

Consumer's Behaviour Towards Online Grocery Shopping

Case study: Helsinki Region.

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Abstract

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Title of Publication Consumer's Behaviour towards Online Grocery Shopping Case study: Helsinki Region.		
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Abstract <p>Digitalization and technological events have transformed the grocery sector and the way retailers do business online. Consumers are an asset to the success of businesses so understanding their behaviour and how they make a purchase decision is important for retailers. More people turn to shop online nowadays from the convenience of their home as compared back in the ninety's, hence online sales have increased in almost every sector with the grocery industry inclusive. This accelerated increase in e-commerce shopping especially during the covid era has forced many industrial sectors not doing business online to join the trend to meet consumer's demand.</p> <p>This thesis aims to understand if consumers have a positive attitude towards online grocery shopping. The deductive approach was used to confirm the theories. Both primary and secondary data collection methods were used to analysed consumers' shopping habits. In the theoretical part, online business models utilized by companies to reach out to their customers were examined, the consumer purchase cycle was also analyzed and an overview of the Finnish grocery sector. Primary data was collected from the respondents in the form of a survey, which included both qualitative and quantitative questions.</p> <p>The results of the study show that consumers have an affirmative mind set towards online grocery shopping. Many individuals find the online channel safe and easy to use to shop for groceries at the convenience of their home although certain factors such as quality of the products, list of ingredients, higher online prices, and product availability were a major concern posed. Consequently, there is a continuous need to improve this sector as it has great potential to maximize sales for retailers and improve customer loyalty.</p>		
Keywords e-commerce, grocery, online, retailer, business		

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The rise in digital technology and the event of the COVID-19, have changed the way companies market their products to consumers (Steenkamp, 2020). Online sales have shown an increasing impact on revenue to brands over the past decades ranging from electronics and music, books, and apparel to clothing (Web Retailer, 2019). Despite the growing popularity of online shopping, online grocery shopping still has low overall sales (Huang and Oppewal, 2006). But in 2018, online grocery shopping accounted for over 32.5% of sales in China, 5.0% in Germany, 7.2% in the U.K., 6.5% in France, and 4.9% in the United States (Van Ewijk et al., 2020). According to statistica (2018), Finland has seen a rise in online grocery from 1 to 9% from 2009 to 2019. The increasing interest of Finnish citizens in online grocery has forced retailers to move online and develop the grocery sector to maintain customer satisfaction. Two large retail chains, S-group, and K-group, hold the largest number of market shares followed by Lidl.

The impact of the Covid-19 has had a significant effect on retailers selling essential goods such as food, grocery, and the healthcare industry. Creating and increasing demand to satisfy these clients while giving challenges to the supply of products, delivery to customers, and inventory. Hence, retailers are adopting new ways to reach out to customers from their homes especially those shopping online. (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020.). It is quite common for consumers to make purchase decisions in an online environment; hence retailers must understand what factors influence consumers to purchase a particular product online, especially grocery products (Hand et al., 2009). Online grocery shopping provides consumers the opportunity to browse through the retailers' shelves to select the products of their choice, a lot of issues arise as to the freshness of the product like fruits, vegetables, meat, etc. Also, consumers questions issues with regards to the safety of payment methods, refunds, timely delivery, and other logistics problems. This study is therefore aimed at determining what consumers consider most important before doing online shopping for grocery products.

1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions, and Limitations

This research focuses on determining whether online shoppers have a supportive way of thinking when doing grocery shopping. This research is made also to support the grocery stores and supermarkets to understand customers' needs. In addition, to encourage an individual to shop for online groceries, especially in this challenging time of the Coronavirus, when it is highly recommended not to gather too many people in the same place.

Other questions are focused on finding information to empower consumers and retailers. Among which are,

- Why does online grocery shopping not meet the requirements of customers?
- What grocery shop do they prefer to shop from?

Given that this research is carried out in a small region in Helsinki, it might not reflect a true description of the overall online grocery shopping habits of a greater population. Also, sending out surveys online might lead to incomplete or partial responses from individuals which will not give a true reflection compared to physical meetings. Individuals might also fail to answer the questions appropriately since it is in English which is not their native language. Furthermore, this study does not focus on a particular grocery store, hence its results are more general than specific to a particular retailer and region. Since they exist different online grocery stores around Finland. Other delimitations might include the age, race, and educational background of the respondents which might affect the validity and reliability of the results.

1.3 Research Methodology and Data Collection

Research Approach

A research approach is based on the steps used to address the main research problem. Two main categories can observe: Inductive and deductive approaches



Figure 1 Components of a research approach (Chetty, 2016)

The inductive approach starts with general observations which lead to theory development on the other hand, while the deductive approach starts with the formulation of theories which are then tested through observations. In the deductive approach, the results are examined to confirm or modify the theory. (Miessler, 2019). Chetty (2016), further explains that the quantitative data uses the deductive approach while qualitative data uses the inductive approach. The difference between these approaches can be summarized in the figure below.

