking in Söder, few guys stopped him and asked him whether he needs drugs or he is selling drugs, making him feel scared.

John stated that:

“On the way to the supermarket, there are lots of small shops around and sometimes people just gather together or argue or maybe fight with each other...It makes me feel somehow worried.” (John, Helsingborg)

However, even though, consumers believe that a certain shopping area is not safe because of the presence of people who come from different social backgrounds, they still patronize the high street. It can be said that reasonable prices and the particular shops, which are located in the high street can be consumers' motives. However, these indirect aspects cannot influence the forming of consumers' perception of safety towards the high street.

Summarizing, consumers can form their perception of safety even by the presence of people with different social backgrounds, which can lead to an unpleasant shopping experience. People's appearance and individual characteristics are enough to shape their perception during the shopping experience. Even though they have not seen people taking drugs or being active in criminal activities, their appearance can form consumers' perception of safety. In short, the consumers don't need to be involved in any criminal activity or antisocial action to form their perception of safety towards the high street. However, behind the forming of the consumers' perception of safety, several socio-cultural aspects explain further the way that consumers shape their perception.

5.2 Cultural background

Another way that consumers form their perception of safety seems to be the way they perceive people who come from different cultural backgrounds. Due to the globalization,

the people's movements have been rapidly increased, affecting the retail sector as well. Especially, consumers interact with people from a different cultural background in the high streets. This interaction can form consumers' perception of safety. Many respondents mentioned the cultural background of people, who walk, stand, or shop in the high street. Consumers might have a negative impression on certain high streets, however, the size of the cities allows them to patronize different high streets, to avoid an uncomfortable incident, which might involve them in an unpleasant event. In turn, Peiser and Xiong (2003) highlighted that the presence of people from different countries or backgrounds usually makes them feel unsafe. However, their presence is enough to make people feel insecure in the shopping environment, even when no criminal activity or unsafe event is occurring by people who come from a different cultural background, consumers formulate their perception of safety (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Peiser & Xiong, 2003). Similarly, Sebastian noted that there are many people with diverse cultural backgrounds that make them feel that something is going to happen, influencing his perception towards a certain high street. For that reason, Sebastian prefers not to go to these shopping high streets.

“In the high streets in Malmö, there are many people from different countries...There are two shopping districts in Malmö, and I am a little bit afraid of going there.” (Sebastian, Malmö)

Also, Nova mentioned:

“I avoid those immigrants standing like too many people in the high streets, so I avoid that.” (Nova, Helsingborg)

Moving further, people who move to another country expect to come across only with people from that country. Having experienced insecurity in their own countries, the presence of different cultural backgrounds leads them to believe that they will experience similar insecure events. Besides, interview participants come from diverse countries, where they might have been influenced by the media. Having heard by media that Sweden is a safe country, it leads them to high expectations regarding the safety level of the country. As the theory mentioned the earned media can be part of forming the consumers' perception of safety (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Even though most of the participants seem to form their perceptions having in their mind

the cultural differences, some interviewees shape their perceptions based on similar cultural backgrounds. To be more specific, consumers who come from the same country or similar culture may also form their perception by the presence of them, which might lead to avoiding behavior. This is a result of the intimidation that consumers might end up involved in any insecure event or be criticized by other consumers or victimized. The knowledge about the culture is also part of the forming consumers' perception when peoples' behavior does not follow the social norms (De Nisco & Warnaby, 2013). Coming from a similar cultural background does not imply that people behave similarly. For that reason, some consumers are afraid of getting involved in any antisocial activity based on the similar culture. This was explained by Stefan from Africa. He said that he does not like to go to a certain shopping street in Malmö because there are a lot of people from different countries. Even though these immigrants are from Africa, where he comes from, he noticed that these people are usually arrested or make problems that he would not like to engage in. Also, he thinks that going there can put himself at risk because it might seem that he is also engaged in these events and he is afraid of getting into trouble. This situation makes him insecure, creating a negative impression towards that shopping area. Moving further, knowing the culture can also be part of forming the consumers' perception of safety, as consumers already know what they will experience. To be more specific, having experienced or knowledge of the culture, consumers simply move their perception of safety from their country to another country. They might also think that it is easier to get involved in a foreign country, as they are the minority and can be easily recognized by the appearance or behavior.

“...I mean, there are mostly immigrants and I'm from Africa as well...I do not want to be tought...I am an African, so I know how we behave and talk. So, I don't want this situation, where I consistently go to a place like this and someone engages me.” (Stefan, Malmö)

To sum up, the above findings show that consumers do not feel comfortable with the presence of people, who react or behave differently in the shopping area, even if they come from the same cultural background as Stefan. In this way, consumers form their perception of safety towards a particular high street. Even the presence of people from different cultural backgrounds can shape interviewees' perceptions of safety.

