



LUND UNIVERSITY  
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# **What is the role of pop-up stores in a multichannel environment?**

A study on understanding how pop-up stores affect the experience that customers receive and the relationship they share with retail brands.

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# Abstract

**Title:** What is the role of pop-up stores in a multichannel environment? A study on understanding how pop-up stores affect the experience that customers receive and the relationship they share with retail brands.

**Supervisor:** Ulf Elg

**Examiner:** Ulf Johansson

**Keywords:** Multichannel, Pop-up stores, customer experience, retail, customer-brand relationships

**Thesis purpose:** The present study aims to investigate the role of the pop-up stores of retailers on the customer experience in a multichannel environment and how this addition can affect the existing relationships between the customers and the retail brands who operate this type of retail stores.

**Methodology:** Social constructionism is the view that has been adopted for the present research, with relativism being the approach that has been selected to gain a greater understanding of the experiences and beliefs of the interviewees through the meanings of their responses. For that reason, the research method that has been selected is qualitative research.

**Theoretical Perspective:** The present research has been based on the theory of the consumer-brand relationship, with some adaptations being made to its implementation. We aimed to identify differences in the relationships between the consumers who interacted only with regular channels of a retailer who did not. The differences in the relationships proposed by this theory would indicate how the addition of this new channel has affected the relationship between consumers and brands.

**Empirical Data:** The empirical data for the present research have been collected through in-depth interviews with the respondents of our research being asked questions that belong to the same themes in order for the data to be comparable. The interviews were semi-structured and adapted when necessary to divert from the primary lines set to catch the different approaches of the participants.

**Conclusion:** Our research found that the addition of the pop-ups as a new channel, even though its ephemeral, has an impact on the experience of the customers with the majority of them, neglecting its ephemeral character and giving it a new role that expands one of the regular physical channels of the retailer for the coverage of more basic needs, regularly, for as long the store would remain open. Another thing that has been revealed is that the pop-ups were seen as an expansion of the already existing offering, something that was a result of its novel character, premium location and size that has been seen as something positive by the customers who as it has been seen experienced a shift in their relationship with that specific brand towards a more committed and stronger one.

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# 1 Introduction

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*The introductory chapter gives a first overview of what pop stores are, how important they are to a business, and how important they are in a multichannel environment. Besides, reference is made to their increasing use by many companies. In addition, there is a discussion about the research problem, which developed through our research into various scientific articles and led us to identify a gap in the literature. At the end of the chapter, there is an extensive report on the purpose of the research and the research questions we want to answer through this research.*

## 1.1 Background

Just think about how different the retail sector is today compared to fifteen or even ten years ago. The scene today is very different compared to previous eras, mainly due to the technological revolution. We live in an age where information and technology are constantly changing and evolving, with the result that competition in all lengths and breadths of the economy becomes more intense compared to the past. This is no exception for the retail sector (Chen & Lamberti, 2016). Keep in mind how different the whole consumer experience is since there are now many different channels through which consumers can shop what they need.

For this reason, companies are looking for different ways to pique the interest of their potential customers and improve the level of experience they usually provide. Consumers have access to an infinite number of products due to the internet, a fact that raises their demands, so at the same time, the pressure on companies is increasing. Imagine a consumer, before going to a store, checking the internet for reviews related to a specific product, then looking at the availability of this product in the stores in the area. All this from the comfort of their own home. We are facing a new form of retail with various other formats. Thus, we understand that we live in an age where the use of multiple channels in the consumer process is paramount for companies and consumers.

Furthermore, as Lemon and Verhoef (2016) mentioned, consumers today have the versatility of having direct contact with businesses through multiple points, which means that their overall satisfaction is judged to be more complex. This is the reason companies set their sights on creating the ultimate customer relationship and experience. According to Schwager and Meyer (2007), customer experience results from all those contacts a customer has with a company. These contacts can be direct or indirect. Companies today apply multichannel methods to

properly follow the changing environment to offer a better experience to their customers. At the same time, they are working in order to create strong links between companies and consumers; previous research has shown that the firms' value offered to the customers across multiple channels is better than the value offered to them by a single channel, creating more committed customers loyal to a brand (Chen & Lamberti 2016). According to Ailawadi and Keller (2004), the role of different channels now incorporates both the role of transactions and creating and maintaining relationships.

The firms that are not providing multiple options channels for the customers to purchase their products may risk losing some of them because of that lack of available options; this shows how important it is for firms to offer more channels-options (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005). Nowadays, customers have the opportunity to interact with one single firm through multiple channels that range from Bricks and Mortar to Websites (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005). In the same article, we see the example of "Shop.org1", which stated that one-third of their customers had used three or more channels for their purchases, almost two-thirds of the participants of this study were positive towards using multiple channels for their purchases (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005). Grewal (2019) brings the concept of Integrated customer experience, where different channels are designed to provide a concise customer experience while expanding the already existing one by giving more options to the customers, buying, interacting, or even getting informed.

The customer experience's importance is based on the fact that with the correct implementation and effective combination with each company's overall strategy, a significant comparative advantage is automatically created compared to other companies that do not follow this approach (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016). Furthermore, In the multichannel environment (Valos, Polonsky, Geursen, & Zutshi, 2010), although different channels offer different values, they offer a combination of services that can benefit the customer and give them a better customer experience. According to Ganapathy (2017), through a multichannel strategy, the firm has the opportunity to offer a continuous and consistent experience of higher quality than just interacting with them through one channel, by giving them the ability to choose how to interact with the firm based on what is more suitable for them. Grewal (2019) states that although the multichannel environment promotes an interconnected environment, the store itself and its experience make a difference and create loyal and committed customers, while all the work mentioned above is complementary to that.

According to Rigby (2011), almost every 50 years, there is something new and impressive in the retail sector that changes consumer habits and customs. We live in an age where everything in retail is changing rapidly; the fast-paced environment forces companies to change their mindset and offer something new to their consumers to achieve absolute satisfaction (Rigby, 2011). The pressure from the business environment is immense since the majority of companies place the customers at the epicentre of their efforts while, at the same time, the demands of consumers have increased, resulting in the need to focus on consumer value creation. As a result, companies are forced to find new ways to strengthen their customer relationships with the brand (Zogaj, Olk & Tscheulin, 2019).



The competitive environment in retail has led many firms to look for different ways to reach and interact with their customers. After reading an extensive amount of literature concerning the importance of having different channels that firms use to reach their customers, it is helpful to introduce the concept of pop-up stores, which is a relatively new phenomenon. As pop-ups' we consider the specific type of store that starts and ceases to operate and consequently exists after a short period (Rosenbaum, Edwards & Ramirez, 2021). Furthermore, with a predefined lifespan, this specific type of store belongs to the overall category of experiential marketing (Spena, Caridà, Colurcio, & Melia, 2012). Financial uncertainty, as well as for continuous growth, have made the presence of pop stores necessary. Specifically, space is secured through these stores since these are stores of temporary nature (Steele, 2018). The Pop-ups' importance can be seen because it constitutes a market of approximately 50bn dollars (Steimer, 2017). The pop-ups offer a different shopping atmosphere and value to the customers because they include different touchpoints that are easily installed since they are ephemeral (Zogaj et al., 2019).

Prior research on the topic revealed that pop-ups provide to the retailers that use their various advantages. Some of the advantages of the pop-ups are the following. Rosenbaum, Edwards and Ramirez (2021) found that pop-ups are ideal as a promotional tool because, in this way, retailers can provide to the customer's experiences that are generated by the interaction of them with the pop-up that is designed and located in a way that covers this need. Brand awareness and image generated by the customers' interaction with the pop-up is another aspect that makes pop-ups valuable to the customers (Steele, 2018). According to Steele (2018), Pop-ups' ephemeral nature allows the retailers to operate from a different physical spot to build communities without investing the same amount of money as a regular store. Another advantage of pop-up stores is that the retailers can communicate their brand to the customers indirectly in an attempt to bypass their resistance towards conventional brand campaigns (Surchi, 2011). Since they constitute a communication and interaction channel between the consumers and the retailers, the pop-ups' overall experiential character allows the latter to target customers more inclined towards new and innovative customer experiences (Kim, Fiore, Niehm and Jeong, 2010). Furthermore, pop-ups are linked to hedonic experiences because of the sense of uniqueness and exclusivity of shopping in an experience-oriented shop (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). The highlight mentioned above is the importance of pop-ups as a strategic tool with all the advantages and the different ways they are structured than regular retail stores.

## 1.2 Problematization

Having read extensive literature, we understand that the increase in competition and technology developments have sparked immense competition between different retailers (Chen & Lamberti 2016). The retailers' attempt to provide better services and experiences has led them to expand their offerings and enter the battle by competing with their rivals across many different channels. By engaging with the customers across multiple channels, the retailers create stronger bonds with their core stakeholders, and as a result, their customers become more

committed and loyal to the retailer and the brand itself (Verhoef, Neslin, & Vroomen, 2007). In this context of engaging with the customers across multiple channels, and based on the definition of a multichannel strategy, it is rational to think that pop-ups constitute another channel of communication and interaction between the firms and the customers, which in contrast to the rest of the channels is ephemeral.

We, as researchers, believe that the impact of pop-up stores on the multichannel experience and consequently on the relationships that are formed between consumers and retail brands is a topic that needs to be further investigated. Fournier (1998) claims that the relationships affect the customer involved in, psychologically, socially-culturally and relationally, and result from the environment they are shaped in. By examining the impact that the addition of the pop-up store channel has on the relationship that exists in an already existing environment, between consumers and brands, we aim to understand how the already existing relationships change when the environment changes and, in our case when the ephemeral channel of the pop-up stores is added to the existing offering. Our ambition is to expand the current work on pop-up stores and multichannel experiences and, by combining them, identify how the customers use this channel and how the retailers can consequently use it to strengthen their bonds with their customers. Henkel and Toporowski (2021) support that there is a shift of the customers' preferences towards embracing ephemerality, but at the same time, the increase of the influence of the digital channels has pushed the physical stores to adapt to provide unique customer experiences.

Here is the point where pop-ups come to the chessboard. As mentioned above, the increase in competition in the retail sector has led many firms to battle each other in a multichannel environment. The importance that the customers give to the in-store experience is one of the reasons why experiential stores have been so successful (Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros, Schlesinger, 2009); in the case of pop-ups, the ephemeral nature increases according to Henkel and Toporowski (2021), the intention to visit. Many researchers have identified brand awareness and the general creation of a buzz related to the brand as the main effects when creating a pop-up store (Rosenbaum, Edwards & Ramirez, 2021). According to Rosenbaum, Edwards and Ramirez (2021), many different pop-ups exist, ranging from online pop-ups to physical ones and can be used efficiently by multichannel corporations. For our research, we will focus only on the physical pop-up stores. The promotion that can be achieved through those stores of experiential character makes them an effective and highly appreciated interaction channel between the customers and the retailers (Zhang, Dai, Dong, Wu, Guo, & Liu, 2019). Another aspect that is highly relevant and worth mentioning is that customers use different channels to execute different actions when interacting with the brands (Lynch & Ariely, 2000, as cited by Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005). Kumar and Venkatesan (2005) described this as cross-buying, the number of different products that customers buy from a retailer.

Given that different channels are helpful to different customers and selling different products through, it is helpful to support that the establishment of multiple channels helps the businesses and, in our case, the retailers to meet the needs of a diversified audience. Taking all the above

mentioned into consideration, we now understand why retailers engage in the multichannel environment. In the retailers' attempt to battle their competitors while offering their customer's highly valued customer experiences, pop-ups find their place in the overall environment, with their ephemeral and experience-oriented nature making them a critical yet distinct channel.

However, despite the already existing literature that tries to explain why retailers lead retailers to engage in a multichannel level with the customers, we still miss the impact of expanding the retailers offering with pop-up stores. Some researchers have attempted to understand what the pop-up stores offer to the customers, such as Arnolds & Reynolds (2003), when discussing the hedonic shopping experiences that experiential stores offer. We miss the existing literature on seeing the customers' side and how they perceive this new and ephemeral channel in the existing multichannel offering. Furthermore, given that the interaction of customers and brands results in the formation of relationships, it is interesting to see how the pop-ups can affect the already existing relationship.

Fournier (1998), in her theory, claims that the relationships that are shaped by consumers and the brands they use, through lived experiences, the path that a relationship can follow can be different. Fournier (1998) created a framework of six potential paths that a relationship can follow, which show that the strength of a relationship can vary through time by acts of both sides that can define and redefine it. So, by examining how an act created by a retailer (like establishing a new channel like the pop-up store) affects the way customers experience a retailer and how they create bonds with this specific retailer can be very useful for both managerial but also theoretical purposes on the value of pop-up store and the impact they could have.

### 1.3 Research Purpose and research question

An attempt to provide a higher quality of services to their customers has led many retailers to diversify their presence and expand their activities across multiple channels to offer higher value and eventually become more loyal and committed (Chen & Lamberti 2016). In this context of offering retail services across multiple channels to cover a greater spectrum of needs, we find pop-up stores, the ephemeral store designed to provide an interaction between the customers and the retailers based on experience. Due to increasing brand awareness and providing exceptional customer experiences, the pop-ups constitute a different type of channel in the overall context of multichannel strategy-presence of the firms, even ephemeral. Having read a handful of research papers related to pop-ups and their importance in creating brand awareness, buzz and promotion while focusing on the experience of the customers, we did not read fount literature that explains how pop-ups are interrelated with the other channels that retailers operate while engaging in a multichannel strategy. This study will focus only on the physical pop-up stores and how the customers' interaction affects the overall consumer-brand relationship when interacting with them since the pop-up stores constitute an ephemeral channel that exists together with other permanent channels multichannel environment. So by examining

the way customers interact with it compared to the regular channels, we try to identify what this ephemeral channel brings to the customers that the rest of the channels cannot provide in terms of customer experience and the way customers create relationships with those retailers. All in all, given the importance of how customers perceive a specific interaction, the overall analysis will be conducted from a customer perspective. Our research question arises in the desire to investigate the following:

RQ1. What is the role of pop-up stores in the multichannel environment?

RQ2. How do pop-up stores affect consumer-brand relationships?

## 1.4 Intended contributions

Our research aims to contribute to the existing bibliography on the field of retail and specifically on the field of temporary stores by investigating what pop-up stores offer to the customers who interact with retail brands in a multichannel environment as well as try to identify the impact of this new channel to the already existing relationship that they share with the retailers. In our research, reference is made to the early nature of stores, which is why these stores differ from the other channels within the multichannel environment. Based on the existing theory and the theoretical models, we want to show how temporary stores offer additional value than regular channels; that is, the multichannel business model is supported through pop-up stores. To achieve this, we as researchers, decided to proceed with a case study from the furniture industry and a comparison of impressions and experiences between people who visited the IKEA temporary store in Piraeus, Greece, with people who had the opportunity to interact only with the regular channels of IKEA in Greece and Cyprus, was conducted. This practice makes it easier to record impressions about how the customers interact with the retailers' regular channel than those who also interacted with the pop-up. By focusing on these ephemeral channels' contributions, we would like to see how the relationship between customers and brands evolves by this encounter and what the pop-ups contribute. Thus, the contributing findings are theoretical and practical because our findings pave the way for more research in the future. In particular, our research can study further specific aspects of temporary stores, such as how vigilance influences consumer decisions. In addition, our research can be used by retailers in a way to improve some of their practices while at the same time forming a complete view of the ephemeral (pop-up) stores.

## 1.5 Outline of the Thesis

The existing academic literature on multichannel strategy has revealed that retailers adopt such a strategy to set up this new channel of pop-up stores to cope with their competitors'

pressure and provide a more concise customer experience by allowing customers to decide which channel to use for their interaction with the firm. As far as Pop-up stores are concerned, the academic literature is mainly focused on aspects concerning the side of the brand itself, while less emphasis has been put on how this type of ephemeral stores affects the way the customers interact with the brand and how the added value is affected by the presence of ephemeral stores together with regular stores. Thus, by examining two groups of customers, the first with individuals with pop-ups and regular stores and the second only with regular channels, we will identify what these ephemeral stores add to the customer's relationship with the retailers. The method that we will use is Qualitative analysis, based on interviews that will provide insight into the role of pop-up stores in a multichannel environment and how they affect the obtained value when interacting with the retailers. The two groups of people interviewed based on questions that met the needs of the analysis in order for us to be able to identify by following the theory of consumer-brand relationship as proposed by Fournier (1998) to identify specific relationship patterns between the participants of the two subgroups that were resulted by the addition of the new channel, one of the pop-ups. Then follows the analysis of the primary findings, and in combination with the existing literature and the theories, there will be a discussion on our research topic.

## 2 Literature Review

*This section is designed to provide insights into the existing literature covering the most critical aspects of our topic of pop-up store customer experience in a multichannel environment and how it affects the relationship between consumers and brands. In this literature review, we are covering the main theoretical themes of, 1. Contemporary Retail Challenges, 2. Multichannel Retail Environment, 3. Consumer Experiences in Retail, 4. Pop-up stores in a multichannel environment. This chapter aims to help the readers get familiar with the already existing research that has been conducted in the field that we are also covering in this thesis. After presenting the literature that constitutes the basis for our analysis, a brief conceptual framework will be created to explain the frame in which our analysis will be drawn. What we want to achieve with this chapter is to, as we mentioned, help the reader to understand the overall framework while at the same time for us as researchers to spot different perspectives of previous researchers on the topic.*

### 2.1 Contemporary Retail Challenges

The general trend towards globalization has created new situations in the field of retail. Globalization has changed the general form of stores since the vast stores outside the city have made their appearance (Paswan, Pineda & Ramirez, 2010). However, on top of that, we see new changes that push companies to turn into new business models to target the younger generations (Paul & Rosenbaum, 2020). The conditions in contemporary retail provide the image of a market that is currently under fundamental changes that reshape this vital industry; changes occurred by the dominance of the Internet and the willingness of the customers to use this new medium to cover their needs (Haas & Schmidt, 2016) create challenging conditions in retail. Ailawadi and Keller (2004) mention the pressure created towards retailers from private labels and warehouse formats in their work. Pantano and Priporas (2016) also supported the above mentioned, who claim that many consumers use several retail channels in the shopping process while using personal mobile devices while shopping is rising. The importance of multichannel presence is also presented in Jocevski's (2020) work, where innovation and adaptation in this context are mentioned because of the uncertainty for physical stores' role. Furthermore, Zogaj, Olk & Tscheulin (2019), in the same context, highlight the importance of finding new ways to strengthen the bonds between firms and customers due to the increase in competition.

According to Rosenbaum, Edwards and Ramirez (2021), the best way to achieve this is by strategically executing a physical presence. In their work, Roy, Balaji, Nguyen and Melewar

(2017) support that the physical presence can be enriched with elements of the so-called "smart retailing" to provide a higher customer experience. "Smartness" is, according to Adapa, Fazal-e-Hasan, Makam, Azeem and Mortimer (2020), the process from the side of the retailer to increase efficiency and satisfaction towards the consumers.

Taking the above mentioned into consideration, and as Akaka, Vargo and Schau (2015) mention in their work, that the epicentre of the interaction between consumers and retailers can be found in the importance of providing exceptional and novel experiences in a context where we can find the concept of value co-creation, which it derives from the interaction between the two entities. The importance of value co-creation can be seen by the fact that many researchers, as mentioned above, place the interaction between the retailers and the customers as an essential thing in the customer journey and the provision of a new, exceptional and different customer experience is the goal (Pantano & Priporas (2016); Adapa et al., (2020); Zogaj et al., (2019)). Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros, & Schlesinger (2009), in their work, support that the provision of exceptional experiences and experience management, in general, must be in the epicentre of retailers' effort, given the importance that contemporary consumers give to the overall experience. Hagberg, Sundorm and Egels-Zandel (2016) support their work that today's role is to unify all the different services provided to provide higher value for the customers.

The different channels that the retailers handle today have created new shopping behaviours from the consumers' side on searching and executing a purchase and how retailers organize their interaction with the customers (Godfrey, Seiders, and Voss 2011; Venkatesan, Kumar, and Ravishanker 2007 as cited by Bäckström & Johansson, 2017). Research covering a very similar topic suggests that consumer behaviour's differentiation favours non-traditional retailers that offer new and different experiences (Grewal, Levy and Kumar, 2009). The need for better support in terms of knowledge pushes the retailers to seek and provide better service solutions (Burke, 2002). At the same time, the need for new and innovative ideas to attract customers and interact successfully with them goes beyond the role of traditional stores and their already known physical presence (Pantano & Gandini, 2018). What is worth mentioning is that the ongoing developments with the sharp increase in the usage of the Internet and e-commerce and the online retailer's dominance have led traditional retailers to change their attitude towards the overall concept of retail and embrace the concept of experiential retailing (Wertz, 2018).

The willingness of consumers to shop in physical locations remains strong, but what Guiot and Roux (2010) suggest is that consumers seek to have such an in-store experience that combines both the services and the interaction with others. It is an approach that is also supported by Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman, (1994), who claim that the interaction between the customers and the firms in the context of a business environment designed for the consumers can affect their decisions towards the firms. So we believe that since the pop-up stores constitute a physical channel that combines both in-store services and interaction with other people, need to be further investigated and see how they affect people's experiences and behaviour towards brands since they are ephemeral and last only for a specific period. The importance of physical stores in contemporary retail can also be seen in the work of Morse (2011), in the work of whom

we can find the response of Ron Jonson, an experienced marketer, which supports that the competitive advantage of the physical presence of retailers is the opportunity that the customers have to interact also with the products, a feature that online retailers cannot replicate. Furthermore, the integration of the available channels of retailers, both online and offline, will be in the epicentre of the developments in the field (Morse, 2011). The conditions mentioned above align with what Peterson (2017) describes as a "retail apocalypse", where drastic retail changes will impact the whole industry. In their work, Hart and Dale (2014) highlight the complexity of shopping as an activity because of its connection with sociocultural factors.

