Universitat de Girona

CUSTOMER TOUCHPOINTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

FOLLOWING THE CUSTOMERS' BEHAVIOR CHANGES ON THEIR SOCIAL JOURNEYS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

FINAL DEGREE PROJECT BY

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Bachelor's degree in Advertising and Public Relations - Class of 2021

To each one of you,
that, someway, somehow,
has and will keep shaping
my consumer behavior path
before, during, and after
a pandemic.

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Abstract

For years, the consumer behavior process has been studied from an individual point of view, known as well as the Customer Journey. However, nowadays, it's crucial to research how society influences it and how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed these patterns. By creating a split-ballot experiment and in-depth interviews with professionals, this Final Degree Project in Advertising and Public Relations, analyzes in a descriptive way the changes faced by the different safety measures, such as lockdowns and socially distancing activities government enforced on five product categories: retail, electronics, wellness & health goods, food, and entertainment. The findings of this project evidence the changes in behavior in the purchasing stages of customer-packaged and intermediate goods have sightly remained the same as when the pandemic started. However, the changes on the enjoyment stage are returning back to pre-pandemic levels.

Keywords: Customer Journey, Consumer Behavior Process, CRM (Consumer Relationship Management), Customer Experience, Covid-19 Pandemic.

Resum

Per molts anys s'ha estudiat el procés de comportament del consumidor des d'un punt de vista individual, conegut com el *Customer Journey*. No obstant això, avui dia és crucial recercar com la societat l'influencia i com la pandèmia de la Covid-19 ha canviat aquests patrons. En crear un experiment de *split-ballot* i entrevistes en profunditat amb professionals, l'objectiu d'aquest Treball Final de Grau en Publicitat i Relacions Públiques és analitzar de manera descriptiva els canvis que s'enfronten les diferents mesures de seguretat quil govern va fer complir, com ara confinaments i activitats socialment distanciades, en cinc categories de productes: comerç minorista, electrònica, béns de salut i benestar, menjar i entreteniment. Els canvis en el comportament en les fases de compra de béns de compra freqüent i intermedis s'han mantingut visiblement com quan va començar la pandèmia. Tanmateix, els canvis en l'etapa de gaudi estan tornant als nivells abans de la pandèmia.

Paraules Clau: Customer Journey, Procés de Comportament del Consumidor, CRM (Gestió de Relacions amb els Consumidors), Experiència del Consumidor, Pandèmia de la Covid-19.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to dramatic changes in how businesses operate, how consumers behave, and how governments adjust regulations (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Due to "lockdowns, travel restrictions, and health fears" (Remes et al., 2021), countries were confined at home, lowering the demand for services that used to require the physical presence of a person. There has been a change in consumer behavior in the wake of the outbreak. Thus, studying this journey before, on the first wave, and one year into the spread of this coronavirus is fundamental to brands, marketing professionals, and future researchers to know consumers' touchpoints to satisfy their social aspirations on durable, consumer-packaged, and intermediate goods.

According to insights reported by Comscore (Essling & Weitman, 2020), the week that had the most digital visits was on April 20th-26th, 2020, with more than sixty billion worldwide. This information matches the first peek of the pandemic as well. After that, visits have slowly declined, but currently remain higher than pre-outbreak levels. "These data suggest that while consumers are spending less time online now than at the height of the lockdowns, digital behavior is still significantly more prevalent than it was pre-coronavirus" (Essling & Weitman, 2020). However, in the advertising world, brands such as P&G, Chase, and Uber turned off their digital ad spending and saw no changes in their business outcomes (Fou, 2021). In marketing, there's a challenging view that misplaces "causation and correlation in assessing the returns to their ad expenditures" (Fishman, 2013). Therefore, it's thought-provoking to see the effects the pandemic has caused on the consumer behavior process.

Donthu & Gustafsson (2020) identify how humans rely on their senses for making decisions in all situations of life, and depending on the area a person lives, they have had different degrees of isolation that have lowered the exposition to stimuli in their journeys. As a result, it's a crucial moment to link the customer experience at home and the digital world by questioning the effects of the pandemic on the purchasing preferences of consumers. Do they prefer going to physical stores or going online?

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM FRAMEWORK

On March 13th, 2020, the Spanish Government declared a State of Emergency and encouraged their citizens to stay at home to protect themselves and the rest of their compatriots (Moncloa Palace, 2020c). These measures included a nationwide quarantine lockdown that lasted from March 15th until June 21st, 2020, where people could only leave their households for indispensable work and stocking (like grocery shopping and medicines), this way closing all non-essential establishments (Moncloa Palace, 2020b, 2020a). Although at the moment of writing this research some measures to stop the spread of coronavirus have been lifted, it's remarkable to keep on record the changes the customer behavior process faced by the Covid-19 pandemic from a social point of view in a period of isolation and social distancing.

This research aims as well to recognize the importance of studying the customer journey from a social outlook, by describing how the consumer behavior process works in a Social Customer Journey in the middle of a sanitary crisis. This introduces the questions: how has the Covid-19 outbreak changed the consumer preferences on their journey; and how has it changed the media consumption in Catalonia? As "in Spain (especially Catalonia) have been given, with a special reference to traditional culture, which has always played a major role in shaping the identities of individuals and groups" (Pascual i Ruiz, 2002, p. 175).

This also raises a question of how brands can manage the touchpoints of an experience in a Social Customer Journey a year into a pandemic from a Customer Relationship Management point of view.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following section holds three parts. The first one describes the Social Customer Journey. The second one analyzes Customer Relationship Management and its touchpoints. The final section discusses the challenges faced by the covid-19 outbreak.

3.1 Consumer Behavior Process (CBP) & The Social Customer Journey (SCJ)

Everett M. Rogers, in the 80s, defined the process of acquiring a product as "the mental process through which an individual passes from first hearing about an innovation to final adoption. He categorizes customers into five types according to their willingness to adopt new products: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards." (Eng & Quaia, 2009, p. 276). For a person to embrace a product or service, they have to go through some touchpoints located on the problem recognition, the information search, the evaluation of alternatives, the purchase decision, and the post-purchase stages of consumption. "These "journeys" were recognized at least as far back as the late 1800s, when marketing experts decomposed the effectiveness of advertising into a series of staged effects. The most influential of these early stepwise models evolved into the AIDA framework – Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action – and is still popular in both academic settings and marketing practice (Strong, 1925)" (Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 69). However, that model only contemplates the pre-purchase stage, and since Puccinelli et al. (2009) said "customer journeys are depictions of the entire customer experience" (Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 69), academics and marketing practitioners should acknowledge the outcomes of a purchase (Solomon, 2016), that include the engagement (Noble et al., 2010), the satisfaction (Chernev, 2018), the evaluation (Belch & Belch, 2021) and the loyalty loop (Court et al., 2017) that creates advocacy (Edelman, 2010).