5.3 Number of people

The number of people with whom consumers come across in the high streets has shown a significant role in the forming of the consumers' perception of safety. Most of the consumers who visit high streets believe that less crowded shopping areas imply safer high streets. Interview participants have formed their perception of high safety towards the high street based on the low number of people who walk or stand in the high streets. To be more specific, consumers feel worried that an unsafe event might happen during their shopping journey, in case there is a high number of people who walk in the high streets. According to the theory of perceived safety, the forming of the consumers' perception of safety is depending on the number of people (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). The presence of people causes a feeling of insecurity in the shopping areas and leads to an unpleasant shopping experience (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Chebat et al., 2010). One of the interview participants from Malmö stated that when he goes shopping, he prefers fewer people walking in the high street, as the high number of people affects him mentally. Similarly, Ben stressed that he doesn't like crowded places, which not only creates the feeling of insecurity but it is also time-consuming when someone is trying to pass through during the shopping journey. Moving further, this implies the involvement of the socio-cultural dimensions. It seems that men prefer high streets, which are not crowded, as they believe that there are fewer possibilities to be victimized. Men do not consider asking for help in case of an insecure incidence but they consider the prevention of the insecure incidence. Due to the perception that men are physically strong, they do not consider that might be easily victimized. For that reason, men think about the avoidance of unsafe events, as they do not want to get involved.

Bin stated that:

“I rather prefer fewer people because it makes me feel safer because we need to hurry...and you're trying to squeeze into a crowd.” (Ben, Helsingborg)

On the other hand, some consumers believe that the high number of people who come across can operate as preventers of any insecure event. However, consumers also believe that it is easier to ask for help in a crowded shopping area. In turn, according to the theory of perceived safety, the number of people present in the shopping area is part of the

forming of the consumers' perception (Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018). People feel safer when there is a high number of people in the shopping area, as they feel that there are enough people to protect or save them in case of an unsafe incident (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). Fewer participants noticed that they prefer crowded high streets, so they can ask for help in case of any insecure event. Besides, they also mentioned that it is less likely an unsafe experience to occur, where many people are walking in the high street because someone would be afraid to cause an insecure event, as there is a possibility to get caught. With that said, the socio-cultural dimensions are also implied in this case. Most of the female respondents answered that they prefer crowded shopping areas, where they can ask for help. As it is mentioned above, there is a perception that women do not have the physical power to protect themselves in case of an unsafe incident. It seems as women believe that there are many possibilities to be victimized, so they think about ways to be saved. So, it can be said that "men see the glass half full and women see the glass half empty". What is more, Danae also related the high number of people with the feeling of safety in the high streets. She said that the high number of people makes her feel more comfortable and in case of an unsafe event in the high street, she feels that she can ask for help.

"I think I would rather have many people around...But there will always be a few who like to take care of people...I would say I would feel so much more comfortable if there were more people in the high street." (Danae, Helsingborg/Malmö)

To sum up, the theory of the perceived safety showed the twofold role of the number of people in the shopping areas (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). It seems that the consumers based on their values are influenced differently by the number of people. However, even though the most expected answer might be the high number of people, social norms are changing, and people seem to believe that the least number of people, the more secure area.

5.4. The neighborhood is the secure area

Neighborhood and location seem to be of paramount importance in this study. The forming of consumers' perception of safety seems to be based on familiarity with the

location. To be more specific, the consumers' perception of safety are depended on where the high street is located. For instance, high streets that are placed in or near the consumers' neighborhood can form their perception, leading to patronize intentions. One of the aspects that have been in question in this study is the familiarity with the location. Ferraro and Grange (1987) mentioned that an area that is considered dangerous and there is a lot of discussion about its criminality can shape consumers' perception of safety, who live in that area. Also, Ferraro and Grange (1987) stressed that people feel safer in shopping areas, which are located near their neighborhood, as they feel familiar with the area and they have already formulated a particular perception of safety towards the shopping area. It seems that consumers even though are concerned about the high level of insecurity in their neighborhood, the convenience might also have played a role in their perception of safety. To be more specific, consumers use to prioritize convenience, as they believe that they will either not be victimized or they will survive in case of an insecure event. The limited-time of everyday life does not allow consumers to consider other shopping areas, which are not located close to their neighborhood. Also, socio-cultural dimensions should be taken into consideration, as it seems that most of the women replied that familiarity with the location is playing an important role in their perception of safety.