## 2.2 Multichannel Retail Environment

Contemporary retailers use many different channels ranging from physical stores and online channels and non-store channels, which the customers use in order to interact with them in a way that provides better and well-supported customer experiences (Jocevski's, 2020; Pantano & Priporas, 2016; Godfrey, Seiders, and Voss 2011; Venkatesan, Kumar, and Ravishanker 2007 as cited by Bäckström & Johansson, 2017). As Neslin, Grewal, Leghorn, Shankar, Teerling, Thomas, & Verhoef (2006) state, as a channel, we consider the medium that the customers and firms use to interact, an interaction that is not monodromic but two-sided. Multichannel retailing consists of all the activities that aim at satisfying the consumer through multiple channels (Zhang, Farris, Irvin, Kushwaha, Steenburgh, & Weitz, 2010). Zhang et al. (2010), in their work, also support that the combination of channels is an act of retailers to help their customers cover their needs in a better way. They specifically mentioned that the financial benefits of providing more holistic solutions to the customers had turned single-channel retailers of traditional physical stores, catalogues, internet-based etc., to expand their operations and consequently become multichannel operators (Zhang et al., 2010). The coexistence of channels is convenient for the coverage of different types of needs (Zhang et al., 2010), the store channel allows the customers to interact with the retailer and the products by *using all five senses*" as the authors state, while being able to use other comforts like paying with cash.

On the other hand, non-store channels like the Internet provide the necessities that the physical presence cannot, like flexibility in delivering products based on the customers' needs and a plethora of information before the purchase. The researchers mentioned that despite the positive aspects that multichannel retail offers to the customers, there are also risks like free riding that should be considered. What Van Baal and Dach (2005) wrote, as cited by Zhang et al. (2010), is that while working on the mixed patterns when physical and nonphysical channels exist, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to the retailers' channel usage and how this usage can affect the perceptions and relationships of the customers towards a specific retailer and on the impact on their relationship.

Understanding the consumers' wants to receive an excellent customer experience is essential in modern retail (Russo Spina et al., 2012). Furthermore, as Ganapathy (2017) supports, the



multichannel strategy that many firms follow allows customers to have continuous interaction with the retailers compared to the interaction a single channel offers. The Internet allowed consumers to reshape how they interacted with retailers and allowed them to interact with them in a way that is suited to them (Paul & Rosenbaum, 2020). Rigby (2011) supports in his work that the selection of channels that the customer uses to interact with the firm as a result of his/her personal preferences in order to receive the best possible experience, they want to take advantage of the pros of the available channels both online and offline to cover their needs. Cao and Li (2015) support the usage of many different channels by the customers, pushing them to find a way to understand what makes the customers use multiple channels or even predict a specific preference towards channels in the overall context of providing unified-integrated experiences. This idea is also supported by Neslin et al., (2006).

The concept of integration is both important for businesses and customers; this happens because, for the first, it is usually a matter of practicality, while for the latter, it has to do with the provision of better interaction and experience while shopping (Cao & Li 2015). Valos et al. (2010) highlight the difficulty of choosing the best combination of channels due to the plethora of different alternatives that exist; on top of that, an organization needs to support the selected channels to provide better and integrated services. The provision of excellent multichannel services involves both internal and external factors and online and offline channels. To be more specific, what Valos et al. (2010) mean by that is that the selection of the channels is not the solution by itself; the selection should also be supported by the capability of supporting those channels effectively in order to provide exceptional experiences and of higher quality than the competitors. So, it becomes clear that it is a complex yet essential activity for the organizations because this blending/integration of the available channels are designed and executed to provide the best experience in the most convenient way (Valos et al., 2010).

The offering of better service quality and the ability to lure new customers is what, according to Rangaswamy & van Bruggen (2005), makes the retailers choose to engage with their customers at a multichannel level. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) follow the same line of thought and claim that the interaction between the customers and the brands nowadays happens across many different channels and touchpoints, creating a more complex customer journey. The researchers also stated that the interactions between consumers and retailers are mainly social, so for this reason, as touchpoints, we can consider both touchpoints that are part of a business's spectrum but also other individuals (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Valos, Polonsky, Geursen and Zutshi (2010) support that a firm operating across many different channels should ensure that those channels work simultaneously and collaboratively in a productive way and that there are no conflicts between different channels of the same firm because there is always the risk of channel cannibalization with one channel being promoted while others being underdeveloped.

Verhoef (2012), as cited by Cao and Li (2015), supports that the firms that use many different channels of interaction with their customers should always balance their support towards the channels they operate to achieve a simultaneous provision of services. Furthermore, to avoid the so-called "*channel cannibalization*" by prioritizing one channel in favour of another, what should be done is to take the opportunity that different channels offer in order to achieve higher

customer satisfaction by providing higher services (Cao & Li, 2015). In this context, where retail but also other types of organizations use many channels to interact efficiently with their customers, many researchers have pointed out the importance of the integration of the available channels that exist and that the firms use (Cao & Li, 2015; Valos, Polonsky, Geursen, & Zutshi, 2010). Neslin et al. (2006), in their work, make it clear that the different channels that exist and range from call centres to home shopping add to the overall customer experience that the retailers provide and shape the shopping environment that the customers interact with.

Adding new channels apart from its advantages, and some of them already mentioned above, also has negative consequences. A customer can use the firm's channel at one point during the customer journey but decide to conduct the purchase from another competitor's channel; this is what Nunes and Cespedes (2003) call research shoppers. In their work, Kumar and Venkatesan (2005) support that this type of consumer is present all across the customer journey and not only in the information stage with all the consequences that such a phenomenon can cause. Verhoef, Neslin and Vroomen (2007) had also identified research shopping as a negative consequence of the multichannel strategy. Their research indicated that firms' actions to support their channels could impact customers' choices and deteriorate research shopping. To be more specific, the researchers have identified research shopping as one of the biggest problems of multichannel customers. Through conceptualization and analyses, they found that actions like convenience in searching for information or research-purchase benefits, for example, can actually have an impact on the customers' choice and make them interact and finally conduct the purchase by using the channels of the same retailer and not from its competitor. Zhang, Farris, Irvin, Kushwaha, Steenburgh, & Weitz (2010) explain that multichannel retailing is a phenomenon that is not following a specific linear path and that retailers can start from any channel and expand their operations to other channels. Thus for our analysis, we focus on the pop-up store as the new channel that expands the retailer's offering in a way that disrupts the "linear" customer journey that the customers have when interacting with a retailer, and for that reason, it is considered essential to be investigated.

Zhang et al. (2010) have classified the drivers that make retailers adopt multichannel strategy into three main categories. 1. Multichannel allows the retailers to access new markets by following the line of thought of Neslin and Shankar (2009), who claim that through multichannel strategy, the retailers have the opportunity to expand into new markets by using their nonphysical presence to achieve that, with all the benefits that this has in terms of cost while luring customers through their multichannel presence, which as the researchers claim to spend more than the single-channel shoppers. 2. Satisfaction and loyalty, as a result of the interaction between the two sides by summing the benefits of every single channel that had been used (Zhang et al., 2010). And last but not least, 3. the creation of competitive advantages, by using the different channels in a way to produce non-reproducible assets, such as seamless interaction across channels, or data transfer for the benefit of both the firm and the consumer, to build loyalty and minimize the costs. Zhang et al. (2010) include four central challenges of a multichannel strategy in their work. The first one has to do with the way channels are structured from an organizational perspective. To be more specific, the researchers support that

based on the nature of the products or the services provided, retailers can adopt a centralized or decentralized organizational approach that allows the administrators to control the different channels or those channels to have a certain degree of autonomy, respectively. The second challenge has to do with the usage of data and the need for integrated handling; Zhang et al. (2010) claim that although the traditional approach of data collection puts each different channel in the centre of its activities, it is necessary for a multichannel environment, the firms to be able to keep track of transactions and interactions between customers and retailers across all the available channels. The third challenge is called Consumer Analytics and is related to aspects like the systematized understanding of the consumer choices and the creation from the retailers' side to monitor experience, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Related to the third challenge because it results from the customers' decisions when interacting with the retailers across multiple channels creates a systematized way to evaluate the different channels' performance. As Zhang et al. (2010) brought up, the above challenges highlight the less glamorous side of a multichannel strategy, which should also be considered for the retailers to be successful. Although the challenges are general, they set the frame for creating targets for the retailers that can be met by applying strategies tailored to their nature and their operational goal. In this multichannel context, more robust and lasting relationships are formed, because of the exchange of information, services in an integrated environment where the customers use different channels based on their needs at a given time (Rangaswamy and Van Bruggen, 2005). Blazquez (2014) claims that even in the current conditions where multiple channels exist, the store remains its primary contact point. Zhang et al. (2010) support that although this effort is to integrate the different channels that the retailers use, we are still far from the point where total unification will be achieved to achieve the so-called omnichannel conditions. What can provide a competitive edge for a retailer can also be the epicentre of a challenge. Data integration, evaluation of different channels, and the business structure's adaptation are aspects that Zhang et al. (2010) see as significant challenges that the retailers need to accommodate in their business plan. The role of multichannel strategy as the medium to provide higher customer satisfaction efficiency and segmentation of the market is what the firms want to achieve, according to Neslin & Shankar (2009). In the same line of thought, Paul and Rosenbeum (2020) support that those changes in the retail sector will permanently reshape the way we experience buying and selling, with technology playing a decisive role in this evolution and understanding the current situation as far as the need to follow the ongoing developments in the field, including understanding how and why customers use a specific channel or combination of channels (Cao and Li, 2015) is highly important.

## 2.3 Consumer Experiences in Retail

According to Schwager and Meyer (2007), customer experience includes all the aspects related to the offering of a company, the way it supports its customers, all the way to marketing, packaging, and extra services provided. It is what Verhoef et al. (2009) described as *'total*

*experience'*. Verhoef et al. (2009) describe customer experience as the next step of the relationship between customers and firms after more simple transactions. In fact, according to Verhoef et al. (2009), the importance of providing exceptional customer experience has been so central for many retailers that they even placed it in their mission statement. Providing the best consumer experience can change the relationship between consumers and brands, as Fournier mentioned in her research (1998). Childs, Blanchflower, Hur, & Matthews (2020) have found that customers expect from the retailer's unique experiences when shopping, while at the same time they act in a way to maintain and attract customers in an attempt to encourage them to spend more. Grewal, Levy & Kumar (2009) support that for the customers, it is essential what and where and how much they will pay for what they want to buy. So the experience is, as Verhoef et al. (2009), affected by factors that are both under the control of the retailer and out of its sphere of influence.

Furthermore, Pecoraro and Uusitalo (2014) support that customer experience results from the interaction between products and services when consumed, and as a result, they spark emotional reactions. So it is rational to believe that the different emotional reactions generated by the interaction of customers and retail brands could affect the experience they receive and consequently the relationship they share. Moreover, this is what we want to investigate. This approach is also supported by Pantano and Gandini (2018), who are supporters of the co-production of experience by both the customers and the firms they interact with. This is in alignment with what Hinde (1979), as cited by Fournier (1998) claimed, that both sides in a relationship should influence it, an approach that has been This process is personal and results from, as we mentioned, physical, mental, and even spiritual factors (Pecoraro and Uusitalo, 2014). In the same line of thought, Jahn, Nierobisch, Toporowski and Dannewald (2018) support that it is a personal response of the customer as he/she reacts to brand-related stimuli. This stimulus can be generated by the so-called hedonic experiences, which combine both the interaction of the customers and retailers and provide a pleasant experience, as stated by Arnold and Reynolds (2003). Excitement is also a feeling that the retailers want to generate to their customers when they interact with them, and as Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) support, by creating such conditions through their acts, they can create a competitive advantage against the rest of the firms that operate in the same industry and will make the customers choose them instead of their competitors. The emotional stimuli generated by the interaction of customers and retailers is considered very important for the customers in conditions of severe competition and affect the way they choose between different retailers (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006).

In their work, Paul and Rosenbaum (2020) support that the changes in the retail and consumer services sectors, with technology one of the main factors of diversification, will affect how we interact with them. Consumers want to find technologies within the store only if it offers them ease in the buying process; in addition, the technology is more or less critical depending on the product that the company sells (Burke, 2002). Technology is how consumers' lives are facilitated inside and outside stores; when this is achieved, their experience will be superior, so their relationship with the brand will improve (Burke, 2002). The innovations that occur are in the direction of covering the customers' needs (Klein, Falk, Esch, & bukhovtsev, 2016).

Nevertheless, the in-store atmosphere is tightly related to the customer experience when interacting with the retailers. It psychologically affects the way customers behave while shopping, with the target of retailers influencing the willingness of the customers to buy and the perceived value related to the shopping experience. Since technology is playing an increasing role for both customers and retailers, it can be used in order to enhance the in-store experience (Blazquez, 2014). The same author supports that even if we live in an era where the physical stores are changing, they remain the primary point of interaction with the retailers because they constitute the central point of interaction where customer experience is generated. Blazquez (2014) also supports that the experience is tightly related to the customer's perception of a firm; for this reason, creating unique and engaging customer experiences through the in-store environment is always essential.

According to Blazquez (2014), who had researched multichannel shopping in the fashion industry, has found that although the role of the physical store is changing, it remains to this day the primary point of interaction between consumers and retailers, with it being the most prevalent channel to be used when buying products for the customers since it incorporates the experience of interacting with the products and the services provided. According to the same author, the experience provided by the store itself shapes the perception that the customers have for the retailer; we understand the importance of the physical presence for both retailers and customers.

The demand for experience-orientated acts results from increased competition, with contemporary consumers in those conditions being focused on emotional stimuli (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006). This aligns with what Grewal, Levy, & Kumar (2009) supported, that retail should offer more to the customers and always go beyond product offering by providing exceptional and memorable experiences. Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) claim that the entrance of new firms and the increase of competition in retail has shrunk the share of the firms that operate in this industry. So as it is supported the provision of exciting experiences, with the creation for example of new assortment or other acts to create excitement are advised as an excellent way to compete in the "battlefield" called retail market, an approach that is also supported by Verhoef et al. (2009). Verhoef et al. (2009) describe the importance of customer experience clearly by saying that the experiences related to consumption and are favourable for the consumers create an emotional bond between the customer and the firm, leading to the creation of customer loyalty.

According to Verhoef et al. (2009), the customer experience includes aspects both under and out of the business's control, yet the individuals perceive their experience holistically (Pecoraro & Uusitalo, 2014). The customers' expectations for exceptional, unique experiences create a demand that needs to be covered by the retailers. In these conditions, non-traditional retail options emerged with pop-ups, subscriptions, and other options gaining a foothold in the market due to innovation acts from the side of the retailers as an attempt to distinguish themselves from the competitors (Childs et al., 2020). An approach that aligns with Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) mentioned the provision of memorable and exciting experiences. Bäckström and Johansson (2017) support that in modern retail, consumers who conduct purchases in-store can

be perceived as a distinct type of consumer because of their higher knowledge of the field to buy a product and demand for excellent service. The combination of top services and excellent in-store experience is what can make physical stores stand against their competition (Bäckström and Johansson, 2017). Bäckström and Johansson (2017) suggest that the elements of in-store experience range from design and atmosphere to social aspects, with technologies being identified as the factors that can shape the preferences towards a specific brand. Childs, Blanchflower, Hur and Matthews (2020) state that the retailers should follow the customers' need for unique experiences, and it is expected. The same research supports that the retailers who act to meet the expectations of their customers can retain their already existing customers while attracting new ones and making them spend more (Childs et al., 2020). An attempt that belongs to the overall try of retailers to separate themselves from their competitors by using non-traditional retail forms like pop-up stores, subscriptions etc. (Childs et al., 2020).

Providing incentives for a customer to select one specific brand is not the only thing that matters positively towards this specific brand (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Russo Spina et al. (2012) support that a firms' offerings are not only constrained in products and experiences, it includes the different spaces and artefacts that the customers interact with, so as they described it, "*co-construct personalized experiences*". This results from the increasing pressure between the businesses to enhance their ties with their consumers and brand (Zogaj, Olk & Tscheulin, 2019).

For this reason, according to Arnold and Reynolds (2003), businesses create environments designed to provide hedonic shopping experiences. This aspect gains recognition as a competitive tool because it combines interaction with multiple touchpoints and emotional-pleasurable experiences. Furthermore, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), as cited by Arnold and Reynolds (2003), claim that hedonic consumption patterns include interactions with multiple sensors. These elements spark the consumer's fantasy and, in general, affect the emotions that they have while consuming and contribute to the creation of memorable and unique experiences. So as it is understandable, the retailers can benefit by providing hedonic experiences because, as Arnolds and Reynolds (2003) claim, this type of experiences constitute a driver that the customers have to conduct purchases.

Furthermore, as Ailawadi and Keller (2004), such firms are often associated with providing offerings or services of higher value. Fournier (1998) supports that the relationships between consumers and the brands they use aim to provide meanings to the customers and are influenced by their environment. So, since the pop-up stores are an act to provide higher experiences to the customers and redefine the relationship they share for the better, it is interesting to try to understand how the pop-up redefines the existing relationship.

Rosenbaum, Edwards and Ramirez (2021) support that it is of utmost importance to build brand communities in contemporary retail, create instant hype, and provide customer experiences tailored for each customer. The in-store atmosphere is an aspect that supports the generation of hedonic experiences, which encourage the customers to extend their visits and adopt repetitive behaviour (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). It is in the personal decision of the

consumer on which channel to use based on his/her needs, but its businesses' responsibility to support those channels in order to provide engaging experiences and predict, as we have already mentioned in the previous unit, the channels that customers use (Aquila-Natale & Iglesias-Pradas, 2021; Rigby 2011). Pecoraro and Uusitalo (2014) state that the physical spaces are the locations themselves and their social role since they spark the interaction between consumers and retailers and are tightly related to the emotions and experiences that a customer has for them. This type of interaction is what Cova (1997), as cited by Pecoraro and Uusitalo (2014), creates the condition for the so-called linking value, where products and services are linked with the experience they are associated with.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) support that value creation is a process that includes both the side of the customer and the side of the firm. Furthermore, the creation of value in the relationship between consumers and brands has a prerequisite for transparency, the dialogue between the entities, and understanding what is at risk and what can be gained from this relationship (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). Understanding how value is created for the customers is an aspect that the managers want to investigate to support their decisions. When the interaction between consumers and firms is considered as positive, then we have the creation of value that is caused by both sides; in that case, we have the customer himself creating value together with the businesses, we have the conditions of value co-creation (Akaka, Vargo & Schau, 2015).

An interesting approach is Weinberg, Paise and Guinan (2007), who mention that in order for a multichannel strategy to be successful, the companies must cover the needs of their customers in a continuous process that includes the whole life cycle. So it is easy for us as researchers to assume that implementing acts like the pop-up stores or other acts that are designed to enhance the experience of the customers are helping the customers cover their needs in a better and more pleasant way. By actively communicating with their customers, the firms enhance brand loyalty and create the basis for long-term relationships (Godfrey, Seiders & Voss, 2011; Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007). Although an experience may occur at one point, interaction's repetition extends the relationship's duration (Akaka, Vargo & Schau, 2015). The perception of how value should be created affects the decision of a customer to choose a specific brand (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), and the interactions with the elements and individuals within the store can also affect the decisions of a customer (Verhoef et al., 2009) as cited by Pantano & Gandini, 2018).

It is helpful to mention that according to Fournier (1998), the customers and the brands they interact with are not interacting through single exchanges. On the contrary, they shape relationships through time. Fournier (1998) proposed that the theory is based on the approach that for the relationships to exist, they need to be set, affected, and amended by both sides. This shows that the acts of both the firms and the customers have an impact on the relationships. The researchers can understand the relationships from the felt experiences of those who take part in a relationship. Fournier (1998) has created a framework based on the interpretation of the felt experiences and the socio-cultural context that a relationship exists to identify the level of engagement and roughly the different kinds of relationships between customers and brands

based on the characteristics of their interaction. She has created a relationship quality and stability model, stating that the way consumers and brands behave creates relationships that can range from partnerships to relationships defined by love and passion, defining how strong their relationships are. The characteristics of each relationship can help the researchers identify what type of relationship it is based on the set of relationships that Fournier (1998) have identified. So we can support that the customers' experiences can be affected by the acts of the retailers. Since, as Akaka, Vargo and Schau (2015) claimed that the repetitive interactions extend the duration of a relationship, we want to see how establishing the pop-up store channel impacts the relationship despite the extension.

## 2.4 Pop-up stores

Most of the existing literature covers the necessity of pop-up stores for overall brand equity. As cited by Zhang et al. (2019), the pop-up republic stated that in 2014, pop-up stores' overall revenues reached 50 billion dollars, with retail pop-up stores constituting more than 10% of that amount. Furthermore, the same literature is focused on analyzing this specific topic from the firm's perspective. The importance of ephemerality for these temporary stores' overall success is evident in the literature we have gathered, and this is the most significant difference of this strategic channel compared to the regular-permanent ones. The majority of the literature we collected refers to how vital the temporary stores are for providing unique experiences to the customers. Surchi (2011), as cited by Lowe, Maggioni, & Sands (2018), claim that temporary retail activations can help traditional retailers to overcome the "threat" of the expansion of internet retailers because it adds to the overall customer experience by providing experiential marketing initiatives in order to differentiate a retailers' offering from its competitors. As part of the experimental initiatives that retailers use to provide differentiated experiences, the pop-up stores include location, interior design, the sense of the unexpected, and differentiate this type of store from the other channels (Haas & Schmidt, 2016).

Our research aims to fill some gaps in the literature concerning the consumers' side on how these pop-up stores affect consumers' experience with retailers since they constitute a different-ephemeral channel used in combination with the other available channels' multichannel context. We chose to include this literature in our analysis because, although it has this brand perspective approach, it will help us to understand the overall frame better and will allow us to examine in which way this type of ephemeral stores affects the customer-brand relationship when it is added to the other more traditional channels that constitute the multichannel presence of a retailer.