When starting a CBP, an individual will be faced with problem recognition. This awareness could be an exposure to a motivation (Loewald, 1971), a need (Taormina & Gao, 2013), or a satisfaction (Chan & Baum, 2007) that would be driven either physiological (rational drivers) or psychological (emotional drivers) input. After learning about all the possible products/services that can solve that point of departure, it's the moment for discriminating the ones that will perform a better outcome for the person (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). In any case, this decision carries a risk factor, and the fear of making a mistake, the fear of missing out, and even the fear of loss could become a driver to select one item (Thomson, 2013).

In Hamilton et al.'s (2021) paper, they examined how the social context has not been studied yet, and how researchers have had an individual customer journey outlook. Even though authors like Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Puccinelli et al. (2009) have studied social influences as an external influence of touchpoints when consumers go through the process of identifying the characteristics of a product or service, then making the purchase decision, using the product, and finally evaluating their experience. Dr. Gajjar (2013) says the factors that affect consumer behavior are cultural, social (like reference groups, family, roles, and status), personal (being an individual's age, personality, lifestyle, economic situation), and psychological (their motivations, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, in the case of consumption they could be risk takers or risk-averse). However, the social spectrum is more powerful than thought before because "people who are seemingly socially distant may exert a powerful influence on one's decisions" (Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 70).

The kind of product a consumer purchase affects their behavior. There are three kinds of responses when purchasing a product (Ariely & Norton, 2011; Marks et al., 1991; Sinha, 2018a). The first one being the routine response behavior, when the purchased goods are frequently bought, usually there's not much information search nor analysis before acquiring it. These products tend to be low-cost, familiar, and easily accessible, and there's not much thought from the consumers. For example, food and beverages or wellness and health products. The second response being extensive problem solving, people need more time, the search of information online or from friends, and thought to decide before purchasing the product. These endurable goods are more expensive and less frequently bought than the ones exposed before. For example, electronics or entertainment products. Finally, limited problem solving, a middle ground between routine response behavior and extensive problem-solving. There's small involvement, but still, some research is needed before purchasing. For example, retail products like clothes.

In this area, we go back to the essence of the marketing mix of the product (including its features and its customer's benefit and experience), price, placement (online or offline), and promotion to guide a consumer through the purchase process (Londhe, 2014). Nowadays, in the digital era, there's been a disruption of how brands interact with their publics. Back then, "marketers assumed that consumers started with a large number of potential brands in mind and methodically winnowed their choices until they'd decided which one to buy. After purchase, their relationship with the brand typically focused on the use of the product or service itself" (Edelman, 2010, p. 64). However, on the present day, "after a purchase, consumers frequently share information about product performance, even for mundane purchases, on retailer websites and social media, potentially influencing the decision making of others with their ratings and reviews" (Hamilton et al., 2021). If these others engage with that information, they might themselves buy a product. By doing so, they're in the middle of their own Social Customer Journey and will share it with their peers.

3.2 Customer Relationship Management

CRM (Customer Relationship Management) is a mean to gather and create a commercial or experiential strategy based on knowledge from customer's insights about their needs, preferences, and demand for a business. It's also an effective and efficient way to oversee their data in a company for the purpose of developing feedback and evaluating key performance indicators to keep an engaging connection with a brand's public (Dibyo et al., 2021; González-Serrano et al., 2021; Montoya & Martín, 2013). This system allows to identify, acquire (when a prospect converts into a customer), retain (when the customer stays with the company), and grow their clients, so will be future advocates of the product and/or brand to other customers (Moreno-Brieva, 2015; Venkatesan, n.d.).

There are individual and organizational impacts of implementing a CRM strategy, such as individual productivity, planning and decision making, learning, awareness, knowledge sharing and communication, process improvement, and product/service improvement (Khodakarami & Chan, 2011). CRM programs can increase the customers' satisfaction. However, a business with a poor product/service quality could see affected its credibility affected (Gopalsamy & Gokulapadmanaban, 2021).

Having said that, there are some companies that perceive CRM as software or web application that collects all the customers' data for marketing purposes (Dibyo et al., 2021; Reinartz et al., 2004). Reinartz et al. (2004) from their literature research portray the following characteristics essential to the CRM process: it conceptualizes the core of marketing and the share of value for each stage of the relationship, and there's an evolution and a different approach on the 3 phases: initiation, where they acquire and retain customers; maintenance, where they retain and manage the up and cross-selling and customer referrals; and termination, where they demarket customers actively.

This process also describes the journey a consumer experience with a brand. Følstad and Kvale (2018) found that these journeys are key to uncover insights and help to figure out from the customers' viewpoint, how they get involved with a product or service. Advertising and Public Relations practitioners have the duty to stay updated on their target audience's habits to better communicate their messages (Martín-Guart & Fernández-Cavia, 2016). It's advised to use the following words as customer journey terminology: "touchpoints, stages, steps, and events" (Følstad & Kvale, 2018).

3.2.1 Influences on Consumer Behavior Touchpoints

Along with the CBP, people consume and are on the line of multiple touchpoints that have a bold or fair effect on their purchases. It's essential to identify critical events ("moments of truth" (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016)) to select the ones that would have a greater outcome for a brand's goals. Lemon and Verhoef propose a Process Model for Customer Journey and Experience, where it takes into account a previous, a current, and a future experience. Each stage describes the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase touchpoints which are either internal or external to a brand. They identified "four categories of customer experience touchpoints: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/external/independent" (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 76).

***Table 1**. Customer Experience Touchpoints*

Owned Experience	Touchpoints
Brand-owned	Store, website, brand's social media, brand representatives, events.
Partner-owned	Third party stores and ATL (Above the Line) channels: TV, radio, magazines, press, cinema, billboards.
Customer-owned	Family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances.
Social/External	Influencers, experts, brand's customers.

Note. Own source based on the papers by Hamilton et al. (2021), Šehović Marijana et al. (2014), and Kuehnl et al. (2019).

Each touchpoint (Table 1) is an enormous source of data that helps companies create and optimize marketing strategies for customer acquisition, retention, growth, and advocacy. The customer-owned and social touchpoints could be defined from the customer's point of view distance. On the social impact theory by Latané (1981), he says that there are three principles that influence social beings: First, it's the social force, that present three sources: the strength (the dominance, the significance, or the magnitude of a given source on an individual), the immediacy (that refers to space or time distance, and the obstacles or filters that are between the two fronts), and the number of sources. The second is the psychosocial law, which explains how the first other person closer to the target has a greater impact than one farther away. And finally, it's the multiplication versus division of impact, that explains how there's a force in which others will stand with the individual, but then, similar to an explosion, the chain reaction is going to outbreak.