Maria mentioned:

"I like the fact that I have been familiar with the area and that now I know exactly where shops are. And there have been times where you can meet the same people from your neighborhood." (Maria, Malmö)

Four of the respondents, who live in Helsingborg highlighted that the main reason for visiting Söder, the south area of the city, which has been characterized by the participants, as the one with a high level of criminality, is the proximity of the shopping area. To be more specific, it is apparent that participants of that area patronize the high street because it is part of their neighborhood, which leads to a feeling of safety. Even though there is a high level of criminality according to the interview respondents, the fact that they live in that area minimizes the feeling of insecurity. However, they take into consideration also other motives. Moreover, there are many advantages under the aspect of familiarity with the location that respondents take into consideration such as financial and time limitations. People do not have the time to visit other high streets placed outside their neighborhood.

Kate noted that:

“...it is close to my apartment and usually I don't have the time to go to other places...When you have very limited time and you don't have many options plus taking the bus every day costs a lot of money” (Kate, Helsingborg)

As Rahman and Sakip (2014) explored, there is a strong relationship between safety and accessibility and consumers take into account both when they choose a shopping area. According to Handy (1993), consumers' choices are affected by the relationship of both location and accessibility. Consumers visit certain shopping areas because the shopping area is located near their neighborhood (Ferraro and Grange 1987; Geurs et al., 2012). However, familiarity with the location might have a twofold role in the consumers' perception of safety (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2011).

Furthermore, the reputation of a particular shopping area has also played an important role in forming consumers' perception of safety. When consumers do not have any information about the high street or there are rumors about the shopping area form the perception of safety accordingly. Several scholars found that the reputation of the shopping area can shape consumers' perception of safety in that area according to the rumors (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Ferraro & Grange, 1987; Kajalo & Lindblom, 2011). Therefore, consumers do not patronize the shopping places for which there has been a lot of discussion regarding their safety situation. Interview participants stressed that if there are rumors about a shopping area, which they have not visited before, respondents said that they would be intimidated to visit the shopping areas, even though they would like to visit them because of the brands and the prices. Moving further, women often distinguish between places, which are familiar with or unfamiliar with and that has a great impact on the way it influences their perception of safety. To be more specific, as it is presented above and witnessed in the results of the study, it seems that women highlighted places, which they do not have knowledge about and do not to visit for that reason. However, most of the male participants referred to the familiarity with the location only from the perspective of their neighborhood, highlighting how they experience familiarity with their neighborhood in relation to the high streets. With that said, it seems that knowledge and rumors are playing an important role for women when they choose high streets.

Venetia mentioned:

“It depends on that area if it's very familiar to me, or if I don't know a lot of information about that or if I have heard rumors, I wouldn't go there even if I find reasonable prices”
(Venetia, Malmö)

All in all, consumers relate the familiarity with the location with the familiarity with the people. There is an interchangeable relation between these two factors. The influence of one can lead to the influence of the other one. If people are familiar with the location will be familiar with the people and vice versa. As mentioned, in this study, under the “familiarity with the people” is placed, the social and cultural background and the number of people.

5.5. Lighting as a security guard

One of the environmental attributes that have been in question in this study and have played a significant role in the forming of the consumers' perception of safety is the lighting. People seem to experience lighting as a crime preventer in the shopping area differently. The majority of the participants stressed that lighting can work as a security guard mainly in the nighttime. However, it is important to mention that the investigation is conducted in Sweden, where the length of the daytime and nighttime differ compared to other countries. To be more specific, in this study, the interview participants pointed several times the difference in the role of the lighting during the seasons. According to the theory of CPTED, lighting is a crucial dimension of safety and it is considered by consumers when they choose the shopping area (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Cozens & Love, 2015; Painter, 1996). Lighting is an aspect that is taken into account during the nighttime rather than the daytime when there is natural lighting (Painter, 1996). This study showed that an interview participant, Nova, who lives in Helsingborg mentioned that the current lighting system in Söder is an aspect that takes into consideration. However, as she highlighted, the lighting in Söder is not enough for her during the nighttime.

“...it's basically in evenings when it's dark, I would prefer to have more lighting” (Nova, Helsingborg)

Furthermore, the interview process showed that women are those who mentioned the

need for lighting installation in the high streets. They believe that can be easily victimized due to the perception that women are not physically strong. Moving further, the consumers' need for longer opening hours of the store is implied in this aspect. Most of the stores in Sweden have limited opening hours, however, supermarkets and restaurants have prolonged opening hours, which affect customer experience. To be more specific, most of the participants stated that they visit high streets during the nighttime for their grocery shopping due to the limited personal time. Therefore, the limited lighting in the nighttime can be related to the opening hours of the stores. Prolonged opening hours would lead to more lighting and in turn pleasant experience in the high streets.