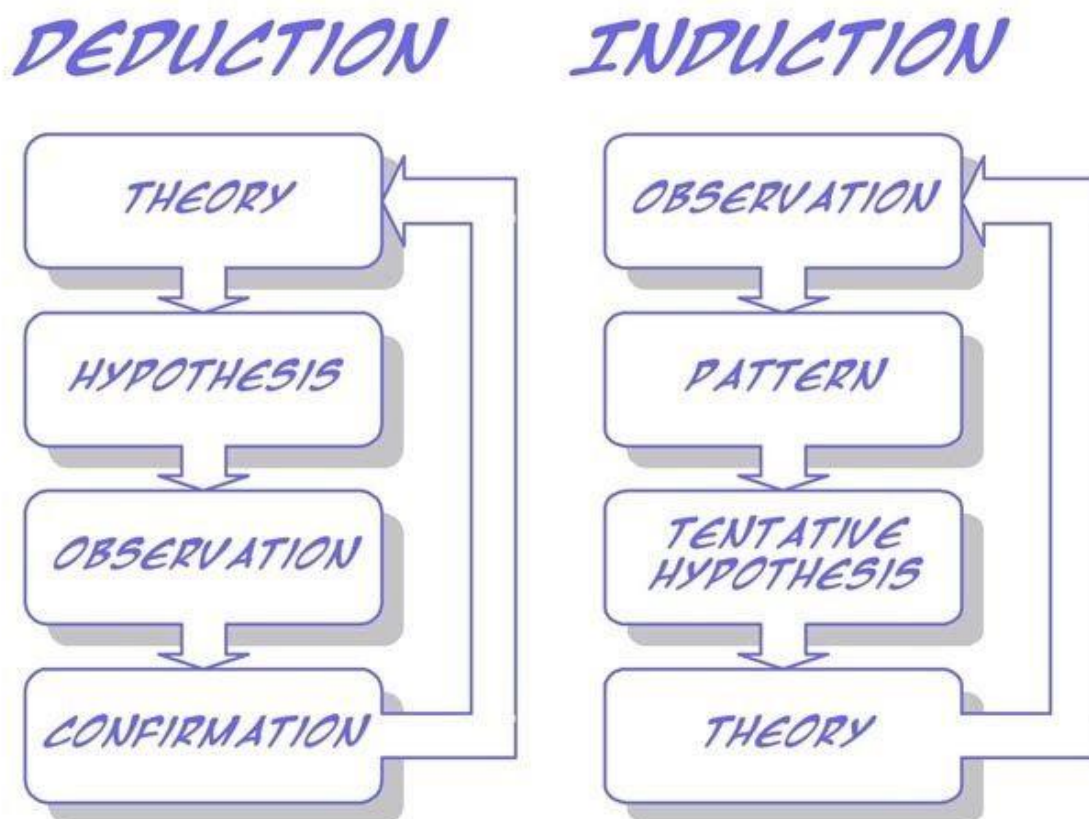


Figure 2 Inductive vs Deductive Research Approach (Miessler, 2019)

In this research, the deductive approach of data analysis will be used where the researcher tries to confirm the theory of consumers having a positive attitude towards online grocery shopping from observations.

Research Methodology

From a scholarly research method perspective, two different research strategies can be used namely quantitative and qualitative methods (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler 2008, 191).

Qualitative research is used to understand concepts, the meaning of words, and experiences. It also seeks to understand how and why things happen. Common research techniques used include case studies, interviews with open questions, observations, and reviews of literature that examine concepts and theories. (Sachdeva 2008,165).

Quantitative research is expressed in figures and graphs (Blumberg et al. 2008, 191). It's used to test or confirm if a given research hypothesis is true. With this research type, facts and conclusions can be drawn from the topic. Common quantitative research techniques include surveys with closed-ended questions, interviews, observations, and experiments (Bhatia 2018). The difference between these two methods is shown in the table below.

Quantitative research	Qualitative Research
Focuses on testing theories and hypotheses	Focuses on exploring ideas and formulating a theory or hypothesis
Analysed through math and statistical analysis	Analysed by summarizing, categorizing, and interpreting
Mainly expressed in numbers, graphs, and tables	Mainly expressed in words
Requires many respondents	Requires few respondents
Closed (multiple choice) questions	Open-ended questions
Key terms: testing, measurement, objectivity, replicability	Key terms: understanding, context, complexity, subjectivity

Table 1 Qualitative vs. quantitative research (Streefkerk, 2019)

These methods are ambiguous and simultaneously undistinguishable by most writers and hence have been employed interchangeably. (Bryman and Bell, 2007, 28-29). This is

known as triangulation. By doing this, researchers try to avoid inherent biases in their findings resulting from a given theory or observation. (Sachdeva 2008, 183-184.)

In this study, both the quantitative and qualitative methods will be used. In the quantitative method, closed (multiple choice) questions would be sent out to participants. While the qualitative research method will be used to understand how and why consumers behave concerning online grocery shopping. By analyzing, summarizing, categorizing, and interpreting answers to the open-ended questions.

Data Collection

Data collection involves the process of collecting information from relevant sources to answer or find a solution to a specific research problem. Two types of data exist: primary and secondary data. Primary data is first-hand information obtained by the researcher through a survey, interview, or observation while secondary data is published by others. (Wolf, 2016.)

In this study, both methods of data collection will be employed. According to this research, where we try to figure out if customers have an affirmative mindset towards online grocery shopping, primary data shall be collected from participants through a questionnaire. And secondary data from articles, journals, books, and other online sources.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of five main parts: introduction, literature review, data acquisition and analysis, discussion, and conclusion. The introduction part gives all information about the background of the topic and clarifies the research objectives, research question, and limitations of the research. In the second part, the literature review takes responsibility for evaluating previous literature and describing the theoretical framework. The third part, the empirical method, comes up with a plan on how the data for the research will be collected and analyzed. The fourth part, the discussion, provides details of the results from the study and compares them with the previous study. After analyzing these results, comments on this study and answers to the question of research would be presented. The last part, the conclusion part, is the place to emphasize if the goals of the thesis have been achieved and give some suggestions and recommendations for the thesis topic.

2 Theoretical Background and Literature

2.1 Previous Literature

The results of previous literature show that online grocery is on the rise all over the world. This phenomenon is fresh and changed so quickly, so we concentrate on the last five years' development and research material. According to research company Nielsen in Helsingin Sanomat (HS 2018), the e-commerce sales of daily consumer goods in 2017 were 48 billion euros. It was 0,3% of the total grocery sales.

The head of digital services of SOK, Torniainen, says that the small size of e-commerce grocery demands tremendous changes from both stores and customers. Collection of the ordered items and delivery are stages that have typically belonged to the customer. For the customer, the purchase experience is therefore different (HS 2018). That is, according to Torniainen (HS 2018), why the change is slow here and all over the world.

The corona crisis has risen the Finnish grocery e-commerce unparalleled high. According to SOK Executive director Krook (Talouselämä 2021), cooperative stores are renewing their online platform and bringing more pick-up lockers. Krook states, that some co-operatives have had difficulties providing enough pickup lockers for online food sales. At the time of last spring's robust growth, there was also a shortage of order collectors, and the same situation was the case in K-stores at the time. (Talouselämä, 2021). In Valli's (Valli, 2015) research, the home delivery service is still clearly more popular than the pick-up service. In the online food trade, sales grew more slowly than in the whole market, mainly due to the limited capacity. Prisma's and Sokos' online stores developed very strongly. This year, big development leaps are taken in online stores, says Krook. In the last year 2020, the online grocery sales tripled in the SOK group (Talouselämä, 2021).

