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"Survival in the Retail Apocalypse"

A qualitative study about surviving the retail apocalypse as a retailer

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Abstract

The retail apocalypse has a significant impact on the retail sector as we know it. The retail apocalypse is the reason for a harsh economic climate for physical retail stores throughout the world. The purpose of this study was to examine how sales personnel in retail stores can act as a competitive advantage when facing the retail apocalypse. Furthermore, a retail store chain in the electronic retail sector in Sweden named Kjell & Company has managed to become well established on the Swedish market and is steadily expanding and ignoring the fact of the retail apocalypse. In this study, relevant concepts have been reviewed to gain an understanding of the interaction between customers and sales personnel. The literature review covered six concepts that were used to create a model that could explain what influences a customer's overall satisfaction when interacting with a salesperson. The model is divided into two sections. The first section consists of the following concepts *hard skills*, *soft skills*, *customer orientation* and *customer satisfaction* and aimed to examine what is important for customers when interacting with a salesperson. The second part examined how *service orientation* can create loyalty by providing after-sales support, which should, in the end, lead to *retail patronage*. The model was used to understand how sales personnel can act as a competitive advantage in stores where sales over-the-counter are taking place. Interestingly the results indicated that the concepts are indeed crucial for retailers that conduct sales over-the-counter since this selling strategy often forces interaction between customer and salesperson.

Keyword: Retail apocalypse, Retail, Physical store, Hard Skills, Soft Skills, Customer Orientation, Service Orientation, Customer satisfaction, Retail Patronage

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1. Introduction

Retailing in physical stores has lately seen a decline in sales in the last decade, which has forced them to shut down due to the harsh economic climate that is connected partly to the rise of e-commerce throughout the world. Furthermore, the phenomenon can be seen in the US, where a vast number of well-established stores such as Macy's and Toys R Us are closing. The US media bill this phenomenon as the 'retail apocalypse' (Martin, 2018).

The retail apocalypse is not only affecting high shopping streets but also large shopping malls, especially in the US, where large malls are left abandoned and empty (Martin, 2018). According to Peterson (2018), approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of malls in the US are predicted to be at risk of losing *anchor tenants*. In other words, anchor tenants are the tenants that occupy large shopping malls, often close to the main entrances. These anchor tenants are typically large global retail chains and are usually well displayed with the smaller businesses listed below the large anchor tenant. These anchor tenants are vital for the survival of malls as they attract smaller companies to establish in the area such as gas stations, restaurants and coffee shops. Furthermore, anchor tenants attract large numbers of potential customers to the malls that are vital for the survival of large-scale shopping malls (Carter, 2020). Examples of anchor tenants are Macy's and J.C Penney (Peterson, 2018). If an anchor retailer leaves the mall, it does not only affect the turnover of the mall, but it also affects the traffic to the mall, which affects the other tenants. When an anchor tenant leaves, the other tenants have the right to terminate or renegotiate their leases. As a result, this event can create a downward economic spiral for the mall owners, where many of the remaining tenants will negotiate for a lower rental lease until a new anchor tenant occupies the vacancy (Peterson, 2018). E-commerce is the main reason behind anchor tenants are leaving malls since e-commerce simplifies the path to purchase, causing the traditional brick-and-mortar stores to struggle (Liu, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, one of the most significant factors for physical stores closing down is the prevalence of e-commerce, with the definition "*the sale of goods and services over the internet*" - (Hasan, 2019, pp. 16). According to Hasan (2019), e-shops will significantly have an impact on traditional brick-and-mortar stores' performance as e-shops bring various benefits that conventional stores cannot match, such as availability, search services, and

instant information. As seen in the graph below, e-commerce has attained market shares from point-of-sales that would otherwise occur in physical stores (McLauchlan, 2017).

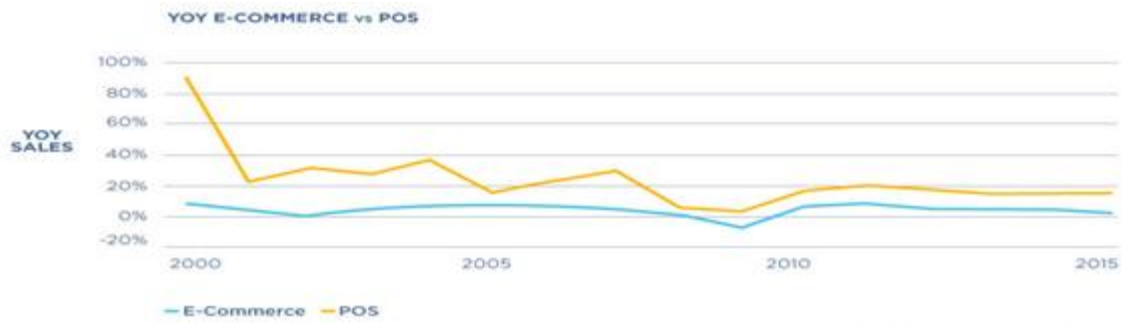


Figure 1. YOY E-COMMERCE vs POS (McLauchlan, 2017)

1.2 Problematization

The relationship between a company and its customers is essential to retain customers. In order to accomplish customer loyalty, service plays an important role. The possibility for retailers to offer service quality can generate a competitive advantage in customer loyalty for organizations. Service quality is an essential strategy for firms to gain considerable performance, and it is not only the offered products that will attract customers to the stores but also the personal interactions between a salesperson and the customer. Research finds that these interactions will make an impact on shopping behavior, which can play a significant role in customer loyalty to the organization (Martinelli & Balboni, 2010).

Lucia-Palacios, Pérez-Lopes and Polo-Redondo (2019), emphasize the importance of frontline employees and the customer-employee contacts called sales encounters. Even though technologies such as self-checkouts and e-commerce can enrich the customer experience, the frontline employees are still valued by the customers for their social interaction and the ability to instil trust. Furthermore, frontline employees and their competencies are especially important to create an enjoyable experience. These competencies are task- and interaction competencies and prior research have shown that these two factors could influence customer satisfaction positively for the retailer as a whole. Task indicates the employees' knowledge of the selling task and the knowledge of the products. Interaction competence refers to an employee's social skills, such as communication and kindness (Lucia-Palacios, *et al.*, 2019).

The importance of service quality is further reinforced by Krafft and Mantrala (2010), which state that retailers that can provide sufficient services to their customers have a competitive advantage over their competitors. Another study that was conducted by Farrell and Jayawardhena (2010) points to the importance of customer service and how it affects customers' behavioral intentions. Although, the study does not focus on traditional over-the-counter stores; therefore, a gap in the research is open for further studies.

As mentioned before, e-commerce is steadily gaining market shares from the physical retail sector (McLauchlan, 2017). The retail industry is considered one of the most important markets for the world economy and the majority of the distribution of products is still through physical stores (Webber, Sausen, Basso & Laimer, 2017).

We argue that the role of service personnel is more important than ever for the performance of physical stores when combating the threat of the retail apocalypse. Handels Utredningsinstitut (HUI) forecasts that many of the physical stores in Stockholm will vanish in a few years. The constant threat of the retail apocalypse that is mainly caused by the prevalence of e-commerce has created pressure for retailers to deliver high-quality service to their customers (Godani, 2019).

Martinelli and Balboni (2010) address the importance of service quality in grocery stores as an important factor for the retention of customer loyalty. However, Kjell & Company's interaction with customers differs in comparison to those in a grocery store. Kjell & Company uses a more traditional form of selling, where we find that product knowledge can play an essential role for the employees, which van Scheers (2015) further reinforces. The product knowledge and how the employees' mediate their expertise to the customers are vital for the sales-encounter. Furthermore, the importance of employee interaction competencies, such as communication, service and social skills are also important. By being able to deliver on both task- and interaction competencies, the retailer can gain an advantage over its competitors (Lucia-Palacios, *et al.*, 2019). In the context of Kjell & Company's way of selling, these skills are fundamental since the customers must interact with the employees over-the-counter to address their needs, whether it would be for advice or purchase. Therefore, the gap of past research does not address what impact employees have on customers when selling over-the-counter, and if this can become a competitive

advantage in a market affected by the retail apocalypse. In the declining retail markets, insight as to how frontline employees can contribute to the survival of physical stores might be of excellent value for society as a whole.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how sales personnel in the retail sector can act as a competitive advantage in a market that is facing hardships from the threat of retail apocalypse. We also want to explore the impact of real-life social interaction have on customers' perceived satisfaction.

1.4 Research Question

How can the store personnel strengthen the competitive advantage of running a business in a physical store?

2. Literature Review

In this section, theories regarding particularly interesting concepts will be presented and analyzed. Specifically, concepts and theories that apply to our study will further be examined and used for our conceptual model, which will be the foundation when we analyze our collected data. The literature review will include retailing and competitive advantage for retailers. Following this, both customer- and service orientation will be presented. Furthermore, skills in retailing will be examined and divided into soft- and hard skills. Lastly, *customer satisfaction* and *retail patronage* will be analyzed.

2.1 Retail

The retail industry is considered the world's most important business sector in terms of GDP. The physical store is still the main channel for companies to reach out to its customers and should result in a competitive advantage for retailers (Webber, *et al.*, 2017). In most developed countries, people that work in the retail sector stand for about 10% of the total labor in the economy (Nickson, Price, Baxter-Reid & Hurrell, 2017). The definition of a retail store is:

A place of business usually owned and operated by a retailer but sometimes owned and operated by a manufacturer or by someone other than a retailer in which merchandise is sold primarily to ultimate consumers (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

The core business of retailers is to provide a location that has a range of products that is available to the customers. Furthermore, it is a place where frontline employees can provide various service tasks to their customers (Blut, Floh & Teller, 2018). According to Chen & Quester (2006), to reach a long-lasting performance for the company, the retailer can gain a competitive advantage by creating customer value that sets them apart from its competitors. Furthermore, Medrano, Olarte-Pascual, Pelegrin-Borondo and Sierra-Murillo (2015) state that the harsh competitive retail market demands more than just innovative products and low prices to stay competitive. A prevalent competitive advantage for the success of retailers is the potential for the employees to deliver service to the customers (Medrano, *et al.*, 2015).

2.2 Orientations

There are two prevailing orientations within retail management, and those are *customer orientation* and *service orientation*. Although they are quite similar, they differ in a few aspects; *customer orientation* is mainly concerned with the actual sales encounter where the transaction takes place. *Service orientation*, on the other hand, goes beyond the limits of the sales encounter and aims to provide the customer with after-sales service and assistance (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). The two orientations will be further examined and presented in the two following chapters.