The competition in modern retail, together with the pressure caused by online retailers, have led many firms to seek promotional strategies that will allow them to create and preserve communities loyal to their brand (Rosenbaum, Edwards & Ramirez, 2019). The pop-ups are seen as a reasonable solution because they are ideal for generating positive word of mouth, as



Henkel and Toporowski (2021) stated. They gain popularity as a promotional strategy because retailers can provide personalized customer experiences using a temporary physical presence designed and strategically located for this specific reason (Rosenbaum, Edwards & Ramirez, 2019). Although modern retail is in a state of the apocalypse, as the authors support, multiple pop-up appliances allow them to thrive by helping retailers create buzz and test the market for potential permanent expansion (Rosenbaum, Edwards & Ramirez, 2019). At the same time, the pop-ups play the role of creating and maintaining customer-brand interaction in a very effective way (Rosenbaum, Edwards & Ramirez, 2019). Given pop-ups temporary nature, the customers benefit from visiting them and shopping from them (Henkel & Toporowski, 2021). Henkel and Toporowski (2021) link the limited time that those stores operate with customers' need for uniqueness (NFU) because they rewrite the rules of what a physical store should be and create the sense of providing something different and new. Ephemerality was a significant factor for such a store's success because it is linked to the idea that they offer an assortment relatively different from regular stores' assortment.

Furthermore, Surchi (2011) supports that a pop-up store's ephemeral nature is usually reflected in the design, with the original colours and design being blended with elements highlighting the establishment's ephemeral, like clocks counting the days till the closing of the store etc. It was reported that the customers with higher NFU were affected to a greater degree while interacting with pop-up stores than those with lower NFU (Henkel & Toporowski, 2021), an approach that is also supported by Robertson, Gatignon, & Cesareo (2018). In their work, Kim et al. (2010) found that the general profile of the average visitor of a pop-up store could be described as youthful and inclined to sales. Additionally, and in line with the idea of value co-creation, Kim et al. (2010) support that the role of customers blends with that of retailers since they also contribute to the creation of brand identity and the product itself by interacting with representatives of the firm and other individuals, and pop-ups are sites that support such proactive behaviour. Kim et al. (2010) also support that pop-up stores allow the customers to explore the brand and the products and evaluate them over their experience with innovative elements incorporated to enhance the experience received. Furthermore, the nature of pop-up stores designed to provide better experiences should also be focused on helping the customers make decisions fully conscious other than conducting impulse decisions-purchases.

Steele E (2018) found seven crucial reasons why companies use pop-up stores. Temporary stores create brand awareness and brand image through word-of-mouth advertising and consumers' overall positive response. This approach is also supported by Warnaby, Kharakhorkina, Shi, & Corniani (2015), who groups the prominent roles of pop-ups into four main categories: 1. Communication, 2. Experience, 3. Transactions, 4. Testing the market, those aspects sum up in a very concise way the main reasons why pop-ups are used by the firms that operate them. Also, according to Steele E (2018), temporary stores have much lower costs but, at the same time, allow companies to build communities. Pop-ups ideal for testing new markets and how consumers are ready to accept brands (Steele, 2018). In other words, we see an organizational detail that determines the importance of temporary shops; simply put, these formations are preheating a business for the upcoming steps (Steele, 2018). According to Surchi

(2011), the pop-ups are helping to communicate the brand to customers indirectly, and it is an effective way to approach those that are not that sensitive to brand campaigns. Although Surchi (2011) research was conducted in the Italian market and fashion industry brands, we see that location was an essential aspect of operating a pop-up, familiar in other literature articles (such as Rosenbaum, Edwards & Ramirez, 2019). The pop-ups (Kim, Fiore, Niehm and Jeong, 2010) constitute an effective strategy for the retailers when they try to target customers that are prone to higher innovativeness and those who enjoy going shopping, so as can be seen the role of physical pop-up stores as the place that retailers design in order to provide experiences is prevalent throughout the literature.

According to Rudkowski, Heney, Yu, Sedlezky, & Gunn (2020), pop-ups can be classified into two main categories: the operator that runs a specific pop-up. The Brand-Based Pop-ups, where the brand runs a specific pop-up, and the Market-Based Pop-ups, where a retailer works with multiple brands, operate a pop-up store. This classification allows us to categorize the pop-ups based on their operational role and understand the entity's objectives and drivers that run them. Another research found that although people get excited about pop-up stores, they do not understand this store's fundamental concept (Alexander, Nobbs & Varley, 2018). In terms of cost, pop-up stores constitute a "cheaper" option for retailers to "test" and "trial" a specific market without bearing the total cost of a permanent site and designed to meet the target customers' needs. In the same research, the researchers reported that most temporary stores were found on the street centrally located, for the customers to find them quickly and shop from them. According to the authors, the stores located on the street are ideal for "multiple specialist retailers," aiming to increase accessibility. On the other hand, the smaller companies specializing in more niche sectors are better off choosing "secondary locations on the street" (Alexander, Nobbs & Varley, 2018). As for the size of temporary stores, according to this research (Alexander, Nobbs & Varley, 2018), they are smaller than regular physical stores, with an average size of 30 m<sup>2</sup>, and the lifespan is more or less 4-6 weeks.

By classifying the pop-ups as suggested by Rudkowski et al., (2020) into Market-Based pop-ups (MBPU's) and Brand-Based pop-ups (BBPU's), understandably, the customer experience journey in pop-up stores are also affected by this aspect since the points of interaction (touchpoints) are controlled by entities that have different wants. Given that MBPU's are entitled to manage and cooperate with multiple brands to provide remarkable experiences while BBPU's are designed, created, and controlled by one brand, it is their goal to target their efforts to provide customer experiences focused on their brand. Furthermore, as it is supported, customer experience is closely related to the concept of co-creation of value which in-store experiences generate (Spena, Carida, Colurcio & Melia, 2012). It takes the interaction way beyond information exchange; it creates an experience environment that creates value for the customer, while it allows the retailers to test innovative solutions that are pioneering and create shared experiences between the brand and the customers (Spena, Carida, Colurcio & Melia, 2012) an approach that closely resembles the one of Lassus & Freire (2014).

According to the existing literature, the experience is intertwined with the consumers' value from the companies. In particular, companies are not simply offered value but are co-created

with consumers' participation (Russo Spena et al., 2012). Value creation is significant today since, in this way, consumers feel like members of the company. It is easier to understand that experience is what the consumer considers to have value for himself. According to this opinion, the consumer takes part in the whole process of consumption and, in particular, has a contribution to this process mentally and emotionally (Russo Spena et al., 2012).

For this reason, it is considered very important to establish a practical model through which consumers will have the opportunity to create the appropriate value. The co-creation experience is a strategic decision that paves the way for innovative paths through which consumers and companies' relationship deepens (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Due to the large amount of information available freely - especially on the internet, consumers are more informed than ever. The internet is the place through which consumers disseminate their ideas and opinions. In other words, the internet is the bridge through which consumers participate in producing value (Ramaswamy, 2008). If companies decide not to involve consumers in the value generation process, they will lose a significant comparative advantage (Ramaswamy, 2008).

Apart from the store's design, the product offering also affects the customers' intention to visit this store because the perceived uniqueness supported by a unique offering of products plays its role (Henkel & Toporowski, 2021). They constitute a promotion tool that remains one of their most important aspects (Picot-Coupey, 2014). The pop-ups are also linked with hedonic shopping experiences due to the sense of exclusivity that these time-limited stores have. The article by Arnold & Reynolds (2003) refers to the hedonic reasons why people go shopping. After extensive research, Arnold & Reynolds (2003) found that consumers look for incentives that will influence whether to go shopping. For example, the atmosphere inside the store affects the decision to conduct a purchase (Picot Coupey, 2014). Specifically, Six motivation categories were found that span from the sense of adventure that customers have to go shopping to the value customers feel while shopping. A cluster analysis based on the six main motives showed that the shoppers could be divided into five major categories (Minimalists, Providers, Gatherers, Enthusiasts, Traditionalists), each category includes customers who have expressed different wants when it comes to why and how they will shop, with those customers inclining minimal- light purchases to more traditional ones. Understanding those categories allows researchers to target the most exciting segments by organizing the in-store environment accordingly to attract the targeted cluster. Customer satisfaction and decision making based on this scale are yet to be found. The different motives have different weights related to how consumers have a large or small engagement during shopping. These motivations change according to the different characteristics of each person (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003).

Picot-Coupey (2014) suggests that pop-ups are one of the available Foreign Operation Modes (FOM) that can be used for multiple reasons such as raising-sustaining brand awareness, developing relationships with the customers, while at the same time they can test a specific market for a potential permanent entry. Picot-Coupey (2014) mentioned in her work that the assortment within those stores was also different in many cases compared to the regular stores' assortment, with some retailers including unique products, while others decided to present their entire range in an attempt to switch to a permanent store soon. Rudkowski et al. (2020) support

that consumers use multiple online and offline channels, and pop-ups constitute one of them in today's environment. The pop-ups and the other channels consist of many different touchpoints as the whole channel, ephemeral. So an analysis of customers' interaction with this ephemeral channel compared to regular channels will provide valuable insights into how they affect the customers' relationship with the retailers that operate those channels.

## 2.5 Chapter summary

All the above mentioned create the frame for our analysis by explaining what pop-up stores are and how they use them. With those attributes, we can start our analysis on this particular type of store, which at the same time constitutes a communication channel between consumers and retailers. What this different channel adds to the customer-brand relationship and the overall experience needs to be answered. As mentioned initially, many aspects of pop-up stores have been investigated through time, but there was no research on how the ephemeral nature of pop-ups could affect the way customers perceive the brands. We did find articles both quantitative and qualitative (Spena, Carida, Colurcio and Melia, 2012; Henkel & Toporowski 2021;) that point to the need for further investigation on the topic, so we decided that the topic on what pop-up stores add to the overall retail experience will be researched. Today, customers interact with retailers and brands through many offline and online channels and touchpoints; this process is also known as the customer journey. When viewed through the customer journey lens, pop-up retail is a series of temporary customer touchpoints (Rudkowski et al., 2020). Moreover, as Kim et al. (2010) also supported the brand identity itself is created through direct interaction and exchange of information, as well as with a productive communication in an online context, so what is understood is that pop-up stores contribute to that exchange and shape in a way the brand identity itself.

Considering all the above mentioned, we can easily conclude that the increase in competition in the retail industry has forced the retailers to focus on the experiences they provide to their customers to create a competitive edge that will make them the first choice against the competitors. As for the multichannel customer experience, the researchers of previous studies have identified that it is a process that occurs throughout the customer experience journey and allows the retailers to reach their target audience in many ways. The number of channels that retailers used is now enriched with more channels since the development of the internet allowed the creation of retailers' online presence. However, as it seems the physical sites in this new environment provide to the customers the physical and direct interaction with the retailers' offering and for that reason maintain nevertheless, central role together with the emerging channels and all together shape the touchpoints which the customers use to cover their needs in a way that suits them best. Last but not least, the pop-up stores, according to the existing literature, constitute an ephemeral store which is designed in order to provide exceptional customer experience because of its centralized customer nature, which has as its target to create hype around the brand and generate hedonic experiences to the customers in order to increase

or improve the level of interaction between customers and brands. What has not been identified and constitutes a gap that our research aims to investigate has to do with the side of the customers and not mainly the side of the retailers as it has been done in the past. Specifically, what needs to be clarified has to do with the role of this ephemeral channel in a multichannel context and how its addition in the offering of retailers can affect the relationship that the customers share with the retailers that operate them. The novel character of the pop-up stores and the way the addition of this new channel affects the already established balance between consumers and brands is what will be investigated in our research, since the provision of experiences is a continuous process (Weinberg, Paise & Guinan, 2007) we would like to build bridges on the theory, bringing together the literature covering the multichannel customer experience with that of the ephemeral retail and pop-up stores, to understand what this new channel offers and how customers are affected by it.

## 3 Methodology

*This section will cover the methodological approach that we will use to provide answers to our research questions. The philosophical background will be presented to set the frame for the analysis, together with a presentation of the research design of how the empirical material will be collected and analysed in our research. Moreover, last but not least, the trustworthiness and the authenticity and ethical implications of the research will be covered.*

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

There is a strong correlation between the data and the theory; thus, researchers have to choose the research philosophy to provide accurate results, which is considered essential (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). According to Easterby - Smith et al. (2018), researchers should understand and solve various philosophical problems, the reasons why this should be done vary. Initially, an insufficient understanding of philosophical differences will lead to the misinterpretation of the pragmatic meaning of the factual theory that will lead to the wrong final reading of the results and, therefore, to the creation of wrong conclusions. The purpose of this research is to answer two primary research questions. The first is how the pop-up store affects the company's operation in a multichannel environment, while the second question focuses on how the pop-up store affects consumers' relationships with the brand. We found that the various interviews have not been answered since we saw that they focus more on the general benefits of pop-up stores, but there is no deeper explanation behind these conclusions. In particular, we did not find research highlighting the importance of pop-up stores in a multichannel environment, which is why we chose this topic. Understanding the various philosophical issues is beneficial because it offers a clearer picture of its structural design. In particular, a correct understanding of the philosophies will lead to a precise categorization of the data required to answer any research question (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). The main disagreements about research philosophies and which ones are appropriate for each research are ontology and epistemology.

#### 3.1.1 Ontology

The writers describe ontology as the approach that describes "*the nature of reality and existence*" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). As it is understandable, ontology is related to the world's central rules, and it is divided into realism, where the truth is only one and relativism,

the case where depending on the context, there might be several different truths. Due to the research's nature, the decision was made to research relativist ontology because there are many truths about this research subject. In addition, the general form of our research favours the use of this philosophy because, through discussions with people, we will record different understandings from these individuals. The understanding concerns why they follow certain practices, their thoughts behind these movements, while at the same time, what is their attitude around temporary stores. There is no single truth since every consumer perceives stores differently, in this case, the pop-up stores. In other words, there is no single truth; the data presented in the research is not the same for every participant. It depends on the research participants' viewpoint (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). The essential element of relativism is that the various conclusions and the developed theory come from the observer and, specifically, people's living experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

### 3.1.2 Epistemology

On the other hand, Epistemology has to do with those methods used to understand how knowledge is acquired. Epistemology is any view on knowledge, how this knowledge is transmitted to the rest of the world and if this knowledge is sufficient and correct (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Epistemology includes three distinct branches of thought I. Positivism, II. Social constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Our research investigates a topic related to the customers' experiences and expressly understands and explains the temporary channel of physical pop-up stores of retailers that add to the overall customer-brand relationship in the context of a multichannel strategy. As it is understandable, our analysis has to do with the social aspects related to the interaction between consumers and retailers, and this can be achieved by using qualitative methods that can be obtained through language data.

For this reason, the analysis is following the approach of social constructionism as it is presented by Easterby, Thorpe & Jackson (2018). To be more specific, in our case, we are following the principles of Social Constructionism because, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) also support in their book, this approach has as its central belief that "*knowledge is created within a social context*". Berger and Luckman (1966), as cited by Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), support that people understand the world around them by sharing their thoughts and experiences with others through the medium of language.

The advantage of this approach is that the researchers are focused on collecting data and results and the analysis and interpretation of them. The readers must understand the different behaviours that individuals adopt in order to understand a specific case. In our case, social constructionism is highly relevant because we are able through language messages and the explanations that accompany them to illuminate how the interactions with the ephemeral channel that pop-up stores create affect the customers' experience that they had with the firm (IKEA) and what were the contributions from this interaction in their overall relationship with the retailer in comparison to those whose interaction with the retailer is limited to the regular

channels that IKEA operates. For this reason, by using the principles of social constructionism, we aim to identify and present in the best possible way the different constructions that exist and the meanings that those constructions stand for as they are expressed by people who interacted with -experienced them. The researcher's ultimate goal is not only to collect the data and identify patterns of behaviour in a social context but also to understand and interpret them based on that context (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Finally, we need to mention that our research is exploratory because we aim to expand the existing literature on pop-up stores and identify the effect of this ephemeral channel on customers' relationship with a retail brand in a multichannel environment.

## 3.2 Research Design

This section presents the choice of qualitative method used for this study. The research design aims to determine how the data will be collected and how this data will be collected in ways through which the various research questions will be answered (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). The goal of the researchers is to provide the best possible answers to the research question. To achieve that, we have to decide what data we need and who is the most suitable to be asked. Due to the type of research and its general form, which is to understand the existing academic gap further, we chose qualitative research as the proper method.

### 3.2.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods are considered ideal in cases where there is little literature available, while at the same time, they are considered ideal methods when the goal of each research is the creation of new theories or the practice of existing theories (Schonfeld & Dreyer, 2008). Qualitative research deals with the efforts to provide answers about how and why specific actions were taken. So in simple terms, qualitative research aims to provide a greater understanding of the data that have been collected in the context of research on a given topic. The importance of qualitative research lies in the fact that the data are not scattered on the internet but must be formulated by researchers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Through this method, the collection of data will be done as well as the analysis. The reactions are all in this research because these correlations of consumers with the temporary store will determine the research results. The research aims to vastly consume the importance of pop-up stores in multichannel environments and the relationship between consumers and the brand. This is achieved through qualitative research since it answers the why (Gephart, 2004). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), qualitative research can answer questions about how and why for a particular phenomenon. For this reason, it is considered the ideal choice to answer the research questions of this research. Qualitative research through observations, on-field interviews and semi-structured interviews - in our case, only semi-structured interviews-provides valuable data that provides essential answers to the questions.



Specifically, there are different ways of conducting qualitative data; the most used is the in-depth interviews. Interviews help create a framework through which the research topic's understanding becomes more robust and transparent. Specifically, qualitative research is the appropriate method for the present research subject because, through the data collected from interviews and the existing theory, new aspects related to the research are revealed. Aspects that are considered more difficult to be uncovered through quantitative research. Quantitative research cannot answer critical questions such as why pop-up stores are essential to a multichannel environment or why new relationships are created between consumers and brands. The researcher can answer other types of questions that this research does not intend to ask. To better understand how customers interact with pop-up stores, it is considered as the right choice to create a framework through the interviews that we will conduct and the theories that we will use in order to answer why people react to a multichannel environment in a specific way and why it is considered a good company strategy.

### 3.2.2 Research Approach

To understand the research problem, the appropriate research approach must be chosen. There are three crucial ways to create and develop theories widely used in various research; the three approaches are Deduction, Induction and Abduction (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Initially, the deductive approach is more a practice of existing theory in the literature. Specifically, it leads to creating a hypothesis to test whether the results are valid or not (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Because the subject of this research has not been studied in-depth and because the central goal of the analysis is consumers and how they react in a multichannel environment and specifically within temporary stores, it is more challenging to create a hypothesis testing of existing theory. With deductive reasoning, the number of conclusions created due to the existence of a hypothesis is less. One of the difficulties of this method is that the truth of the data is based entirely on valid assumptions (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The inductive approach is a method in which the researcher develops a new theory based on the data presented to the researcher. For a new theory to exist, the research raises research questions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). It is prevalent to use this method to record data from phenomena from a different perspective (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The inductive approach moves from precise observations to more general conclusions and theories. Compared to Deductive Reasoning, in which the various arguments are based on existing rules, the Inductive method, on the other hand, is based more on observations of phenomena (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Essentially, this method builds a generalisation based on given or observed things (Dong, Lovallo & Mounarath, 2015).

### 3.2.3 Abductive Research

For the needs of this research, it was decided to choose abductive as the most compatible research method. The Abductive approach is how the theory, together with the observation, has a continuous collaboration, accelerating scientific gaps in the literature. Besides, through abductive research, it is possible to develop the theoretical framework during the research further (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In our case, the consumer-brand relationship theory, as proposed by Fournier (1998), was used. Since the relationships are a result of the experiences of the customers with the brands they interact with, we tried through our research to make the customers talk about their personal experiences and see how the act that the retailer made (in our case IKEA, by opening a pop-up store) followed by the response of the customers to that, have affected the relationship between the two entities. The data collected through this method explains a phenomenon and identifies specific diodes, which help create a conceptual framework (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This choice was made because our research is based on empirical materials through interlocutors and how they relate. We wanted to understand why consumers behave in a specific way towards temporary stores (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). At the end of the analysis of the data from the interviews, to have a better understanding of the phenomenon, other theories had to be used. This was done using Fournier (1998)'s theory of the relationship between consumers and the brand. This helped to draw better conclusions and correlate them more correctly with consumers' examples. For this reason, the abductive approach was chosen after there was a continuous contact of the data with the theories (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In addition, according to Bryman and Bell (2015), the abductive approach is considered the bridge between the deductive and inductive approach.

## 3.3 Case Study – IKEA

In order to achieve the objectives of our research, it was decided to use a case method to obtain data from a company. It was considered that the data from the case method would give rich answers to our research questions. The reason is that through contact with people who were related to the pop-up store phenomenon but also the regular store, it would be easier to understand consumer interactions. To better understand the research issue and its relation to the retail trade environment, IKEA was selected as a real-life case study. Due to its displacement, IKEA was considered an ideal choice to operate as a real-life case study. IKEA is a huge company that has loyal consumers. Therefore, the use of IKEA as a real-life case study was considered entirely logical. According to Easterby, Thorpe & Jackson (2018), the case study is the method that provides in-depth information about a company or many companies at a given time. Case studies help the general build-up of understanding various social phenomena through their natural environments (Darke & Shanks, 2002).

In research, there can be the use of single cases but also multiple cases. For this research, a unique case was used. This choice was made because it is helpful for our case since Single cases offer the possibility to the investigators to investigate the various phenomena in-depth to

understand better (Darke & Shanks, 2002). For the research question, case study research is considered appropriate because it will provide a more general understanding of an event. Besides, it will create a new theory and develop new ideas based on a vivid example Case study. In our case, there is not enough topic in the existing published articles, which is why the use of the case study method is considered the right strategic choice. As we have already mentioned, we aim to examine pop-up stores' contributions to the customers or retailers in a multichannel environment. The best way to do that is to focus on a specific case and, by comparing what we have already found and included in our literature review, examine whether pop-ups have common effects on the multichannel experience of the customers of retailers (Darke & Shanks, 2002).