According to Lehtikoinen (2020), the most critical challenges facing Finnish food online stores are divided into three areas: the concentration of Finnish grocery trade, the creation of added value for the customer, and logistics. The small number of users of food online stores reduces the profitability of the service and makes its development challenging. However, companies can develop the logistics of food webshops, making the collection more efficient and preventing the problems caused by the last mile (Lehtikoinen, 2020).

2.1.1 The Pentagon Model

The theoretical framework is a structure that can support or support research theory. The theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory that explains why there is a research problem under study. (USC, 2021.) The Pentagon-triangle -model has been developed to recognize and minimize the threats to the functioning of retail and trade. The Pentagon is the five main customer-oriented activities through which retailers can visually distinguish themselves on the market: location, product, value, communication, and people. The triangle supports the pentagon in the retailer's goal of achieving operational effectiveness through superior systems, logistics, and supply relationships. (Babson College, 2021.) The basic idea of e-commerce grocery in Finland leads us to its challenges and possibilities surrounding the pentagon. When conducting the research, the survey questions considered all the aspects of the pentagon model, that could affect customer behavior in online grocery shopping. If all the corners in the pentagon and triangle are covered, the more attractive the service is to a consumer. The figure shows how all the pieces are in interaction together. Where the challenges and opportunities meet, positive development is created.

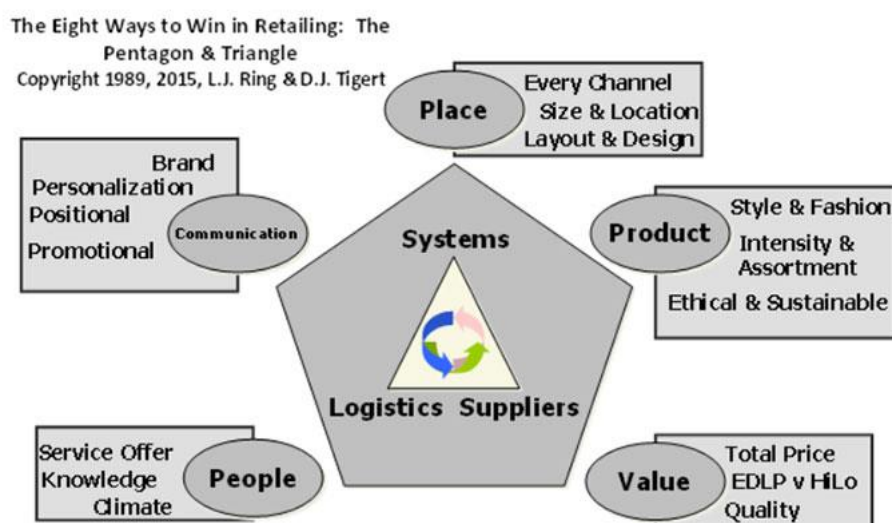


Figure 3 The Pentagon Model

The opportunities in this field of industry are huge. By identifying the issues, it is easier to know how to build this sector in a constantly changing environment.

2.1.2 Online Business Models

A business model describes the process of transforming an idea to make money out of it based on your capabilities and value proposition (Newth 2013, 5). Timmers (1999,5) adds

that a business model benefits suppliers and customers. Similarly, Rappa (2000, 1) claims that a business model is a method by which a company profitably does business. They exist numerous variations of business models (Reynolds, 2000). But Murphy (2007), explains that only three of these models apply to the e-grocery industry that occurred from internet-based home food delivery during the late 1990s. The success of the online grocery business was based on the home delivery system which was deemed cost-efficient (Punakivi and Saranen, 2001; Hübner et al., 2016). These models include brick and clicks, pure-play, and infomediary.

Bricks and Clicks

This is the cheapest and quickest method of in-store fulfillment where a retailer uses its established store network to reach its customers (Murphy 2002). This method was first utilized by Tesco, the UK's largest supermarket chain in 1996, though it had some setbacks according to the US press. In this model, Tesco requests from customers were routed to the nearest store based on the customers' location. Pickers process customers' orders using computerized scanners to pick multiple orders and place these items in allocated bins. Once the orders are complete, it's been loaded into custom-built temperature trucks and delivered to slots close to customers' homes (Murphy, 2003).

This method utilized by Tesco was cost-efficient and time-saving, as it utilized multiple order picking scanners to segregate customer orders into various boxes. Though criticized by the US press as being backward and limited, Tesco saw an increase in sales and recorded £950 million for groceries, appliances, books, DVDs, and other accessories. This accounted for over 32 percent of sales to about 750,000 regular customers. (Tesco, 2006).

Pure play

According to Sandel (2000), pure-play is online grocery companies delivering at the last mile. They thrive by operating one or multiple warehouses on the edge of town locations. They do not operate a physical store; hence orders are given through the webshop and delivery vans. Dedicated picking centers up to the size of a supermarket with computerized-controlled picking racks bring the orders to the consumers (Perman, 2000; Cassidy, 2002). This model has an advantage over the brick-and-click model because it saves costs related to parking, rental taxes, and inventory management. However, this model has the con when the order volume becomes insufficient to compensate for the expenses.

This system was first utilized by Webvan in 1999, a United States retailer. It saw its success over the years of about \$800 million until July 2001 when its stock order deflated, and this virtual shop was closed. Despite the failure of Webvan, Ocado a United Kingdom company

was successful as a pure-play retailer. It uses multi-pod transporters with interchangeable pods which helps in rapid cross-docking of their delivery trucks without the need to reload them (Murphy, 2007).

Infomediary

According to Murphy (2007), infomediaries are an interplay of pure-play that do not physically handle operations but link customers and retailers through the online platform. Infomediaries manage the storefront, webpages, and database of retailers and rely on customers' orders through fax or emails. When the orders are complete, the store then packs and delivers the goods to the customers. Peachtree Network, a North American company is an example of a company that provided a website storefront for taking orders and passing them through email or fax to the retailers.

Infomediaries, therefore, act as third parties linking the customers and retailers. As it can manage the orders of a business from kilometers away while relying on just a fast and reliable internet connection.

2.1.3 Consumer Decision Making

This model explains the factors that influence consumers' decisions during the purchase cycle. Strong (2014, 65) argues the fact that consumers are rational in their behavior during the buying process but rather their decisions are based on the type of consumer, the product being bought, psychological, social, and cultural factors, not living out the environment.