2.2.1 Customer Orientation

According to Kadic-Maglajlic, Micevski, Arslanagic-Kalajdzic and Lee (2017), *customer orientation* has stayed consistent in its core meaning during the last decades. Employees that are *customer oriented* focus more on the needs and concerns of their customers at the sales encounter. Furthermore, *customer oriented* employees place the importance of the long term implications of customers by building a long relational alliance with customers; thus, the employee can reap the benefits of loyal customers that return. The definition of customer orientation is: "*degree to which salespersons practice the marketing concept at the level of an individual by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs*" - (Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.*, 2017, p 54). Even though *customer orientation* places emphasis on maintaining and building long-term relations, the salesperson must be able to identify situations where a short-term selling strategy is more beneficial than creating a relationship. *Customer orientation* is often regarded as a key factor for success when employees and customers interact. However, coaching employees and investing in *customer orientation* is time-consuming, and this may cause diminishing returns on financial aspects (Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.* (2017), argues that employees with too high customer orientation might negatively impact the sales encounter by making the purchase decision too complex. In some cases, customers might not want to interact with a salesperson. However, a salesperson with too high customer orientation might not notice the cues and force an interaction with the customer. This interaction forces the customer to devote time and effort to communicate instead of finding the product they came to purchase. This forced interaction might affect the whole experience for the customer in a negative way and could

result in the customer not to return in the future. This occurrence implies that there is an optimal amount of customer orientation that should be delivered by the employees to attract and retain customers (Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.*, 2017).

If organizations can provide the resources for their employees to provide the optimal level of *customer orientation*, they can reap the benefits of creating satisfied customers. Furthermore, a satisfied customer will return for future purchases and in time, become a loyal customer to the store which is a major factor for success (Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.*, 2017). We argue that this concept is of great importance to our study since our goal is to capture the essence of how frontline employees can act as a conduit for competitive advantage in retail.

2.2.2 Service Orientation

Service orientation is an approach that consists of two perspectives; it can be seen from the perspective of the organization or the perspective of the individual (Popli & Rizvi, 2015; Lee & Ok, 2015; Jayawardhena & Farrell 2010). Popli and Rizvi (2015) define service orientation as "*anticipating, recognizing and meeting customer needs*" (p. 60).

Popli and Rizvi (2015) present the organizational perspective as a business philosophy and is a part of the corporate culture and strategy. The *service orientation* as a corporate culture refers to the behaviors, norms, values and beliefs that impact the actions of its employees. Furthermore, it influences the management of the organization to focus on factors considered essential to deliver high-quality service. Since *service orientation* is also an integral part of the strategy of an organization, service is one of the key factors that the company competes on (Popli & Rizvi, 2015).

As very clearly described by Jayawardhena and Farrell (2010), the second perspective focuses on service on the individual level. This perspective refers to how the employees of a business view their level of service and what they believe to be important factors that contribute to delivering service quality at a high level (Jayawardhena & Farrell, 2010). This perspective is thought to influence *customer satisfaction* at a higher level, as the direct contact between employees and customers is a major determinant when customers assess the service that they received. Although this perspective is more important in the hospitality sector, such as hotels, the individual *service orientation* plays a crucial

role in economic success in many industries that include employee-customer contact (Lee & Ok, 2015).

However, to reap the benefits that the employee-customer interaction can present, the employees must be *engaged* in their role. According to Popli and Rizvi (2015), engagement differs from standard job involvement, as it does not focus on the employees' skills but rather their performance and commitment to their work. In order to fully engage employees, three psychological factors must be accommodated. Firstly, the work must be *meaningful*, and the employees must feel that their work has value. Secondly, *safety* is important; the workplace must provide support and instill feelings of trust. The last factor is *availability*; the employees must have the emotional, physical and psychological means to fully engage in their work. If an organization can accommodate these factors, employees should feel a sense of engagement in their work. Engaged employees feel a strong connection to the organization, they also innovate and push the organization forward. Engaged employees are highly valuable as they can significantly contribute to the success of the company by being able to provide high-quality services (Popli & Rizvi, 2015).

Service orientation is a vital aspect of retailing; furthermore, the concept of having engaged employees appears to be a necessity to provide service on a higher level (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Therefore, this concept is important, and in our study, we will look at *service orientation* from the post-purchase perspective.

2.3 Hard Skills

The retail environment is in constant change, where competition is a tough obstacle to overcome. This environment makes it very important for retailers to focus on *customer satisfaction* and customer retention. Therefore, retailers need to deliver customer service in order to gain an advantage to stay competitive (van Scheers, 2015). Retail work is many times considered as being low-skilled labor, where no need for higher education is required. According to a study by Nickson, *et al.* (2017), for part-time position hiring, availability to work, and personality are more important than the experience. Although, for full-time positions, past experiences are more valued. However, there are some skill differences between employees, depending on what type of market and what type of products the company offers (Nickson, *et al.*, 2017).

The retail sector consists of different sub-sectors where different skills are in demand by different companies (Nickson, *et al.*, 2017). For example, the electronics retail sector seems to look for people with some pre-knowledge about the company's products. This knowledge will develop over time during employment. Food retailing, on the other hand, does not require product knowledge to the same extent as in the electrical sector (Nickson, *et al.*, 2017). Also, van Scheers (2015) agrees that *product knowledge* is vital since the demand for such knowledge has increased among customers. Research states that customers value *salespersons' product knowledge* more than if the salesperson would agree to sell the product for the same or lower price than competitors. Furthermore, the *salespersons' product knowledge* will increase the likelihood of customers returning to the store. By displaying knowledge about their products, retailers can provide customers with the necessary information that is needed to make the right purchase. When retailers can provide this type of knowledge about products, it instills peace of mind for the customer when purchasing from the store (van Scheers, 2015).

2.4 Soft Skills

The discussion of skills has changed from solely *hard skills*, which refers to technical or knowledge applied to a craft. Lately, the discussion of skills includes *soft skills* as well. *Soft skills* refer to social and interpersonal skills. These personal factors are considered central in a service role where interactions are crucial. *Soft skills* are defined as "*non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular social contexts*" - (Nickson, *et al.*, 2017, p. 694). Employers who facilitate the creation and encouragement of *soft skills* will assist the salesperson in their service encounters, and the employee will display the desired image of the organization (Nickson, *et al.*, 2017).

Another important factor that seems to influence customer loyalty is the *salesperson's responsiveness*. A study finds that proper training can help the salesperson to identify when a customer requires assistance. Since either being too talkative or too distant can have a negative influence on the customer. When employees interact with customers, training can help the salesperson to become more open-minded to the customer, which can further increase the chances for the consumer to return to the store (van Sheers, 2015).

Nickson, *et al.* (2017), state that in grocery retailing, for example, product knowledge has less or no value to the customer. Therefore, depending on the sector, *soft skills* might be more valued than *product knowledge*, which is considered a *hard skill*. These *soft skills* include personality, physical attributes and selling ability; these can have a positive influence on customers (Nickson, *et al.*, 2017).

2.5 Customer Satisfaction

"Customer satisfaction is the degree to which a customer's expectations agree with the actual performance of the product and/or service" – (van Scheers, 2015, p. 192). Customer satisfaction is influenced by various factors such as the social interaction with the salesperson, the product price and value, and lastly, the product knowledge of the salesperson. These factors are prevalent when customers assess their satisfaction with the store. Furthermore, customers are heavily influenced by the people that surround them, and this means that opinions that are formed by one customer might spread and influence the people in their surroundings (van Scheers, 2015).

According to Minh and Huu (2016), customer satisfaction is one of the most important factors when retailers attempt to establish long-term relationships with customers. One of the main contributing factors to customer satisfaction is the service quality provided by the employees, and it is believed that service quality is antecedent to satisfaction. Furthermore, the authors state that even though satisfaction and loyalty are two different constructs, they are closely linked together (Minh & Huu, 2016). Similar factors to the product price, value, social interaction, and product knowledge are *perceived value* and *perceived service quality*; these are drivers for satisfaction, as stated by Jayawardhena and Farrell (2010). Perceived value refers to the pre- or post-purchase benefits that a customer seeks when they are buying a service or product. If a product has inferior quality but is priced highly, the customer might turn to other sources to make their purchase; this refers to the pre-purchase aspect of perceived value. The post-purchase factor is a phenomenon that occurs when the purchase has been made, and the customer evaluates the product and or service received (Jayawardhena & Farrell, 2010). Although, prior research and literature appear to have little agreement over how quality affects customer satisfaction. It is believed by Jayawardhena and Farrell (2010) that perceived service quality is related to overall customer satisfaction.

2.6 Retail Patronage

According to Skippari, Nyrhinen and Karjaluoto (2017), customers are not only evaluating the stores' service by their task-oriented forward stance. Further, these authors list a few motives for the customer to visit the store, which are *convenience*, *information attainment*, *credit sales* and *personalized service*. Retail stores are also a place where people have the opportunity to interact. In other words, stores enable customers to satisfy their social needs. A store is a place where people visit and it enables people to talk and interact with each other (Skippari, *et al.*, 2017).

A key driver for visiting a local store is according to Skippari, *et al.* (2017), the social interactions such as customer service, which is positively related to retail patronage behavior since customers value the relationship that is built between them and the store employees. Sina and Kim (2017) agree that the service personnel can play an important role in retail patronage but also add that accessibility to the store and the environment of the store are also important factors. *Customer satisfaction* is another factor related to retail patronage. Customers can gain satisfaction through the relations they build with the salesperson. This relation is built by social interactions and spending time together with the salesperson, and this is positively related to *customer satisfaction* (Skippari, *et al.*, 2017).

Since e-commerce is an option for customers instead of physical stores, retailers have to build stores that attract customers and give them a pleasant experience (Johansson & Bäckström 2017). Since customers are more updated today, they also expect something additional from the store personnel. Furthermore, since online shopping is considered to be an easy way of shopping, customers also demand that store shopping should be the same way. Customers want to be able to visit the store quickly. Therefore, it needs to be easily available, since they are often aware of what they want already before the arrival at the store (Johansson & Bäckström 2017). Therefore, retailers need to be prepared that customers might be very knowledgeable about certain products when they arrive at the store, which increases the expectations on the store personnels' *product knowledge* (Johansson & Bäckström, 2017). Pantano, Priporas and Dennis (2018) agree that the customer demand of today's retailing pushes the retailers to be innovative and to rethink in order to attract and create a delightful shopping experience for the customers. Further, the store personnel are great influencers for the firm's innovation and development, since they

are the link between the firm and its customers (Pantano, *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the sales personnel gather valuable information from the customers who later can be used to develop the store to fit the demand of the customers. The sales personnel give advice and recommendations to customers and by doing so, the sales personnel and the customer will interact. Moreover, the information on how to satisfy the customer is revealed to the employee. This information can then be sent back to the management level, where the data can be evaluated and further used to create incentives that can lead to *customer satisfaction* (Pantano, *et al.*, 2018).

Johansson and Bäckström (2017) state that it is a good idea for retailers to create a store layout where the customers can navigate themselves to find the right product without spending too much time. The layout of the store may also affect how the service provided by the sales personnel is perceived by the customers, which can facilitate the sales personnel to provide the customers with valuable service (Johansson & Bäckström, 2017). The behavior of the sales personnel influences the customer in several aspects, which Johansson and Bäckström (2017) list as following: the *willingness* to help customers, skills, *product knowledge* and *attitude* towards the customers. It is also important to create motives and incentives for sales personnel to interact with the customers that can increase the profitability of the firm. Patel, Guedes and Pearce II (2017) suggest that an increased salary for the personnel can increase the involvement of the customers and therefore create motives to interact with and guide the customer.