3.2.1.1 Behavior & Lifestyles

Within touchpoints, it's crucial to include that consumer behavior is affected by the individual's personality and the communities they interact. Facts like being a social person or an individualistic person could alter the way they behave. Marketing practitioners take into account three perspectives of consumer behavior when making a decision: the behavioral (that conditions the way consumers respond to stimuli), the information processing (a process of cognitive mechanisms for problem-solving), the emotional (how a person is driven when purchasing a good) and the cultural perspective (Sinha, 2018b).

In the late 70s, the department of Strategic Business Insights (SBI) from Stanford's International Research Institute (SRI) created the VALS (Values & Lifestyles) model as a market research tool to find the "motivations behind consumer purchasing decisions" (SRI International, 2020b) to think about customers beyond their demographics. They segment the market by resources (from high to low) and by three categories that define lifestyles: ideals (thinkers and believers, their decisions are based on their principles and beliefs, so they tend to be more traditional and conservative), achievements (innovators, achievers, strivers, and survivors who look for a way that what they own to show their success), and self-expression (experiencers and makers that are more interested about living their lives and are more risk-takers) (SRI International, 2020a).

The well-known advertising agency, Leo Burnett (2012), published insights from consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and motivations. They classified them into three categories: thinkers (quality seekers and strategic savers) who hunt information to make their decisions, feelers (passionate explorers and opportunistic adventurers) who seek satisfaction from their purchases, and doers (habitual sprinters and dollar defaulters) who need to optimize their time and money (Burnett, 2012). The CBP not only is driven by lifestyles and the consumer's personality, but it's also influenced as well by external factors such as sanitary crisis.

3.3 The Pandemic of Covid-19

On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) alarmed by the high levels of SARS-COV-2 cases and deaths around the world decided to declare a pandemic so countries could take legal actions to reduce transmissions. As of May 2021, the outbreak has caused more than 170 million cases and more than 3,5 million deaths of the disease (Johns Hopkins University, 2021).

One important factor when studying the CBP is taking into account the economic influence that Covid-19 had on people. In a period of affluence, there would be more disposable income, and individuals will buy better and more expensive products (Gajjar, 2013). However, in times of recessions, like the sanitary crisis we're currently living in, "consumers will be less willing to buy products that frequently, they might be buying more of the frequently purchased products like your food products, milk, eggs and so on. But they might be less likely to buy more durable products like TV, cars and so on" (Sinha, 2018b). Nevertheless, the impact has been uneven on the grounds that some people have been able to work from home, keeping their incomes and "accumulating more savings while forced to cut back on spending…; others lost jobs and income or closed down businesses and have struggled to pay the bills" (Remes et al., 2021).

Not long ago, in 2019, Havas Media Group shared a hardly possible insight. They said that "a massive 77% of brands could simply disappear and no-one would care" (Havas Media, 2019a). However, almost two years later, the Bank of Spain communicates in the middle of the Covid-19 outbreak that the containment measures, together with the decline in demand, have caused an unprecedented drop in business activity and a significant reduction in surpluses for a very high proportion of Spanish companies (Blanco et al., 2020, p. 16). It turns into an increase in debts due to low commercial activity, and almost 40% of companies will be under financial pressure (Jiménez, 2020) and might close forever. McKinsey and Company

(Remes et al., 2021) expect that between 2021 and 2022 spending behavior will go back as it was before the outbreak because all the development our society made in some areas stopped and even reversed. However, in areas like digital adoption, the pandemic has accelerated it. For example, there's been:

> "*Acceleration of e-grocery shopping, a sharp decline in live entertainment, the emergence of home nesting (that is, spending on items such as home gyms, backyards and gardens, and gaming equipment), a decrease in leisure air travel, a switch to remote learning, and an increase in virtual healthcare visits*." (Remes et al., 2021).

In countries like the United States, they have seen an increase of new-business applications that doubles the volume from 2019, and the United Kingdom had a 30% growth (Sneader & Singhal, 2021). This pandemic has created an opportunity for entrepreneurs to build their hustles to stay afloat in these unprecedented times. Regardless, companies cannot forget that they are brands as well. As Maria Garrido, Chief Insights Officer at Havas Media, affirms, people prefer brands that mirror their values, and "77% of consumers prefer to buy from companies who share their values" (Havas Media, 2019a). Those values can be translated into these three questions: "a) does the product or service deliver? b) how brands improve people's lives? c) what's their role in society?" (Havas Media, 2019b).

Along with this idea, in a highly competitive field, "companies look for ways to connect emotionally with customers, become irreplaceable, and create lifelong relationships. A strong brand stands out in a densely crowded marketplace. People fall in love with brands, trust them, and believe in their superiority. How a brand is perceived affects its success—whether it's a start-up, a nonprofit, or a product" (Wheeler, 2018, p. 2). In the book *Designing Brand Identity* (2018), they explore three primary functions of a brand: navigation, reassurance, and engagement. These characteristics focus on consumers and how they interact with brands whenever they have to choose from an immense pool of options. It's significant to take it into account since many studies by psychologists and economists have concluded that "a person's satisfaction with an outcome can be influenced by the alternatives to which that outcome is compared" (Morewedge et al., 2010, p. 986). For this reason, authors believe that "establishing quality brand-consumer relationships is crucial to the success of a brand" (Tho et al., 2016, p. 307).

In research by Jennifer Aaker, a marketing professor at Stanford, she classifies for further studies the dimensions of a brand personality into these five attributes perceived by consumers: sincerity (refers to brands that are domestic, honest, genuine, and cheerful), excitement (referring to brands that are daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date), competence (referring to brands that are reliable, responsible, dependable, and efficient), sophistication (referring to brands that are glamorous, pretentious, charming, and romantic), and ruggedness (referring to brands that are tough, strong, outdoorsy, and rugged) (Aaker, 1997, p. 351). This scale to measure brand personality has been highly criticized by many authors who have decided to develop and implement their own models since it could not be applied to retail goods and it's sensitive to culture (Kumar, 2018).

4 METHODOLOGY

To identify the change the pandemic has had over the consumer behavior process one year after it started, it's valuable to perform a descriptive research because it "generates data, both qualitative and quantitative, that define the state of nature at a point in time" (Koh & Owen, 2000, p. 219). In order to achieve it, quantitative data will be gathered by a survey to later validate with secondary data from media studies and qualitative data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with academics and professionals in consumer behavior.