On the other hand, there are two interviewees, who do not take into consideration the lighting of the shops neither in the nighttime nor in the daytime. However, they also related the lighting with the seasons in Sweden. Especially, in the wintertime, they prefer to go shopping in the daytime, which is a safer time to do your shopping in Helsingborg and Malmö. In the summertime, participants stressed that lighting does not play any role, as the daytime and the natural lighting in Sweden lasts long. The interview process showed that participants who experience lighting in a neutral way are usually men. Most of the male participants seem not to be based on the lighting in order to formulate their perception of safety towards the high street. Due to the perception that men have the physical background to protect themselves, they believe that it is less likely to be victimized.

Sebastian said:

“Yeah, so what I prefer is noon times between 11 to 2 o'clock or 2 p.m. or 3 p.m. not late. But the shops are opening here at 10:00 or 11:00, it is so late. (Sebastian, Malmö)”

All in all, it seems that lighting installation in Sweden is related to the nighttime and the seasons' span in Sweden. Consumers pay attention and consider lighting as an important tool for crime prevention during the nighttime, however, in the daytime as well as in the summer season, natural lighting seems to be enough. Besides, the socio-cultural aspects have also played an important role in the consumers' experience of lighting, showing that the perception of differences between genders is formulating consumers' perception of safety.

5.6 CCTV as a security guard

CCTV system is another aspect that consumers experience in the shopping journey in the high streets, contributing to forming the consumers' perception of safety towards the high streets. It has been highlighted that the surveillance of crimes can be assured by increasing the CCTV in the shopping areas (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). There is a high number of people, who support the installation of CCTV in public areas (Sedat, 2015). Ten interview participants mentioned that CCTV is an important surveillance tool that should be advanced and increased in the shopping areas, especially in those areas, which are facing greater safety issues. People feel safer in shopping areas, where CCTV systems are installed, as it can capture any unpleasant event that might happen during the shopping journey (Bennett & Gelsthorpe, 1996; Honess & Charman, 1992). Five participants, who live in Helsingborg mentioned that in both high streets, Söder and Kullagatan, there is not enough CCTV. Moreover, they highlighted that cameras of the shops in the high streets cannot replace the security guards. However, they believe that the existence of cameras will be able to catch any unpleasant incident in the future.

Adrian stated that:

“...because of the cameras, at least I know that if someone wants to do something to me if someone wants to steal something...at least you know that the camera is going to catch that person...it might stop him from doing something bad...” (Adrian, Helsingborg)

Moving further to this aspect, it can be understood that consumers, who have had previous unsafe experiences stressed the need for CCTV installation in the high streets, as a necessary tool. The previous personal experiences can also play a significant role in their perception. To be more specific, people believe that it is less likely to be victimized and for that reason, they do not take into consideration the necessity of CCTV installation. However, consumers who have experienced insecure events in the shopping areas are usually those who strongly support the installation of the CCTV.

In contrast, the installation of the CCTV system raises a lot of discussion about privacy protection and human rights. Honess and Charman (1992) found that there is a limited number of people, who are not in favor of the installation of CCTV systems in public

areas. These people believe that their life is being controlled by the authorities that impinge upon humans' liberties and rights (Bennett & Gelsthorpe, 1996; Honess & Charman, 1992). This is what seven interview respondents stressed. Especially, they pointed out that the CCTV is against human rights and it raises critical privacy issues that should be taken into consideration by the local authorities. Besides, monitoring consumers' life results in reducing the life quality of consumers, who walk in the shopping areas (Sedat, 2015). Four of them live in Helsingborg and three of them in Malmö. The supporters of this opinion mentioned that they feel that they are being controlled all the time, which increases the feeling of stress and anxiety and in turn influences their customer experience and perception in the high streets. For instance, one participant said that CCTV systems should be installed in order to catch any insecure event, however, he believes that CCTV works against privacy, as he feels that his life is being controlled during his shopping.

Eric also noted that:

“To be honest, I don't feel very comfortable with cameras, it's like Big Brother” (Eric, Malmö)

Moving further, consumers are also afraid of getting involved in criminal activities through the CCTV system. A recording of the cameras might reveal that the consumers have witnessed a particular criminal action, getting involved without their consent. It is the fear of getting into trouble, which shapes a perception against CCTV installation in the high streets. Also, there is always a fear of how the recordings of the CCTV are used and whether they protect individuals. For instance, in case a criminal activity becomes a piece of big news on the media and social media, consumers would be worried about the reveal of their faces that would also lead to troubles, affecting their private life.

All in all, as it has been found, the CCTV system is part of the formulation of consumers' perception of safety, as it is also part of the customer experience (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). It is apparent that the influence of CCTV is twofold, which shows that consumers perceive differently the attributes of the environment based on their values. For the majority of the respondents, it seems that the CCTV installation is a positive measure, however, for a considerable number of interviewees this measure put in question the privacy protection and human rights. Over the last year, people are more and more concerned about privacy in general and it seems that this concern is also passed on the

shopping environments, affecting the customer experience.