The case study method of this research was based on a vast - global furniture company and is none other than the Swedish company IKEA. IKEA is a compelling case to be selected because it is a furniture retailer that runs its channels, and the nature of the products it offers is usually related to the direct interaction of the customers with them in a physical location. Previous research on the topic of pop-up stores was focused mainly on the fashion industry (de Lassus & Anido Freire, 2014). For this reason, an analysis on the effect of a temporary channel like pop-up stores on the consumers' relationship with a brand was a challenge but also an opportunity in order to understand the applicability of this method to other less conventional in terms of products industries. So, the choice of IKEA was initially made because there is no research on the usefulness of temporary stores in a furniture environment.

Furthermore, IKEA decided to proceed to such an action in the Greek market, where the concept of pop-up stores is less known and mainly related to seasonal offerings (Christmas, Easter etc.), so the respondents will be less preoccupied than consumers from markets where pop-up stores are a common phenomenon. IKEA proceeded to create a temporary store in the market of Greece and specifically in Piraeus, Attica. This fact aroused the interest of researchers because the phenomenon of early stores, especially in Greece, is not so common. If the furniture sector is included in the equation, then a fascinating situation is created. Besides, due to the configuration of stores worldwide, the various findings of this research can be used on a large scale and not only in IKEA Greece. The company's memorable experience inside the store and the existence of the temporary store are the main reasons for which IKEA was chosen to complete this research. Taking all the above mentioned into consideration, we believe that this unconventional method of pop-ups can give us insights that will be useful for both the consumer's real intentions, as well as for the real power of this approach for the retailers themselves since they will be able to identify the impact that this addition on their overall offering. IKEA has many loyal consumers, so it was considered more straightforward to find people who had contact with the regular IKEA store and the company's pop-up store. In addition, we knew about the unique environment within the store, so it was considered appropriate to compare it with the environment of the pop-up store and how the relations between consumers and brand are affected.

## 3.4 Interviews

Once the decision has been made regarding what data will be needed for the research, and, at the same time, the methodologies that were followed, then the decision was made regarding what type of data should have been collected. There are two different types of data a) primary and b) secondary data. Primary data constitutes a piece of new information and is collected directly by the researcher. The collection of primary data can be made either through questionnaires, interviews, observations or experiments. On the other hand, secondary data are those sources that already exist and are published. The collection of primary data helped us better understand the thoughts and the driving forces behind consumers' actions. Interviews are a charming way, especially in a pandemic period, to gather information and data face to face (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

Once the decision has been made that the interviews are the way the data will be collected, then the building of the interview guide begins. First, the decision must be made about how structured the interviews will be (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Qualitative interviews aim to unravel the various motivations that participants have and their behaviours during the studied phenomenon, particularly their motivations behind their presence in a temporary store (Malhotra, 2010). The interviews were considered ideal because we came in contact with people who had the experience of pop-up stores and people who just had the experience of regular stores. This resulted in a framework in which it allowed us to collect valuable data and compare it. These data are the basis that includes thoughts, experiences, feelings and helped us build our conclusions and answer the research questions. As mentioned above, our research was conducted through semi-structured interviews to allow participants to express themselves freely about their experiences in IKEA stores.

This research is qualitative, so it is more exploratory. In this manner, it is considered a better solution to collect data via open-ended discussions - interviews rather than closed-ended and automated ones. We form an image that concerns the person's inner thought through examples or previous experiences through the interviews. The interviews allow us to understand our research topic of the role of pop-up stores in a multichannel retail environment and how the customers from their perspective perceive this ephemeral channel of interaction in their overall brand experience. The Qualitative interviews provide Language data that allow the researchers to, as dew Easterby et al. (2018) support, gain access and a greater understanding of social and organisational realities.

### 3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Because of the exploratory nature of the study, researchers decided to gain a deeper understanding of the consumer's actions in pop-up stores and their thoughts via in-depth interviews with people that visited the IKEA pop-up store in Greece and also from people that

did not visit the pop-up store but only the regular IKEA store. Interviews are conversations between the researcher and the participant that revolve around some specific topic questions. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), the purpose of the interviews is to understand the participants' perspective on a particular topic and their attitude. Interviews are the best method to meet our objectives for the following reasons. Semi-structured interviews are the method that has been selected because they allow us to set the framework to and illuminate diverse approaches, experiences and interactions, as Kvale (1983,1997) has mentioned, cited by Rennstam & Wästerfors (2018).

The Qualitative Interviews constitute primary data in the form of information that the researchers have collected from the interviewees for the research (Easterby et al., 2018). In the context of our analysis, as we mentioned, we decided to work with Semi-structured interviews because, in this way, we were able to set a framework for the discussion that we had with the participants, and as Esterby et al. (2018) support in their book, help them express the way they see the specific phenomenon we are analysing. These interviews are based on a list of questions but are more like a discussion. For this research, semi-structured interviews were the right choice because they allow making the questions more open and in a different order from what was decided in the beginning. In addition, for the most comfortable conduct of the interviews, it was decided that the questions be divided into different categories. The categories of the interview were 1. Background questions to see the consumer past of the participants, 2. IKEA experience to see what was their relationship with IKEA and at the same time how they feel about this company, 3. The customer experience of regular IKEA consumers in a multichannel environment, to see their experience in a multichannel environment - participants who had not visited the pop-up stores were asked, and 4. Experience in IKEA pop-up store to find out what their experience was in the temporary store. These questions were created through the various theories that we collected; that is, the categories of questions were based on the kinds of theories developed but without direct reference to theories. The reason for this is to avoid prejudice on our part and for the participants to respond in a completely transparent manner. The semi-structured questions helped to create a more amicable discussion.

It was decided that both researchers would be present during the interviews. This was done so that there would be two minds during the interviews, asking additional questions and taking notes to escape nothing good. One of them was in control of the flow of interviews and time. The interviews took place online with a video call via Zoom or the Facebook messenger application to be easily accessible and safe for both the participants and the researchers because of the ongoing global pandemic. The researchers interviewed 12 participants, and the overall time of the interviews was 25-40 minutes. We divided our interviewees into two groups of people. The first group consists of six (7) participants that have interacted with pop-ups and the other channels of IKEA (regular stores, websites etc.) and the second one of 5 participants that did not have the opportunity to interact with the pop-up store of IKEA. The main objective for doing so is to examine how the experience and practicality that the customers that had the opportunity to interact with this ephemeral channel differ from the experience of those that had interacted with the already established channels, so to identify what are the gains for the

customers from this strategic tool. Before the interview started, the participants were informed about the research aim, research problem and the overall purpose.

Furthermore, participants were asked to consent for their participation in the research; for ethical reasons, the participants will be referred to in the research as "participant 1, participant 2". For the interviews of this research, Greek was chosen as the primary language of communication since all participants are fluent Greek speakers as the researchers. In this way, the participants were much more comfortable in order for them to present their thoughts and experiences. Besides, the whole interview process was recorded by two different devices so that everything is insured in case of a malfunction. The recordings were powerful allies for our data analysis as they allowed the investigators to be fully committed to the interviewees without worrying about taking notes. This led to the creation of a discussion with the proper flow and participation. Of course, there was an update regarding the recording; all participants gave their consent. To make the details of the interview more understandable, an interview guide was created and applied. As mentioned above, the type of interviews followed for data collection are semi-structured interviews. In this type of interview, a list of questions creates a discussion between the researchers and the participants.

In particular, the questions in this type of interview are used more to create a conversation based on the interview topic (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). While an interview takes place, the researcher may find something interesting in the whole discussion and thus make the interviewee elaborate on that, that is why more questions may come up, questions that are not officially written in the list of questions, but can add to the overall analysis of the topic, by providing insight that otherwise would have been neglected. The critical thing with this practice is that additional questions will be used in future interviews. This practice is called Laddering (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). The questions that will help the researcher discover more conceptual behaviours through the *"fact or descriptive accounts about the questions"* are laddering up and succeeding through the questions that include why. On the other hand, laddering down is how the researcher comes in contact with examples of behaviours. These techniques are considered very important as they help build research findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

In the first part of the interview - Background questions, we intended to get general information about their consumer habits to create the proper basis for continuing the questions. In addition, through these questions, we put them in the interview atmosphere more easily and gave them the step to begin to describe their journey in the field of commerce. The next part of the interviews was related to the IKEA experience. Following our literature review, we designed our interview questions to follow the fundamental aspects found, like hedonic experiences, customer experience while shopping, excitement, etc. In this category, we wanted to see the relations of the participants with IKEA while seeing if they have a favourable view. Since, according to Fournier (1998) and the consumer-brand relationship theory that she proposed, the relationships are shaped by the lived experiences that the customers have with the brands they use, we wanted to collect the views of the customers who interacted with IKEA based on that. These questions were the basis for us to continue to ask further questions related

to the IKEA experience within the store. The third category of questions was the Customer experience of regular IKEA consumers in a multichannel environment. These questions were more targeted at the multichannel environment of IKEA. We wanted to know if people favour using multichannel media; we wanted to have data on how much the steamer inside the store is nice and influenced by the technology that exists. In general, with these questions, we wanted to see if the multichannel in a store like IKEA can change the general experience.

### 3.4.2 Selection criteria – sampling technique

This research aims to understand better the importance of temporary stores in a multichannel environment and how consumers and specifically IKEA customers, perceive this multichannel normality. Two types of interviews were conducted, the first concerning ordinary customers of IKEA and the second concerning people who visited the IKEA pop-up store in Piraeus, people who had contact with IKEAs' regular channels and the pop-up store of IKEA were asked for comparison purposes between the two subgroups. In other words, the interviewees of this research were IKEA customers. This was especially important since these people - especially those who visited the pop-up store, could express their general views and concerns on this issue, which was very helpful in carrying out the work.

To a large extent, when there was the same material of answers from the respondents, it was decided to stop the interviews - that is, when there was no variety in the answers. The sample size must be large enough to give the required validity to the research. When there are several answers from different sources, then the result is considered more solid and robust. At the end of the twelve interviews, an entire database of data would help complete the research. For this reason, it was decided that no additional interviews would be conducted as no additional value added to the existing data. We achieved the so-called data saturation; it is a widespread phenomenon for semi-structured interviews. So the number twelve was considered sufficient to start the analysis (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016). Once data saturation is achieved, the number of interviews is justified (Tran, V.-T., Porcher, Tran, V.-C. & Ravaud, 2017). That is why our sample included 12 interviewees; in that number, we saw that the respondents were giving similar answers.

The main criterion regarding the selection of participants was their relationship with IKEA. Age did not play a significant role, although most participants were between 20 and 30 years old. The researchers considered that age was not a catalyst for selection since all ages have access to IKEA stores and wanted to collect data from different ages to have a better and more comprehensive analysis. In addition, for the needs of this research, individuals who are residents of Greece were selected. For the first group of interviewees - people who visited the regular IKEA stores were selected from Greece and Cyprus. This is because the IKEA stores in Greece and Cyprus belong to the same group of companies, and it was considered easier to reach consumers from both countries. For the interviewees who visited the pop-up store IKEA in Greece, people were selected only from Greece since it was considered more accessible to

find people who visited this store from a specific country. For this research, we tried to identify the best possible ways to collect the data that would allow us to answer our research questions most accurately and efficiently. Considering the form of our research and its research purpose, it was considered appropriate to conduct interviews to get in touch with the respondents who had the experience of both the regular channels of IKEA as well as the pop-up store that it operated in the Greek market in order to obtain primary data regarding our topic and answer in the best possible way our research questions.

For the conduct of this research, a combination of the non-probability sample was selected. Since this thesis focuses on Generation Z, a non-probability of convenience and purposive sampling to collect the responses from several participants necessary for our research while meeting some criteria to be chosen as an interviewee, following the propositions of Easterby-Smith et al. (2018). To be more specific, we are using convenience sampling because, in this way, we were able to overcome the difficulty of finding respondents that meet the criteria that we have imposed, given the restrictions that have been imposed because of the ongoing pandemic of Covid1-19. Convenience sampling includes the selection of participants based on how easily they are accessible. Especially in the pandemic era, it is done through social media and specifically through Facebook and Instagram to make this method viable.

In an ideal environment, field interviews in the physical IKEA store that operates in Athens would have allowed us to search for customers that had the opportunity to interact both with the physical stores of the specific retailer and the other available channels (catalogues, website etc.) but also with the pop-up store. Since the restrictions when it comes to the movement of people as well as the closed stores in the period when the collection of data occurred led us to adopt the approach mentioned above in order to make the process of finding and collecting data as safe as possible for both the researchers and the participants. For this reason, we have used our contacts to spot the participants that would eventually be interviewed. That is, through friends on social media, we find those who have contact with IKEA and specifically with its temporary store. Participants were selected based on how easily they were found for our research if they had contact with IKEA or its temporary store but also with the regular channels of IKEA if they wanted to participate in the research, and of course, if they had the time to participate (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

On the other hand, purposeful sampling was chosen because we knew what was needed from the participants; we knew the criteria required to conduct formal interviews. This is how we approached (online) people who, in our opinion, met all the criteria. We asked them, and they met the criteria we set at the beginning as introductory remarks before the interviews. Two different groups were used for the interviews; the first sub-group consisting of participants who had experienced the temporary channel (pop-up store) that IKEA had created in Piraeus, Greece, as part of the multichannel presence of IKEA in the Greek market (Website, Regular stores). On the other hand, we had the other participants who had contact using only the regular channels. We wanted to identify what this temporary channel provided to the multichannel experience of those customers compared to the multichannel experience of the other customers to understand the value of pop-ups for the customer experience in a multichannel context.



<u>Interviewees</u>	<u>Channel Usage</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Participant 1	Pop-Up	28	28 min
Participant 2	Regular Channels	25	32 min
Participant 3	Regular Channels	25	30 min
Participant 4	Regular Channels	39	40 min
Participant 5	Pop-Up	21	37 min
Participant 6	Regular Channels	24	32 min
Participant 7	Regular Channels	26	35 min
Participant 8	Pop-Up	24	45 min
Participant 9	Pop-Up	36	40 min
Participant 10	Pop-Up	24	35 min
Participant 11	Pop-Up	24	43 min
Participant 12	Pop-Up	26	40 min

Table 1. Interviews with IKEA customers

### 3.5 Empirical Analysis

The analysis of the data started by organising everything according to the themes they belonged to. After that, the researchers transcribed the recorded audio file that was collected from the interviews. The interviews were transcribed by hand into a word document and divided according to who the respondent was. The most critical data from each interview were then placed in a different document to analyse based on the essential data. The data collected from the interviews were divided into thematic sections - based on the interviews so that the participants' answers have a standard orientation. In other words, the interviewees' responses were divided into topics that had similar characteristics, relationships, and feelings (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018).

This resulted in the most productive and accurate data analysis. This classification is based on the respondents' answers, precisely what they say, how they say it and why they say it. Given the vast amount of data obtained by the semi-structured interviews that allowed the participants to talk about their experiences-thoughts, researchers chose to apply sorting, reduction and arguing, which constitutes an ideal way to handle primary data Rennstam & Wästerfors, (2018).

Once the interviews are over, and generally, as soon as all the data needed to complete the research is collected, this data must be analysed somehow; that is, the researchers must find a way to understand the data better. In this way, there was a correlation of the participants' answers with this research's research problem.

According to Rennstam et al. (2018), qualitative research must find solutions to three critical problems. First is the problem of chaos. According to the book, this problem refers to the incorrect classification of the literature. This results in obstacles appearing during the completion of the research. Next is the problem of representation. This problem seeks to highlight the difficulty of integrating all available sources and research. This leads the research to the process of selecting the best available sources, which is confusing. The third problem has to do with power and is related to whether we can be at fault - to create a high level of research (Rennstam et al., 2018). These three problems have solutions. Specifically, there are three different practices.

The first practice is sorting. According to this practice, the correct categorisation of texts from the most insignificant to the most important must be done. This practice aims to reduce the workload and make it more controllable (Rennstam et al., 2018). According to this method, the researcher must contact the data, guide the data and then classify it based on its importance. Significance depends on the size of the reaction to the research requirements. Sorting answers the problem of chaos since, through it, the data is labelled in categories. For example, in our pilot project, we placed the data under three different categories. The researcher reads and understands the materials better, which means that the researcher feels more familiar with the data, so it is easier to relate it to the research questions. Besides, by creating different categories, the research focus will be more comfortable as everything is more transparent (Rennstam et al., 2018).

The second category is Reducing. Reducing deals with representation; through this category, the author reduces the material at his disposal. Sorting may have been done earlier, but that does not mean that everything is ready. There are several categories and subcategories, so there is still much work to be done in data. When much material is collected for analysis, it is considered impossible for the researcher to analyse all the data for himself, and there must be a required reduction in the amount of data. In other words, the researcher chooses in which categories (which preceded the sorting) he will focus the research efforts to answer the research question. The researcher has to reduce the data so that he has material that will be easier to organise and manage while also, he will have the opportunity to examine it in depth. One method by which data is reduced is categorical reduction. Through this method, the essential categories concerning the respective research remain. After the categorical reduction, the illustrative reduction follows. The reduction of data occurs within the categories that have previously been reduced and relate to specific phenomena that the researcher wants to understand (Rennstam et al., 2018).

The third category is Arguing. This category deals with the problem of authority. According to the book, arguing means "theorising", i.e., creating a theory based on all the empirical data

that the various methods have collected. Theorising is how the correct explanation is given regarding the data and aims to understand the phenomenon under consideration better. In simple words, via arguing, a researcher creates texts that explain the various phenomena from the data collected, an explanation is given for the phenomena in general terms, and thus, it creates a theoretical background that will lead to a dialogue with other researchers (Rennstam et al., 2018). When the empirical data is collected, there should be a discussion about this data's basic framework (Rennstam et al., 2018). Some basic rules when creating a theory are 1) the continuous observation for the choice of a topic - a phenomenon that will cause interest, 2) the categorisation of the phenomenon and the formulation of the topic, 3) further development of the topic to be relevant with previous research and theories and 4) completion of the theory with more explanations (Rennstam et al., 2018). By following the approach mentioned above of sorting, reducing and arguing, we aim to produce a text rich in data yet accessible for the reader to read because all the secondary and irrelevant information will be excluded. At the same time, the most critical comments by the interviewees will be used for deeper and richer quality analysis.

### 3.6 Quality of the research

How can we determine if research is qualitative? In order for research to be qualitative, it must meet specific criteria. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), eight criteria determine whether research is qualitative or not. The first criterion is the Worthy topic. Is the topic we are writing about interesting? Will it make others want to read it? Is the research topic relevant and significant? Our research shows that it is a fascinating topic because companies are turning more and more to pop-up stores, so it is good to have research. We saw that there was not much research on the subject, although an exciting and topical one. The second criterion is whether the subject is Rigour, i.e. to what extent the methods used in conducting the research are appropriate. This is true for our research as, after a thorough reading and study, we found that our methods were suitable for our research's smooth and correct conduct (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). The third criterion is Sincerity, i.e. the extent to which the survey was conducted transparently and if all parts of the survey were included. To the greatest extent, our work is transparent since all the critical pieces were included, which helped us build our research results. In addition, the fourth criterion is credibility, which includes comprehensive descriptions of all stages of the research. Of course, we tried to be as descriptive as possible to put the reader in the mood of our writing.

To what extent do the conclusions that have been written reflect in full what the participants in the research have said? To ensure credibility, the data were analysed by two individuals who collected the data and divided them into categories, which ensured that all the essential data were placed (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). The fifth criterion for the research to be considered qualitative is Resonance, which is the correct generalisations of the results. The results of our research offer the correct conclusions and suitable generalisations, a fact that offers the

possibility for the findings to be transferred. This criterion is similar to the Transferability criterion reported by Treharne & Riggs (2015). According to this criterion, an interview result must be placed in other surveys and other data. Although the research size is not enough to offer significant conclusions, key conclusions concerning attitudes and feelings towards the phenomenon of personal shops can be drawn. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), the sixth criterion is Contribution, whether our findings can be used as new theories, new research methods, or usable form at the company level. Our findings are essential as they contribute to the existing theory while at the same time they are significant for the companies as we give crucial advice on the correct way of using the temporary stores. The seventh criterion is Ethics and whether the research took into account the various ethical issues. At first, we were cautious with the data we collected; we did not use personal data beyond age and gender. Before we write something, we have seen it many times to ensure it is morally correct until the research question is answered (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

The last criterion for judging research as qualitative is Meaningful coherence; that is, has the research succeeded in achieving its goals? Our research has achieved Meaningful coherence after answering the research question by combining theories, literature and empirical data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Some different criteria are mentioned in other research. Specifically, we have Dependability which refers to whether research can give the same results in the future (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). We consider that due to the nature of our research, it is pretty challenging to have a complete replica of our research. The reason is that it was based on the temporary IKEA store in Greece which is currently closed. A similar investigation will be conducted with another temporary store, but a replica will not exist. The following criterion is Confirmability, which refers to the objectivity of the results and to what extent the researchers were biased in a specific direction. If the research pushed in the direction that the respondents wanted to answer what they wanted. We tried to be as objective as possible, given our background in the field. We left the flow of interviews free without constantly intervening and pushing with additional questions, while in addition, the general form of the questions was a free fact that left the discussion open so as little bias as possible.