Both retailers and consumers agree that the physical stores are a multidimensional place that must meet the demands of the customers. Although, the view on what is important to focus on is divided between the two parties. Retailers are steadily making technological improvements to their store, which are welcomed by the customers. However, when asked, customers do not tend to mention issues regarding technological improvements in the store. Instead, the focus on what is important to customers tend to pivot towards more traditional aspects such as, personnel, atmosphere and layout of the store (Johansson & Bäckström, 2017).

2.7 Conceptual Model

In order to create structure and be able to relate our data collection to the theoretical framework, a model was created that is based on our literature review. The model helped to create a connection between our concepts and theories that we will apply to our data. The conceptual model is based on our theoretical framework and it will display what we believe is essential in the interaction between sales personnel and customers and how it relates to *retail patronage*. If the retailer succeeds in meeting the customers' demand when the interaction between personnel and customers occurs, the retailer would be able to create satisfied customers. By providing after-sales services, this satisfaction should lead to *retail patronage*, which would be a vital aspect of surviving the retail apocalypse. In other words, customer loyalty is reached, and the customers will tend to come back more than once in the future.

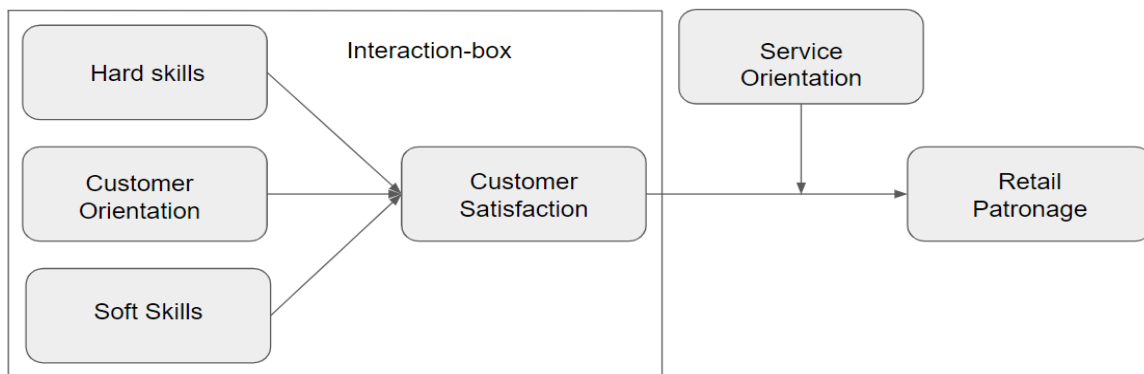


Fig. 1. The model of Customer Patronage

The model consists of two sections and the first section is called *Interaction* and refers to when customers interact with store personnel in order to make a purchase or inquire about various products and/or services. We believe that *Hard skills*, *Customer Orientation* and *Soft Skills* are key concepts in order to achieve *customer satisfaction* at the point of interaction. *Hard skills* are one of the main components in the *Interaction*-section. As such, it is vital for succeeding in delivering the necessary information that should make the customer feel peace of mind about their purchase. We believe that *hard skills* such as *product knowledge* will satisfy the customer and that the customer will feel credibility towards the organization. In contrast to *hard skills*, *soft skills* refer to the personality traits of the store personnel and their ability to decipher the customers' needs. We believe that a mix between the two different sets of skills is crucial to build a relationship with the

customers. Combining these sets of skills with *customer oriented* personnel that puts the need of the customer at the center should result in a high rate of satisfied customers. Although, the store personnel must not exaggerate *customer orientation* since this could lessen the positive experience for the customer.

The following concept, found outside the *Interaction-box*, is *service orientation*, which we refer to the ability for the organization to follow up on post-purchase events such as warranties, questions and refunds. This step is important for organizations since it is not only the point of sale that should be regarded as the main aspect of success. In order for the customer to feel a sense of patronage, an organization must be able to provide assistance all the way. Patronage is the final step in the model, and this should be the aim of all retailers as it could be a way of surviving the ongoing retail apocalypse. Patronage is crucial since it refers to satisfied customers who feel trust towards the organization and therefore become loyal customers that return.

3. Methodology

This section will provide information regarding our choice of methodology and strategy. We will also argue for why we have chosen the specific method. Furthermore, this chapter includes factors such as limitations that need to be considered when establishing our way of research. The COVID-19 situation in spring 2020 deferred us from collecting data in the intended way that was initially planned. The initial plan for the collection of data was to interview customer outside Kjell & Company face-to-face. Instead, our method was inspired by Störby and Strömblad (2015) that utilized *online focus groups*. However, this method has support from Bryman and Bell (2011), as a method with validity. This method might also increase the possibility to get more valid answers as it allows the respondents to think about their answers thoroughly before submitting a response.

3.1 Strategy & Research Philosophy

According to Denscombe (2016), a research strategy is a plan of action that is designed in a way to reach a specific goal. A research strategy in social science implies a large-scale angle of incidence, which includes: “*a distinct research logic with underlying ideas that shape a methodology that aims to tackle a clear, specific, and identified research problem.*” – (Denscombe, 2016, p. 22). It should be noted that a research strategy is not the same as the research method. The research method is how researchers have chosen to collect their data to fulfill their goals. In other words, the method is a part of the strategy that is used to answer the research question. Other important factors that might influence the choice of method is if the strategy is feasible and appropriate. It is also important to consider the ethical aspects when selecting a method. In order for a method to be feasible, the researcher has to have access to the sources of data needed to answer the research question. Furthermore, the collection of data must be completed within a limited timeframe. Further, the researchers need to consider if the chosen method is suitable to reach the goal. No method is considered bad, nor wrong or right. Nevertheless, it needs to fit the purpose of the study to be able to collect as much relevant data as possible. The last factor to consider when choosing a method is the ethical aspect, which will be further elucidated later in this section (Denscombe, 2016).

According to Denscombe (2016), two distinct research philosophies dominate the research of social science, namely positivism and interpretivism. The epistemological way of thought that is positivism views the social world through the perspective of natural science. The social world is treated the same way as something independent that just 'exists' and encompasses various aspects that can be measured and studied objectively. The focus of this philosophy is to analyze numbers and facts in order to find correlations between phenomenon's and cause in the social world. Furthermore, the positivistic way of thought is mainly connected and utilized in quantitative data, and as such, this view will not be utilized. Instead, the research philosophy, called interpretivism will be used. The interpretive view challenges the fact that researchers can view things from a position of objectivity since the social world is considered to be a construct that consists of human thoughts and actions. Therefore, the researchers themselves are a part of what they aim to study, and this can cloud their judgment and objectivity since they are 'inside' the very world they aim to study. The purpose of this philosophy is to study and understand human behavior on a deeper level and collect insight into their experiences. As positivism is connected to quantitative data, interpretivism is connected to qualitative data, which is more aligned and better suited to our research strategy (Denscombe, 2016). Utilizing the interpretivism view will allow us to gain knowledge and understanding of the various factors which influence a consumer's overall experience when they interact with retail store personnel. Furthermore, it should provide us with insight into why these factors are important. Our data will be collected by using a qualitative method called *online focus groups* (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009)

3.2 Research Method - Online Focus Groups

Each of the commonly used methods of collecting data brings with them a set of positive and negative aspects. The researchers need to pick the right method of data collection in order to achieve satisfactory data that aligns with the research strategy. When the sampling method has been chosen, it is important to make sure the method is ethically accepted, and a permit is granted (Denscombe, 2016). In this section we will present our chosen research method, as stated at the start of this chapter, the chosen method is based on a prior study by Störby and Strömblad (2015), which utilized *online focus groups* during seven days to collect their data.

According to Saunders *et al.* (2009), one example of a qualitative method to collect data is to use focus groups. A focus group is a form of an interview where the purpose is for the respondents to discuss specific topics. A focus group mainly focuses on issues, product or service, that requires the respondents to interact and discuss among each other. The individuals are chosen because they have something in common with each other, which is related to a specific topic. The respondents are supposed to discuss the topic and share their thoughts and opinions without any pressure from the moderator (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, Saunders *et al.* (2009) list two critical tasks for the moderator to keep in mind while moderating a focus group:

- To keep the respondents within the topic.
- Creating interest in the discussion and encourage the respondents to keep discussing without folding in and leading the respondents towards opinions.

In our case, we have chosen to do *online focus groups* by using the social media platform Facebook. These forms of interviews are divided into two subgroups, namely *synchronous* and *asynchronous*. The first one mentioned occurs in real-time. An example is when the respondents discuss a particular topic in a chat room and reply directly after the questions have been stated. In other words, both the moderator and the respondents are online at the same time (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The second approach is *asynchronous* and refers to when topics are discussed during a more extended period where the respondents have a longer time to think and reply (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the primary advantage of an *asynchronous* approach is that the replies will be more thoughtful and less instinctive.

Bryman and Bell (2011) mention advantages by using *online focus groups* as a method to collect data. Since the focus group is conducted online, any regional obstacles are removed since the moderators do not need to meet the respondents in person. This lack of regional restrictions allows the respondents to allocate time to answer any questions whenever they want to. Further, discussions and opinions that are shared between the respondents are stored online and can be observed and studied multiple times. Since answers are saved online, the need for audio-recording is unnecessary, and this eliminates the issue of mishearing an audio-recording, this also implies that the need to transcribe the audio-

recording is removed. Also, respondents that are not very talkative in person might be able to express themselves more elaborately compared to in real-life focus group. By using *online focus groups*, the respondents are essentially provided a safe location since they are participating from a place where they feel comfortable (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

As with everything, there are both positive and negative factors with this type of method, and Bryman and Bell (2011) mention a few negative factors regarding *online focus groups*. It can be difficult for the moderator to drive the *online focus group* forward and to interact with the respondents compared to if the focus group took place during physical circumstances. Furthermore, it can be difficult in *asynchronous online focus groups* to retain built-up harmony over a longer period. It is also stated that it is more difficult for the moderator to inquire about further explanations and opinions since the respondent in question could just ignore or forget the inquiry. *Asynchronous* interviews can take some time, depending on how cooperative the respondents tend to be. If cooperation is lacking or if the respondents choose to cancel their participation, this might cause trouble for the data collection. Body language and facial expression will not be visible, and therefore this cannot be interpreted by the moderator (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The advantages trump the disadvantages of this method for our specific study since the respondents are spread all over Sweden, therefore it is to our advantage to use an *online focus group*. Because it allows a broader range of available respondents since they can participate from any location. Additionally, by using Facebook as the platform for our *online focus group*, we can succeed in structuring our data collection since it is a well-known platform with many beneficial aspects, such as being able to schedule posts and comments. Furthermore, a definite advantage for us is that the need for transcribing the collected data is removed. This will allow us to focus and allocate time for other important tasks such as the analysis of data and managing the information simultaneously as the *online focus group* takes place. Further, an *asynchronous* type of *online focus group* will be used, and this will benefit the respondents since they can answer any questions when they have the time, thus making recruitments for our *online focus group* easier. On the other hand, the challenge will be for us to supervise and to motivate the respondents to actively interact with each other in comparison to a *synchronous* focus group.