Referring to the survey, the tool to collect data will be a questionnaire, as it's a research method instrument that gathers objective (facts) and subjective attitudes to subsequentially analyze the frequency, distribution, and correlation of some variables in a sample (Igartua Perosanz, 2006, p. 231). In this case, the segment to study will be a non-probability sampling, following the convenience and the voluntary response of people in Catalonia, since they are accessible units of analysis to reach between March and April 2021, taking into account that those months mark the anniversary of the almost global lockdown. Considering that we're going through the 4th wave of the pandemic, the questionnaire will be in a digital format, using the university's resources on Google Forms.

A suitable sample for the size of Catalonia's population, 7,7 million according to the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (IDESCAT, 2020), to have a 95% confidence level, the most commonly known to have statistical significance (Devault, 2020), and an error margin of ±8,5%, would be of 133 individuals (SurveyMonkey, 2021). To reach that sample, I will contact on WhatsApp friends, classmates, family, and colleagues to answer the survey, and ask them if they could spread the word of the survey. The questionnaire's link was also posted on the Faculty's Newsletter for two consecutive weeks twice, from March 20th until April 30th, and also on my social media pages. However, since most of my acquaintances live in Spain (outside Catalonia), Latin America, and the rest of the world, then the sample cannot be extrapolated to Catalonia. Nevertheless, for future research, this study could be performed to range a bigger sample to analyze in-depth the changes faced by the pandemic in the Iberoamerican sphere.

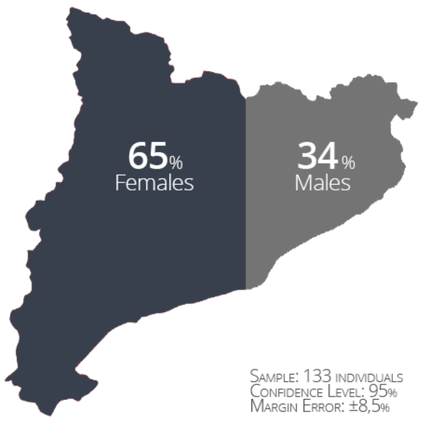

Figure 1*. Survey's Sample. Own source.*

The biggest strength of online surveys is their requirement to fill all the answers and not allowing an individual to skip any questions, thus promising complete data. Other advantages include the convenience, the ease of data entry, the availability to obtain a large sample, as they "can decide when and where to complete the survey" (Lefever et al., 2007), and the question diversity. There will be yes/no questions, multiple-choice of a single answer, multiple-choice – selection of a fixed number of answers, multiple-choice – select as many as variable number of answers, multiple-question batteries that have the same scale, and scales such as Likert and semantic differential questions (Evans & Mathur, 2005). However, some weaknesses of online surveys are respondents' lack of online experience/expertise, impersonal, low response rate if they choose to postpone completing the survey, and the fact that anyone with the link, no matter the location could answer the form (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Lefever et al., 2007).

One of the biggest challenges when studying consumer behavior is product choice. Depending on the kind of product an individual encounters, the outcome will be unclear. It's completely different if it's an item they frequently buy, such as food and beverages or wellness goods. Or if it's a product that is less frequently purchased, like clothes, electronics, or entertainment. To have a global view of the consumer behavior process it's representative to use an experimental questionnaire, also known as split-ballot, to create different models with the same questions and randomly distribute it to be able to analyze the groups separately for context-specific variables and at the same time use the results as a whole (Igartua Perosanz, 2006; Krupnikov & Findley, 2018; Stucki et al., 2018).

For the survey, the questionnaire has introductory and subjective variables to gather data relating to their consumer behavior process before, during the first wave of the outbreak, and a year after the Covid-19 pandemic started. There are opening questions to identify their lifestyles and media consumption. Further, based on the final digit of the sample's phone number, they are categorized into one of some specific scenarios of buying a product. The products selected for this research are from the five "most meaningful industries in 2019" (Havas Media, 2019b) in Western Europe, being retail, electronics, food, consumer goods (for this study being wellness & health-related), and entertainment. This will ensure a close to accurate randomization and low human error.

Referring to the interviews, it will be meaningful to reach experts to validate the result found on the consumer behavior process from a social outlook. The interviewees will be carefully selected according to their professional background. They will take place right after analyzing the results. To keep distancing and safety restrictions to prevent contagion of the coronavirus, they will take place on Google Meet, the university's resource for videoconferences that also allow sharing the screen with the results' figures. Since they will be remote, then distance is redundant, and academics and marketing practitioners could live anywhere in the world. They will require a reliable technological device and a place with a stable internet connection (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021).

The principal purpose of this qualitative technique is to find an enriching argument between the results found in this research and the current practices of professionals to validate the data. Their identity will be preserved anonymously, leaving their identities confidential on this paper, but still keeping the integrity of the qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2015; Val & Gutiérrez, 2005). As soon as the professionals accept being interviewed, they will receive a link with the scheduled appointment on their mail or chat, so they can save the date on their online calendars, and another link (https://infogram.com/interview-scj-1hzj4o3p39qp34p?live) to a slideshow with the results and the correspondent questions for them to prepare the interview.

5 FINDINGS

From the survey, the sample is formed by 65% of females and 34% of males. 4% students under 20 years old (Gen Z), 36% students and employed 21–27-year-olds (Zillennials), 19% students, freelancers and employed 28-40-year-olds (Millennials), 17% freelancers, employed, and unemployed 41-52-year-olds (Gen X), 23% freelancers and employed 53-72-year-olds (Baby Boomers), and 2% freelancers, employed, and unemployed over 73 years old (Silent Generation). The fact that they answered a 20-30-minute-long questionnaire means that they rely on a stable internet connection.

When talking about segmenting the respondents by the VALS Framework, on the one hand, Gen Z (60%), Zillennials (71%), and Millennials (68%) follow ideals. They're thinkers that value knowledge and creativity with exclusive resources. On the other hand, Gen X (64%) and Baby Boomers (77%) follow self-expression. They're makers that value family bonds and personal beliefs with shared resources. It's noteworthy to take into account that on a second level, the Zillennials (48%) and Millennials (44%) follow self-expression with shared resources, and Gen X (59%) and Baby Boomers (57%) follow ideals with exclusive resources. On another front (Table 2), they identify themselves as thinkers (quality and savings hunters), which matches their values and lifestyles, and doers (loyal to the brand they constantly buy).

Table 2. Consumer behavior attributes on different products.