5.7 Cleanliness keeps insecurity away

Cleanliness is an aspect that most of the interview participants mentioned and especially those, who live in Helsingborg. Especially, respondents pointed out that the non-clean atmosphere in the high streets lead them to believe that there is high possibility for an insecure event to take place. According to Burns et al. (2010), cleanliness is one of the aspects that consumers take into consideration when they visit a shopping area, which can also influence consumers' shopping experience. To be more specific, consumers tend to feel less safe in the shopping areas, where there is a lot of chaos, and streets and shops are dirty, influencing their perception of safety towards the particular shopping area (Warr et al., 2009). A dirty high street implies for the respondents that the authorities do not take care of it and there are no rules taken by the government, which will not allow the dirtiness and in turn any other issue that might arise in the high street. In a vandalized area or in a shopping area, where there is litter on the streets, people tend to feel that might be victimized or that some criminal activity is possible to happen (Peiser & Xiong, 2003).

Moreover, interview participants said that the lack of cleaning strategy has led to the ever-increasing number of people who sell drugs, guns, etc., relating the cleanliness to crimes and consecutively presenting it as an aspect of the safety strategy of the shopping areas. Also, Ben stressed that in the Söder area, there is a lot of chaos and the shopping area is not clean, which also led him to think that criminal activities are more likely to happen in this case. However, Ben still patronizes the high street, as the reasonable prices seem to be attractive.

He stated that:

"...nobody's going to clean up all this kind of chaos and it probably is not really safe to go to the shop because the city doesn't care. They just let people buy guns...It's not safe to jump there" (Ben, Helsingborg)

Dirty high streets, which are considered as expensive and safe, even if they are dirty people do not witness it, as they are appealed by the other aspects such as visual merchandising of the shops. Most of the respondents who related the cleanliness to the

safety strategy live in the south part of the city of Helsingborg, which it is considered as an low income area. For an area, which is already handling safety issues, it is easier consumers to mention and witness issues. However, for the expensive shopping areas or high street with many branded shops there is already a perception of safety due to the image that branded shops create for the certain high street. It seems that store image as well as high street image has already shape consumers' perception of safety. The maintenance of cleanliness in those high streets is considered as it is quaranded. However, if the is not a standard cleanliness, consumers will overlook the cleanliness issues due to the high street's image.

Also, respondents highlighted the dirtiness of the high street of Söder. They mentioned the plastic bags, the rubbish, which also come from the open market in the high street affect his feeling of safety in the high street.

John said:

“Gustav Adolf torg is usually very dirty. I do not know why. Maybe because there is an open market or something...There are always lots of plastic bags and rubbish, standing on the road, which I think is not really nice to see in the street.” (John, Helsingborg)

Finally, it seems that the environment of the high street plays a significant role in consumers' perception of safety. However, the familiarity with location is again part of the consumers' perception of safety. People who go shopping in the high street where is located in their neighborhood usually overlook the cleanliness of the place as they are used to come across litter and rubbish. However, it is easier for people who are not familiar with the location to mention such aspects, as they do not come across in a daily basis. It is also depended on the standard of cleanliness of someones' neighborhood. If consumers is clean, he/ she will believe that other shopping areas should keep similar standard of cleanliness in order to provide a secure place.

All in all, this aspect seem to be related to safety as well as to familiarity with the location. The maintance of the cleanliness has been part of the consumers' perception of safety, which can also influence consumers' experience in the high streets.

5.8 Brands as security guards

Last but not least, the branded shops located in the high streets seem to part of the customer experience, formulating the consumers' perception of safety. According to Lemon and Verhoef (2016) media, which implies the marketing activities of the retail stores can affect consumers' experience. The owned media, which include the visual merchandising of the retail store may affect consumers and create conditions of safety or unsafe in a certain location (Milam et al., 2010; Stephen & Galak, 2012). Consumers' perception of the safety and attractiveness of the shopping area is very much related to the brands located in the shopping area (Coaffee & Rogers, 2008). Many times, authorities have increased the number of brands located in commercial areas because their image has been affected by criminal incidents (Coaffee & Rogers, 2008), increasing the feeling of safety and getting the consumers back. Four of the interviewees consider the visual merchandising of the retail stores in the high streets, as an important aspect, which shape the image of the high streets. They mentioned that the known brands make them feel that the location is safe. The known brands have the financial support to invest in the exterior atmospherics, to attract customers. Especially, Thomas highlighted the role of the known brands in the high streets, showcasing the way he experiences safety. Thomas said that he feels safer in Kullagatan because there are a lot of brands that follow certain standards regarding the maintenance of the shops inside and outside. That gives the feeling of security, in comparison with the Södergatan, where there are no famous brands.