3.3 Kjell & Company – The Case

We have mentioned that Kjell & Company is a well-established retailer in the Swedish retail market. The theoretical framework provides us with interesting factors and insights that can affect customers when visiting a physical store. However, to create a better base for our findings, the theoretical framework will be complemented by Kjell & Company's selling strategy, which is to sell products over-the-counter. This strategy will be taken into account when creating questions for the *online focus group*. Moreover, this will also be considered when involving ourselves in the discussions that might take place in the *online focus group*.

3.4 Selection of Participants

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a focus group roughly consists of between six to ten respondents. With this in mind, one *online focus group* with approximately eight respondents were chosen to participate. The decision was taken since Bryman and Bell (2011) state that larger focus groups could be hard to manage. Furthermore, our decision to choose a smaller group is reinforced by Saunders *et al.* (2009), that believe the topic of the study should decide the size of the focus group. Larger focus groups are used when the aim is to discuss actual physical things, like product range. Since the aim of our study is to gain an understanding of emotions, opinions and thoughts, a smaller group will be used in order to fulfill our data needs (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Since it was decided to use Facebook, it was concluded that it would be convenient to contact our respondents through the same platform. When recruiting respondents for our study, a set of requirements were established that had to be fulfilled to be allowed to participate. The requirements were that the respondents had to have an interaction with Kjell & Company in any way or form, and they have to be active on Facebook regularly during the specific period of the *online focus group*. These requirements established a filter that helped us to find relevant respondents that could participate in the study.

Firstly, we looked at social media platforms where we found that Kjell & Company is established. As a first method of finding respondents, we searched Kjell & Company's Facebook page to find Facebook friends that like Kjell & Company's page. Then we decided to contact those who have liked their Facebook page. Twelve people were contacted in order for us to find relevant respondents. Eight of those respondents said that

they would be able to participate. Two persons declined, where as one wanted to participate but stated that his Facebook presence is scarce and, therefore, would not be suitable for this study. The other person's reason was that he had never purchased from the company, even though the person liked the Facebook page. Two other persons did not respond when they were asked to participate in the study. Additionally, Kjell & Company is originally from Sweden, and the respondents' native language is Swedish. Therefore, we decided to conduct our *online focus group* in the Swedish language since we are not aware of the respondents' English skills. Since the thesis is written in English and the *online focus group* is conducted in Swedish, we had to translate all the material and data used for the *online focus group*. Translating respondents' answers poses an ethical dilemma since it is crucial for us not to alter the opinion of the respondents by translating incorrectly.

When we had gathered enough respondents for our study, the private Facebook group was created that would be the platform for our *online focus group*. After the creation of the Facebook group, we decided to publish a post that was pinned, meaning that it would be at the top of the feed for the group. The purpose of this post was to inform the respondents about dates when the *online focus group* would take place, which was between the 4th of May until the 10th of May. Furthermore, the letter contained information as to how the data would be used and that they would be anonymous in our study. According to Ahrne and Svensson (2015), it is important to keep them anonymous since it should not be possible to trace the respondents in the study. A welcoming letter was created before the invitations was sent to the respondents since we wanted to create a welcoming feeling for the respondents as this would be the first thing that they saw (see appendix 1). When we were satisfied with our welcome letter, the respondents were invited to the Facebook-group. The group consisted of seven males and one female; the respondents are presented below, although in order to keep them anonymous, they have been given fictitious names.

Table 1. Respondents

Name	Age	Gender
Charlie	33	Male
David	27	Male
Dennis	26	Male
Edwin	25	Male
Jake	27	Male
Johan	24	Male
Johanna	26	Female
Oliver	24	Male

3.5 Focus Group Guide

In order to create a comfortable, smooth and consistent *online focus group* for the respondents, the questions were created beforehand (see appendix 2). Facebook's scheduling tool was used to post one question each day at 10:00 A.M.

The **first** post of the study was scheduled to be published on the 4th of May and aims to examine the respondents' opinions on *hard skills*. According to Nickson, *et al.* (2017), *hard skills* are considered very important in the electronic retail sector. Therefore, we have chosen to examine this subject and to ask the respondents relevant questions connected to this concept. The post consisted of a three-part question, each aimed to explore the respondents' interaction with sales personnel concerning *hard skills*. The first post of questions is presented below:

1. When you are searching for a specific product, what qualities do you believe is important when interacting with sales personnel, and would they be able to influence your purchase?
2. Please share an occasion where you have searched for a product and the sales personnel has affected your purchase. Is there a scenario where you have interacted with store personnel and left the store with a different product than the one you had in mind? What influenced you to change the product from your original choice?
3. Compare your experiences from the electronics retailer. Is there any significant difference in how the store personnel is helping you?

The purpose of the first question was to see if *product knowledge* is a significant aspect that the respondents feel is important when they interact with sales personnel. With the inclusion of the word ‘product’ and ‘sales personnel,’ we hoped to capture the importance of *product knowledge* in our respondents' answers. *Product knowledge* is a crucial factor when analyzing the concept of *hard skills* (van Scheers, 2017). We wanted to examine *product knowledge* since we believe this is important in a store like Kjell & Company that sells its products over-the-counter, and where the sales personnel must know more about their product range.

The purpose of the second question was to explore the influence that sales personnel could have on customers. In order to achieve this, the respondents were asked to share their own experiences where store personnel have influenced them to make a different purchase than intended. The last question of the post was aimed to explore if the respondents noticed any significant differences between the sales personnel among various retailers. We wanted the respondents to discuss their own experiences and compare the interactions they have had with sales personnel.

The **second** post was scheduled to be published on the 5th of May and aimed at getting the respondents to discuss the subject of *soft skills*. *Soft skills* refer to the interpersonal and social skills of the sales personnel and are, according to Nickson, *et al.* (2017), crucial in service roles where interactions are an important aspect. In order to examine this subject, a two-part question was posted that would guide our respondents to discuss aspects found within the concept of *soft skills*. The questions in the second post of the focus group were:

1. How should sales personnel act for you to feel a sense of trust and feel comfortable in asking for help?
2. Which attributes and character traits are important for sales personnel to have? Do appearance, outfit, or other factors influence how you perceive the sales personnel?

The first question aimed to examine how sales personnel should act in their role to instill feelings of trust and credibility in order to create an atmosphere for customers to feel comfortable interacting with the sales personnel. The purpose of the second question was

to understand how important character traits and appearance are for the respondents when they interact with store personnel. We decided to examine this concept since, according to Nickson, *et al.* (2017), *soft skills* are a central factor in the interaction between a customer and the sales personnel.

The **third** post was published on the 6th of May with the purpose for the respondents to discuss the subject concerning *customer orientation*. According to Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.* (2017), *customer orientation* covers the actual interaction and transaction between the customer and sales personnel. This post aimed to capture the advantages and disadvantages of having to interact with a salesperson.

1. In order to make purchases at a store, direct personal interaction is almost always a necessity, what are the pros and cons for you if you compare it to making the purchase online? Please refer your answer to your own experiences.
2. Why have you, at some point chosen to visit a physical store instead of purchasing online?

The purpose of the first question was to capture what the respondents feel are the best or worst parts when interacting with a salesperson in comparison to purchase the product online. By trying to get the respondents to refer to their own experiences, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of this concept. The purpose of the second question was to get an understanding of what type of factors would sway the respondents to visit a store instead of going online to make the purchase. These questions were asked since the concept is crucial for retailers. Further, according to Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.* (2017), sales personnel have to deliver the right amount of *customer orientation* since too high can have a negative impact on *customer satisfaction*, for example, a salesperson that asks too many questions.

The **fourth** post was published on the 7th of May to examine what the respondents' thoughts and opinions are about *service orientation*. We acknowledge that this is important since, according to Lee and Ok (2015), *service orientation* is a significant determinant for customers when evaluating the overall service they receive, which will influence the overall customer satisfaction. The question posted is presented below:

1. The service that can be provided online can differ quite a lot from the service that could be provided in a store. Examples of this could be that when you are in a store you can receive the necessary support directly and you can talk to a sales personnel face to face. In contrast to in-store service, online support is mostly offered through email or over the phone.
2. What experiences do you have from service in physical stores compared to online stores? For example, questions of products, changing products. On what channel do you prefer to receive service?

Service can be offered in both physical stores and online. With this question, we want to understand on what channel our respondents prefer to receive their service. Furthermore, we wanted to understand what influences a customer's choice of service channel.

The **fifth** post was published on the 8th of May, which aimed to create a discussion on the topic of *customer satisfaction*. According to Minh and Huu (2016), *customer satisfaction* is a vital aspect for retailers to consider in order to maintain satisfied customers. The question is presented below:

1. A high degree of customer satisfaction is a major goal for retailers, and various aspects could influence it. Please describe how the perfect store experience should be according to you in order to create the highest amount of satisfaction. What aspects are important for you if you consider visiting a store instead of shopping online?

Since various aspects could influence a customer's evaluation of satisfaction, an open question regarding satisfaction was posted. The idea behind this question was to allow the respondents to describe what they believe is important to them when shopping in a physical store versus online.

The **sixth** post published on the 10th of May aimed to examine *retail patronage*, which according to Skippari, *et al.* (2017), is important in order to build and sustain a long-term relationship with the customers. We decided to ask these two questions since Kjell & Company utilizes a unique way of selling that is considered traditional: in other words,

over-the-counter. Furthermore, the store layout will, according to Johansson and Bäckström (2017) affect how store personnel provides their services to customers.

1. Lastly, Kjell & Company is an organization that expands its physical retail stores, in comparison to many others that have to close down their physical stores and instead focus on their online channels. Why do you prefer to shop at a Kjell & Company store instead of making your purchase online? Elaborate what you think is good and bad with their way of selling over-the-counter.

Furthermore, during the focus group, we decided that during the second half of the week, we will interfere in the discussion and present various follow-up questions that are based on the respondents' responses. This was done to create a better discussion and to fill in gaps where we believe that data seem to be missing, or if the respondents stray away from the original questions.

3.6 Data Analysis Method

After the *focus group* was concluded, a considerable amount of data was amassed (see appendix 3). In order to analyze the collected data, we had to sort it with a method called color coding. According to Ahrne and Svensson (2015), coding is essential to sort the material to make it more comprehensible. Further, the authors also suggest that the material should be connected to relevant concepts. With this in mind, each concept that was studied was given a unique color and each post a number. By analyzing each question separately, the answers could be sorted into the colored concepts. Sorting the answers was done in order to remember what concept the answered referred to. Additionally, we numbered each reply to connect to it to a specific post (see appendix 4)

Table 2. Color Coding

Concept	Color
Hard Skills	Red
Soft Skills	Green
Customer Orientation	Blue
Customer Satisfaction	Pink
Service Orientation	Orange
Retail Patronage	Brown
Physical Store vs Online	Magenta

4. Empirical Data

In this section, the findings from our *online focus group* will be presented. The findings of each topic will be presented in chronological order. The data has been compiled and structured to make it more accessible when analyzing it.