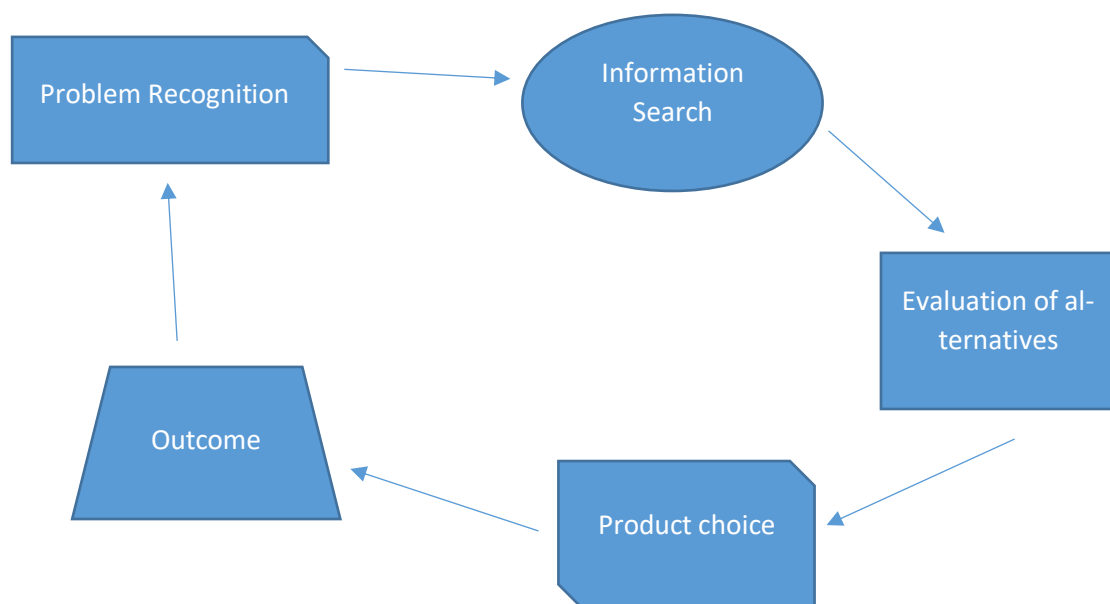


Figure 4 Consumer Decision Making Model

Figure 4 above, states that retailers need to understand what type of products they offer to consumers and their role in their lives because their decision to purchase a product is based on many factors. For example, a retailer selling tomatoes online has considered that this helps consumers in cooking, hence solving a problem. He also needs to consider what alternative products can substitute for the tomatoes, the list of ingredients it contains, what prices his rivals offer for the same product, and what sparks consumers to buy from that particular shop as this all influences the decision process.

In conclusion, the purchase of a product by a consumer goes beyond the physical attributes and the product's functionality. As consumers want a feeling of trust, recognition of their values and lifestyle, reputation, and corporate responsibility when dealing with a supplier. These factors go a long way to influence their purchase decision.

2.2 Finnish Grocery Market

According to yle (2021), the Finnish grocery market has doubled since the onset of the covid crisis. This has accounted for around three percent of the country's overall grocery trade, and it's anticipated to increase to around five percent in the next four years. Furthermore, reasons suggest that individuals aged 65years above and households with children are the primary users of this online channel. This was to avoid close contact with others and prevent the back-and-forth movements from the supermarkets respectively.

Jaana Kurjenoja (yle, 2020) further affirms the consumer decision model above by stating that, consumers' online purchase decision is influenced by factors such as price, and previous experience and it could be a regular or planned purchase.

The Finnish grocery market is predominantly commanded by four major retail groups accounting for 11.4 billion sales in 2003 and 11.6 billion euros in 2004. These retail firms include K-group (Kesko) 35.3 percent with 1,085 store outlets, S-group 34.3 percent with 768 store outlets, Tradeka/Elanto 10.0 percent, Spar-group 6.8 percent, and 13.6 percent by other retailers. (Uusitalo et al., 2007). Among the other independent retailers, Lidl gained its entry into the market in 2002. Was the first foreign-owned grocery store in Finland with about 90 outlets in 2005. However, according to recent data from statistica (2020), the S-group is the leading retailer with over 9.3 billion sales, followed by K-group with approximately 7.5 billion sales and thirdly by Lidl with 1.9-billion-euro sales. The combined sales for the Finnish grocery market amounted to about 20.2 billion euros as seen in the graph below.

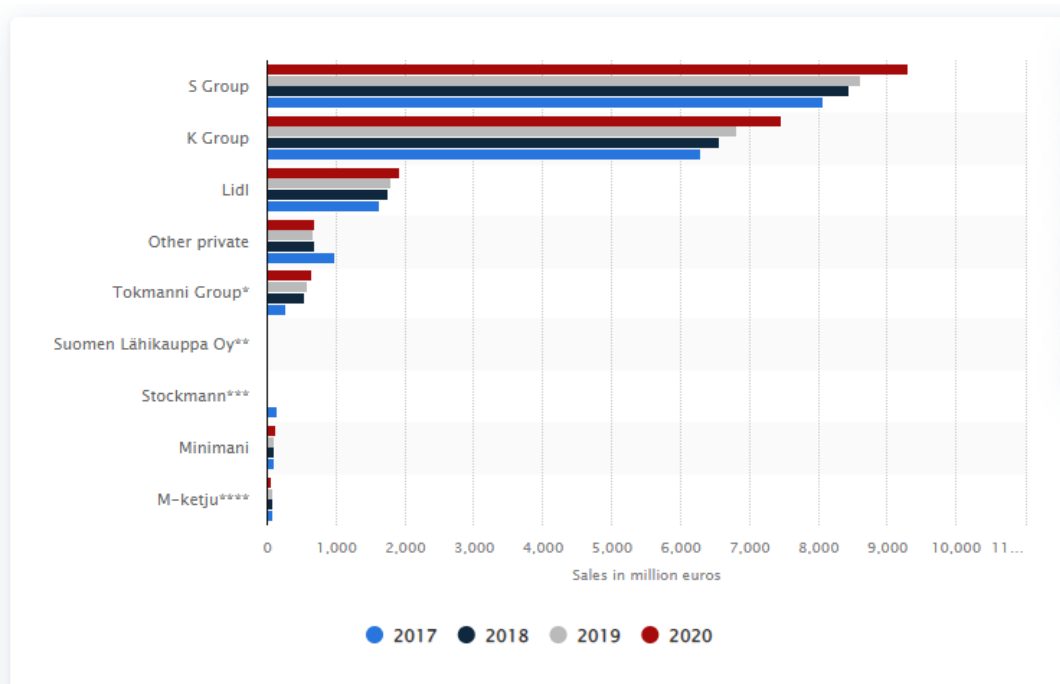


Figure 5 Sales of grocery trade groups in Finland from 2017 to 2020(in million euros)

Lidl's entry into the market significantly changed the competition seen between the two giants K-group and S-group. They expand to small villages and use the price discount strategy to gain consumers' attention. This strategy was controversial by other managers and scholars because the Finnish consumers value a convenient location over price. (Nielsen, 2003). This consumers' preference factor of a convenient location over price is similar to the UK grocery market situation (Fernie et al., 2006). However, as stated by Jaana Kurjenoja above, the price remains an ultimate factor in influencing consumers' shopping behavior. The price strategy is proliferating among marketers as they can no longer rely on consumers' loyalty.