Attributes	Clothes	Electronics	Entertainment	Grocery's Food	Health & Wellness
Quality Seeker	85%	93%	76%	90%	81%
Strategic Saver	61%	40%	55%	59%	67%
Dollar Defaulter	9%	20%	10%	7%	22%
Passionate Explorer	15%	33%	21%	24%	15%
Opportunistic Adventurer	27%	27%	21%	24%	15%
Habitual Sprinter	36%	40%	24%	41%	33%

Note. Own source from the survey's 9th question that follows Leo Burnett's personality segmentation (2012).

As mentioned in the literature review, there are internal and external factors that affect a customer's behavior (Figure 2). The respondents across generations think that one year into a pandemic individual and social factors are more important than branding and marketing factors. The standing of emotional and physical wellness and friends and family wellness increased from significant to crucial (scored on average 77,8/100 in before the pandemic to 92,9/100 in April 2021), possible from the crisis's uncertainty, and the fact that they could have taken them for granted; and a brand's eCommerce went from a neutral factor to an essential one (scored 56,4/100 in before the pandemic to 71,7/100 in April 2021).

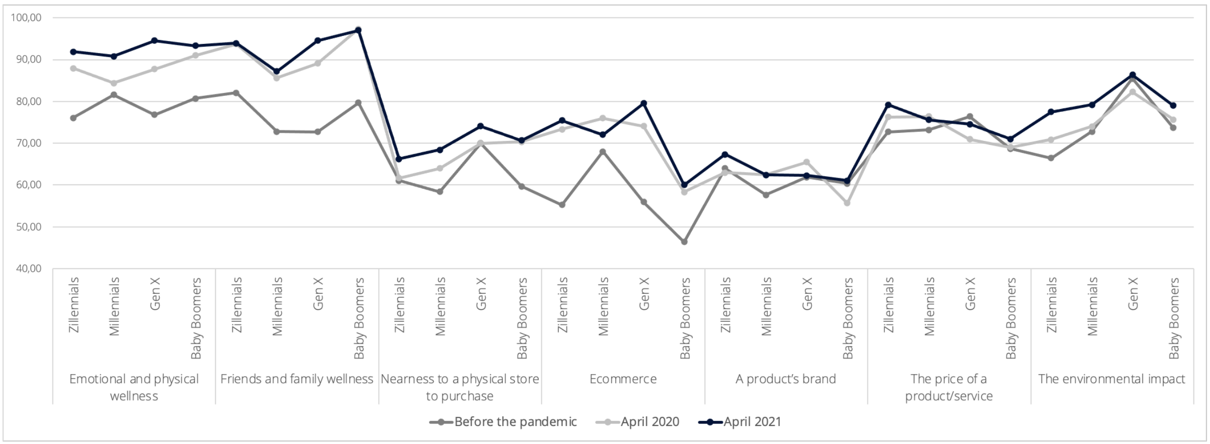

Figure 2. Change on the importance of internal and external factors that influence consumer behavior. Own source from the survey's 5th question.

A product/service's price and their brand have slightly remained the same, while the willingness to protect the environment has only increased on Zillennials and Millennials. It's noticeable to observe how Millennials and Gen X, before the pandemic, cared more about a product/service price than their friends and family wellbeing. Talking to academic researchers about this behavior, they mention that it could be because of the low-cost craze that started at the beginning of this millennium in Spain when prices stopped being value attributes. A new reality is born where any product/service can be produced at the demand a customer is willing to pay. Before that time, the price was proof of the product/service quality. Then the higher the price, the better quality it had.

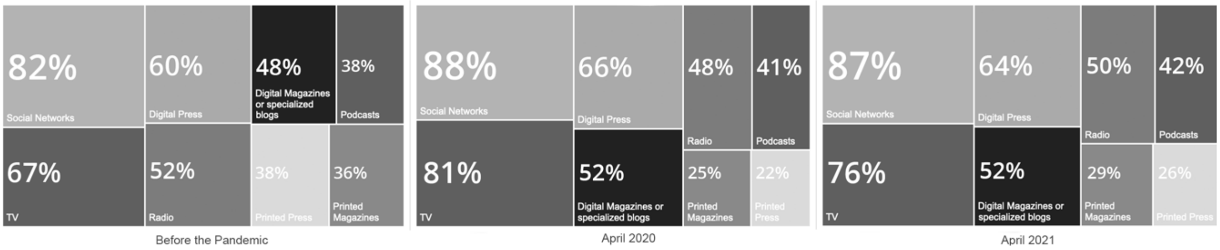

Figure 3. Change of media channels share based on frequency. Own source from the survey's 6th question.

The media channel that thrived the most because of the pandemic was television. It reached 20,9% more people during the first wave of the pandemic than pre-Covid times (Figure 3). In a study about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on media consumption in Spain (Montaña Blasco et al., 2020), 86,4% of their sample said that the first time they heard about the coronavirus was on television, and 83,2% said they used this media to keep updated about the outbreak back in March 2020. The media that were negatively affected were printed press and magazines. Even though, before the outbreak, many people occasionally used to read them, nowadays, the percentage of never using them has doubled, while their digital counterparts have remained almost the same.

Putting TV and social networks together, they were the only channels where the fewest people said they never use them. Taking into account the studies by the Association of Media Research in Spain (AIMC, 2021), before the pandemic, internet audiences matched with the sample (81,1% vs 82%). As of the first wave of the study between January and March 2021, the results slightly differ from 84,7% by the AIMC versus 87% by the sample, but still, it's within the error margin. However, in the case of television, on the one hand, in 2020 the AIMC reported an audience of 84,2% and the sample were 81%. On the other hand, as of March 2021, the AIMC reported 85,2%, which is even higher than the previous year, while the sample lowered its reach to 76%.

From the IAB Spain social media study (2021) that was conducted from March to April 2021, the people that are currently users of this media are 85% of Spain's population from 16-70-year-olds, then compared to this sample is 87%, that it's within their ±3% error margin. They evidence that social networks that are used the most in those months are WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. They are mainly used for entertainment (81%), social engagement (72%), and search for information (66%).

The following part of the questionnaire focuses on the pre-purchase stages that cover need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and the purchasing place of a product. To fairly randomize the split-ballot survey, the respondents were divided into five groups depending on the last digit of their phone number: 0 or 9 (25,5%), 1 or 8 (11,5%), 2 or 7 (21,5%), 3 or 6 (21,5%), and 4 or 5 (20%), that represent three different categories of products that resemble the thought behavior process across: durable goods (i.e., 1 or 8: electronics, and 2 or 7: entertainment products), consumer-packaged goods (i.e., 3 or 6: grocery's food, and 4 or 5: health and wellness products), and intermediate goods (i.e., 0 or 9: clothes).