4.1 Findings from the First Post

The first post examined the topic of *hard skills*. When the first question was asked that inquired about what is important to them regarding the salesperson, all eight respondents shared the same opinion that *product knowledge* is important to them. One respondent shared a clear opinion that captures how *product knowledge* and the interaction with a salesperson could affect her purchasing decision.

"Most of the time I make prior research before visiting the store. If I am still a bit uncertain despite my research I ask the sales person for help and I notice if they seem knowledgeable and helpful, if they recommend another product that could be more suitable for me I will most of the time listen to their advice. A professional approach can therefore make me change my mind about a specific product" -Johanna

This statement is further reinforced by Jake that stated that his trust towards the salesperson increases if they can have a dialogue about the product. Johan pointed out that if he has enough knowledge about a product, he often makes the purchase online. The main reason for him to visit a store is when he feels uncertain about the product specifications. David's opinion about the topic was that the salesperson's interaction with him would affect his purchasing behavior. By this, he meant that it is important that the salesperson can 'read him'. David does not appreciate it when the salesperson is too eager and not giving enough space for him in the store. However, he emphasized the importance of *product knowledge*.

The second question of this topic asked the respondents to share their experiences when a salesperson has influenced their purchasing decision. A majority of our respondents stated that they often research before their visit. All respondents, except for David, agreed that they had been affected by a salesperson to buy a similar product instead of the one they came to buy. However, David stated that a salesperson had affected him by being to

forward, and this caused him to leave the store and considers not to return in the future. Charlie shared that he has a broad experience from interactions with a salesperson where he has felt happy and satisfied with the recommendations. However, there have been times where he felt the opposite and, on occasion, fooled by the salesperson.

In the last question of the topic, the respondents were asked to share experiences in the electronic retail sector, and if they find any differences in how salespersons assist them. Edwin and Charlie did not specifically find any noticeable differences between different retailers in the sector. Oliver pointed out that he feels that sales personnel in the retail electronics sector is a bit more forward, he gets the feeling that the sales personnel is quicker to approach him and inquire if he needs any help. Moreover, Oliver believes that this is both negative and positive since he can feel annoyed if they are too forward. However, when he needs assistance, he appreciates it when a salesperson is a bit more forward. Dennis thought that both Kjell & Company and NetOnNet have reasonable prices and pleasant personnel that can achieve a balance between being too forward or too relaxed. Another finding that was shared by the two respondents David and Jake, both said that they notice a difference in behavior when they interact with a salesperson that has a commission-based salary. Further, they both feel that commission-based sales personnel affected their experience negatively. Johan's opinion about this was that the experience changes with the type of product he is about to buy. When looking to purchase simpler and less expensive products, Johan said that he receives more genuine help than when purchasing more complicated and expensive products. However, when he has been looking to buy a mobile plan, he does not feel as much trust for the salesperson. Additionally, he added that the salesperson is not as willing to talk about the final price when he has been considering purchasing a mobile plan.

4.2 Findings from the Second Post

The second post examined the topic of *soft skills*. The first question of the second topic inquired our respondents about how a salesperson should act for you to feel a sense of trust and ask for help. All respondents shared that they wanted the salesperson to be available and willing to help if asked. Edwin, Johan, Jake and Johanna, all stated that they want to be greeted or, in some form, acknowledged when they enter a store. Edwin and Charlie said that they prefer to be offered help directly when visiting a store. Edwin further explained

that he wants to be approached and inquired about what he searches for. If this does not occur, he will approach the salesperson who shows a sign of being willing to help. On the other hand, Johan, Oliver, Dennis and David, did not explicitly state that they want to be greeted; instead, they prefer a salesperson that is less forward and gives them the space they want.

The second question of the second topic examines the attributes and traits of a salesperson that are important to the respondents. Do the outfit and appearance or other factors affect how they perceive a salesperson? All respondents except Johanna and David stated that the salesperson's looks do not matter. However, all respondents agreed that outfit is important since it displays professionalism and makes the salesperson easy to identify. Both David and Johanna shared the same opinion about first impressions and stated that the looks of salespersons are an important factor when visiting a store. David mentioned that if he perceives a salesperson as sleazy, he instantly gets the impression that the salesperson will try to push products on him. He also wants the salesperson to be a good listener, which Johan agreed with. Additionally, Johan said that he wants the salesperson to have good knowledge about their product range; Oliver, Jake and Charlie also agreed with this aspect. Jake and Dennis both agreed that a salesperson should act humbly and not make them feel stupid for asking questions. Further, Dennis shared a unique insight that describes how it is important for him that a salesperson finds a balance in their social interactions with customers.

"However, a salesperson should not be too rigid but should also be able to connect with the customer, but not so much as to leave the professional sphere."

– Dennis

Jake explained that small things such as salespersons consuming chewing gum and having drinks on the sales counter is being perceived as unprofessional. However, according to Jake, this does not affect his overall trust of the salesperson.

4.3 Findings from the Third Post

The third topic only included one question, and the purpose of this question was to learn the opinions of the respondents about shopping online in comparison to shopping in a

physical store. Additionally, we asked them to tell when they have chosen to purchase in a physical store instead of buying online.

It appeared that all respondents agreed that one of the major advantages of purchasing in a physical store is that you are able to see, touch and try the product before a purchase decision. It is also visible in the respondents' answers that a decisive factor is the ability to take part in service from store personnel. As mentioned before, it is common for the respondents to do prior research. However, they appreciate the service that is offered in the stores if they have further questions or want to learn more about the product.

"The advantages of shopping in a store is definitely the service and competence that a salesperson can offer the consumers. In a store you are also able to touch the product physically." - Charlie

Johanna, David, Oliver and Johan also emphasized the importance of being able to get a product directly if they visit a physical store since there will not be any delivery times. Although, Johanna voiced the issue of visiting a store to purchase a specific product only to be informed that it is out of stock. Three of the respondents brought up the negative aspect of having to travel to the store instead of just shopping from home on an online platform. Three respondents emphasized that being able to order from home is something they appreciate. Further, Johanna expressed that online prices were often lower than if you would visit a store.

4.4 Findings from the Fourth Post

The fourth topic examines the service offered in physical stores in comparison to the service offered through online platforms. In order to deepen our knowledge about certain topics, we decided to involve ourselves in the discussion from this post until the end of the *online focus group*. This was done by adding follow-up questions when enough respondents had answered the post. All respondents were very certain about the fact that they rather take part in service in a physical store than online. The respondents also thought that the service in physical stores is more accessible since it is possible to talk to a salesperson face-to-face, thus eliminating the chance for miscommunication that might occur through online services. Even though all respondents prefer to engage in service in physical stores, Johanna and Dennis still feel that the service offered online is still good.

"I personally believe that the service is better when it comes to returns and refunds in physical stores. It can get quite complicated if you are to return or change a product and you have to repack it and send it back. However, the customer service provided online has improved and is accessible via online-chat and email" – Charlie

When six respondents had answered the main question of the day, a follow-up question was introduced to our respondents. Since many of our respondents had expressed the hassle of returning goods and managing warranties on products purchased online, a follow-up question was posted to examine this topic further. The respondents were asked to answer the following question: *Are simpler returns and service the main reason that you choose to visit a store, or are there other factors that are more meaningful?* This question proved to be highly successful and a discussion was started. Charlie, Edwin, Dennis, Jake and Johanna, all agreed with the question. The main reason for them to visit a store instead of shopping online is the service in physical stores and to avoid the hassle of having to deal with warranties and returns through an online platform. Furthermore, Charlie expressed the negative aspect of waiting 2-5 days when shopping online instead of purchasing the product from a physical store and receiving the product directly. Johanna, Jake, and David replied that they agree with this statement.

After reading the replies of the first follow-up question and noticed that the discussion had cooled off a bit, another follow-up question was posted. The decision to ask a follow-up question was based on the respondents' answers. Delivery time and the ability to get the product directly appeared to be an important factor for the respondents that made them choose to shop in a physical store. The second follow-up question that we asked our respondents was: *Are there any specific products that you tend to buy online versus in a physical store?* The most common opinion was that buying groceries is preferred to be done in a physical grocery store. However, Jake expressed that when he purchases groceries online, he makes less spontaneous purchases. Furthermore, we found that in all other sectors that were brought up, there were no significant similarities. Instead, the opinions were vigorously different in shopping behavior.

4.5 Findings from the Fifth Post

The topic of post number five was *customer satisfaction*; the respondents were asked to describe how their perfect shopping experience should be to make them feel satisfied. This question was postponed by one day since there was a delay in the answers from the previous day, and we wanted to ask follow-up questions. On this day, the respondents were asked about what aspects are of importance for them to consider when visiting a physical store instead of online shopping. According to the findings from this topic, all respondents except for two, specifically pointed out that they appreciate when the salesperson greets them when they enter the store.

A majority of the respondents expressed that in order to be satisfied with the visit, the salespersons have to find a balance and not be too eager to sell. Further, some of the respondents repeated that *product knowledge* is important to them, and this is a factor that all respondents have agreed upon earlier.

"When i do not find what I am looking I will approach the salesperson that will present me with different alternatives in various price ranges. It is important that the salesperson does not talk badly about the cheaper products but instead just tells me the actual difference between the cheap and more expensive product. When I have decided to purchase a product I want the salesperson to ask if I need any accessories that is not included in the main product. If I do need these I will accept. However, if I decline I do not want to be pushed to change what I already have because for example I do not have the 'latest' HDMI-cable." - Jake

Edwin replied that he enjoys when there are computers located in the stores that can guide him to the location of a product and display product information. David mentioned that he does not enjoy store layout that is constructed like a 'maze' where he has to walk through several different departments of a store in order to reach his desired product and the checkout, such as IKEA.

As discussed in the method section, we decided to ask a follow-up question when all respondents had replied to the daily post. The follow-up question was based on the consensus that most respondents seem to appreciate the assistance they get when asking for it: *What do you think of the common phrase 'Hi, how can I be of assistance' when entering*

a store? The findings from this follow-up question were that Jake, Johan and Oliver just want a simple 'Hi' when entering a store. If they need any further help, they will contact the salesperson themselves. Since one of the respondents expressed that computers located in the store are a contributing factor to his satisfaction, we decided to post an additional follow-up question to see if the other respondents agreed with this. However, this question only got three replies. The consensus in these replies was that computers would only be fitting in larger stores such as in Biltema. Jake also mentioned that he used to appreciate when Kjell & Company had catalogs that you could browse. Dennis pointed out that he does not believe that a computer will ever be a replacement for a competent salesperson.