The last criterion but paramount is the authenticity of our research. To what extent have we offered good results that include different perspectives (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). In order to have a high degree of authenticity of the writing, a comprehensive examination of the existing theory was done so that we could create the right questions for the interviewees. In addition, through a better understanding of the literature, we could approach the issue from different angles to give a more comprehensive view. In this part, we have to refer to something that we did not want to happen, but unfortunately, it happened. Due to the Global pandemic that also affected Greece and Cyprus, we had a stroke resulting in us not visiting IKEA. Under ideal circumstances, we wanted to conduct field interviews where customers would have responded to our questions right after having conducted their purchases or visited IKEA stores to receive more accurate responses.

Another thing that would have helped us conduct more proper research would have been conducting field observations and taking notes about customers' behaviours while shopping at

the pop-up store IKEA. Unfortunately, the above mentioned could not be implemented given our time frame and pandemic conditions with all the restrictions. This resulted in us staying with the in-depth interviews, a method that was a safe choice for us in order to proceed with our research. However, we believe that the result was outstanding, perhaps because the name IKEA offers a lot to people, who usually know the brand, so it was considered attractive to try and identify the impact of the pop-up store in the multichannel customer experience and consequently in the relationships that customers and brands share. By limiting our analysis to the pop-up store that operated in Piraeus, Greece, we did that to receive homogeneous responses since the participants chose to come from two markets (Greece and Cyprus) that are highly interdependent culturally and financially. Hence, the same values characterise customers from both markets, and the way of purchasing is common. The existence of only one pop-up store in combination with the restrictions that the covid pandemic has resulted, was, of course, a limitation when it comes to the number of respondents. However, with technology usage, we managed to collect people's responses enough to reach saturation and proceed with our analysis. IKEA has been selected as our case study because it is an industry that is highly associated with the physical interaction of its customers with its products. However, the fact that it operated an ephemeral (pop-up) store makes it an unusual case and an opportunity to identify how the customers experience pop-up stores in a less conventional industry.

## 4 Analysis

*In this section, the results from the empirical data that we have collected through the in-depth interviews that have been conducted for this research will be presented. Our research examines how adding a new channel to an already existing group of channels affects how customers interact with retailers and, consequently, the relationship they share with them.*

### 4.1 Overview of the analysis

In order to help the readers of our research read our empirical data, the responses obtained were grouped into two main themes. The themes are designed to showcase the general beliefs of the participants on a specific topic first and then their approaches on the same topic concerning our case study of IKEA to specify. The first theme covers the topics related to the fundamental role of the pop-up stores as far as the customer experience is concerned, compared to the regular channels that are offered permanently. This theme has been selected because our interviewees' responses showed that different channel formats are being used differently by the customers, and we aim to investigate what the pop-up stores add to the customers' overall experience that the rest of the channels lack. The second theme revolves around Brand Perception and Consumer Brand relationship. This theme has been selected because how a brand is perceived closely related to how we interact with it through time. The second theme revolves around Consumer Brand Relationship. This theme has been selected because of how a brand is perceived and is closely related to how we interact with it through time, leading to the creation of relationships. This aligns with what Fournier (1998) supports. The way a brand is perceived and how we experience it was also a very big part of our literature review, and examining how the multichannel experience is affected by the addition of the pop-up stores lies in the epicentre of our research is understandable why this constitutes a standalone theme. So, what is the impact on how customers perceive a specific brand when their interaction passes through a different channel from the channels used to create the customer-brand relationship in the past? This is what this theme aims to answer. At the beginning of our analysis, we focused on more general questions to understand simple consumer habits.

## 4.2 General Shopping Behaviours

Before proceeding with the two main themes of our research, it was considered beneficial to understand why customers adopt a specific shopping behaviour. For that reason, we started our interviews with more general questions to understand how our respondents shop in general and their overall preferences when they shop. All in all, those questions are designed in a way in order to help us understand how the participants tend to shop and how their behaviour diverts when it comes to shopping furniture and experiencing pop-up stores in the furniture industry. As seen by the participants' responses, many customers shop to cover their needs, but most of them also support that they shop because they enjoy the process of shopping.

*"In order to satisfy my needs, but also, I enjoy the process" (Participant 1 - pop-up visitor), similarly, "I do it for the pleasure that the shopping experience gives you" (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor)*

The excerpts mentioned above denote a combination of pleasure and practicality that this experience gives them. Some participants claim that they value the opportunity to get active and take action to conduct purchases.

*"The process itself to go there, to take your car, your bus, and go there with your friends is what I adore, what I like. This interaction with the shop, the employees, friends, or other customers is something that I like" (Participant 11 - pop-up visitor)*

An interesting approach that slightly differs from the most responses on the way it is described is the following: "I like going shopping because it gives me peace of mind" (Participant 2) This response shows that shopping is an activity that affects the emotional status of some customers. However, what are the factors that lure the customers to start interacting with a specific retailer? What are the values they are looking for? The following responses show that some participants consider a firm's practices to interact with a specific retailer.

*"I prefer shopping from companies that have a corporate social responsibility" (participant 1 - pop-up visitor), I only shop from environmentally friendly companies (participant 2 - regular store visitor), I am generally an environmentalist (participant 3 - regular store visitor)*

This shows that some customers want to create relationships with entities that share beliefs and moral values. However, the participants highlighted a significant majority that the overall interaction with the stores, the products and the employees is what makes them want to visit or even stop their interaction with a specific brand. The participants supported that the experience that they have when they shop is of utmost importance. One participant stated:

*"The experience while interacting with a brand is of utmost importance... I want the store to be customer-friendly, bright, and clean. I want the store to be created so the customers will be able to move around because this comfort will make me visit the store again and even allow me to be relaxed to buy more products if you can say that. The relaxed feeling makes me feel less sceptical about products. I prefer the more minimal experiences" (Participant 4 - regular store visitor)*

*"I like seeing professionalism from the retailer I am about to purchase from. I want to be able to find the information that I want without any trouble. So regardless of the point of contact that I will have with the retailer, I want it to be efficient and pleasant. I also want the assortment to be well presented both online, in catalogues and physical stores" (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor)*

What is to be drawn from the above general questions is that although the practices of the retailers constitute a factor that the customers take into consideration, most of them supported that issues related to their personal experiences, mainly concerning the professionalism of the employees and pleasant environments make them choose to interact with a retailer. The responses showed that the customers value stress-free experiences when shop directly connected with their interaction with the retailers.

### 4.3 The role of the pop-up in the multichannel format - what does it add compared to other channels

The importance of multichannel interaction between retailers and customers was discussed extensively. To understand the customers' familiarity with different channels, a closer inspection of the participants' responses while describing their relationship with physical and online channels can provide valuable insights on how different channels are used in general. Although the responses were divided between customers who generally in their shopping life prefer online and offline channels, a significant majority of the participants supported that they usually prefer physical channels and specifically physical stores, a phenomenon which shows a strong connection of the Greeks with physical shopping.

*"I REALLY LOVE (intonation of that phrase) to shop in physical stores. I prefer to shop in that way much more, compared to online shopping. Because I can see the product that I want to buy, I want to understand what a specific product is" (Participant 4 - regular store visitor)*

*"I prefer to shop in physical stores since I come in contact with people while at the same time, I see the product with my own eyes and I can hold it in my hands" (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)*



Those responses help us understand why most of our interviewees consider physical stores the most helpful channel. The answers mentioned above denote a pattern on why the customers prefer the interaction with a specific channel. The physical stores allow them to interact with the product itself and examine its properties in person, which diversifies this channel from the digital ones offered by the retailers, which cannot convey the same experience with the products as the direct hands-on interaction. Furthermore, a visit to the store includes social interactions with the employees and other customers that add to the overall experience. On the other hand, some claimed that the online channels offer a more convenient experience because of their nature, which is time-saving oriented and lacks the need to visit a physical location.

*"I think the online form of shopping is much more excellent and more correct. This form of shopping has many advantages. The most common online purchases have to do with technology products, clothing and footwear. I think these products are easier to buy online because you know about the actual size of the products"* (participant 3 - regular store visitor).

*"Online shopping is also helpful for me. I can purchase the products that I want when I am busy when I am bored"* (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor).

Nevertheless, also the opportunity that they give to the customers in order to use them to support their pre-purchase stage by collecting information for the items they want to purchase.

*"There is something positive about online shopping. You can see the items that are offered before you visit the physical store. So you know beforehand if the shop you are searching for has the item you are looking for"* (Participant 11 - pop-up visitor)

So what can be supported is that although most customers select the physical channels as the channel they prefer, many find the online channels also useful to enrich their experience while shopping. The above mentioned denotes that the customers, although they have preferences, engage in multichannel interaction with retailers to support their overall experience.

*"There are cases where I started my search for a product online, and then I purchased the product offline."* (participant 8 - pop-up visitor).

The cooperation of the various channels when buying a product is evident. Especially for more expensive products, it makes a lot more sense for someone to check it online and then go to the physical store to see it up close and buy it. Something similar applies to IKEA, which deals with furniture.

*"I prefer online shopping because you can buy products in no time. You can select what you want, you buy it, and it comes to your house".* (participant 6 - regular store visitor).

Online product shopping offers prospective shoppers the opportunity to buy something from the comfort of their own home without having to grab the car and drive away. It makes the

consumer's journey much more effortless. What is to be drawn from the participant's responses is that regardless of channel preferences, they all understand the importance of this plethora of channels that are available for better interaction with the retailers and the more efficient coverage of their needs. While the opportunities that the combination of those different offerings provide help the customers interact in a way that suits best to their needs. The participants mentioned that they cross through multiple stages when shopping, with most of them supporting that they usually start online in the pre-purchase phase and then move offline to see the items. From the data that we have collected, it is evident that many respondents prefer to look on retailers' websites to see if there is availability in the product they are interested in. After looking on the website for the product's availability, most of them will go to the physical store and buy it. This process shows us again the importance of having a multichannel presence in the buying process. This is evident from the words of the specific informant:

*"I will often gather information from the internet, and then I will go to the store to shop. In addition, I get in touch with companies through their websites, through websites related to their partners" (Participant 3 - regular store visitor)*

In some cases, the search is done to find the right product, even from a company's website, but the prospective buyer ends up buying that product from another company. This is a bad thing for the company but at the same time perfect for the consumer. It promotes the collapse of the monopoly, which pushes the market to offer better prices. Moreover, this is why many customers choose to start their purchase process from online channels. One respondent says:

*"I often find something that I want to buy from one channel, but I end up buying it from another" (Participant 2 - regular store visitor)*

This, of course, applies to IKEA, too; because of the nature of the products it offers, consumers are more likely to know in advance what they want to buy. For this reason, they enter the IKEA website and look for the products. They can see the different dimensions and compare them with their existing products. It is something that offers a complete experience. This can be seen from the following by a participant:

*"I have checked the website in order to get informed about products and to see if there is availability in IKEA...It makes my experience more complete, I can use the website where my purchase is more to the point, and I know exactly what I want to buy. So I start with the website to get informed and then proceed to the normal purchasing process of visiting the physical store" (Participant 4 - regular store visitor)*

This combination of channels does not favour all consumers, however. Some people feel the need to make direct purchases while in-store or online without being forced to do both, see them on the internet, go to the physical store, go to the physical store, and buy them online. However,

multiple channels allow consumers to have immediate and much more accessible, more specific shopping behaviours.

*"I prefer to conduct the purchase when I see the products, but I like to have the support in case of need. I am a person that when I see something that I like, I will buy it" (Participant 6 - regular store visitor)*

*"I am a person that likes to have complete control of the purchases that I am conducting...I like to collect as much information as I can in order to be able to decide if I will buy it or not. So I usually collect the information that I want online, and then I visit the physical store to have the last inspection before the purchase that usually occurs there" (Participant 12 - pop-up visitor)*

Using multiple channels during the purchase process and after the purchase is beneficial for everyone is gaining ground in many discussions. Consumers recognize that multiple channels help create a much better in-store and out-of-store experience before purchasing a product. One interviewee says:

*"multiple sources can be helpful, like after-sales support, and I had an experience where I had bought something it broke during quarantine; I called the call centre of the after-sales support, and they told me what to do in order to return the broken item and receive the new one, which has very helpful for me especially in the lockdown" (Participant 7 - regular store visitor)*

The pre-purchase contact is considered necessary, if not for how they recall a specific brand but in general for the way they start interacting with it, and we were particularly impressed that an interviewee told us just that. The contacts that one has with a company before entering the store can change for the better and, worse, his purchasing decisions. The online shopping channel, in particular, enables consumers to get in touch with the company.

*"the online channels help me to start the purchase process way before the actual purchase in the physical store" (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor)*

The responses mentioned above highlight that the presence of different channels is making their experience more comfortable because they can interact with a retailer without entering the store itself or even comparing different prices. The customers seem to value diversified experiences because they allow them to have more options, and they usually seek that for their comfort and enrichment of experience, as the responses indicated. They become a valuable tool in the hands of the customers. The general conclusion is that the participants in the research all have contact with multiple channels. Some show a clear preference in physical stores while others online. The common denominator in the answers given to us is that everyone views the parallel integration of channels positively.

*"I like checking first in the websites and social media about the products that I am interested in, and then after having created a shortlist, I usually go to the physical locations to see them in person. However, there are also cases in heavier items where I visit the physical stores, and I may keep the number of the item and order them online when I return home in order for them to be delivered to my place. I think that having the opportunity to interact with a firm through multiple sources is always helpful because you can create the combination of activities that suit you best" (Participant 9 - pop-up visitor)*

Regarding the balance between online and offline channels, the customers favoured the opportunity to have many channels to choose from. To enrich and handle their experience with the brands they interact with. Moreover, this shows the willingness of the customers to enter into the provision of services process and take a more active role in the experiences they have.

*"You provide the customers both ways of buying (on and offline), you give choices." (participant 1 - pop-up visitor); it is always helpful to have the opportunity to decide between online and offline choices" (participant 6 - regular store visitor), "The presence of both online and offline sources is always significant, and I think for me as a customer is that extra sense of support" (participant 7 - regular store visitor).*

What can be understood is that in general, the customers like the idea of having the opportunity to shape their own experience by deciding which channels to use, so regardless of channel preference, the respondents seem to be in favour of multichannel support because as it has already been mentioned above, the customers may in different cases use different channels to shop. As participant 7 said, it creates *"the sense of support"*. All in all, those general questions set the frame on how customers tend to consume and use the available channels. The interviewees claimed that they favour shopping in physical stores because of their direct interaction with the items and the social interaction with employees and the other customers, which they see as a pleasurable experience. On the other hand, although supported less by the same group of people, the digital channels all understand their importance and, more specifically, the importance of having all those available channels to choose from and support them in their customer experience journey.

#### 4.3.1 IKEA store

In order to understand the impact of pop-up stores on the multichannel experience, we need to understand the regular interaction of the customers with the specific retailer. Interestingly enough, and something that highlights the importance of multiple channels, although choosing and purchasing a product is based on physical interaction or online convenience, the collection of information aligns with what most participants have supported in the preliminary questions. Specifically, they supported that they get informed from other channels, mainly online. Opinions differ as to what is the appropriate way to inform the consumer about the company's

products. The prevailing view is about the usefulness of catalogues. One interviewee said the following:

*"I just love to sit at home and read the companys' catalogue; this is the main way I am informed about the company's products" (Participant 1 - pop-up visitor)*

Although catalogues are one of the most well-known ways people are informed about the company's products, the participants gave us other exciting answers. There have been some reports on social media, while it was interesting to note that they came in contact with the company's ads on the highway. We see that the company uses a lot of available media to reach consumers.

*"I get informed from the social networking pages, and also I see a lot of big ads on the highway." (Participant 2 - regular store visitor)*

*Of how consumers are informed, television could not be missing. "I like the way they inform us about offers and new products via the TV." (Participant 3 - regular store visitor)*

However, some people do not need any information. They know in advance what they will buy, the advertising does not lead them to the store. Advertising is a way to get them to buy something extra.

*"I do not usually search for the offerings to see if there is an offer you know. I usually know approximately what I want, so I enter the store, and I buy it" (Participant 4 - regular store visitor)*

*"Most of the time, I know what I need in advance, go into the store, and search until I find exactly what I need. But I also look for the company's website to make sure they have specific products" (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)*

The last two excerpts show us that people trust the company's products, and without the need for information from the company, they go and buy products. This shows us a relationship of trust and loyalty. For our research, we needed to understand why the customers of IKEA choose to interact with this specific retailer so, at a later phase, see what the pop-up store added to their previous experiences. The participants of both subgroups claimed that they choose IKEA because they value the physical interaction with the assortment that it offers and the overall atmosphere.

*"It is an outstanding experience, the variety of products, and the overall atmosphere within the store is amazing." (participant 1 - pop-up), "I enjoy shopping from the IKEA store... It is probably the friendliest and nicest store I have ever been to." (participant 5 - pop-up visitor), the way the IKEA store is structured makes the store's experience much more accessible and enjoyable ( participant 2 - regular store visitor).*

Apart from the in-store atmosphere and the opportunity to check the assortment in person is also the sense of assortment guarantee that they feel, and as it has been expressed to us, the majority of the participants, when responding to that question, were focused on talking again about the physical stores.

*"Furthermore it is also very convenient to be able to find whatever you want in one single place and IKEA offers that, it closely resembles a shopping mall." (participants 9 - pop-up visitor).*

*"to be honest with you, I usually go there because I know that I can find items for my house, and for every part of my house, all in one place." (participant 4 - regular store visitor).*

What is worth mentioning is that the participants' responses regarding the drivers that made them choose IKEA were mainly focused on their direct interaction with the physical stores. This means that even if they use multiple sources while shopping, collecting information or comparing the prices and assortment with competitive brands, what makes them choose IKEA is closely related to their direct interaction with the physical channels they offer. The nature of the products offered by the furniture retailers and the willingness of the customers to interact with them before the purchase is what places the physical channel in the epicentre of the decision to choose this specific retailer. As we have already mentioned, the strong point of IKEA is its physical stores and the interaction with the items. It is worth mentioning that the customers who only interacted with the regular channels of IKEA seem to have this specific brand in their minds to give the practical and aesthetically pleasing pieces of furniture to cover their needs in a well-designed site.

*"I like the way it is structured and how the products are presented, so yeah, I prefer to go there and not to the competitors" (participant 4 - regular store visitor). "I also like the store's aesthetics and the products." (participant 7 - regular store visitor).*

On the other hand, the customers that had the opportunity to interact with the pop-up store seem to move from a more passive admiration of the brand to a more active interaction and actual co-creation of experiences.

*"You visit a store, and you can touch the items, open the cabinets, and check the items personally." (participant 10 - pop-up visitor). "It offers the opportunity to potential consumers to imagine the ideal room for them." (participant 5 - regular store visitor).*

The respondents show that the customers who interacted with the pop-up store are inclined to interact more actively with the assortment and the offering in general. These aspects are also present to the rest of the participants of the regular channels because the stores of this retailer are shaped in such a way to support that, but providing mainly experiences was the epicentre of the pop-up store, and the people whom this would lure seem to see IKEA more interactively. When asked about what IKEA offers to them personally, outstanding shopping experience, feeling relaxed and calm, and Convenience were the most common answers. The

connection that the participants have with IKEA is obvious. The words shopping experience were constantly present in all the answers given by the participants, a fact that demonstrates the outstanding work that the company does. One of the respondents commented:

*"I think Convenience. I like the idea of having a complete experience while shopping and IKEA offer that. Another positive thing is that I can have a stress free experience since the store with all those concepts makes me feel at home, and I enjoy that. There is no other store that you have those feelings, at least here. It is a place where you can go with your family, have fun, and find whatever you are looking for. It is the best of both worlds, practical and fun" (Participant 9 - pop-up visitor).*

Moreover, as stated by various respondents, the experience in an IKEA store is smooth and pleasant. Consumers care about the experience they will have with the company and especially within the store. They want something that will be nice and pleasant and at the same time convenient. This is evident from the statements of the following participants:

*"I think it gives me a pleasant experience and also a sense of relaxation and comfortability. And as I already mentioned in our way of life where everything is moving so fast, it is nice to have a comfortable experience" (Participant 10 - pop-up visitor)*

The participants show their satisfaction regarding the experience that comes to them when they contact IKEA. Reports such as the fact that the use of the store makes them happy show precisely that, that is, IKEA offers ideal conditions for consumers. *"Being inside this store makes me happy."* (Participant 2 - regular store visitor). This happy environment, combined with consumers' experience, creates a more general atmosphere that pushes consumers into new markets as they feel more relaxed and comfortable.

*"It offers me the opportunity to be in an environment where I can find what I need and feel good that I am in that environment" (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)*

*"Only the fact that I know that I will receive an outstanding customer experience, in combination with the comfortability of being able to find what you want in one place, makes it a must." (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor)*

In conclusion, we see that IKEA offers ideal conditions inside the store, making consumers feel happy. The experience that the company offers to consumers is unique while at the same time, *"It is a pleasant experience that is also convenient" (Participant 12).*

#### 4.3.2 IKEA in-store atmosphere

From the above interview excerpts, consumers give the atmosphere inside the store and how it reflects the company's image to the outside. In addition, the ease of use of the store is a severe factor that affects the expected experience within the store. The interviews emphasize that

consumers want to have pleasant and carefree moments within the store, away from anxiety. For IKEA's customers, the in-store atmosphere was described as a comfortable and well-designed store to make you feel at home. So we can support that in the eyes of its customers, it provides stress-free experiences.

*"Very nicely decorated rooms that make you feel at home" (Participant 2 - regular store visitor), "When I enter, the first thing that I feel is this smell of freshly cooked food, and at that moment, I feel at home" (participant 6 - regular store visitor).*

The customers define it as home by themselves, while the fact that it combines home-looking concepts and smells like freshly cooked food adds to this overall relaxed feeling. The aesthetics of the stores and the assortment also play a role in how the customers perceive it.

*"I would describe it as "Scandinavian" cause everything is placed in order so effortlessly, those aesthetics are so nice" (Participant 8 - pop-up store visitor).*

However, on the one hand, some customers found the stores practical due to the collection of items, but on the other hand, some of them find it a bit dysfunctional because they lack the sense of interaction with the employees due to the vastness of the stores. An aspect that for some customers may decrease the value that they would receive from it.