Similarly, Mela mentioned that:

“Where I go shopping there are many you know, fast fashion brands, which I know that they take care of the environment in and outside” (Mela, Malmö)

Moving ahead, it seems that branded shops have already built on the trust between the customer and the shop. Apart from the investment in the visual merchandising, which contribute to customer experience, it is apparent that consumers trust the branded shops. Consumers who already have identified themselves with the brands, do consider that the particular shop will create the security conditions to protect the customer. Having worked on the trust between the customer and brand has played an important role in the perception of safety towards the high street.

All in all, brands located in the high street seem to have an important role in the consumers' perception of safety. As mentioned above, safety and security can determine

and affect the place branding (Kavaratzis, 2004). This implies that brands can work as a preventer of insecure incidents, showcasing that the choice of the brands' location has deeper meanings for the consumer. Interviewees showed that brand location does not only serve consumers' conveniences, but it is very much related to safety conditions in the high street.

6. Discussion of findings and conclusion

Conclusions and reflections of the data analysis will be discussed in this chapter of the study. Next, the managerial implications and future recommendations are presented.

This study aims to explore the way that aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety, in order to improve our understanding of how consumers experience safety issues in the high streets. It also purposes to understand the role of safety for consumers during the shopping journey in a particular shopping context such as high streets and the importance of safety in the retail sector. The existing literature review led us to the following question: *How do aspects of the external shopping environment form consumers' perception of safety towards the high streets?* After the analysis of the data collected, the discussion of the above findings is presented.

To begin with, consumers come across people from a diverse social and cultural backgrounds in the high streets, influencing the customer experience. Even the presence of people, who seem to have a different social background and without seeing any criminal activity can be part of the formulation of consumers' perception of safety. Accordingly, the theory of perceived safety supports that consumers' perception of safety is formed by people's characteristics (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). This study improved our understanding of the role of the social background of the people, who come across in the shopping areas, in the retail sector regarding the safety issues.

The cultural background of people, who walk in the high streets seems to have a great influence on consumers' experience in the high streets. Cultures that consumers are not acquainted to create a feeling of insecurity. In turn, Peiser and Xiong (2003) also highlighted the multicultural shopping environment that consumers might experience can form consumers' perception of safety. Nevertheless, it seems that it is not only people from different cultural backgrounds (Peiser & Xiong, 2003), as the previous theory highlighted but people from similar backgrounds, which can lead to insecurity. Consumers are afraid that they will be easier involved in other peoples' activities, due to a similar cultural background. Knowing the culture also forms consumers' perception when peoples' behavior tends to lead to action that does not follow the social norms (De Nisco & Warnaby, 2013). This study showed the twofold role of the cultural background in the retail sector, improving our understanding of the phenomenon in question, adding to the theory of perceived safety, and showcasing the importance of safety for consumers.

Besides, the number of people who walk in the high street seem to form consumers' perception of safety in the high street in different ways. Some consumers mentioned that they feel safer in the high street, when there are a lot of people, as they feel that someone can help them in case they will be victimized. Ceccato and Tcacencu (2018) and Badiora and Odufuwa (2019) also stressed that the high number of people on the consumers' perception of safety can influence and formulate consumers' perception of safety. However, some other consumers prefer a limited number of people, as the high street will be less chaotic, so there will be fewer possibilities to be victimized. The twofold role of this aspect in the public areas was also mentioned by the theory of perceived safety (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). Similarly, consumers' perception of safety is formed in the context of high streets, emphasizing the role of safety issues in the retail sector. However, this study also showcased the overlapping relationship between the familiarity with the people and familiarity with the location, which is analyzed below.

Another aspect, which consumers experience in the high streets and in turn form their perception of safety, is the neighborhood. Consumers visit the high streets, which are located in their neighborhood, regardless of criminal activities. The perception that the location is safe is boosted by the familiarity with their neighborhood. DuBow et al. (1980) and Ferraro and Grange (1987) highlighted that knowledge about the location can shape consumers' perception of safety. In order for consumers to feel familiar with the location, they also need to feel familiar with the people, who shop in the high streets. In this study, it is found that knowledge about the area, where the high street is located is also part of forming consumers' perception of safety, improving our understanding of this factor. However, this study also highlighted the interchangeable relation of the people and the places, enhancing our knowledge of these factors.