3 Empirical Research and Data Analysis

3.1 Data Acquisition

Theoretical and empirical research is often used in contrast but theoretical focus on testing or developing theories on how things operate while it could also be empirical base on observations and measurements of what researchers perceive. Since this research is based on observations rather than testing theories, hence the name empirical research.

The time frame for this research was from January 2022 to May 2022. Both methods of data acquisition were used in this research. The secondary data was collected from several databases provided by LAB, books, articles, and google searches while the primary data was collected from a questionnaire form. The survey had 11 multiple choice questions and one open-ended question. Data collection ran for 3 weeks from 15th February until 8th March 2022.

The questionnaire was planned in English using google forms. Three demographic details were collected which included, age, nationality, and level of education. This data was introduced into the study to analyze if some bias will arise from the respondents' answers. As stated in a previous study that demographic attributes such as age, race, gender, and literacy status is likely to contribute to individuals' behavior and usage of the platform. (Olteanu et al. 2019). The survey was sent out to a social media group to which individuals living in Helsinki belong.

The questionnaire had 18 respondents for the 3 weeks. The results gathered from the participants were then compiled and analyzed in the next sub-chapter.

3.2 Data Analysis

How has the corona outbreak affected your online grocery habit?

The first question asked how the corona pandemic influenced the consumers' online shopping habits for groceries. Since the introduction of social distancing and quarantine, people were required to stay home and avoid crowded places and supermarkets. This question was to validate if the introduction of these rules has changed consumers' online shopping habits. The results can be seen in the figure below.

1. How has the coronavirus outbreak affected your online shopping habit for grocery?

18 responses

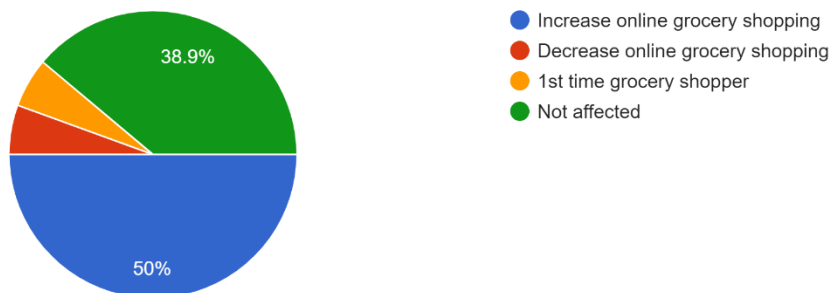


Figure 6 Respondents’ response on the effect of corona on their shopping habits.

According to the results, 9 out of the 18 respondents have had an increase in their online grocery shopping habits making up 50% of the response. 7 (38.9%) did not affect their online shopping habit due to the corona pandemic. Equally, only (5.6%) of the respondent was first-time online grocery shopper and had their shopping habit affected negatively due to the pandemic.

This question agrees with the fact of an increase in online grocery shopping due to the covid pandemic as depicted by previous studies above.

How often do you shop for groceries online?

The second question asked about the frequency at which the respondents shop online for groceries. The responses showed that 38.9% (7) individuals shop online for groceries at least once a week. Also, 27.8% (5) individuals shop online for groceries once or less than six months. Furthermore, 22.2 (4) individuals never had any interest in online grocery shopping and lastly, 11.1% (2) individuals shop more than once a week for groceries. As seen in the figure below.

2. How often do you shop for groceries online?

18 responses

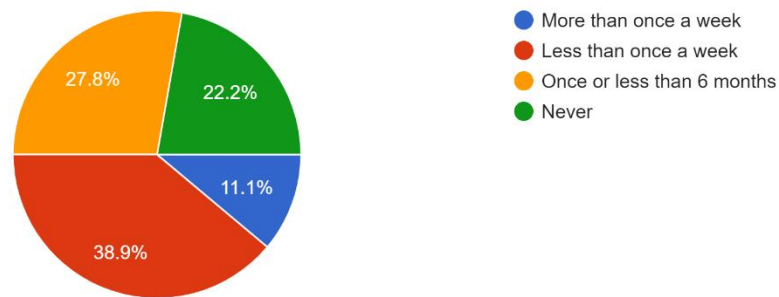


Figure 7 Frequency of online grocery shopping.

Overall, this chart shows that individuals have a positive attitude or behavior toward online grocery shopping as only four individuals showed a negative interest in their online shopping grocery habit.

Shopping for fresh food products are important factor consumers consider when they want to purchase groceries online. Also, grocery products have a short shelf-life span. So, if these products are fresh and of great quality as the display on the retailer's website, it motivates consumers to purchase them regardless of their price. (Zheng. O. et al. 2020). This explains the fact why most of the respondents shop less than once a week for groceries.

How many individuals are in your household?

This question was to find out the number of individuals living in the respondent's home. Three options were given for the participants to choose from, one, two, and three or more. The reason behind this question was to determine if the number of people living in a household had an impact on the frequency at which they will shop online for groceries as seen below.

3. How many individuals are in your household?

18 responses

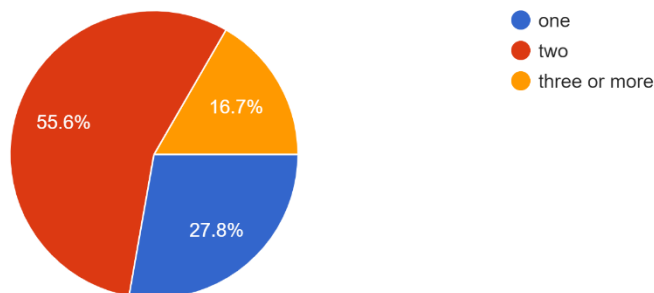


Figure 8 Number of individuals in a household.