4.6 Findings from the Sixth Post

The topic of our last post was the retail apocalypse and how one specific retailer is able to expand their physical stores. The question of the day was why our respondents would choose to visit Kjell & Company and have them elaborate on what they think is beneficial/disadvantageous about selling over-the-counter. Three respondents agreed with each other that one disadvantage of selling over-the-counter is that the customer must ask the sales personnel to be able to touch and see the product. Edwin and Johanna also expressed frustration when they had to talk to a salesperson just to see if the product is in stock. They also said that they feel annoyed when a small store such as Kjell & Company becomes too busy. Edwin elaborated on this topic and explained that it does not feel good just to stand and wait. Instead, he would prefer to be able to walk around and look at other products while he waits for his turn. He felt like this is not an option in a small store when it is overly crowded. Both Jake and Johan shared the opinion that the service received in a Kjell & Company store is guaranteed to be excellent. Moreover, Jake expressed that the overall experience is made better when selling over-the-counter since the salesperson can provide him with a full solution by offering related products. A respondent shared a story that provides excellent insight into the topic of *retail patronage*

“When he went to Kjell & Company to purchase screen protection for his phone. The screen protection was applied on the phone by a salesperson, and he was happy with the result. However, two weeks later, he dropped his phone with the screen facing downwards, resulting in the screen protection absorbing the impact, thus saving the phone. Later, when he

visited Kjell & Company to replace the screen protection, he once again received excellent service and was provided with a discount for new screen protection, which they also applied to the phone. Further, he mentions the fact that he does not have to save the receipt since it is stored online by Kjell & Company, and he only has to show them his ID. This outstanding service he has received has led him always to return to Kjell & Company when he requires new screen protection.” – Johan

4.7 Online vs. Physical Store

During the *online focus group*, a topic that was not the main focus of our thesis to study appeared to be important for the respondents; the topic was certainly interesting and relevant for modern retailing. The topic is related to retailing, although it focuses on another aspect than the one we aimed to study. Despite this, it was decided to be included in our findings because the respondents frequently discussed it. As mentioned before, one of the reasons that physical retail stores are struggling today is the competition from e-commerce. The topic of e-commerce was brought up quite frequently in our *online focus group*, and various iterations of this topic were discussed.

One of the most common opinions about the topic was related to delivery time. The results showed that the advantage of purchasing a product from a physical store eliminates the delivery time that is unavoidable when making a purchase online. This was something that the majority of our respondents stated. Furthermore, another advantage of buying from a physical store is the ability to touch, try and see the product. Clothing is an example of a product that was mentioned by one respondent, which stated that he never purchases clothes online since he wants the ability to try them on first. However, a negative aspect that was brought up was the need to travel to the store; this aspect is eliminated when making a purchase online. One respondent in our *online focus group* mentioned that his main reason for visiting a store is when he feels that he does not have enough information about the product. Therefore, he prefers to see a salesperson instead of purchasing online.

5. Analysis

The purpose of this section is to relate the results of our study to our conceptual model and literature review. The analysis will follow the same logical structure as our conceptual model and findings chapter.

5.1 Hard Skills

According to Nickson, *et al.* (2017), companies in the electronic retail sector seem to look for labor that is already interested in this field. Pairing interest with experience over time will cause the salesperson to be more knowledgeable about their products. Our respondents emphasized that they feel credibility for a salesperson that is well informed and interested in the products himself. The conceptual model that was created consists partly of the concept of *hard skills* and is believed to be a significant factor that could influence *retail patronage*. According to our results from the *online focus group*, *product knowledge* is a highly appreciated factor since all respondents agreed that this factor is very important when they interact with a salesperson. This finding is further reinforced by van Scheers (2015), who states that demand for salespersons with *product knowledge* is increasing. Furthermore, our research indicates that if a salesperson can demonstrate that they are well informed about the products, the credibility of the salesperson can increase. Moreover, this credibility can influence the customer to buy another product that might be better suited for their specific needs. Johansson and Bäckström (2017), emphasize that customers are better informed since modern technology has allowed them to do their own product research online. The statement about better informed customers is supported by our findings as the respondents referred to this behavior frequently. The results in our study show that customers seem to visit a store when their own research and knowledge about products are not sufficient to make the purchase online.

5.2 Soft Skills

The concepts of *soft skills* refer to the interpersonal and social skills of the sales personnel. These *soft skills* are considered important, according to Nickson, *et al.* (2017), which states that these skills play a central role when sales personnel interact with customers. The results of our study show that the social skills of a salesperson play a significant role when visiting a store. Furthermore, the results indicate that customers appreciate when they are greeted

and acknowledged by the salesperson when entering a store. Additionally, a salesperson must also be willing to offer assistance if approached by a customer.

The concept of interpersonal skills was also reflected upon by our respondents. It was found that the ability of a salesperson to act humbly and not make customers feel dumb for asking questions constitutes to be a valuable insight that was discovered in our study. Additionally, *salesperson responsiveness* is vital in order to detect if a customer needs help; this is important since it allows the salesperson to offer relevant services at a suitable moment (van Scheers, 2015). We found that the ability to offer service at the right moment was also indicated to be an important factor.

Nickson, *et al.* (2017), further state that physical attributes have an impact on customers. However, the results in our study show, the physical appearance of the salesperson is not a significant factor that affects a customer's overall experience. Nevertheless, other factors than physical appearances, such as outfit and that the salesperson looks fresh and hygienic, are more important to customers than the actual look. Customers tend to appreciate when a salesperson is easily identifiable as an employee if they require assistance. Furthermore, the results in our study indicate that when a salesperson consumes chewing gum or keeps a drink on the counter, it has a deterrent effect on the customer. Thus, our results indicate that social skills and interpersonal skills matter and are supported by what Nickson, *et al.* (2017) also claim.

According to Patel, *et al.* (2017), increased salaries can create incentives for the salespersons to get more involved with the customers. However, our results indicate that customers will notice a salesperson that has specifically a commission-based salary. This can have a negative influence on the *customer's satisfaction* since a commission-based salary might cause the salesperson to be more forward and eager to sell products. Therefore, according to our results customers seem to appreciate salespersons that are a bit more careful and humble when approaching customers. Hence, they still need to be alert and be able to detect if a customer wants assistance.

5.3 Customer Orientation

According to Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.* (2017), customer oriented employees place emphasis on the point of sales, and this is regarded as a key factor for success in the retail sector. Even though the results of our study indicate that today's customers are more informed since they do prior research, customers tend to appreciate the service they receive when they feel that the prior research is not enough for them. The results indicate that when customers enter a store, they are greeted with a welcoming phrase, either a simple 'hi', acknowledgment or asked if they need assistance. The findings of this particular topic are fragmented since it appeared that some customers just want to be greeted; others want to be asked if they need assistance, and others want to be left alone and ask for help first when they need it. Too much *customer orientation* will possibly scare the customer away since the salesperson might interrupt the customer's search for the product he came to buy. Therefore, it is vital that the salesperson can balance *customer orientation* which Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.* (2017) point out is important. This balance of *customer orientation* appears to be a crucial aspect according to our results since this subject came up and was elaborated on. The result of our focus group showed that there appeared to be no real difference between the various retail sectors. However, there was an indication that sales personnel in the electronic retail sector is a bit more forward than in other sectors. Furthermore, evidence was found that within the electronic retail sector, there might be some retailers that are able to find a better balance in *customer orientation*, namely Kjell & Company and NetOnNet.

5.4 Service Orientation

According to Popli and Rizvi (2015), *service orientation* is about anticipating, recognizing and meeting the demand for service of the customers, which can be done on an organizational and individual level. The results of our study clearly indicate that customer service is preferred face-to-face with a salesperson. Face-to-face is, according to our results, the preferred way to take part in service as the risk for miscommunication is minimal. Further, based on our results, it is evident that customers think that returns and warranties through online channels are a hassle. Instead, customers seem to prefer service that is offered face-to-face. The reason for this is because customers believe that service in the store is less complicated, whereas service online or over the phone is considered to be an annoying channel to go through. According to Jayawardhena and Farrell (2010), *service*

orientation has a positive impact on the quality of service that is offered to the customers. However, service might be hindered if the organization does not facilitate the creation of *service orientation* and *engaged employees* (Popli & Rizvi 2015).

5.5 Customer Satisfaction & Retail Patronage

Customer satisfaction is, according to van Scheers (2015), how the expectation of the customer agrees with the actual service or product. Besides the results presented in the chapters regarding *hard skills*, *soft skill* and *customer orientation*, the results in this study find that some technical aspects such as computers could raise satisfaction in customers by making the visit easier and more efficient for them. Johansson and Bäckström (2017), further claim that technological improvements in the store are vital; however, customers do not tend to acknowledge them, and they are not able to replace a salesperson completely according to the results in our study. *Retail patronage* is an evolved level of *customer satisfaction* where more aspects are taken into consideration by the customer.

Besides the interaction with a salesperson, other factors influence patronage. The layout of a store can affect a customer's patronage; therefore, the store must consider their customers when they design the store layout, further a customer should be able to visit the store and find the product they came for, without too much effort (Johansson & Bäckström, 2017). It can be derived from our results that layout has a considerable effect on *retail patronage*. The stores should be built with the customer base in mind and be easy for the customers to navigate, it is also indicated that customers do not enjoy shopping in a crowded environment. The results regarding sales-over-the-counter appear to have one significant negative aspect for customers. This negative aspect is the fact that a customer is not able to see, touch and try the product without asking a salesperson for assistance.

For *retail patronage* to be achieved, the results of our study indicate that a customer must feel satisfied with the interaction that occurs with the salesperson. Furthermore, the after-sales service must be excellent, and the customer should feel that their needs and wants are taken seriously. This should make the customer feel a sense of belonging to the store and therefore return for future purchases.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how sales personnel in retail stores can act to gain a competitive advantage for the organization since the sales personnel is the link between customers and the organization. Skippari, *et al.* (2017), argue that building a relationship with the customer can further result in *retail patronage*. *Retail patronage* is, according to our conceptual model, the final and most important step that could be the saving grace in the retail apocalypse.

The concept of *product knowledge*, which is a major part of *hard skills*, proved to be a very important factor. The results showed strong support for the importance of this concept that *product knowledge* is very valued by customers when they visit a physical store. Moreover, the results indicated that knowledge about the products can increase the credibility of a salesperson, which is also believed to increase the credibility of the organization itself from a consumer perspective. As suggested by Nickson, *et al.* (2017), *product knowledge* for sales personnel should develop over time as they work. We believe that in a store where sales over-the-counter take place, sales personnel behind the counter are responsible for bringing the product to the customer instead of the customer just picking up the product from a shelf. This way of working should quicken the learning curve and reinforce the *product knowledge* for the salesperson because they are in daily contact with a wide range of products. However, in our *online focus group*, it was apparent that customers are more informed about the products they are interested in than ever before. This result corresponds with the statement made by Johansson and Bäckström (2017), that also claim customers are more informed today. Customers tend to visit a store and ask for help when they feel that prior research that they have made is not enough. Salespersons tend to be more transparent about prices and helpful when talking about simpler and less expensive products.