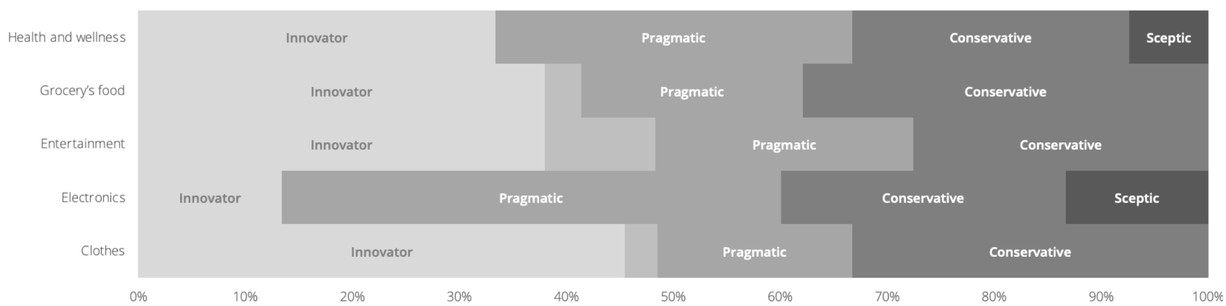

Figure 4. Characteristics that describe the way people purchase products based on the product adoption curve. Own source from the survey's 8th question.

When asking them the characteristic that describes them the most purchasing their product (Figure 4), generally speaking, almost a half of the sample belongs to the early market of product adoption, and the other part constitutes the mainstream market. In the case of people buying an electronic product, their data resembles the product adoption curve theory where a small part of the population are early adopters and laggards, and the bigger part are the majority. On this market of people who value family bonds, knowledge, and creativity, Zillennials are the most innovative, visionaries, and pragmatics on intermediate goods. Millennials are rather innovators on consumer-packaged goods, while Gen X are innovators on durable goods. Baby boomers are the most conservative and sceptic of consumer-packaged goods.

For durable goods (Table 3), before the pandemic there was a tie for the best place for people to be aware of new products, locations like physical stores, eCommerce, and digital magazines were the most ideal. Due to lockdown implementations, the optimal locations to place ads and information about current releases reduced to the brand's website, followed by digital magazines and specialized blogs. On the search information stage, social networks were the most used, followed by television and digital press. However, one year into the pandemic, people prefer to seek inputs from television and then from social media and a brand's website. In the case of product/brand comparison, people used to rely on stores, then on social media, digital magazines, and specialized blogs. Even though on the first wave of the pandemic the go-to place were digital outlets, nowadays, people prefer to go to physical business establishments and then eCommerce. Nevertheless, it's meaningful to keep in mind that at this stage, channels like press (printed and digital), tv, radio, and podcasts are sources that do influence their behavior. As on the decision-making stage, people solely rely on brand-own channels during all this time.

Table 3. Preferred media channels on the pre-purchase stage one year into a pandemic.

Touchpoint Events	Durable Goods	Consumer-Packaged Goods	Intermediate Goods
Awareness of New Products	Ecommerce	Brand's store & website	Ecommerce
Search Information	Television	Social Networks	Social Networks
Product/Brand Comparison	Stores	Ecommerce	Ecommerce
Decision-Making	Brand's store & website	Stores	Stores

Note. Own source from the survey's 10th question.

On consumer-packaged goods, the leading places for people to be aware of new products were brand-owned. One year into the pandemic, they remain on top and closely followed by social media that before the pandemic wasn't influential compared to the other channels. On the search information stage, social networks were the most employed, followed by eCommerce, television, and billboards. Nowadays, social networks have become even more relevant, mainly used for customer service, and they're closely followed by television and radio. Channels like digital magazines, specialized blogs, billboards, a brand's website, and digital press have a symbolic audience that shouldn't be overlooked on this stage.

In the case of product/brand comparison, people used to rely on brand-owned locations, followed by billboards and press (printed and digital). The pandemic strongly impacted physical stores, billboards, and printed press to lose their relevance. Currently, a brand eCommerce keeps leading the stage, and now it's followed by social networks, digital magazines, specialized blogs, and digital press. As in the decision-making stage, people solely prefer physical stores no matter the time.

On intermediate goods, the outstanding place for people to be aware of new products is eCommerce. One year into the pandemic, it remains on top. Social media and offline stores should be considered as well. On the search information stage, social networks were the most engaged, followed by the brand-owned touchpoints. Nowadays, social networks have become even more relevant. On one side, a brand website kept the same influence. On the other side, stores lost a little bit of their force. In the case of product/brand comparison, before the pandemic, eCommerce dominated the stage. Stores, social media, digital magazines, and specialized blogs had a slight relevance. Currently, the digital business remains on top. Even though during the first wave of the pandemic physical stores weren't thought of. Nowadays, they're the second option followed by digital magazines, specialized blogs, and social networks. As in the decision-making stage, people used to solely rely on offline stores. Today, it's still on the top, and now closely followed by eCommerce that boosted its force during the first wave of the pandemic.

When asking the sample about their Social Customer Journey (Figure 5), they answered that as they get into the purchasing process, they start to be more social along the way on durable goods. The stage when they are the most social is enjoying themselves with their peers (average 54,5%) and evaluating (average 34,5%) their durable and consumer-packaged goods. When purchasing intermediate goods, the most social are the acquisition (36%) and enjoyment (27%) of the product. This evidences the concept of word of mouth, a form of communication that "has been found to be nine times more effective for rapid distribution of information than print and media communications" (Meilatinova, 2021, p. 3).