55.6% (10) respondents live with another individual in their household. While 27.8% (5) of the 18 respondents live alone and 16.7% (3) had three or more individuals living in their household. This question validates the hypothesis that households with more than one individual are the primary users of the online channel (yle, 2021).

Would you prefer online grocery over physical?

The fourth question asked the respondents if they will prefer online grocery over physical shopping. This question was asked to assess the consumer's ability to choose between online shopping, physical shopping, and others. Several factors affect people to choose online shopping over physical shopping among which are, saving time and transportation costs, convenience, waiving higher delivery fees, or longer time (Huang and Oppewal, 2006). The following figure shows the results.

4. Would you prefer online shopping for grocery over physical grocery shopping?

18 responses

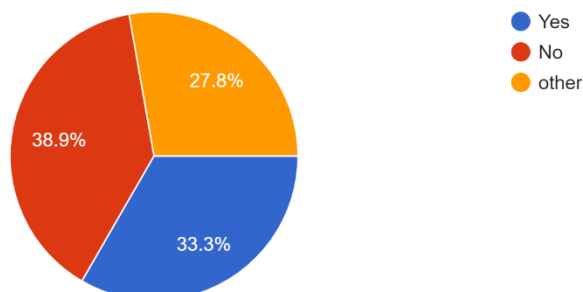


Figure 9 Online grocery preference over physical shopping.

According to the responses, 38.9% (7) respondents say they won't prefer online grocery over physical shopping. Six out of the 18 respondents would prefer online shopping over physical shopping. The rest 27.8% (5) had other reasons. A follow-up question was not asked to determine the reason for the respondent's reply. However, there was a slightly negative attitude toward future online grocery shopping according to the respondents. This could be related to issues related to convenience, cost, and delivery as mentioned above.

How important are the following factors to your grocery shopping?

The fifth qualitative question was to determine what consumers consider useful when purchasing from the online channel. This question is more beneficial to the retailers as it gives them a view of the level of importance consumers put on the quality of the products, delivery fees, delivery time, and ease to use of the website. Like apparel shopping, grocery shopping has similar attributes that play a significant role in consumers' purchasing power such as price, product image, price, and website design (Ha and Stoel, 2009; Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012; Park et al., 2012). However, some other studies conducted by (Morganosky and Cude, 2000) shows that price is not considered one of the most important factors influencing consumers' shopping habit but rather convenience and time-saving factor. The responses from the respondents with regards to these attributes can be seen below.

5. If you think that an online store can be an option for your grocery shopping, how important are the following factors when buying food online? Please use a checkmark (✓) in the columns below.



Figure 10 Factors considered important during online grocery shopping.

From the results above, it shows more than two-thirds of the respondents consider all the above factors important, but the delivery fee and quality of the product were more important to the respondents.

Which product below did consumers consume more before the pandemic?

The sixth question asked the respondents to select from a range of products from which they shop frequently from the online channel. This question was to see which grocery product consumers shop for more frequently among fresh foods and vegetables, frozen food, chilled meat, freshly baked produce, drinks and alcohol, confectionery, toiletries/cosmetics, home cleaning products, and home interior products.

6. Thinking about your shopping habits now, what you are buying more of in the past 3 weeks than prior to the crisis? Please select from all the categories below that apply.

15 responses

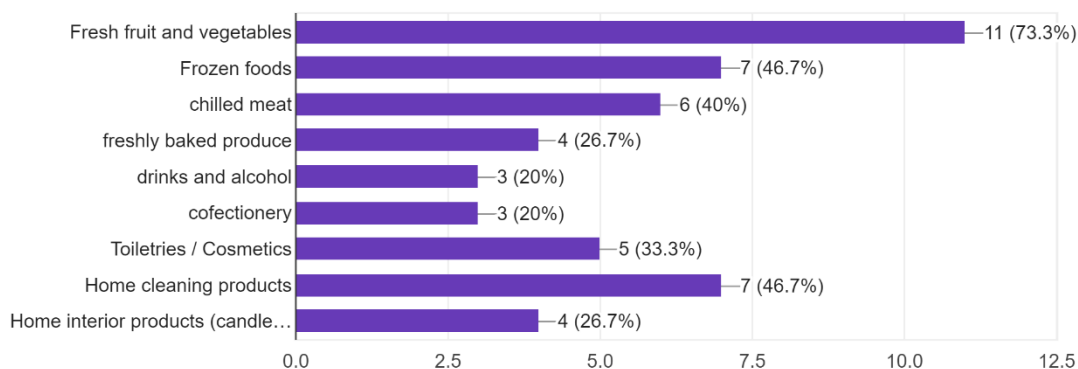


Figure 11 Which grocery products do consumers purchase more.

The responses showed that fresh fruits and vegetables were among the highest purchase products by consumers in the past 3 weeks followed by frozen foods and home cleaning products. Whereas confectionery, drinks, and alcohol were among the least purchased online grocery products. According to yle (2020), Finns are the highest consumer of domestic products since the coronavirus outbreak period. The two major retail giants S-group and K-group reported that consumers prefer domestic products for their quality and to support domestic suppliers. More sales for fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and the meat was recorded than before the pandemic. The results show a similar situation for the major products consumed by customers.

Do you think the online channel is safe?

The next question was focused on security issues concerning the safety of the online channel. This question was to determine how comfortable consumers were when using their visa/master/credit card, and providing their details to retailers during the online purchase. With the introduction of the European Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in 2018, consumers have found the online channel safe as they are confident their data will be treated with

privacy. GDPR levied heavy fines on companies violating consumers' rights in distance selling and with the introduction of the two-step authentication factor, the safety and reliability of the online channel have increased (www.gdpr.eu). The results can be seen as reflected in the diagram below.

7. Do you think that online channel is safe?

17 responses

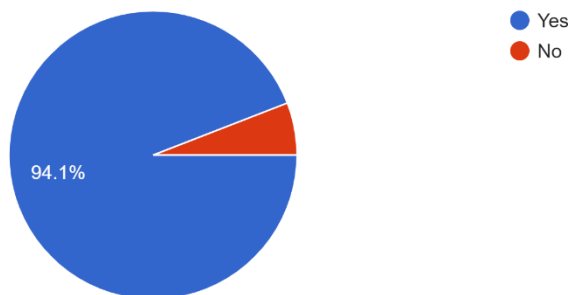


Figure 12 Safety of the online channel.