Previous research by Nickson, *et al.* (2017), regarding *soft skills* suggests that it is an influential factor for a customer's satisfaction when interacting with a salesperson. The results of our study are in line with this since *soft skills* proved to be important for the respondents in our *online focus group*. Various aspects of *soft skills* were discussed, an interesting topic was the ability for salespersons to act humbly and not talk down to customers for asking questions. Salespersons should also be well dressed, look fresh and it

is vital that customers can easily identify them if they require assistance. Another concept that we studied was *customer orientation*. Salespersons must establish a balance in how they approach the customers. Salespersons that are too eager and intrusive on customers tend to negatively affect the customer's overall satisfaction and can make them feel uncomfortable. However, salespersons that are too 'laid-back' can also pose a problem since they can seem unapproachable. The results regarding a balance in *customer orientation* are supported by with what Kadic-Maglajlic, *et al.* (2017) express in their study.

According to our results, the three concepts discussed above are all highly appreciated and taken into consideration when customers evaluate their visit in a store. If these three concepts are managed, it should create a customer with a high degree of satisfaction. *Customer satisfaction* is a milestone because, in this stage, a relationship between the customer and the organization has started to grow, which eventually, if managed correctly, should lead to the ultimate goal of *retail patronage*.

In order to reach the stage of *retail patronage*, the organization must be able to manage *service orientation* by offering after-sales services that might be needed by the customer. Our results suggest that being able to provide an easy method for customers that want to take part in customer service is a highly appreciated aspect. Product returns and managing warranties for customers must be made accessible, both through online channels and through physical stores. However, customers tend to enjoy the service that is provided through the physical store more, since this makes the risk for miscommunication minimal, and the hassle of having to wrap and send the product back is eliminated. The service that can be provided in a physical store appears to be better because customers can directly talk and interact with a salesperson. This interaction is important since we believe that customers are exposed to the organizational level of *service orientation* through the sales personnel; thus, the evaluation of the organizational *service orientation* is a product of what the customers experience when they interact with sales personnel. To be able to build a long-term relationship with customers, it is also important to take the layout of the store into consideration. We found that if customers feel they could easily navigate in the store and find the products quickly *retail patronage* could be further reinforced.

A topic that was discussed frequently in the *online focus group* was the advantages and disadvantages of shopping online. However, various factors were found that would incentivize customers to visit a physical store instead of purchasing from an online channel. The most significant reason for them to visit a store is the delivery time and the service that is available in stores. Since physical stores often have products in stock, customers can get the desired product directly, and this proved to be a factor that strengthens the position of physical stores. On the other hand, purchasing online does not seem to have many negative aspects. Despite the lack of negative aspects, customers feel that the service through online channels seems to be inferior to the service that can be provided in a physical store. In other words, the negative aspects that are found with online shopping appear to be the positive aspects of visiting a store.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, we believe that the *interaction-box* and all its components, *hard skills*, *soft skills* and *customer orientation* are especially important in a retail store where sales over-the-counter take place. This type of traditional selling almost forces interaction between a customer and a salesperson. In a store where it is possible to pick up a product, pay and then leave, interaction is not required or is minimal. On the other hand, customers seem to enjoy that they can touch, see and try the product without having to ask the sales personnel, which is not possible to the same extent in a store where most of the products are placed behind the counter. Therefore, the concepts in our model become more relevant for a store that sells its products over-the-counter since it refers to the interaction between customers and salespersons.

In the context of *service orientation*, customers prefer to handle product issues during a face-to-face interaction since they find it easier to take part in service in a physical store. The reason is that customers find it less complicated and confusing by visiting a store to talk to a salesperson. We conclude that *service orientation* is a highly valued concept since customers seem to express appreciation towards the ease of being able to receive service face-to-face. The appreciation is based on the fact that customers want to avoid service through online channels such as email or over the phone. *Service orientation*, in collaboration with the concepts found within the *interaction-box* of our model, should result in *retail patronage*. Moreover, according to our conceptual model, *retail patronage* is a vital factor in order to stay competitive. It is also the ultimate goal in order to stay sustainable in terms of long-term relationships with customers. We conclude that sales personnel can act as a competitive advantage by delivering on all concepts found in our model. However, we found that the main factor is *product knowledge*, and this must supersede the prior knowledge that the customers can acquire by doing research themselves. We believe that *product knowledge* should develop faster in a store that uses sales over-the-counter since the sales personnel have more contact with their product range. This developed *product knowledge* can act as a competitive advantage for stores that apply sales over-the-counter compared to stores that does not, this excellent *product knowledge* can be the key factor for achieving *retail patronage* and surviving in the retail apocalypse

7.1 Contributions

This thesis contributes with knowledge regarding factors that are important to customers when visiting a physical store. Although, the concepts used in this thesis appears to have different levels of importance to customers. It is apparent in our thesis that product knowledge is of great importance to customers, since it was discovered through our online focus group that this can improve the overall satisfaction towards the retailer. Furthermore, this thesis sheds some light on the positive and negative aspects that relate to shopping in a physical store versus shopping online. This knowledge can be of importance for retailers that aim to thrive in a highly competitive market.

7.2 Research Limitations

The findings in this study are not without limitations; the model we created only analyzes the interaction that occurs between customer and salesperson and how it affects satisfaction. The study does not include other factors that could influence satisfaction, such as atmosphere, product range and similar factors. Furthermore, our *online focus group* only consisted of people within the age range of 24-33. By including a broader range of ages, additional findings could be achieved. Another limitation of the *online focus group* was the fact that there was only one female. However, our research did not aim to study the differences between males and females; hence we believe that this will not affect the results of the study.

7.3 Future Research

In this thesis, we have studied the interactions between salespersons and customers. Further, the perspective of a customer has been the main focus. It would also be valuable to study the management of the salespersons and how they learn and apply their knowledge in the different concepts from our model. *Service orientation* is a concept that is commonly used as a term in management. We have mentioned that salary, for example, will have an impact on a salesperson's performance, it would be interesting to see how such factors could be efficiently managed. Furthermore, factors that create and keep employees engaged in their role would also be interesting to study. Since our study focused on a customer perspective, it would also be interesting to learn about the perspective sales personnel in the electronic retail sector, such as Kjell & Company. Lastly, the study was conducted in

Sweden with only Swedish respondents, and it would be interesting for future research to see if the components of our model are viewed differently depending on location.

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Appendix 1

Hej och välkomna.

Vi (Måns & Christoffer) är nu ungefär halvvägs i vår kandidatuppsats, tiden har kommit för oss att samla in datamaterial med hjälp av er.

Under en veckas tid kommer vi på förmiddagen att lägga ut några rader text, till exempel en fråga. Ni har hela dagen på er att besvara frågan, vi är också tacksamma om ni har möjlighet att reflektera över även andras svar genom diskussion. Tanken är att ni alla fall vid minst ett tillfälle besvara det inlägg som vi kommer att göra varje dag inom tidsperioden: 4/5-10/5.

Den sista dagen (10/5) tänkte vi avsluta med att bjuda in er till en chattgrupp, under dagen kommer vi att ställa djupare frågor som en avslutning på frågorna som ställts under veckan.

Alla deltagare kommer att framstå som anonyma i uppsatsen, efter datainsamlingen är slutförd kommer vi att sammanställa och analysera materialet för att kunna göra materialet användbart i uppsatsen. När vi har sammanställt materialet kommer vi att radera gruppen då den inte längre fyller någon funktion.*

Gilla gärna det här inlägget så vi vet att ni har läst det 👍



Seen by everyone

 Like

 Comment

Appendix 2

Focus group guide

Koncept	Fråga	Artikel
Hard Skills	<p>När du söker en specifik produkt, vad anser du vara viktigt hos butikssäljaren och hur skulle denna kunna påverka dig att slutföra köpet?</p> <p>Berätta gärna om ett tillfälle där du sökt efter en produkt och där butiks medarbetaren har påverkat ditt beslut. Kan det vara så att du efter kontakt med säljare har gått ifrån butiken med en annan produkt än den du först tänkte dig? Vad var det som fick dig att ändra ditt val av produkt?</p> <p>Jämför även gärna dina upplevelser från elektronikbranschen. Finns det några stora skillnader i hur butikspersonalen hjälper dig?</p>	<p>van Scheers (2015)</p> <p>Nickson, Price, Baxter-Reid & Hurrell, (2017)</p>
Soft Skills	<p>Hur bör en säljare uppträda för att du ska känna förtroende och be om hjälp?</p> <p>Vilka attribut och personlighetsdrag hos en säljare tycker du är viktiga. Har utseende, klädsel eller andra faktorer en påverkan på hur du uppfattar säljaren?</p>	<p>van Scheers (2015)</p> <p>Nickson, Price, Baxter-Reid & Hurrell, (2017)</p>
Customer Orientation	<p>Att handla i en butik innebär direkt personlig kontakt med säljare, vilka för- eller nackdelar upplever du med detta i jämförelse med att handla varorna online? Koppla gärna ditt svar till egna upplevelser som du haft.</p> <p>Varför har du vid något köptillfälle valt att istället besöka en butik framför att handla online?</p>	<p>Kadic-Maglajlic, Micevski, Arslanagic-Kalajdzic and Lee (2017)</p>
Service Orientation	<p>Service som sker online kan skilja sig ganska mycket från den typ av service som erbjuds i butik. Exempel på detta kan vara att i butik kan man få hjälpen direkt och man får tala med en säljare. Kontrasterar man detta med e-handel kan det vara så att man får hjälp genom t.ex. telefon eller e-post.</p> <p>Vad har du för erfarenheter av service i fysiska butiker i jämförelse online? T.ex. frågor om produkter, byte av varor. Genom vilken kanal föredrar du att ta del av service?</p>	<p>Popli & Rizvi (2015)</p> <p>Jayawardhena & Farrell (2010)</p> <p>Lee & Ok (2015)</p>
Customer Satisfaction	<p>En hög grad av kundnöjdhet är ett viktigt mål för butikskedjor och det finns flera aspekter som kan påverka detta. Beskriv hur en perfekt butiksupplevelse bör vara för att just du ska vara nöjd. Vilka aspekter är för dig viktiga för att du ska föredra att handla i butik istället för online?</p>	<p>Van Scheers (2015)</p> <p>Jayawardhena and Farrell (2010)</p> <p>Minh & Huu (2016)</p>

<p>Retail Patronage</p>	<p>Slutligen, Kjell & Company är ett företag som expanderar sina butiker i jämförelse med många andra som lägger ner butiker och istället fokuserar på att sälja online. Varför föredrog/föredrar du att hellre handla i Kjell & Companys butiker istället för att göra ditt köp online? Ange även vad du anser vara fördelaktigt/ofördelaktigt med deras säljkoncept att handla över disk.</p>	<p>Skippari, Nyrhinen and Karjaluoto (2017) Sina and Kim (2017) Johansson & Bäckström (2017) Pantano, Priporas & Dennis (2018) Patel, Guedes and Pearce II (2017)</p>
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Appendix 3



Christoffer Oveby

Många av er har nämnt att servicen i butik när det gäller returer och garantier är smidigare än servicen som kan erbjuds online. Är smidiga returer och service den främsta anledningen till att ni väljer att handla i butik, eller finns det andra faktorer som är mer betydelsefulla?