*"I would say that the feelings can be diverse. On the one hand, I have time to find and see the products that I want. On the other hand, I have the sense that I do not have people to ask" (Participant 9 - pop-up visitor)*

#### 4.3.3 A pop-up store in a multichannel environment

The current topic brings us to the epicentre of our analysis. IKEA operated in Greece a temporary store or as it is usually called Pop-up store between May and November 2018 in the urban market of the city of Piraeus in a location wherein proximity two additional IKEA stores exist. During the interviews, a steady direction was observed on the part of the respondents. We saw a guideline which was very positive towards the temporary store as a new business structure.

*"The idea of temporary stores is incredible; I hope to see similar initiatives in the future. Of course, I enjoyed my visit to the temporary store; it was something I saw for the first time up close since this type of store is not so common for a country like Greece while at the same time it was impressive from the point of view that this temporary store was a furniture company. Even today, I remember the cosy atmosphere inside the store" (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)*



From the above excerpt, the positive opinion towards the temporary store is obvious, while we view that similar initiatives should become a habit shortly. This section aims to respond to the participants of our research who interacted with this ephemeral channel, identifying how its customers have used this store in a multichannel context where several IKEA channels already exist.

*"This particular store made a great impression on me how friendly it was to me while also, the service was immediate, maybe because the store was smaller than a regular IKEA."  
(Participant 2 - regular store visitor)*

Pop-up stores constitute a different approach that companies adopt in order to bring people closer to them. They have a different purpose of presence. The same applies to the early IKEA pop-up store that opened in Greece. Respondents were asked about what they perceived as different from the use of the temporary store compared to the regular IKEA store. Initially, we received answers that had to do with the essential part of the customer experience process. For example, an aspect that has been brought up is the number of products was very different from the regular store. This is perfectly reasonable since the early store was much smaller. Due to the size of the pop-up store, the time spent by the participants inside this store was shorter.

*"Variety of products, number of products, duration I could spend in the regular store, the overall stock" (Participant 1 - pop-up visitor)*

It is also worth mentioning that the size of the store offers the opportunity to create an atmosphere that will be ideal for consumers, an atmosphere that shapes the behaviour of employees. Due to the size of the store, the employees are closer to the consumer, who in turn receives this friendly atmosphere. Additionally, the colours in this store are different compared to the regular store. The temporary store creates the prerequisites that will bring the consumer closer to the company.

*"The atmosphere inside the store is different; I would say that the behaviour of the employees is different. In general, the whole treatment is more relaxed but at the same time very pleasant. Additionally, the location is different as it is located within the city. Compared to other channels I would say that the temporary store was more colourful. I mean the atmosphere inside the store was happier, while the staff were closer to us. Overall, it was a lovely experience. Yes, it is not the big store that has it all, but I felt much closer to IKEA than before" (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)*

The regular IKEA stores are located outside the city in a considerable area. On the other hand, the temporary store was located inside the city in a central location, which constitutes a huge difference compared to the regular IKEA stores. This fact made the visit to an IKEA much more accessible while at the same time it opened its gates for a more significant number of people who did not have the opportunity before, or the will to spend so much time to visit a store that is located in a less convenient location out of the city.

*"The location was one of the main differences; it is an IKEA in a busy area inside the city...While inside the pop-up store, you immediately knew that it is an IKEA store, but the atmosphere could be described as more festive than the usual stores. The pop-up store was a pleasant addition to the already existing network of channels offered by the firm, a channel designed to cover different needs. I have visited the store multiple times. If I wanted to buy something small I would visit it. Moreover, if they did not have something I wanted to buy, I ordered it from the pop-up store and brought it to my home. So yeah, it was beneficial for me"*  
(Participant 9 - pop-up visitor)

The difference between a smaller store and the obvious is noticeable. Everything becomes much easier to use; the employees a closer while at the same time all the products are closer to the customer. In addition, due to its central location, people had effortless access to it. We see many different changes compared to the regular store of IKEA. Because it was close to the consumers and in combination with its smaller size, the interaction between IKEA consumers was apparent.

*"It covered more fundamental needs related to the house, and there were not many massive items. Not in stock, at least. This store allowed the people who live nearby to have this vibe of IKEA closer to them and even go to an IKEA store just for more basic things. So in my mind, it worked as an addition to the already existing channels in order to improve the interaction with the retailer while at the same time covering needs and I think this is very nice"*  
(Participant 10 - pop-up visitor)

The temporary store was an inspirational space that opened the door to IKEA to get on the map of the most miniature objects and large furniture. It allowed IKEA to achieve many things and not just to make people remember the name IKEA.

*"as a place to interact and get inspiration was super lovely. You could also buy small things like "souvenirs" (Participant 12 - pop-up visitor)*

In the general experience with the company IKEA, the temporary store offered the possibility to the consumers to shop much easier and faster. The size of the store offered this possibility, a fact that delighted the participants in our research. This is evident from the following statements:

*"Finding IKEA closer to you is always pleasant, and for many people, it was easier to visit this store and not the regular one" (Participant 9 - pop-up visitor)*

*"Because of its Size, it was quicker to shop" (Participant 1 - pop-up visitor)*

The smaller size had another advantage; the overall behaviour of the employees was more personal, that is, they made the consumers feel nice and very comfortable. This difference in experience is one of the most important that the temporary store offered to the company IKEA and the consumers. A participant commented:

*"due to the better and more personalized service, I felt much more familiar and beautiful"*  
(Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)

The participants also mentioned the customers' experiences blended with the other available channels for pop-up stores. Specifically, some supported that having the opportunity to use the available channels in a way that fits their needs is something that they take into consideration. For example, Participant 8 supported:

*"...for me knowing that I have the support and the opportunity to interact with the retailer both in big stores and smaller stores conveniently located close to me, and also have the opportunity to start searching and have after-sales support also online makes me happy. The smaller stores like the pop-ups can pave the way in order for IKEA to provide unified experiences that cover the whole spectrum of the customers purchasing needs" (participant 8 - pop-up store)*

This response provides a fascinating insight. Participant 8 showed most directly that the addition of this channel that the pop-up store offered is added in the already existing network of channels that a retailer experiences. The customers value the opportunity to use and be supported by a network of channels and the different forms that they have to allow them to create the experience that they will receive by using the available channels as they wish to be supported by them. Participant 12 provided, based on the experiences that she had, information concerning how well integrated the experience of the pop-up store was with all the other available channels.

*"As I saw, it blended well. If I remember correctly, you could order the product of the physical store to be delivered to you or pick it up from the store. You could start again online and end up in the pop-up if it was more conveniently located to you, as it was to us, so yes, I would say that the channels blended perfectly" (participant 12 - pop-up visitor).*

The excerpt mentioned above shows how the customers could use this ephemeral store in combination with other channels conveniently and experience the brand. An approach that is also evident in the responses of other participants.

*"...I said, I ordered the product that I could not find in the pop-up store, and the IKEA team brought it in my home; I was already able to go to the regular store if something was broken, so yeah, I would say that with all those channels available at the same time my interaction*

*with the brand was efficient and pleasurable at the same time. I am satisfied if you ask me"*  
(Participant 9 - pop-up visitor).

The customers seem to link this store with the opportunity to receive "easier" shopping experiences.

*"I will not say that this store replaces the regular one, but it certainly works alongside it. As I said, the bigger stores, although convenient in terms of assortment, are time-consuming. This store was smaller than the regular store, filled with more basic yet necessary items, which made you consider it a perfect option for smaller purchases where a routine visit to the regular store of IKEA is not an option. Furthermore, of course, the fact that it is conveniently located. Why not visit this channel for light purchases?"* - (participant 10 - pop-up visitor)

Last but not least, the participants who had interacted with the pop-up store were aware that they would not find all the assortment that a regular store, so for that reason, it is noticeable why the respondents in many cases reported that they had or they had experienced active interaction with multiple channels while using the pop-up store, a fact that worths mentioning. The pop-up store, in many cases, could be described as the physical entity that for the customers brought closer the online channels (web-site) with the form of the physical IKEA store. This can be seen by the following answer:

*"The pop-up store was a link between the website and the physical store. It was something in between. It was where you could go and see products more fundamental than the regular store without worrying about the time you will spend there. Such a store is handy in smaller places like smaller cities to bring a bit of hand on IKEA, and why not make it permanent. I think that having the experience creates a demand that a permanent store will satisfy. I also heard that there would be a new store in Piraeus, a small one like the pop-up"* (participant 12 - pop-up visitor)

By asking the research participants whether they would be interested in seeing a furniture retailer like IKEA adopting such practices more often, the response that we got was homophonous. Participants who had interacted with the pop-up store were willing to interact again with this kind of concept because of the practicalities they have seen on it and the different needs they have identified that it covers.

*"Of course, I would like to see more similar acts from IKEA in the future"* (participant 9 - pop-up visitor)

*"Yeah definitely, it is fun and practical to have IKEA close to me, so if I have fun and I can cover my needs at the same time is something that I seek, and the pop-up inspired me for further purchases that I did in IKEA; the following months."* (participant 8 - pop-up visitor)

Many supported that this store could be helpful in smaller cities even for a limited period.

*"Yes! If I were to have an IKEA in my city, I would have visited it every time I was in the market." (participant 11 - pop-up visitor)*

The participants of the customers who did not have the opportunity to interact with the pop-up store supported that they would be happy to interact with something different and new, something that aligns with what they have supported that they like having the opportunity to interact with a retailer in a way that is convenient and enjoyable to them.

*"Yes, possibly. If the retailer tries something new, I am interested to see what it is,...The most important thing for me is the experience, and seeing a different IKEA store in an unexpected location would make me visit it for sure" (participant 7 - regular store visitor).*

Those responses make it apparent that the interviewees, given that they already know the brand and have already formed a relationship with it, allow them to interact with it through a different channel that is new, ephemeral. However, those characteristics make it also highly experiential to them, and the physical interaction is something that they value in this specific industry. The experiential character of the store, combined with the different form and location that it had compared to the online and physical (regular) channels of IKEA, seemed to have affected the way they perceived it. The interviewees' responses about the drivers led them to choose a specific retailer mainly associated with physical interaction to allow us to assume that the actual hand-in interaction with the items inside the pop-up store contributes to the perceived image for the overall brand.

## 4.4 How can pop-up stores influence brand relationships?

The interviews gave us some fundamental data which clarify the field around the role of pop-up stores. It became easier to understand their importance in the way the relationship between consumer and brand changes. We extracted essential data through the interviews, emphasising that pop-up stores play an important role in building and maintaining the brand.

### 4.4.1 Excitement – Buzz

When asked about the pop-up store, the participants immediately came up with responses that indicate that they were very excited about their experience with this store. Most of the participants claimed that they did not know about its existence. Some supported that they bump into it by coincidence, while others by the buzz that it created. In a way, we can support (and based on the responses of the group of interviewees that we have found) that the location of this

store, which operated in a central street in the market of Piraeus, was the primary reason for their encounter. While others were lured to it because of the buzz created and the positive WOM of people who had experienced it. Starting with the location, we see that many respondents did not know about the existence of this store but were surprised to see an IKEA in a location that is entirely different from the locations where the regular stores are.

*"I did not know about the existence of it. I went shopping with my friends in the city centre of Piraeus, and I bumped into it." (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor); I visited a friend of mine who lives in Athens ...as we were walking, we bumped into it (Participant 11 - pop-up visitor).*

The element of surprise was evident across several participants. The unexpected encounter excited the participants and made them want to see what this store was all about.

*"I was surprised to see an IKEA store in the middle of the city. The fact that I was able to experience IKEA differently made me visit the store" (Participant 8 - pop-visitor).*

The unexpected encounter of a brand related to a specific format of stores (at least for the Greek market) played a role in making the customers want to visit it. The second important factor related to the excitement towards the pop-up has to do with the buzz that it generated. Many respondents claimed that the overall hype made them want to visit this store to experience it, while positive WOM also played a role.

*"My friends informed me about the existence of this store while at the same time I was informed by the many Instagram stories of my friends. In general, when this store came, there was much talk throughout the area, resulting in the required buzz that led people to want to visit it." (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor).*

As we can see, the customers were feeling like taking part in something new collectively by talking about it and making it the "talk of the town", an aspect that shows how this different idea created a vibe around it. Last but not least, apart from the unexpected encounter that excited the customers and the buzz around the store, what sparked this excitement towards this type of channel was the store itself. The pop-up store of IKEA challenged what the customers thought about IKEA. This multinational retailer is mainly associated with the regular stores that it operates that are vast and usually located out of the cities. The pop-up store changed that and brought something completely different, a smaller store in a central location of a populous city.

*"I enjoyed my visit to the temporary store; it was something I saw for the first time up close since this type of store is not so common for a country like Greece while at the same time it was impressive from the point of view that this temporary store was a furniture company".*  
(participant 5 - pop-up visitor)

The customers were excited and curious to experience this different IKEA store and see what they could find in it. All in all, we see that this new type of store sparked a great interest in

IKEA's customers. The unexpected encounter, the buzz and the store size and location contribute to the willingness of the customers to see what this new channel was all about and experience IKEA differently. Responses like:

*“When I saw that there was a small IKEA, I was shocked. Cause I did not expect to see such a store in the city centre” (Participant 11 - pop-up visitor)* indicates that before the customers' interaction with the pop-up, in their minds, IKEA was linked to a particular set of channels, store format and interaction experience. However, the pop-up store came to change that, and customers went there by this evident science of excitement to experience how a familiar brand can be experienced differently. The fact that all the respondents were expressing positive feelings about interacting with the pop-up aligns with what the general questions have indicated that the customers like the opportunity to have many channels to choose from and shape their experience based on their needs. Furthermore, the participants pointed out that the main thing that caught their attention and excited them was the store itself. Precisely, an aspect that made many customers visit the pop-up store was also the different format. IKEA has been tight with the bigger regular stores that are located out of the cities. The pop-up store defined that and brought a smaller version of IKEA into the urban market of a populous city.

*“I was pleased about it! I was able to receive the IKEA experience in a very convenient way. The store was strategically located in the urban market of Piraeus, very close to my house, and that was so nice for me as a customer of IKEA.” (participant 9 - pop-up visitor).*

The fact that IKEA offered the opportunity to the residents of a particular urban area to have an IKEA experience around the corner seems to embrace it. Most of the respondents said that the location played a vital role in luring them to experience it, while its size made them more willing to see what they could find in it. The size, although mentioned, was not seen as a negative aspect because the participants valued the store's practical purposes to find more necessary items without having to visit the regular store.

*“This store allowed the people who live nearby to have this vibe of IKEA closer to them and even go to an IKEA store just for more essential things. So in my mind, it worked as an addition to the already existing channels in order to improve the interaction with the retailer while at the same time covering needs, and I think this is very nice” (participant 10 - pop-up visitor)*

Last but not least, the ephemeral nature of the channel did not affect negatively the willingness of the participants to visit this store; on the contrary, some said that it made their decision to visit it more accessible since it would not operate for long and the brand name of IKEA seems to have worked as a seal of guarantee for the quality of services and the overall experience.

*“I first thought that I should visit it immediately because it will leave the city and I will miss the opportunity to see it up close. My following thoughts were that this is something impressive, and I must see it. In no case did I have second thoughts about my intention to visit*

*the store. On the contrary, its temporary nature made me want to visit it as soon as possible. IKEA products were the guarantee I needed." (participant 5 - pop-up visitor).*

The pop-up store added something different to the already existing channel offering because the participants can experience IKEA without visiting the regular stores to cover everyday needs.

*"I already know Ikea, and I liked that they came up with a different idea. Moreover, I would like to see such stores creating a network of small IKEAS because if it is permanent, you can buy more basic products or order products to be delivered to you more regularly" (participant 12 - pop-up visitor).*

What can be concluded from the sections mentioned above is that the participants were drawn by the fact that they mainly bumped into this ephemeral store by coincidence or by positive WOM that created for them the willingness to visit this store. The store itself and its different format was also an essential factor for their excitement and willingness to experience this store, and as it was proven, they saw different needs that they would like to cover from a store of that format. Another fact that also needs to be mentioned is that they were confronted with the store mainly from non-traditional ways like advertising, which generated curiosity and exploration to see what this alternative channel offers. The above-mentioned show that the participants were willing to see what a new channel was all about and made them visit it as a physical presence which aligns with what we have seen above, that the customers are more inclined to interact with a retailer in a physical location than the other available channels.

#### 4.4.2 Curiosity - The element of surprise – Ephemerality

After having set the frame for the way the customers use the available channels when it comes to furniture retailers and, in our case, how they interact with the multinational furniture retailer IKEA, Most of the participants showed that they did not know about its existence, but they were lured to it because of its central location and the buzz that it created.

*"I did not know about the existence of it. I went shopping with my friends in the city centre of Piraeus, and I bumped into it." (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor); I visited a friend of mine who lives in Athens ...as we were walking, we bumped into it (Participant 11 - pop-up visitor).*

One of the main features of the temporary store is its temporary stay in a specific market. In the Greek market, pop-up stores - which are temporary - have no deep roots and are new. As is logical, this business choice by IKEA caused different feelings in the participants. Furthermore, the questions focused on which factors are essential in consumers' decision to visit the temporary IKEA store. All the interviewees answered that the main factor that pushed them to enter the store was their curiosity to see it up close. The temporary nature of the store created a sense of curiosity towards would-be consumers. In combination with the fact that IKEA decided



to bring a store in the city centre, then very quickly created noise around this prospect. One participant specifically said:

*"I think that the experience of this type of store in Greece is something new and impressive. It is a different yet special experience that encourages you to interact with the products and even conduct direct and spontaneous purchases. Furthermore, it was this sense of curiosity; I saw the brand name of IKEA in a completely different setting than the one I have used to. The fact that we knew it was ephemeral played a role. You feel like taking part in something unique. You know that it has been designed as such; it will not exist in a while. So the ephemeral nature made us visit it without even thinking about it" (participant 10 - pop-up visitor).*

*"Ephemerality was an extra point for me to visit this store. I see IKEA in a more positive way" (Participant 1 - pop-up visitor)*

They visited this store due to its temporary nature, which created a curiosity to see it up close. So the temporary nature of the store, combined with its central location and size, caused a sense of curiosity which was diminished by their visit to the temporary store. The participants showed their curiosity about this store and precisely their curiosity to see how IKEA operated a store in an urban location. These answers showed that the regular customers of IKEA were inquisitive to see this new store and compare it with the regular store. The transfer of the company within the city excited the people. One interviewee said the following:

*"I was curious. I wanted to see what this store was all about. We know that IKEA operates those huge stores usually out of the city, and that store proved to be the exact opposite. I found a mini version of IKEA conveniently located in the urban market of Piraeus. So trying to see what this store was all about made me receive this experience "(Participant 9 - pop-up visitor).*

There are many reports about the curiosity of the participants who wanted to see this store up close. In particular, the name IKEA played a crucial role in their decision to visit it. In their minds, consumers have IKEA as a company that sells furniture in a substantial out-of-town store. Of course, when all these changes are placed within the city, everything becomes more exciting and impressive. For this reason, there was a massive response from the people who visited the central temporary store.

*"The fact that I saw the brand of IKEA caught my attention." (Participant 11 - pop-up visitor)*

One factor mentioned by participants states that the location within the city, regardless of the brand and the type of store, played a significant role. The participant specifies:

*"By seeing it there in the middle of the market was by itself a driver to visit it. My friends and I were like, "what is that? Do you want to check it out?" and this is how I went there. It was of*

*pure curiosity to see what we could find there. A friend of mine also bought something small that he remembered that he needed. For me, it was nice to see our market welcoming another brand. So yeah, the sense of uniqueness this store evoked to me in combination with the curiosity of what to find there made me and my friends visit it" (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor)*

*"The main reason that made me visit the temporary IKEA branch is that I was inquisitive about visiting something new. I wanted to see what IKEA did and how it integrated a store in the city centre" (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)*

From the above excerpt, it is evident that the reason that led the specific consumer inside the temporary store is the curiosity for something new while in addition, he wanted to see how IKEA implemented its various practices in the city centre. The curiosity mentioned many times in the interviews, combined with the hype mentioned above, made everyone nearby visit the specific store. The pop-up store was a pleasant surprise for consumers. In combination with the curiosity created and the general hype, a surprise led the IKEA fans inside the temporary store.

*"I think that the experience of this type of store in Greece is something new and impressive. It is a different yet special experience that encourages you to interact with the products and even conduct direct and spontaneous purchases. Furthermore, it was this sense of curiosity; I saw the brand name of IKEA in a completely different setting than the one I am used to" (Participant 10 - pop-up visitor). "Although I am happy with the interaction with the regular channels, I can say that the pop-ups generated a sense of surprise" (Participant 8 - pop-up visitor)*

#### 4.4.3 Closer to the brand

The temporary IKEA store, as mentioned, was located within the city in a very central location. This resulted in a complete change in the IKEA philosophy in which IKEA has large stores outside the city. This brought IKEA literally into the normalcy of consumers. We received many answers during the interviews in which we were told that the location of the store in the city - centrally - was an excellent decision since IKEA came closer to society. First of all, the participants' positive attitude was shown by a question related to the future presence of temporary stores in the Greek market. The answers we received said precisely that the existence of these stores brings IKEA closer to consumers. The purpose of this store was to create a more active interaction of the customers with the brand and as they supported

*"The purpose of IKEA was to bring us closer to the company, and it succeeded." (participant 10 - pop-up visitor).*

*"Through these stores, customers are coming closer to the company. It is creating hype around the company name, and I want to see it, especially in a market like Cyprus or Greece*

*where the appearance of such stores is not very common" (Participant 2 - regular store visitor)*

*"Such movements must occur in all cities, especially in island cities - for example, Crete. People will enjoy it and will come very close to IKEA" (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)*

Temporary stores offer the opportunity to those who live far from the big stores to contact the brand. This is precisely what IKEA achieved with the opening of the store in Piraeus. In one case, one participant stated that she felt exclusive about using this store. A new store that does not have a stable presence in the Greek market caused feelings of exclusivity. The respondents mentioned that the general interaction with IKEA was excellent and again supported by its size, which was more compact and friendlier to them, giving them the sense of the more approachable IKEA. One of the participants stated:

*"The experience there gave me the sense of exclusivity because I came in close contact with IKEA and saw something new and unique. Furthermore, as I also said previously, I had the sense of exploration to see what I can find there in such a small place. The in-store atmosphere was so "IKEAish", but I was able to see the employees being close to me. So I had the IKEA experience with the benefits of a corner store. For me, it was fun but for many people would have been way more convenient than the regular stores out of the city"*  
*(Participant 8 - pop-up visitor)*

In addition, there were reports that IKEA, due to its choice to appear in the city centre, rose a lot in the eyes of the local community because it showed that it respects their wishes. It is not a small thing that a massive company like IKEA allowed people who were not so easy to go to the regular store before to have access to IKEA products.