Besides, lighting is another aspect that this study analyzed. Consumers believe that lighting is an important aspect during the nighttime, however, during the daytimes, the natural lighting is enough to make them feel safer. Cozens & Love (2015) and Painter (1996) also pointed out the importance of lighting in the shopping areas in the nighttime. This study showed that the lighting is also considered by consumers in Sweden, as the daytime and nighttime differs in the winter and the summer in Sweden, improving our understanding of the role of lighting in relation not only with the time but the season too in the consumers' perception of safety.

Regarding the CCTV system, consumers would prefer to have more cameras in the high streets, in order to decrease or prevent the criminal or non-legal action in the high streets.

In turn, the theory of CPTED refers to the CCTV system, as an important tool that can prevent the non-legal action in the public areas (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019). However, it is important to mention the privacy and human rights issues that emerge from the installation of the CCTV system in the public areas. Consumers believe that cameras interfere in their private life, having a feeling of being controlled during the shopping journey. Honess and Charman (1992) also mentioned the emergence of privacy issues by the CCTV installation. This study showed that privacy issues have a significant role in the context of shopping areas and especially in high streets, enhancing our knowledge about the role of CCTV in the retail sector.

The cleanliness seem to be part of forming consumers' perception of safety in the shopping areas (Badiora & Odufuwa, 2019; Burns et al., 2010). Consumers believe that the authorities that ignore the cleanliness, will not take care of the prevention of non-legal activities in the shopping area. Warr et al. (2009) also stressed the importance of the cleanliness of the shopping areas for consumers. Also, consumers who live in the same neighborhood with the high street usually overlook the maintenance of cleanliness. This aspect showed its relation to familiarity with the location, improving our knowledge of the cleanliness in the security issues of the retail sector.

Ultimately, another aspect that consumers experience in the high streets and is part of forming their perception of safety is the branded shop in the high streets. To be more specific, the existence of brands in high streets has a significant role in the consumers' perception of safety. Coaffee and Rogers (2008) highlighted the relation of brands and safety in the commercial area, however, this study enhances the understanding of the role of this relation in the consumers' perception of safety.

Furthermore, from the data analysis, it is noticed that there is an interchangeable relation between some aspects. Consumers relate familiarity with the location to the familiarity with people. Specifically, consumers perceive as safe high streets, which are located close to their neighborhood, as they can come across with people, they feel familiar with.

All in all, returning to the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis, it is now possible to mention that safety in the shopping context such as high streets plays a crucial role in the consumers' perception. This study has shown how diverse aspects can form consumers' perception of safety in the high streets. The location seems to be of importance, playing an important role in consumers' perceptions based on the characteristic of the high street. However, individuals' characteristics are also considered by consumers and seem to form their perception of safety. The present study has been one

attempt to thoroughly examine consumers' perception of safety, enhancing our understanding of the role of safety in the consumers' perception and in turn, the importance of safety in the context of high streets.

6.1 Societal relevance of findings

As mentioned, high streets are spatial entities, where there is high social interaction between the social actors (Carmona, 2015; Griffiths et al., 2008). That is also witnessed in the findings of this study. Especially, in this study, under the "familiarity with the people" can be placed in the following themes: social background, cultural background, and the number of people. These aspects imply that there is a high social interaction of consumers with other consumers.

To begin with, consumers' perception of safety even by that the presence of people, who look like they are involved in criminal activities or people from different cultures and traditions are formed. Also, Peiser and Xiong (2003) mentioned the role of people from different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, it was found that consumers perceive a place as non-safe by people, who come from similar cultural backgrounds too. This implies that the high social interaction of consumers in the shopping area of high streets shows that perception of safety is formed even without seeing any criminal activity or behavior. It also shows that social actors such as consumers do not need to directly communicate with each other but their interaction can also be indirect and still be able to form consumers' perception of safety.

Also, the number of people is another social aspect mentioned in this study. It seems that some consumers prefer a high number of people in the high street to perceive the place as safe, however, there are consumers, who perceive as insecure a shopping area with a high number of people, as they believe that they can easily be victimized. Therefore, it seems that some consumers prefer higher social interaction with other people in order to perceive the high street as safe. However, other consumers believe that the lower social interaction, the higher safety. Badiora & Odufuwa, (2019) also highlighted the twofold role of the number of people towards the shopping areas.

Furthermore, it is found that familiarity with the location can form the way consumers perceive safety. However, consumers relate familiarity with the location to familiarity with the people. Especially, it was found that in order for consumers to perceive the high street

as a secure place need to feel familiar with the people, who shop in the high street. This implies that the interaction of the consumers with the places is driven by the social interaction of consumers, showcasing the high societal relevance of the findings.

All in all, the communication of the social actors in the high streets is of paramount importance for consumers. Specifically, the social interaction of the social actors, which in this study are the consumers, determines how the consumers will perceive safety towards the particular high street. The above themes showed the high societal relevance of the findings as well as the societal relevance of the topic researched in general.