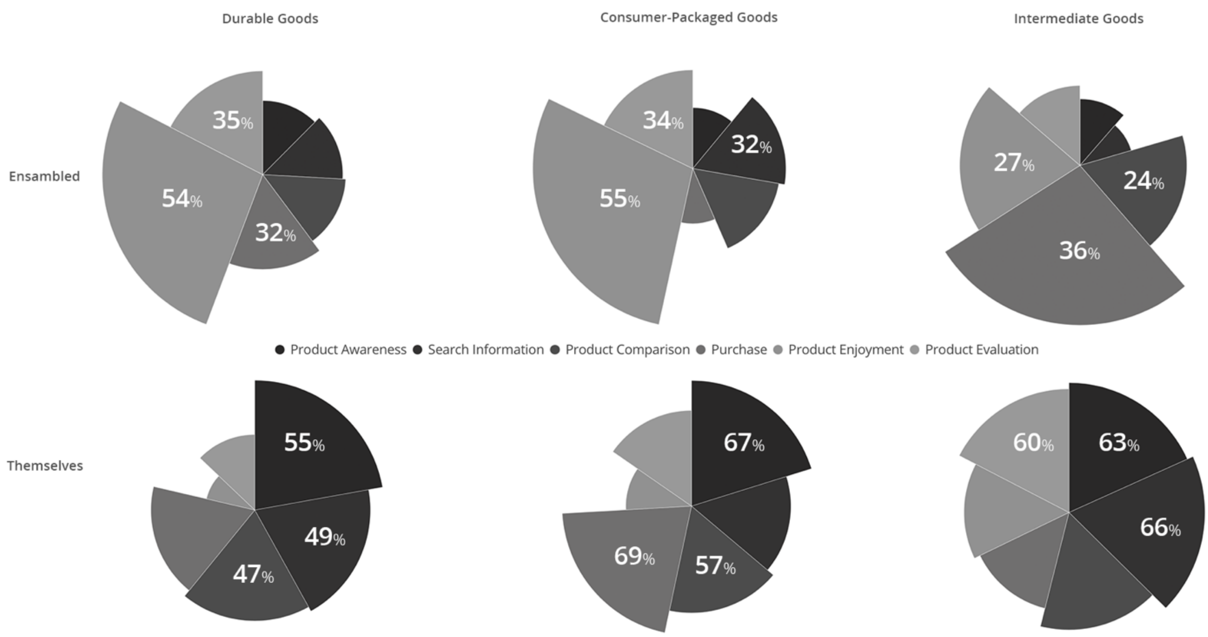

***Figure 5**. The Social Customer Journey as of April 2021. Own source from the survey's 11th question.*

People are the least social when acknowledging their need for a product or service (average 62%). However, it's uncertain the degree of their social influence on that stage since the funnel works in spiral and the external factor is constantly impacting. The fact that they don't experience a touchpoint with a social other doesn't mean that on another stage they haven't been affected before to be aware of a new product/service. Depending on the kind of product, people behave differently. They could experience a touchpoint either by themselves or along with their peers. Nevertheless, on durable and consumer-packaged goods there's a target range when the level of individualism and social factors meet, that is when enjoying the product and when evaluating it respectively.

On consumer-packaged goods, the stages that faced the most change due to the pandemic were the comparison, the purchase, and enjoyment of the product. And on intermediate goods were the purchase and enjoyment of the product (Figure 6). The changes in behavior in the purchasing staged have sightly remained the same as when the pandemic started. However, the changes on the enjoyment stage are slowly turning back to the pre-pandemic practices.

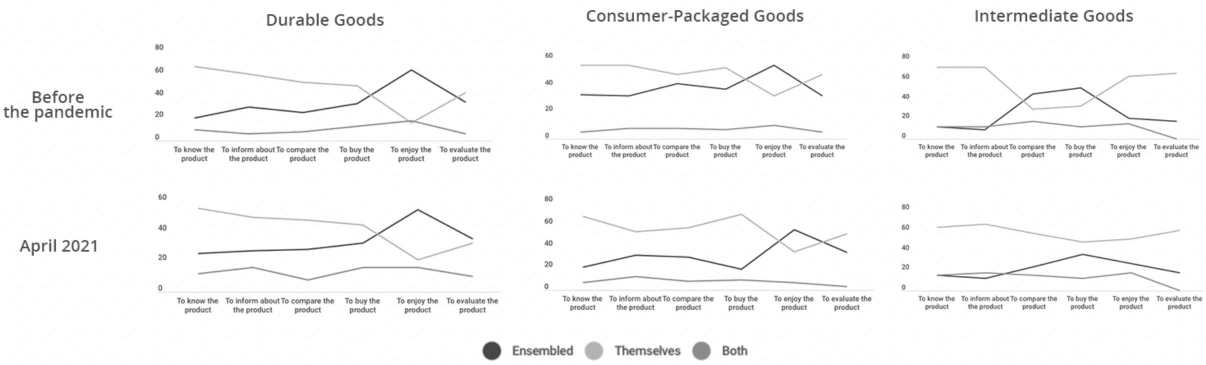

Figure 6. Changes on the Social Customer Journey. Own source from the survey's 11th question.

On the one hand, the behavior patterns of people when sharing information at the search about the product stage of the CBP slightly changed from pre-pandemic times until one year later. People started relying more on closer people. On the other hand, between different products, their sharing experience is fairly similar.

Figure 7 shows evidence of the social impact theory as the sample exchanges knowledge with proximal people who are temporally and physically close on an average 7,4 out of 10 scale across products. Even though, brand representatives may seem too distal (3,5 out of 10), in health, beauty & wellness products, they could be also associated as acquaintances, friends or family, and especially online reviews are growing their impact.

Figure 7. Averaged frequency of people sharing information when being inspired to purchase a durable, consumer-packaged, and intermediate good. Own source from the survey's 12th question.

Professor Dr. Ryan Hamilton quoted from an ad: "I tell my friends about your brand not because I like your brand, but because I like my friends" (Hamilton, 2021, min: 35:20), which is significant to brands since from a social media angle, 92% of users in Spain follow these proximal others, while less than half of users in Spain follow brands and influencers, specially of entertainment, culture, sports, and travel (IAB Spain, 2021). It's important to take into account, that this fact works better on more pragmatic and conservative products than on innovative or new products on their lifetime cycle.

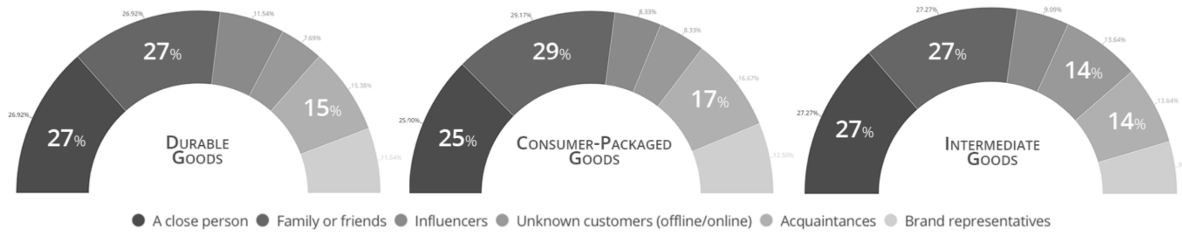

Figure 8. Average of frequency of people reaching these social others on the decision-making stage. Own source from the survey's 13th question.