*"I felt very nice because the company showed us that it cares about the local community. The regular IKEA - big store is located outside the city, so people here have to drive to get there. The pop-up store was built inside the city and specifically in the centre. As a result, people were able to combine their shopping and walking with a visit to IKEA. I was already a regular customer of the company; after this move, I feel the company is even closer to me"*  
*(Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)*

We see that the participants felt good that IKEA brought its services close to the consumers. Furthermore, as Participant 5 stated, the correlation of the atmosphere inside the store with the general improvement of the consumer experience because of the smaller size is evident. There is a general feeling from all the respondents that the atmosphere, although at the same colour levels as the regular store, was much more friendly, bringing IKEA much closer to consumers.

*"In my opinion, this store brought the company closer to me through the different structure of the regular store; the whole experience inside the store was much more interactive. In addition, due to the better and more personalized service, I felt much more familiar and beautiful. I even saw better technology inside the store, which I liked. Although it pushed me*

*to buy things because of the atmosphere, I still did not feel pressured to buy something”*  
(Participant 5 - pop-up visitor)

We see that IKEA came closer to consumers - society. This different approach logically affected the relationship of consumers with the brand.

*"I was in an in-depth meeting with IKEA, so yes, it affected the whole relationship with the company" (Participant 1 - pop-up visitor)*

*"Yes, I have seen that IKEA can support a version of it that is more compact and related to the experience that is closer to my everyday needs. Moreover, trust me, this interaction gave so much inspiration for future purchases you can not even imagine. I would love to see such a store taking a more permanent role the are so practical for inspiration and coverage of everyday needs. Why shop cups from the supermarket when I have IKEA near me."*  
(Participant 12 - pop-up visitor)

#### 4.4.4 Familiarize with the brand

Last but not least, the pop-up store constitutes a different channel, that on the one hand, reintroduces the IKEA brand to the already existing customers of the retailer by showing that it can be present in different forms and different ways than usual. Many customers claimed that the pop-up store allowed them to interact with the IKEA brand and its products differently, which was even more experiential than the experience they were receiving from the other channels. Many customers supported that those stores allowed them to come closer to IKEA and experience it more instantly.

*“This temporary store was more to get close to IKEA. The products mainly were small everyday products and not large furniture. It covered more needs of the moment but also needs of socialization. In addition, this store brought me closer to the company.” (Participant 5-pop-up visitor)*

The fact that IKEA is a furniture retailer linked to a specific group of channels of interaction that are constituted of vast stores less conveniently located to the majority of the customers of urban areas, and of online channels that are in most cases helpful to the customers, they are not providing except a sense of convenience and support the opportunity to the customers, to come in close contact with the brand itself in a regular basis.

*“I was pleased about it! I was able to receive the IKEA experience in a very convenient way. The store was strategically located in the urban market of Piraeus, very close to my house, and that was so nice for me as a customer of IKEA” (Participant 9 - pop-up visitor).*

For that reason, and as it has already been supported, the participants, although expressed positive feeling about IKEA because of its aesthetics and convenience when it comes to finding the products that they want, their relationship mainly revolves around the practicality that it offers and the relationship that they share is one based on the coverage of their needs.

*“Convenience” (participant 1 pop-up), offers me the opportunity to be in an environment where I can find what I need and feel good that I am in that environment. (Participant 5-pop-up visitor).*

So the already existing assortment of channels available regularly is an efficient one but factors like the comfort of going to IKEA regularly are constrained because of the whole process that the customers have to go through in order to reach the brand directly in their stores, which is the place that most of the participants of that retailer end up in order to conduct a purchase. So the regular channels do not allow the customers to experience IKEA that often directly, with physical interaction being significant for the customers when it comes to furniture.

*“It is a great customer experience and especially for me because I am loyal to this company. A great idea that provides a great customer experience. I had plenty of time to see what this store was offering”. The pop-up was Ideal because of its strategic location... overall, it was an attractive package” (participant 1, pop-up visitor).*

As seen above, the pop-up store seems to work as a reminder that IKEA is here for them while allowing them to experience the brand most efficiently by just walking in a store close to them. A significant factor that needs to be mentioned and analyzed has to do with the way customers perceive IKEA. In contrast to the regular stores, which are being praised because of their convenience due to their assortment and the opportunity to see the items up close, the pop-up stores seem to be linked to a different kind of need. The customers who interacted with the pop-up store of IKEA seem to neglect its ephemeral role, and while they visit it to experience IKEA and see what this store is all about (see the sections about Excitement and Curiosity), they also start to link it with a different kind of need. IKEA is not seen anymore only as a place where the customers can find whatever they want and see it as a brand that can also be conveniently located closer to them to cover basic needs with smaller yet practical items.

*“It was a perfect addition to the already existing combination of channels that IKEA offers... In my mind, it covers different kind of needs. It is designed to go there as part of your regular visit to the market of Piraeus and go there to buy smaller yet practical items, order them to be delivered to you if you do not have time and even go there to get inspired. (participant 8, pop-up)*

*“You know, if you have it in mind that you can visit IKEA even for smaller items without having to take your car and go to the big store is always convenient.” (Participant 9 - pop-up visitor).*

The customers expressed positive feelings about this attempt of IKEA to create something different to complete the experience of their customers (excerpt), while many felt like coming closer to the brand because they started feeling that they can interact with IKEA more regularly.

*“It covered more needs of the moment but also needs of socialization. In addition, this store brought me closer to the company.” (Participant 5 - pop-up visitor).*

What can be concluded is that IKEA opens the door also to another type of customer who cares about the practicality and wants to experience IKEA without having to drive out of the city.

*“Not all people have cars to go to the regular stores, or they do not want to go out of the city just for that. So such a store can be convenient for many people, including me. As I said before, I would love to see such a store opening in my region because in this way, you allow us to experience something different, and we need that.” (participant 11 - pop-up visitor).*

We see that the customers seem to embrace this idea of having IKEA closer to them while even the customers of the regular stores seem to be willing to experience this different channel too because they seem to understand the benefits that it has. This store is ephemeral and does not play a role because they seem to value the experience and practicality that it offers, more than its temporary nature, which shows its impact on the customers and their relationship with IKEA.

## 5 Discussion

Previous research has focused on the various managerial incentives through the use of temporary stores. The reasons why a company chooses to open this type of store have been analyzed above, according to the literature, offer different opportunities for each company. Nevertheless, apart from opening a temporary store, the rationale behind this importance has not been thoroughly investigated. In other words, it has not been analyzed why consumers choose this type of store. It has not been studied what difference it offers in a multichannel environment while at the same time it has not been studied how the optics for a brand changes with the use of the temporary store. In this chapter, there will be a presentation of the data that have been developed in the research and how these answer the questions we have asked at the beginning of our research.

In order to have a better discussion of the results, we decided to follow the structure of chapter 4 (analysis) to make it easier for the reader to follow the momentum of our thinking. We divided the discussion into two topics - just like in the previous chapter and specifically: **5.1 The role of pop-up stores in the Multichannel Environment** and **5.2 Customer Brand Relationship**. These two issues are essential for the general understanding of the issue and for drawing meaningful conclusions.

On the one hand, there is the importance of temporary stores in multi-channel environments. It is considered very important to understand why temporary stocks are essential for companies as this will give the impetus to be used further by more companies in the future. On the other hand, we have the Customer Brand Relationship in which there is a discussion about how temporary stores affect consumers' relationships with the brand and how their involvement with these stores changes their perspective on the brand. Again, the data analysis is considered very important to draw valuable conclusions that will contribute to the existing theories and give the impetus to managers and companies to use pop-up stores further.

Specifically, the impact on the multichannel experience of the customers of retailers because of the addition of the pop-up stores in the already existing set of channels was researched, and consequently, how the relationship of the customers with retail brands gets affected by that. The abductive approach that we have adopted helped us establish a basis for our analysis and a greater understanding of the importance of the multichannel interaction between customer and retailers and how an ephemeral channel like the pop-up can alter the already existing way of interacting with the brand and all the side-effects it has in the relationship between the two sides. Through this research, the various changes that pop-up stores have brought to the company's environment have been identified. In addition, there was a better understanding of what the temporary stores offer in the brand as a whole. The study of Brand Relationship and

the conclusions drawn are significant for the effectiveness of our research. The relationships that develop through the use of temporary stores will determine their future use by various companies. In addition, if consumer relations with the company improve after using a pop store, we will know precisely what actions helped improve the relations. So we see that the conclusions that will come out through this research can help companies improve their relationships with consumers. Through this research, a better understanding of the importance of pop-up stores has been created. Through the analysis, we have identified four different vital categories which are very important for the brand:

1. The **curiosity** about the brand
2. The **joy** about the brand
3. The fact that IKEA came close to consumers (**closeness**)
4. The **transformation of IKEA** from a company that sells furniture to a company that is easily accessible and sells smaller products

## 5.1 The role of pop-up stores in the Multichannel Environment

The importance of the multichannel presence of firms has been identified across many studies in the past. Jocevski (2020) specifically supported that by engaging in a multichannel level with their customers, the retailers have the opportunity to provide innovations as well as adapting the offering that they have in order to upgrade the experience that they provide, as a result of the uncertainty about the future role of the physical stores. According to Lemon and Verhoef, the development of new channels from the retailers to cover the needs of their customers can create conditions of confusion, so the retailers need to find the right spot on providing extra offerings. An excellent example is the following. The technological developments and the dominance of the internet have also affected retail, according to Haas & Schmidt (2016), with the customers being willing to use the online channels to cover their needs. This aligns with what the respondents of our research have supported, that they use online sources to conduct purchases. Paul and Rosenbaum (2020) state that the development of technology is the most important thing that affects the overall experience of contemporary customers and makes a brand stand out from the competitors.

However, what is worth mentioning is that the majority of our respondents stated that they use the online channels mainly at the beginning of their purchases to collect information about a specific product or compare prices among competing firms. The actual purchase usually takes place in the physical stores, which shows that although the online channels enrich the experience, they do not determine the purchase outcome. Some respondents stated that they would have been happy if tech elements accompanied the visit to the physical sites without placing it as a prerequisite; they mention it as something that would enrich their overall in-store experience. This trend is even more apparent when the participants were asked on how they usually interact with IKEA, showing that when it comes to furniture, the willingness to see the



items in person and interact with it in the context of a physical store is more robust, while the rest of the available mainly online channels are used as a support. This agrees with Pantano and Priporas (2016) observations about using multiple channels when people conduct purchases. The strong preference that the research participants showed about the physical purchases showed the potential physical sites still have on the customers' minds, which proves what Guiot and Roux (2010) have also suggested in their work about the importance of the role of physical stores.

What is also worth mentioning is as Zogaj, Olk & Tscheulin (2019) have said that it is vital for retailers to find new ways to strengthen their bonds with their customers as a result of the increase in competition, this can be seen by what the participants of our research have supported. When they were asked about the advantage that multiple channels gave them, all the participants claimed that it is always a plus to use the more comfortable channels for them when shopping. It gives them a sense of control over the experience they will receive, something that Rigby (2011) found in his work and shows how customers usually behave when they provide a more comprehensive range of channels to choose from. In a sense, what the interviewees responded and this was evident both on the customers who interacted only with the regular channels of IKEA and those who had the experience of the pop-up store, is that the customers like the idea of taking part in the process that will create value for them, by selecting the channel they will interact with. In alignment with what we have just mentioned comes, both Zogaj et al. (2019) and Adapa et al. (2020) support in their work that when the two sides, those of customers and retailers, interact, the creation of value can be enriched when both sides are taking an active role on the generation of value. Hence, the provision of many channels as seen by the participants' responses allows them to decide and consequently take an active role in the customer experience and create value that they will receive. In the same context, Akaka, Vargo and Schau (2015) support that the relationships between the customers and the brands they interact with can be affected by creating and offering novel and exceptional experiences.

In the same context, when asking the participants about their experiences with IKEA, the norm was that they were usually crossing through many different channels in order to shop with online and other channels (like catalogues) being usually used in the pre-purchase stage and the physical stores of this retailer being used as the leading site where the actual purchases occur. This affection that the customers of IKEA have towards the physical stores shows that the direct-physical interaction of the customers with the brand of IKEA is its strong point. Although the customers of IKEA generally express a positive approach towards the already existing offering of the brand, the subgroup of the customers who had the opportunity to experience the pop-up store that operated in Piraeus seemed delighted by this encounter, with many of them expressing feelings like excitement, and joy because of this specific experience that they had. The positive reviews of those who visited a temporary store combined with the buzz generated around the store's opening create positive indications for the company. The hype around the temporary store led the participants inside this store, thus showing its importance for the company because of its impact on the customers' behaviour who decided to visit IKEA spontaneously and regularly. It was created because of the curiosity they had to see something

new concerning the guarantee offered by the name of IKEA. As it is logical, the buzz around IKEA also created enthusiasm for the new store.

The importance of the temporary store is obvious again since people are talking about it and the company in general, while at the same time they are excited about the content that the store has. It is in line with what Henkel and Toporowski (2021) wrote: pop-ups are ideal for creating positive word of mouth. This proves what Rosenbaum, Edwards and Ramirez (2021) have claimed about the impact of strategically located physical stores. The pop-up store combines the physical presence, an element that seems to be of utmost importance for IKEA's customers because the answers denote a need to inspect the item of interest in the person with a spot located in a very excellent location in the middle of the city market. The creation of this new store for IKEA in Greece closely resembles what Paul & Rosenbaum (2020) have supported, but with a twist.

In our research, we see that the customers value this store because of its:

- **Since it offers something that has not been done in the past, Novel character** created a highly experiential store designed to provide a minimal yet comfortable IKEA experience.
- **Premium location**, which is a core element that characterizes pop-up stores and indicates that IKEA is trying to adapt its business model and offering and provide something new and different to its customers by placing this temporary yet physical store at a location where the customers can quickly and effortlessly reach it so to receive an IKEA experience and cover his/her needs.
- **Open up also to other types of customers.** As shown by their responses, the respondents saw IKEA differently and, to a degree, started seeing themselves as potentially different customers of these specific retailers while interacting with this store, While as proposed. However, multiple respondents could open up to customers who do not have the medium or visit the regular stores outside the city. These stores could introduce those potential new customers to the IKEA brand.

Pantano & Gandini (2018) have supported the same thing since the challenge of the traditional forms of stores can help the retailers to attract and cover in a better way the needs of their customers. The pop-up store created a sense of pleasure, the so-called hedonic experience as Arnold and Reynolds (2003) calls it, for the customers, during shopping and excitement because it is new and different in terms of location and size. The interviewees respond that the customers saw, to a great degree, this store as an opportunity to cover a different kind of needs. Many supported that the convenient location allowed them to visit it just for inspiration for future purchases. Something that would not be the case for the regular channels because the regular physical stores, although convenient for the reason that they created the sense of being able to find almost everything they wanted a visit has as a prerequisite the customer to plan the visit while the pop-up store due to its strategic location does not.

Last but not least, we see that the customers that visited the pop-up even for a limited period gave to this store due to its properties (as stated above) the role of the minimal IKEA experience, where customers visit it for inspiration and interaction with the IKEA brand but also for regular purchases that are usually smaller in quantity yet important in practicality. The customers of the pop-up store seem to embrace the different experience that this experiential store gives them. We see that in the case of the furniture industry the experiential practices like the creation of a physical site where the customers can quickly come in contact with the brand has a most noticeable impact on the relationship of the customers with a specific brand and the way the customers experience it, somethings that also aligns with the approach of Werz (2018) on the advantage of experiential attempts over internet-based ones.

All in all, and since the participants who had interacted with the pop-up store stated that the experience that they had blended well with the rest of the channels available, something that blends with what Blazquez (2014) have supported that a well-integrated network of channels can affect positively the experience that they have with the brand and enrich it. We can support that this new channel, despite allowing the customers to experience IKEA differently, also allows them to experience IKEA through different interactions. Many participants who interacted with the pop-up stores felt pleased about it, and some of them even supported that they feel like they came closer to the brand. We can support that the pop-up store helped the customers interact with the retailer IKEA in a complete way since this new channel was designed in order to provide practicality and higher experience in a smaller store closer to the place where most of the customers live and allowed them to have this pleasant and comfortable experience that they did not have before. They are looking for something more practical and easier to use than something that will make their lives difficult. Our findings are consistent with Blazquez (2014) investigation, according to which the better cooperation between the channels positively influences the consumer choices while it also determines to a large extent their behaviours.

## 5.2 Customer Brand Relationship

To better understand the actual results, we have based our explanation of the Consumer Brand Relationship theory results as proposed by Fournier (1998). Fournier (1998), in this theory, supports the claim of Webster (1992) that short-term exchanges have been replaced by relationships that are formed between the customers and the brands they use. The results showed some interesting aspects that are worth mentioning. Those results are the following: When applying the available types of relationships as proposed by Fournier (1998), the participants expressed the reasons why they choose IKEA, the common responses that we received were 1. convenience and 2. a pleasant buying environment where a significant number of items enriches the assortment offered and creates a stress-free experience for the customers that are almost convinced that they will find what they want.

Furthermore, the rest of the channels available mainly work to support the customers to collect information they want for their products. Based on the responses that we got, the relationship of IKEA's customers when interacting with the regular channels range from 1. Casual Friendships for the fact that the customers voluntarily decide to interact with IKEA, to 2. Marriages of Convenience, with mentioning that they are using the IKEA brand to provide convenience. The decision is made from factors that combine convenience and commitment to choose this brand over the competitive ones since this relationship was valuable. What is to be drawn from those responses is that the regular channels, although necessary to cover the customer's needs and create a sense of convenience, do not provide exceptional experiences that will usually draw the customer to feel the experience.

What we found suggests that those customers are generally willing to embrace different experiences and even, as our case suggested, find different uses for it. The pop-up was identified as a type of store that even ephemeral could cover different needs. The customers added this new channel on what they already perceived as "IKEAish", and for them, the spectrum of the needs that IKEA could cover expanded, so we identified changes in the way they perceive this specific brand. The respondents of this study expressed feelings that are consistent with the bibliographic review. They are looking for something more practical and easier to use than something that will make their lives difficult. Our findings are consistent with Blazquez (2014) investigation, according to which the better cooperation between the channels positively influences the consumer choices while it also determines to a large extent their behaviours. A better interaction is created through better cooperation, resulting from the consumers' relations with the brand change.

The pop-up communicated the brand indirectly by leading the customers to interact with it due to its highly experiential role, smaller size, and extra convenient location in the middle of Piraeus. The customers found that for acts like inspiration or the coverage of more basic needs, they could use this store, which was in perfect coexistence with the rest of the available channels; the customers could use the combination of channels that suit them best. For this reason, many customers have also claimed that they felt like coming "closer", as they call it, to the brand. The responses indicated that the relationship between the two entities had evolved. More specifically, by adjusting the data that we have collected to the consumer-brand relationship framework as proposed by Fournier (1998), we see that the customers who had interacted with the pop-up store tend to form relationships such as **best friendships** because the customers consider interacting with the retail brand regularly, even for less critical purchases and its always the option they consider. This situation was apparent only for a small minority when interacting with the regular channels. The pop-up store customer decided to visit a site of IKEA and then be directed to another based on the needs and wants of a customer can be seen as a step towards stronger relationships in the future. At the same time, the customers are willing to adopt this experience of the pop-up store, again and maybe regularly in the future.

The questions targeting both subgroups of customers were designed to show us possible alterations when the customers interacted with the pop-up store. As we mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 5 (discussion), our interviews have helped us find specific benefits that

a company acquires through a temporary store, which improves the brand's relationship with consumers. Specifically, four categories have piqued our interest. These are the following:

### **1. Curiosity about the brand:**

When survey participants were asked about the reasons that led them into the pop-up store, most gave the same answer, curiosity. They heard from somewhere; they saw the store, they saw an advertisement related to the specific temporary store. They immediately felt the need to visit it. In other words, we see that the opening of this store brought consumers closer to the brand. This curiosity was created towards these consumers initially that temporary stores are not very common in Greece. In addition, they felt strange to hear that a company like IKEA opened a small store in the city. It would be a unique and memorable experience for them to express their curiosity. They wanted to see what the store would be like from the inside, they wanted to see what the variety of products would be, and in general, they wanted to see how IKEA managed to open a store in such a central location. The above goes hand in hand with their research that says that consumers experience pop-up shops much happier because these stores arouse their curiosity due to their uniqueness (Alexander et al., 2018; Picot-Coupey, 2014). A finding of the study showed that the uniqueness of the pop-up store was a significant factor for consumers to visit. This uniqueness is based on the fact that temporary stores have specific features that regular stores do not. This uniqueness caused curiosity in the residents, which increased their desire to visit this particular store. Specifically, the temporary nature of the stores offers a sense of exclusivity and, in combination with the different atmosphere inside the store, offers something different to the whole experience. Specifically, the research participants stated that the store's temporary nature did not affect their decision to visit this store at all; on the contrary, it was still an extra element that pushed them to visit it.