How much time do you spend grocery shopping?

The eighth question asked the respondents the amount of time they spend online for their grocery shopping. Four options were available for them to choose from. First, if they spend less than an hour, second if they spend two hours, thirdly if they spend three hours, and lastly if they spend more than three hours. The responses gathered can be seen in the figure below.

8. How much time do you spend grocery shopping?

18 responses

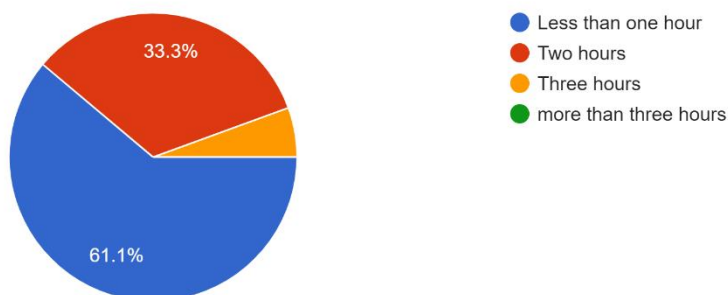


Figure 13 Time spend on online grocery.

Out of the 18 respondents, 11 (61.1%) said they spend less than an hour while 6 (33.3%) said they spend at least two hours whereas only one individual spends more than 3 hours when shopping online for groceries. No response was recorded for the fourth option, implying none of the respondents spend more than three hours shopping online for groceries.

This question was aimed at validating the hypothesis that individuals spent less than an hour grocery shopping in-store. The responses are tied with the fact that most individuals also spend less than an hour during online grocery shopping.

Do you have difficulty with your purchase situation?

The ninth question was qualitative which required a yes or no response from the respondents. It asked the participants if they had difficulties related to their current buying situation. This question was a continuation of the previous question and it aimed to assess how easy it is to use the online channel to purchase grocery products. The researcher did not emphasize that it was related to the consumer's online shopping situation hence it must have been misunderstood by the participants. Nevertheless, the responses were considered as being related to the respondent's online shopping habits as seen below.

9. Do you have difficulty relating to your buying situation?
18 responses

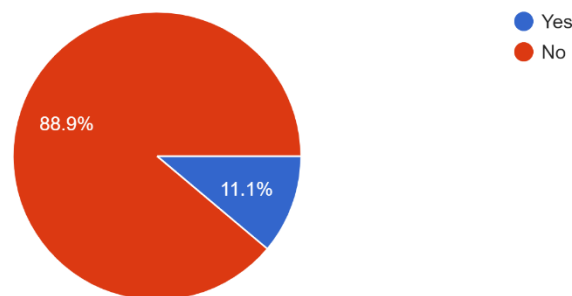


Figure 14 Difficulties related to the current buying situation.

Based on the 18 responses, only 2 (11.1%) of the respondents had difficulties related to their buying situation. The rest of the 16 (88.9%) had no difficulties related to their buying situation showing an overall positive impact of the online purchase channel. The decentralization of the food outlets throughout Helsinki gives consumers a comfortable shopping experience.

What are your biggest concerns about online grocery shopping?

This was the only open-ended qualitative question in the survey. An open-ended question is one in which respondents are free to express their point of view or elaborate their point rather than being stuck with the researcher's option. (Adams et al. 2014, 123-124). The question asked the respondents their biggest fears about online shopping. This was aimed to get other viewpoints about online grocery shopping which were not addressed in the questionnaire by the researcher.

The question got 11 responses out of the 18 participants. The answers were a little different from each respondent's viewpoint as seen below.

"That the product is out of stock. If I need that item, I would have to go shopping."

"Not seeing the product+ list of ingredients+ exercise to go shopping is good for you."

"The item will be missing, or fruit/veg low quality."

"Price of product online is sometimes expensive."

"Security"

"Delivery fee"

"Quality of products such as vegetables and meat."

"If they bring me non-fresh vegetables or that the food is about to expire in a day or two."

"Getting good selections of fruit, vegetables, and meat."

"Finding the product, I want."

Among the responses, the greatest consent for the respondents was the quality of vegetables and meat. They mentioned, that either the vegetable item would not be available, is of low quality or its expiry date is in a day or two. A previous study carried out in China on factors influencing consumers' online grocery habits, highlighted the fact that consumers miss the touch-and-feel experience, especially when shopping for fresh food. Hence, they must rely on the retailers' information about the quality and safety of the food products (Zheng et al. 2020).

Retailers must put the effort into labelling their product description information to distinguish them from their competitors and gain consumers' trust (Tang, 2012; Bali, 2018; Feng, 2018). As consumers are worried about not being able to find the product they want on the shelf, or it is out of stock, or the list of ingredients is not visible therefore they need to take a trip to the shop. On the other hand (Kim et al. 2005), outline that consumers can benefit from

online shopping by doing it at the convenience of their home avoiding crowding, especially during rush hours, they can shop at any time of the day.

As mentioned in subchapter 2.2, the price remains a controversial issue when it comes to shopping. Some consumers prefer a convenient location over price while others compare prices of similar products with that of competitors, and retailers turn to depend on customer loyalty. The price of online products turns out to be expensive as one respondent said. But according to Xulia et al. (2018), price dispersion may occur for individuals selling homogeneous products in the same market. He also went further to explain that two factors might influence price differentiation. Firstly, differentiation may lead to retailers persistently selling at low prices compare to others in the same niche. Secondly, price dispersion can result in a mixed strategy equilibrium when consumers are not informed about market prices (Stigler 1961; Varian 1980).

This theory of price differentiation dispersion could be the reason why the respondent considers the price of online goods to be higher than in-store prices.

Security was another concern raised by the respondent in purchasing products online. Consumers who have made purchases online and other internet users are worried about privacy and security issues. Individuals are concerned about issues related to data usage and acquisition by online retailers. However, some studies show that consumers who perceive a low risk related to online shopping have a high purchasing power compared to risk-laden consumers. (Miyazaki and Fernandez 2001). Also, as stated above, with the introduction of the GDPR in 2018, issues with privacy and security are now becoming less an issue for consumers.