Like · Reply · 2w · Edited

Christoffer Oveby Jag handlar faktiskt

övervägande online för att det är smidigare för mig, men när det gäller de gånger jag faktiskt handlar i fysisk butik så är det oftast för den service man får.

Like · Reply · 2w



Ja främst det men tidsaspekten är en

del med. Oftast då jag handlar i butik så är det för att jag behöver produkten direkt och vill inte vänta 2-5 arbetsdagar på den.

Like · Reply · 2w



[View 12 more replies](#)



Christoffer Oveby

May 7 at 10:00 AM

Servicen som sker online kan skilja sig ganska mycket från den typ av service som erbjuds i butik. Exempel på detta kan vara att i butik kan man få hjälpen direkt och man får tala med en säljare. Kontrasterar man detta med e-handel kan det vara så att man får hjälp genom t.ex. telefon eller e-post.

Vad har du för erfarenheter av service i fysiska butiker i jämförelse online? T.ex. frågor om produkter, byte av varor. Genom vilken kanal föredrar du att ta del av service?



Frifrakt

Viljuder på frakten när du handlar för mer än 300:-



Frifretur

Frifa returer i alla våra butiker.



Snabba leveranser

1-2 arbetsdagar leveranstid



Hämta i butik

Reservera online och hämta ut i butik samma dag

23 Comments · Seen by everyone



Like



Comment

När jag handlar online brukar jag kolla upp allt jag vill få svar på om produkterna innan jag köper dom. Oftast via google, youtube eller vänner. Då servicen för online köp är oftast väldigt dålig. Har jag frågor kring produkter är det bättre att gå till butiken. Det är väl lite därför butiker finns känner jag, för en bättre service än den man får online.

Like · Reply · 2w



Jag brukar oftast kolla runt noga innan jag köper något så jag får en bra bild av varan jag vill köpa trots att jag köper online. Nu för tiden tycker jag många butiker online erbjuder snabb hjälp via chatt eller liknande ifall de skulle vara något vilk... [See More](#)

Like · Reply · 2w



Personligen tycker jag att servicen i butiker är bättre när det gäller både inköp samt returer. Service online tycker jag oftast känns omständigt som att man blir omkringkopplad till olika säljare eller så måste man göra massa knepiga knappval. Även nä... [See More](#)

Appendix 4

Color coding of the findings

Hard skills

1. When asking the first question about what is important to them regarding the sales person, all eight respondents shared the same opinion that product knowledge is something that is important to them. Johanna stated that when she is uncertain about a specific product and asks a salesperson for assistance, if the salesperson is able to show that he is well informed about the product and willing to help, it increases the chance that she is able to change her mind about the product and purchase. Further, this is reinforced by Jake that stated that his trust towards the salesperson increases if they are able to have a dialogue about the product. Johan pointed out that if he has enough knowledge about a product he often makes the purchase online. The main reason for him to visit a store is when he feels uncertain about the products specifications.

1. majority of our respondents stated that they often make research prior to their visit

Soft Skills

1. By this he means that it is important that the salesperson are able to 'read him', he does not appreciate when the salesperson is too eager and not giving enough space for him in the store, however he emphasizes the importance of product knowledge.

1. Charlie shared that he has a broad experience from salesperson where he felt happy and satisfied with the recommendations, however there have been times where he felt the opposite and on occasion fooled by the salesperson.

1. Another finding that was shared by two respondents, David and Jake was that they felt a difference in behaviour when interacting with a salesperson that has a commission-based salary. They both felt that commission-based sales personnel affected their experience negatively

1. However, when he has been looking to buy a mobile plan he does not feel as much trust for the salesperson. Additionally, he adds that the salesperson are not as willing to talk about the final price when he has been considering to purchase a mobile plan.

2. All respondents shared that they wanted the salesperson to be available and willing to help if asked. Edwin, Johan, Jake and Johanna all stated that they wanted to be greeted or in some form acknowledged when entering a store.

2. If this does not occur, Edwin will approach the salesperson who shows a sign of being open to being asked for assistance. On the other hand Johan, Oliver, Dennis and David, does not explicitly state that they want to be greeted, instead they prefer a salesperson that is less forward and gives them the space they want.

2. All respondents except from Johanna and David that the salespersons looks does not matter. However, all respondents agreed that outfit is important since it displays some

kind of professionalism and makes the salesperson easy to identify. Both David and Johanna shared the same opinion about first impressions and stated that looks of salespersons are an important factor when visiting a store. David mentioned that if he perceives a salesperson as sleazy he instantly gets the impression that the salesperson will try to push products on him. Additionally, a salesperson's adaptability is important to him since he believes that he will be offered more relevant products. He also wants the salesperson to be a good listener which Johan agrees with. Additionally Johan says that he wants the salesperson to have good knowledge about their product range, this aspect is also shared by Oliver, Jake and Charlie. Jake and Dennis both agree that a salesperson should act humbly and not make them feel stupid for asking questions. Further, Dennis shares a unique insight quoted below:

However, a salesperson should not be too rigid but should also be able to connect with the customer, but not so much as to leave the professional sphere. - Dennis
Jake explains that small things such as salespersons consuming chewing gum and having drinks on the salescounter is perceived as unprofessional.

Customer Orientation

1. Edwin and Charlie did not specifically find any noticeable differences between different retailers in the sector. Oliver pointed out that he feels that sales personnel in the electronics retail sector is a bit more forward, he gets the feeling that the sales personnel is quicker to approach him and inquire if he needs any help. He believes that this is both negative and positive since he can feel annoyed if they are too forward. The positive aspect is related to when he visits the store in need for assistance. Dennis thinks that both Kjell & Company and NetOnNet have good prices and pleasant personnel that are able to achieve a balance between being too forward or ignoring.

1. Edwin and Charlie prefer to be offered assistance when visiting a store, Edwin further explains that he wants to be approached and asked what he is looking for.

1. It is also visible in the respondents' answers that a positive factor is the ability to take part of service from store personnel. As mentioned before, it is common for the respondents to make prior research, however they appreciate the service that is offered in the stores if they have further questions or want to learn more about the product. Although, Johanna voiced the issue of visiting a store to purchase a specific product only to be informed that it is out of stock. Three of the respondents brought up the negative aspect of having to travel to the store instead of just shopping from home from an online platform. Three respondents emphasized that being able to order from home is something they appreciate. Further, Johanna expressed that online prices were often lower than if you would visit a store.

5. The findings from this follow-up question was that Jake, Johan and Oliver just want a simple 'Hi' when entering a store. If they need any further help they would contact the salesperson themselves.

6. And Jake thinks that the overall experience is made better when selling over the counter since the salesperson are able to provide him with a full solution by offering related products.

Service Orientation

3. However, when he is looking to buy clothes he will instead visit a store since he does not want to send clothes back and forth.

1. The respondents also think that the physical service is easier since it is possible to talk to a salesperson face-to-face thus eliminating the chance for miscommunication that might occur over online services. Even though all respondents prefer to engage in service in physical stores, Johanna and Dennis still feel that the service offered online is still good. Charlie further expresses that he believes that the online service is a reasonable alternative which has improved. One of the main reasons that the respondents prefer service in physical stores is because refunds, warranties and returns are smoother to handle.

4. The main reason for them to visit a store instead of shopping online is the service in physical stores and to avoid the hassle of having to deal with warranties and returns on an online platform.

1. all respondents except for David and Oliver specifically pointed out that they appreciate when the salesperson greets them when entering the store.

1. Edwin and Johanna also expressed frustration when you had to talk to a salesperson just to see if the product is in stock.

Customer Satisfaction

5. Half of the respondents expressed that in order to be satisfied with the visit, the salespersons have to find a balance and not be too eager to sell. This was also agreed upon by David who stated it in a previous reply to a post earlier in the week. Further, some of the respondents repeated that product knowledge is important to them, and this is a factor that all respondents have agreed upon earlier. Jake, expressed that a salesperson that are able to present him with associated purchases to complement the main product is a positive aspect. Additionally, he thinks it is important that the salesperson is objective and does not talk badly about cheaper product. Instead the salesperson just tells him what the main difference is between the cheaper and the more expensive product. Edwin replied that he enjoys when there are computers located in the stores that can guide him to the location of a product and display product information.

5. Since one of the respondents expresses that computers located in the store is a contributing factor for his satisfaction, we decided to post an addition follow-up question to see if the other respondents agreed with this. However, this question only got three replies. The consensus in these replies was that this would only be fitting in larger stores such as in Biltema stores. Jake also mentioned that he used to appreciate when Kjell & Company had catalogues that you could browse.

Customer Patronage

5. David mentioned that he does not enjoy store layout that is constructed as a 'maze' where he has to walk through several different departments of a store in order to reach his desired product and the checkout, such as IKEA.

6. Three respondents agreed with each other that one disadvantage of selling over-the-counter is that the customer has to ask the personnel to be able to touch and see the product.

6. They also felt annoyed when the store becomes too busy, since Kjell & Company stores are very small. Edwin elaborated on this and explained that it did not feel good to just stand and wait. Instead he would prefer to be able to walk around and look at other products while waiting for his turn. He felt like this is not an option in a small store when it is crowded.

6. Both Jake and Johan shared the opinion that the service received in a Kjell & Company store are guaranteed to be excellent.

6. Johan shared a story when he went to Kjell & Company screen protection for his cellphone. The screen protection was applied on the phone by a salesperson and he was happy with the result. However, two weeks later he dropped his phone with the screen facing downwards resulting in the screen protection absorbing the impact, thus saving the phone. Later when he visited Kjell & Company to replace it he once again received great service and was provided with a discount for new screen protection which they also applied to the phone. Further, he mentions the fact that he does not have to save the receipt since it is stored digitally while showing them your personal ID. This outstanding service he has received has led him to always return when he is in need of new screen protection.

E-commerce vs Physical Store Shopping

Johan pointed out that if he has enough knowledge about a product he often makes the purchase online. The main reason for him to visit a store is when he feels uncertain about the products specifications

It appeared that all respondents agreed on that one of the major pros by purchasing in a physical store is that you are able to see, touch and try the product before making a purchase decision.

In other words, he wants to be able to try on the clothes before he decides to make a purchase. Johanna, David, Oliver and Johan emphasize the importance of being able to get a product directly if you visit a physical store, deliver times are in this way eliminated.

Furthermore, Charlie expressed the negative aspect of waiting 2-5 days when shopping online instead of purchasing the product from a physical store and receiving it directly. Johanna, Jake and David replied that they agree to this statement.

However, Jake has similar experiences when it comes to shopping online groceries, he believes that it makes him less spontaneous in his shopping behaviour.

Dennis pointed out that he does not believe that a computer will ever be a replacement for a competent salesperson. Three of the respondents brought up the negative aspect of having to travel to the store instead of just shopping from home from an online platform.

Although, Johanna voiced the issue of visiting a store to purchase a specific product only to be informed that it is out of stock.