Many of the participants in the survey stated that they were surprised by the presence of this store in the city centre. People did not expect IKEA to have a presence in the city centre, which led to the curiosity that prevailed around the temporary store. They knew that it would be very likely that the products offered would be much less than the regular store due to their size, but they chose to visit it. They knew that they would have access to more distinctive - different products than the regular store because of their size. This is quite logical, as evidenced by Picot-Coupey (2014) findings, who stated that the products inside a temporary store are several times different from regular stores while sometimes there are very different products. So we can mention that through the temporary stores, the company, with the help of consumers, creates a new brand identity. This data is in line with the findings of Kim et al. (2010), who argued that pop-ups contribute to the creation and re-creation of brand identity through the various interactions within the store.

### **2. The joy about the brand:**

Due to the curiosity that is created due to the uniqueness of the temporary stores, at the same time, joy and enthusiasm are created among the consumers. An important

finding from our results is that because people had contact with IKEA, as soon as they heard that a store would be opened in the city, an incredible hype was created, which shows that consumers, due to their relationship with IKEA, developed feelings of joy and surprise. In addition, this surprise was founded because they did not expect IKEA to bring something so different to the city centre. This is in line with what Arnold and Reynolds (2003) reported in their research, in which they found that different hedonic shopping experiences involve a combination of multiple touch-point interactions with outstanding in-store experiences. The experiences inside the store will determine the consumers' overall attitude towards the brand; with a better experience, there will be value creation. Creating value in the customer-brand relationship will create more general transparency that will deepen the customer-brand relationship, something based on the research of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). Value creation comes from consumers' interaction with the brand, so we have the phenomenon of co-creation of value. According to Spina et al. (2012), when the atmosphere inside the store allows the creation of value - in our case, due to the unique atmosphere and unique business model, so it creates value, then the interaction goes beyond the levels of a simple exchange of money and goods. It is a process that creates value for the consumer but also for the brand. At the same time, it gives the best trigger for the company to test which methods are suitable to be applied in the regular store.

Because they did not come in contact with a similar store, they were overwhelmed with enthusiasm. This event led the consumers to say that their relationships were affected; we now feel joy and excitement for something new. The element of surprise was evident across several participants. The unexpected encounter excited the participants and made them want to see what this store was all about. This favoured the feeling of curiosity but also the feeling of impatience and joy. The general hype which was analyzed above is a factor that is in the interest of the brand. The more people talk about this store, the more the company's name will surface. In the case of IKEA, due to their insufficient employment with a similar type of stores, the people felt incredible enthusiasm, due to which they embraced the whole effort. In addition, the name IKEA is a reason for their enthusiasm since all participants declared customers of the company. Upon hearing that IKEA will open a store in the city, regular customers felt very good since their favourite company would come closer to them, allowing them to get in touch with IKEA much more often.

### **3. the fact that IKEA came close to consumers (closeness):**

According to our analysis, as well as the data that have been collected from the interviews, a straightforward conclusion emerges. Using temporary stores comes closer to the company; temporary stores are a method to come closer to the brand. Our research findings include reports that pop-ups help people get closer to the brand. As we have mentioned above, due to the easy access to the store, due to its smaller size, due to a better atmosphere inside the store, the consumers felt closer to IKEA. This finding is consistent with Surchi (2011) research, which states that pop-ups communicate the brand indirectly, especially when the consumer is not interested in brand campaigns.

Due to the strategic location of the temporary store, consumers felt much closer to the brand as they came in contact daily. They may not have visited it every day, but they passed outside the store every day, so they saw the different procedures in the store. So it is clear that the brand came closer to consumers. These findings also refer to the research of Rosenbaum et al. (2021), who states that the primary goal of pop-up shops in the various promotional activities. After the people felt closer to the brand, then the company's promotions were crowned with success. Through the various promotions, the companies aim to promote a new product, recognize the company, create a bug in the market, and finally, a general goal is to improve the brand's image. Due to their uniqueness, temporary stores can function as a bridge between the regular store and consumers. According to Rosenbaum et al. (2020), temporary stores improve the brand's image; the data we collected took it a step further as it clearly shows the correlation of temporary stores with the feeling that consumers are closer to the brand. In combination with the literature review findings, it is evident that experience is related to the consumer's opinion of the company. Blazquez (2014) argues that experience is closely related to the customer's perception of a firm, so to have a unique and engaging interaction, the total experience inside the firm must be very high. These findings align with what the survey participants said: temporary stores offer a special and unique experience that brings consumers closer to the brand. Some responses said that temporary stores functioned as something extra to experience, so it was not a catalyst for building strong bonds. According to their research (Klein et al., 2016), temporary stores can also practice new technologies. According to the findings of Bäckström and Johansson (2017), the various technological innovations within the store are characterized as the most crucial for building brand relationships with consumers. Companies through these stores can check if technology is good for the local community, they can see if it fits the needs of the people, also the companies are allowed to put their employees to deal with the technology in a smaller store before going to the big - regular store.

On the other hand, according to our research findings, although very important, technology was not the main factor that pushed consumers within the store. The preferences towards a specific brand can come from the quality of the products, the location of the store, the atmosphere inside the store, the way employees treat consumers and generally how close they feel to the company. Technology is a medium that adds to the experience, but it is not the catalyst. At least for the case of IKEA. However, if the technology is uniquely placed in the store, it will increase consumers' chances to create stronger relationships with the brand. This is confirmed by the findings of a study by Child's et al. (2020), who stated that "retailers should follow customers' need for unique experiences". In the case of IKEA, the people embraced the initiative protocol because of the name IKEA and after the rest. The combination of IKEA, location, the atmosphere inside the store, uniqueness and temporary nature were the catalysts.

#### **4. the transformation of IKEA:**

The last important finding from the interviews is that the temporary store changed the character of IKEA. By character change, we mean that the company has focused on different consumers than its regular store. Initially, the reasons vary due to the size of the temporary store, the products offered were different or in a much smaller number. As a result, people knew that they would not find exactly what they were looking for in an IKEA, that is, oversized furniture. Instead, they would find something smaller. The temporary store offered to IKEA to change its character from a large store that sells furniture and is located outside the city to be transformed into a smaller store within the city that meets different needs. In other words, it offers convenience to consumers to get in touch with IKEA. The temporary stores have given a different character to IKEA according to what we collected in the interviews. We saw that it created a new kind of consumer: consumers who are not interested in buying something big.

On the contrary, we see the trend of meeting more minor and occasional needs. The temporary store of IKEA is an example that demonstrates that through these stores, a company can change to some extent the public for which it is addressed. In essence, we see an exercise in how much there is the ability to focus on different customers. At regular IKEA stores, people spent their day shopping for my furniture, passing their car or train. On the other hand, the temporary shops give the happiest feeling: it is in a central location and can be visited by any pedestrian who enjoys his walk. According to Rosenbaum, Edwards & Ramirez (2019), the strategic placement of a store offers personalized customer experiences, which increases the chances for the strategy of temporary stores to be successful.

For this reason, the temporary shops are located in the centre of the city and not far from it. So that more significant numbers of people have access to it since it will be more easily accessible. We see identification with the research of Alexander, Nobbs & Varley (2018), who stated that those stores that have a central location have as their primary concern the most accessible, and this is ideal for large companies such as IKEA.



## 6 Conclusion

*This is the last chapter of our research, where we will summarize and present the conclusions that we have made and the managerial implications and limitations of it that set the basis for future research to be made on this specific topic.*

Previous research showed a tremendous interest in the role of pop-up stores for the retailers and their purposes. Although highly relevant for these topics and illuminating as far as the role of pop-up as a strategic tool is concerned, the works carried out mainly focus on analysing the firms' side. The customer's side is usually present but mainly concerning the impact that the interaction has on the firm, its benefits, and its opportunities. Scholars and researchers mainly focus on the buzz and the hedonic experiences that the pop-up store offers to create a competitive edge for the retailers. While for the literature covering the multichannel customer experience, the impact of ephemeral channels is generally neglected. At that exact point, we found a literature gap that is worth covering. For this reason, our research aimed to identify the impact that the pop-up stores have on the relationship that is shared between customers and brands, given that this type of store constitutes an ephemeral channel that in a multichannel context is used alongside other channels like the regular stores and the online channels. What makes this research interesting and important is that it tries to identify the impact of an ephemeral channel on the way customers see a specific brand and interact with it.

### 6.1 Theoretical Contributions

Taking all the above into consideration and after executing our research, we found some exciting things that need to be mentioned. Our research has shown that the customers who experience pop-up ups tend to start seeing the interaction with a specific brand differently than they used to. When it comes to the multichannel experience, what has been found is that the customers are generally more inclined towards physical channels. The online channels are mainly used supportively by the Greek-Greek Cypriot customers, but the physical presence remains the site where the decision towards a purchase is made. The importance of the physical interaction is more apparent when the customers were asked about their preferable channel when it comes to furniture; the vast majority of the customers have replied that the physical interaction is the core of their experience.

The pop-up store combines for the customers both the elements that make the physical presence stand out and make it distinct from the rest of the regular channels with the experiential character that this specific type of stores has, with its distinct characteristics (that we will

mention in the following sections). Our research respondents claimed that the pop-up stores provided a unique and pleasant experience, expanded the points of interaction they had with the retailer and allowed them to have more options to choose from, contributing to their comfortability while interacting with this brand. This gives us an insight into the usability of pop-up from the customers, a literature gap that has been identified and proposed as a topic for future research by Warnaby et al. (2015). The customers took advantage of this store and incorporated it into the already existing offering to better cover their needs since it gave them more options to choose from and especially the opportunity to experience IKEA physically like in the regular IKEA stores.

As far as the impact of the pop-up stores in the multichannel customer experience is concerned, it has been found that the novel character and the premium location creates a buzz that makes the customers want to visit the store instantly just by seeing it. The customers of furniture retailers tend to be attracted by seeing a brand's physical presence in a very central location. This encounter is usually unexpected because most major furniture retailers tend to operate stores out of cities. Furthermore, the pop-up stores are usually operating from the central locations, allowing the customers of urban areas to visit a brand's physical presence effortlessly without visiting the regular stores. The fact that the customers have the opportunity to interact with a physical channel of a usually known to the retailer without having to move out of the city seems to affect the willingness of the customers to interact with that specific brand more regularly while using it in combination with the rest of the channels for pick-up services, online and offline comparison of prices etc. The respondents showed that they took advantage of this in order to maximize the value they receive.

The second factor related to the role of pop-up stores, as it has been found in our research, is their size. The pop-ups are usually smaller than the regular stores of retailers. This is even more apparent when it comes to furniture retail brands. Our research has found that the pop-ups' size played a role for the customers to decide to visit it; it seems to lead the customers to identify it as a channel where different needs can be met. The customers seem to be aware that in a smaller store, they will not find all the items that someone can find in a regular store; they do see in it the opportunity to cover more basic needs while purchasing smaller yet valuable items when at the same time have the opportunity to receive the experience and joy of interacting with the same brand. What we conclude from that is that the customers add to the already existing perceived offering of a brand a new channel, a factor that indicates that the pop-up, although ephemeral, expands the offering of a brand and allows the customers to link the same brand with the coverage of different kinds of needs and consequently more regular purchases. It generates in a way a new type of minimal but regular customers. This answers in a degree the gap that has been found in the work of Zogaj, Olk and Tscheulin,(2019) about the personal desire for uniqueness which can affect the consumer behaviour since the new character and the different establishment that the pop-up stores offer to make the customers adopt a different consumer behaviour by adapting their purchasing activities in order to embrace this new channel.

The customers use the pop-up as a new channel where the convenience that it offers allows them to visit it more regularly while simultaneously using it collectively with the rest of the channels to cover their needs better. In furniture retailers, we found that the customers tend to neglect its ephemeral character and be focused on interacting with it. This shows that in the case of IKEA, the customers tend to forget about the ephemeral character of the pop-up, while they were mainly focusing on the practicality that the pop-up store offers; this gives an answer to what Henkel & Toporowski (2021) indicated as a topic that needs to be answered.

The above mentioned are affecting the relationships that the customers form with the retailers. More specifically, our research has found that the customers who did not have the opportunity to interact with the pop-up store were mainly focused on the convenience they will receive and the pleasant buying environment. The responses of the interviewees indicated that the relationships of the customers and brands that they use in the furniture industry usually range from, as proposed by Fournier (1998), casual friendships to marriages of convenience since the customers are those who decide with which retailer to interact with retailers and are mainly focused on the convenience of their experiences. Those customers do not receive exceptional experiences. The pop-up brought to the customers who interacted with it a sense of renewal because of its experiential character, location and smaller size.

This channel, as it seems, operates perfectly with the rest of the channels for the customers, but it takes their interaction one step further. More specifically, we see that the customers consider interacting with a retailer willingly and regularly, even for smaller purchases, something that was present only to a small minority of the respondents who experienced the regular channels, so we move towards a best-relationship as proposed by the framework of Fournier (1998). This happened because the novel character and the overall physical presence of the pop-up (location & size) impacted the joy that the customers of furniture retail brands have when interacting with them; they generated curiosity about what they will see in that channel. It works as a reward for the customers because they can experience something new yet comfortable. They figured out that they can also interact with a brand they already knew in a different and even more convenient way. All in all, the brand seems to change in the eyes of the customers who manage to interact with it even for more light purchases, a factor that seems to bring the customers closer to the brand and even more committed and willing to interact with it. All in all, our research contributed to the already existing literature on multichannel customer experience and pop-ups by showing how this ephemeral channel is used.

## 6.2 Managerial Implications

Through our research, we have found some aspects that managers can find extremely useful. The main finding is that pop-up stores are significant for the brand as they bring the customers closer to the brand. The findings of this research allow managers to get in touch with various

information related to pop-up stores. Specifically, that these temporary stores affect the multichannel presence of the brand while at the same time the brand is affected by the usage of these stores—interesting elements regarding the new relationships that are created between consumers and the brand. The data that we have collected provides valuable insights on how the customers use pop-ups and how they affect the relationships that consumers and brands share. The results that we have collected can be used by various companies that want to imply this method in their strategy in the future. Our research was based on the company IKEA, but more industries can use our findings to relate to multichannel environments and accept temporary stores. Great emphasis was given to how the consumer experience inside the store is affected, so it is considered logical that the results of this research form the basis for future use by company managers.

The primary advice we have for other managers is to emphasise the service inside the store while incorporating more technological means. In addition, the use of pop-up stores is a perfect solution for companies to improve their relationship with consumers, to get closer to their audience. A good in-store experience can change the relationship of the underdogs with the brand, so it is necessary to pay better attention to achieve the best possible experience. As we saw in our research, people are interested in being close to the company; pop-up stores offer this same opportunity and the perfect atmosphere inside the store. Managers need to create strategies that will bring the different channels together and offer a single result that will not confuse consumers. Managers will achieve this with the most extensive use of social media, where they will be in daily contact with the world and pop-up shops to try new technologies that offer more personalized experiences such as virtual reality inside the store.

Furthermore, due to its temporary nature, the pop-up store is considered a perfect solution for changing different types of consumers. This ensures multiple relationships with consumers of different types and categories, which will lead to stronger relationships. Based on our research findings, the store's temporary nature aroused consumers' curiosity, which pushed them inside the store, so they have to find the right strategies to apply more ephemerality of actions that will create curiosity. Our research offers a sufficient number of feedback that would be suitable for managers to read to improve the quality offered by their companies. There must be a better understanding of the subject of the multichannel environment and at the same time how the branding of the brand is affected when it opens a pop-up store. In this way, superior customer experiences will be offered, and the consumer public will be delighted. Especially in the case of IKEA, a company that deals with the interior of the houses and specifically the furniture, this research offers valuable clarifications on the necessity of pop-ups in multichannel environments.

## 6.3 Limitations

As we have mentioned in the chapters above, some limitations may have affected this research. Our initial plan was to conduct observations outside the regular store, parallel with interviews at the IKEA site, while the third method for obtaining data would be semi-structured interviews. The pandemic that is plaguing us changed our plans. The reasons for this decision are that in Greece and Cyprus, we were in a total stalemate resulting in large stores - such as IKEA being closed for a long time. For this reason, the decision was made to join only with the semi-structured interviews because if we waited until the stores opened, we would not have time to finish our research. Perhaps by conducting only the interviews, the result will be somewhat different compared to the result we would have if we had the opportunity to make observations and interviews in the field of IKEA. Despite the problems caused by the pandemic, we do not consider the quality of our research below. On the contrary, everything was done meticulously, emphasizing detail, so we consider the result excellent, meaning the conditions. Just if we managed to make observations and interviews at IKEA, the result would be even better.

## 6.4 Future Research

This research has provided valuable findings for the pop-up sector in multichannel environments. However, several areas can be further studied and give additional conclusions that will unimaginably help company managers, people who research and generally help retail. The consumer has not sufficiently studied the field of temporary stores, so the more research there is, the better. So there is room for further study in this area, which will show different aspects of pop-up stores. This research was done with qualitative methods to answer the reasons behind consumers' decisions, but it would be nice to research a mixed-method between qualitative and quantitative research. For example, to go out to a store and ask people to answer a questionnaire. In this way, there would be the positive elements of the qualifying league and the positive elements of the quantitative research. There would be room to test a hypothesis through quantitative research to determine what exactly affects the relationship between pop-up's consumption and branding. It would be good to research more furniture stores favoured less or more by the presence of pop-up stores. We did not find research that dealt with the pop-up furniture stores during the existing research study to be an excellent idea for future research. *Furniture* is a commodity that needs more space and therefore larger stores. However, it would be interesting to see more studies on how furniture stores can better implement the institution of pop-up stores. In addition, it would be nice to see research on how the use of technology in temporary stores increases the customer base in regular stores. In this way, there will be conclusions about how technology offers valuable help to the brand. There will be a better understanding of what technology offers in a multichannel environment and precisely how the brand is positively or negatively affected. In addition, we would like to see future research focusing on how loyal bonds are created between consumers and brands using temporary stores.

In the beginning, we wanted to carry out this study, but we did not have enough time at our disposal for this, and we changed the original plan. This sector is probably the most important for pop-up stores. If the evidence is found to say that temporary stores make customers loyal, more companies will operate such stores.

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# 7 Appendix A - Interview Guide

The interview guide explained to the interviewees the general purpose of our research—specifically, explaining what a multi-channel environment means and what a temporary store means. After explaining what they mean, we explained what they would offer in our research by answering our questions. The interviews concerned two groups of consumers. The first group were consumers with experience from the regular IKEA store, and the second group, consumers with experience from the pop-up store. For these two categories, we had ten common questions. The rest of the questions were different.

## **Ethics**

Regarding the ethics of our research, we informed the participants about all our research procedures. We informed them that everything would be anonymous and use the terms by participant 1 instead of their names. Also, they gave us their consent so that there could be a recording of the interviewees and of course, we got permission to use what they said in the form of quotes.

### **Background questions – common questions**

1. Why do you usually shop, and what do you think it gives to you as a customer?
2. What is your relationship with physical and online shopping? Which shopping channel do you prefer most?
3. Do you use multiple sources when shopping (for collecting information, purchases, after-sales support) and why?
4. What values are you looking for when you go shopping?
5. How would you describe the right balance between online and offline sources?

### **IKEA experience - Common Questions:**

6. How often do you shop at IKEA?
7. What are the drivers that make you want to shop at IKEA? Is it an enjoyable experience?
8. How do you usually get informed about IKEA offerings?
9. What does IKEA offer that distinguishes it from the competitors?
10. What does IKEA offer to you personally?

### **The customer experience of regular IKEA consumers in a multichannel environment – questions regarding people with experience in IKEA regular store:**

11. How would you describe the in-store atmosphere at the IKEA stores?
12. What combination of sources (websites, physical stores etc.) do you use when shopping at IKEA and why?
13. Is there a source channel that you favour when interacting with IKEA?

14. To what extent do you think it is helpful for you to use multiple channels to shop in IKEA?
15. Would you be interested to see IKEA expanding their offering support by adding new channels like the pop-up stores in a more systematic way?
16. Is the present system of channels that IKEA uses fulfils your expectations to conduct repetitive purchases or want to interact with them and why?
17. If you were offered the chance to change something that affects your shopping experience in IKEA, what would you change and why?
18. What are other things that you find essential to have a good shopping experience?
19. How would you evaluate the shift from one channel to another?
20. Why and when would you go to a physical store compared to other alternative channels?
21. When you go to an IKEA, what do you want to find there (information about products, your usual products, offers on products) And what do you expect regarding in-store applications?
22. In what way have multiple applications changed (if it did) the way you shop?

**Experience in IKEA pop-up store – questions for people that visited the pop-up store:**

23. What is your opinion about pop-up stores? Did you enjoy visiting the pop-up?
24. What elements do you still recall?
25. How did you find out about the existence of this Pop-up store?
26. What were the drivers making you want to visit the IKEA pop-up store?
27. How would you evaluate the pop-up store compared to the other channels?
28. In which way do you think it covers your needs? And to what extent?
29. How do you feel that this pop-up store only exists temporarily and will be gone soon? Did it lead you to second thoughts?
30. What feelings did the pop-up of IKEA generate to you when you visited it? What about the in-store atmosphere?
31. How did you feel that IKEA created something tailored-personal to cover your needs?
32. What did the pop-up store add to your overall experience with IKEA that the other channels did not? For example, compared to the regular stores?
33. Would you be interested to see more acts like that by IKEA in the future?
34. Do you feel your relationship with IKEA has been affected by your interaction with the Pop-up store? Did you see IKEA differently?
35. How do you perceive IKEA after coming in touch with their Pop-up store?
36. Given that pop-up stores are ephemeral, what was your post-purchase experience support by the retailer's other channels?
37. Did the interaction blend well with the other available channels, and what added to the overall offering?