It could be argued that this fact only happens in either social communities, for instance, in Latin America and the Mediterranean, specifically Catalonia (Figure 8), or in close relationships in cultures that could be described as cold, such as some regions in North America and Northern Europe. In this survey, people do trust their peers' thoughts, and they reach their close relationships for informative information about all three categories (60,6%). On durable goods, they reach brand representatives for technical advice (21%). On consumer-packaged goods, they equally engage for technical information (25%) with almost every segment, except with influencers. On intermediate goods, for this kind of matter, they trust brand representatives (20%) and unknown offline/online customers (15%). This fact raises questions of the true value of influencers since people don't either reach them at the beginning of the journey for product awareness or for enquires when deciding to purchase a good.

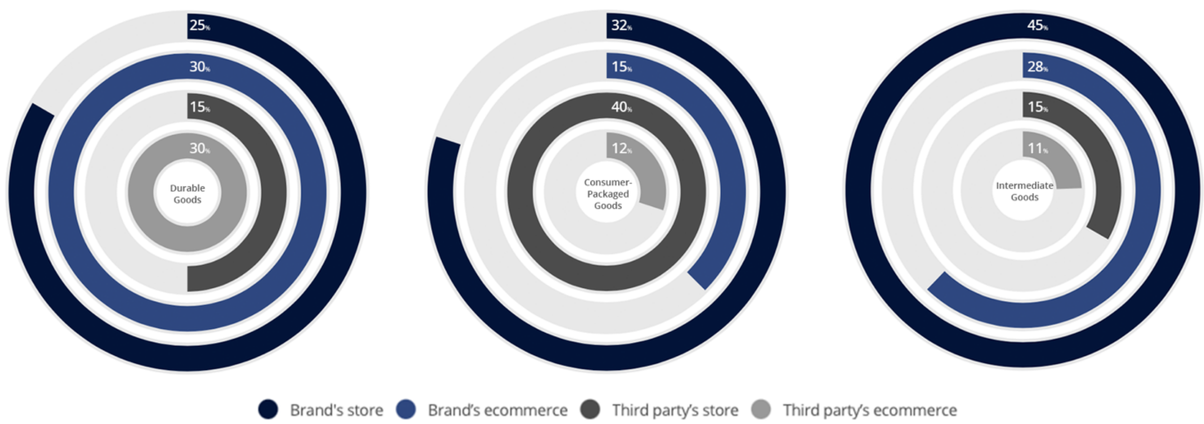

***Figure 9**. Average share of purchase channel as of April 2021 on durable, consumer-packaged and intermediate goods. Own source from the survey's 15th question.*

Due to lockdown restrictions, and because people didn't want to have physical contact, sales on eCommerce and third-party websites of durable goods pushed up to 60% combined against offline stores (Figure 9). There's a battle head-to-head on these two channels. For instance, for a slight difference, people prefer the brand-own online store. Besides that, people prefer buying those kinds of products on a brand-owned store (25%) than on third-party stores (15%), like MediaMarkt and El Corte Ingles.

On consumer-packaged goods, people prefer purchasing their products at their local supermarkets (40%), and then on the brand's website. Even though third party's eCommerce was the least preferred by this sample (12%), apps like Lidl, Club Dia, and Carrefour were downloaded more than one million times in Spain as of August 2020 (Leal, 2020). It's important to take into account that in food and health & wellness products, there aren't usually specific brand's offline stores. However, people can order their items on the brand's website and 15% of the sample prefer them.

On intermediate goods, people prefer the most offline stores (60%). Combining physical and their online alternative, 73% are brand-owned. The most downloaded apps in Spain, more than ten million times, were the fast fashion brands: H&M, Pull and Bear, Bershka, and Zara (Leal, 2020). In the case of clothing, people won't purchase them on third-party websites like department stores (i.e., El Corte Ingles), Amazon or eBay. This could be a reason why an eBay case study by Labs points found that after stop buying ads online, their sales were not affected by the advertising on browsers like Google (Fishman, 2013).

Depending on the physical location a person lives in, their behavior will differ. For example, people living in cities with a reliable internet connection will be more likely to adopt digital alternatives for their shopping behavior, whereas people in villages will be averse, and will try more offline sources. The pandemic has not only affected people's behaviors, but it has widened the gap between technology innovations. Brands should keep investing in better customer-centered digital interfaces for people who now prefer online shopping on their own channels. "Marketers have moved from defense to offense" (Moorman & Shkil, 2021), which from a sales point of view is great news for businesses that need to survive. However, it's still important for brands to create value that connects with their customers, and after acquisition build relationships that retains and grows their public, so they will become advocates for the brand.

6 CONCLUSIONS

From a social point of view, the significant change the Covid-19 pandemic had over people was the increase of awareness of their own and their peers' wellness. The significance of these factors is crucial, as they will appreciate and care about their outlooks more. From a "moments of truth" point of view, these consumer-own channels would have more impact than brand-owned, partner-owned, and external channels. Brands have an enormous challenge to provide an exceptional customer experience on their own offline and online channels. Since those are the ones where people become familiar with new products, where they search information, compare items, make their decision, and purchase their products.

Beyond the outbreak, a second challenge that faced the consumer journey was lockdown restrictions. The government's-imposed closures did change people's behavior. However, as soon as they were lifted, the behavior was almost back to normal because three months of nearly complete isolation is not enough time for people to create new consumer habits. Nonetheless, depending on the person, they might prefer to continue online shopping for consumer-packaged and intermediate goods and offline shopping for durable products.

Even though a consequence of confinements was that the levels of socialization reduce to proximal others, however as of April 2021, people kept their Social Customer Journeys patterns and engage the most with others when purchasing intermediate goods and enjoying durable and consumer-packaged goods. People will trust the people they find equal, like family and friends (offline & online) because they find that they share the same values. So, in the case of this sample, they will believe what their peers who value family bonds and knowledge and creativity accept. Having said that, it's crucial to keep in mind that there are stages at the beginning of the process when people prefer to experience those touchpoints by themselves, for instance, being aware of a new product across product categories.

On the market studied, their media consumption significantly changed on printed channels like press and magazines, and their use of online versions increased. In the case of television, it enlarged its audience because people trusted this medium to getting updated on the pandemic restrictions, despite that it's also the leading place for people to search information about durable goods like electronics and entertainment products.

For future research, this study should compare broader cultures because Spain's culture tends to be more social than other European countries. From an advertising point of the customer journey, in this kind of market, it should be focused on strategies from a customer-center perspective, marking objectives to reach a wider audience since they need to reach not only the buyer persona target, but also their friends and family. This research opens a question of what behavior patterns people have picked up in a pandemic and won't they change? What's the true value of influencers and if is their ROI worth it? Must smaller influencers have a proximal approach to their audience to have a closer relationship? Do brands think of products for people in villages with unreliable internet connection? How do they reach them?

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