6.2 Methodological reflections

After analyzing the data, it seems that the method utilized was able to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of consumers' perception of safety in the high streets. In the semi-structured interview, the follow-up questions gave the participants the chance to elaborate and share their experiences in the high streets, which have been valuable for the outcome of this study (May, 2011). Besides, the collected data showed the different opinions of the interviewees regarding the number of people, the neighborhood, the CCTV, etc., which showcased the twofold role of them. That helped the author to make comparisons between the answers and understand the data collected (May, 2011).

On the other hand, the topic of safety is a sensitive topic, which also consists of other sensitive aspects such as criminality, social and cultural issues. Interview participants tried to be objective and honest in their answers. However, they might have hesitated to share additional personal experiences and opinions, considering total privacy, or feeling ashamed, even though anonymity was ensured at the beginning of the interview. Nevertheless, a possible interviewees' hesitation cannot affect the result of this study. This study sought to understand the role of safety in the retail sector through opinions and experiences that interviewees think are necessary to share in order to further explain their opinions and perceptions and it did not seek to reveal participants' personal and sensitive information.

6.3 Managerial implications and future recommendations

As stated, this study aimed to give more insight into how aspects of the external shopping

environment form consumers' perception of safety. Also, it purposed to understand the role of safety in the retail sector. This study can also be utilized by urban planners and retailers to improve customer experience and successively reach customers' satisfaction and improve the attractiveness of the high streets.

Firstly, this study showed the importance of the CCTV system, which should be taken into consideration by the managers in the main cities of Skåne (Helsingborg and Malmö), in order attract even those consumers, who hesitate to visit a high street, which has no or limited CCTV system. Additionally, it is of paramount importance to take into consideration the privacy policy and follow the updated legislation regarding human rights. It seems that a considerable number of people are concerned regarding the privacy policy of the CCTV system in the high streets. However, it could be effective if the managers were cautious about the installation of the cameras and the places that they could be installed. Moreover, managers need to inform the consumers regarding the limitations of the legislation and the privacy policy that is followed by the retailers and urban planners.

It is worth mentioning that brands seem to have a significant impact on the consumers' perception of safety in the high streets. This aspect should be taken into consideration by urban planners and retailers. Both parties need to work, to have a variety of shops in high streets. It would be of importance, if the urban planners have an equal number of branded and non-branded shops in the high streets, contributing to a high standard of safety in all high streets.

The results of this study have several significant implications for further explorations by the researchers. Firstly, it is recommended to explore further the role of brands in the consumers' perception of safety in the shopping context of high streets. This study brought up an aspect of safety through the interviews conducted, which can be further researched, in order to improve our understanding of the brands in the high streets in relation to safety issues. Especially, it is also recommended the place branding and how it would form not only consumers' perception of safety but also consumers' choices in relation to safety issues to be further researched.

Furthermore, another aspect that is recommended to be investigated is the role of the CCTV system in the consumers' perception of safety. It seems that the legislation regarding the privacy policy has concerned many people and it is a contemporary issue that is of importance to be explored by the researchers, contributing not only to the theory but providing significant insight to the managers, to handle the current complex situation.

Furthermore, future research is recommended to explore how to minimize the privacy issues that interfere and what would that result in consumers as well as retailers.

All in all, it is worth exploring further any of the aspects of the external shopping environment that have been mentioned in this study and do an in-depth analysis of each of them, contributing to the knowledge and the theory of safety in the shopping context of the high streets.

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8. Appendix

Semi-structured interview guide

1. Could you tell us about yourself? How old you are, where you are from? Are you studying or working in Sweden?
2. Where do you currently live? And in which area?
3. Are there any specific criteria based on how you chose that area?
4. What do you like, or you do not like about your neighborhood?
5. How often do you go shopping?
6. Where do you usually go shopping? And why?
7. Do you have any specific high street you prefer for you shopping for your groceries and clothing?
8. Have you ever experienced any insecure incident on this high street?
9. Is it a common practice in this area or it just happened once?
10. How did that experience change your perception towards the high street?
11. Do you feel safe in any area that you choose to shop in?
12. What are the characteristics of the environment that increase or decrease your feeling of safety? How that influence your perception of safety towards the high street?
13. Do you feel that cameras and lighting would change your attitude towards shopping in that area?
14. How does familiarity with the people affect your perception towards the high street?
15. How does familiarity with the location affect your perception towards the high street?
16. How do you feel when you shop in an unknown area with a few people?
17. When you choose a high street to shop do you have any other criteria related to safety issues that may affect your feeling of safety?
18. What would you like to recommend to the local authorities for future improvement and development of the safety strategy on the high streets?