Would you consider online grocery shopping in the future?

The eleventh question asked the respondents if they will consider online grocery shopping in the future. This question was to determine the respondent's behavior towards grocery shopping. They had the option to choose between a yes and a No response. The response can be seen below.

11. Would you consider online shopping for groceries in the future?

16 responses

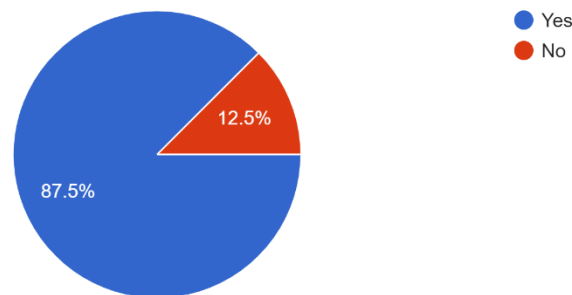


Figure 15 Respondents' view for future online grocery shopping.

The results show that 14 respondents (87.5%) would consider online grocery shopping in the future as opposed to 2 (12.5%) who said no. Out of the 16 respondents, 14 said yes showing a positive attitude towards online grocery shopping. According to yle (2020), the dramatic increase in online sales in the food industry means a no turning back. As more employees have been recruited and invested in refrigeration pieces of equipment by retailers. Hence consumers have shown greater potential for growth and development in this sector.

Which online grocery store do you often shop from?

This final question asked the respondents their preferred grocery shop of choice. They were given five options to choose from: 'K-group', 'S-group', 'Lidl', 'Others', and 'None'. The question was aimed to see an overview of the prevailing online grocery store in the Finnish market and especially in the Helsinki region. The responses can be seen in figure 16 below.

12. Which online grocery store do you often shop from?

18 responses

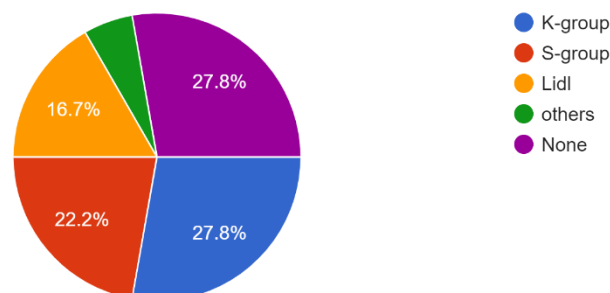


Figure 16 Respondent's choice of an online grocery store.

According to Uusitalo et al. (2007), the finished grocery market is predominantly commanded by four major retailers, K-group, S-group, Lidl, and others. As stated in subchapter 2.2, K-group has the highest number of store outlets, followed by its competitors S-group (Prisma, Alepa/sale) and lastly Lidl. However, S-group comes at the top of the Finnish grocery retail market with 46% of market shares, followed closely by K-group with 36.9% and lastly by Lidl (9.5%) (Clausnitzer, 2021).

From the 18 responses, 5 respondents (27.8%) said they shop for groceries from the K-group while 4 (22.2%) said they shop often from the S-group. In a like manner, 3 (16.7%) of the respondents said they shop from Lidl, 1 (5.5%) choose others, and the remaining 5 (27.8%) said they neither shop for groceries from these outlets. The results show that K-group is the preferred grocery shop of choice for the respondents given the fact it has the highest number of outlets in Finland. Although the S-group has the highest number of market shares, they come second with 1056 grocery stores, this also explains why they come second as the respondent's choice. With Lidl coming into the Finnish market in 2002, it now operates 193 stores in Finland. Nevertheless, it comes in third place as the respondent's grocery shop of preference as well as it maintains the third position among the Finnish grocery stores. According to subchapter 2.2, the other grocery shops indicated by the one respondent could be some others like the Wolt or Foodora market. Furthermore, the remaining 5 respondents indicated they neither shop from any of the above grocery stores. This shows they are not interested in shopping online for groceries or they prefer shopping in person and making their selections.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Answer to Research Question

This thesis aims to understand if consumers have a positive attitude towards online grocery shopping in the Helsinki region. Furthermore, the research was aimed to support the grocery stores to understand consumer behaviour. The main research question and two sub-questions were formed. The research question and answers are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Research question and answers

Research question	Answer
Sub-question one: What is successful online grocery shopping?	<p>Successful online grocery is the ability of consumers to go through the retailer's shelf and select their product of choice to the basket. These products which include: fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, alcohol, snacks, frozen foods, etc are then paid for using a secured payment method. The retailer gets information regarding the customer's purchase including the item/s and consumers' info like name, and address details. Depending on the business model utilized by the retailer, the customer shipment is being dispatched.</p> <p>Several online business models had been developed in the nineties to satisfy consumers' needs. Amongst these models, the brick-and-click model stands out to date for its fast and quick delivery system. This system is being utilized by most online stores using their established network to route customers' orders to the nearest store to their location or to pick up lockers if the order can't be delivered directly to their home address.</p>

	<p>Successful online grocery shopping involves the selection of items, payment, acknowledgment/dispatch of the order, and pick-up confirmation by the recipient.</p>
<p>Sub-question two: Why online grocery shopping does not meet the requirements of customers?</p>	<p>The theoretical part stated some factors affecting the online grocery trade, but the questionnaire allowed the consumers to experience their opinion.</p> <p>According to the consumers, a couple of factors influence their online grocery shopping decision. Firstly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their inability to view the list of ingredients labelled on the products or find their alternative. • Secondly, being unable to assess the quality/freshness of the products on shelves hence must make the trip to the store. • Thirdly, the high prices of online products compared with in-store prices couple with delivery fees included. <p>Despite the increase in online grocery shopping, consumers still find some setbacks that demotivate them as stated above.</p>
<p>Main research question: Factors affecting consumer's behavior toward online grocery shopping</p>	<p>A lot of factors influence consumers' decisions when purchasing the online channel. Despite the event of the covid-19 pandemic they have been a positive attitude and increase in sales in the Finnish grocery sector. Some factors which play a greater role in affecting consumers' decisions include:</p>

- Recognition of their values and lifestyle. Consumers want to appreciate the products offered to them by retailers by being able to assess the list of ingredients present on the product leaflets as most products displayed online does not offer that, hence influencing their decision-making process. Also, the feeling of trust in dealing with a particular retailer gives them the confidence to shop from that supermarket.
- Price factor. Consumers take into consideration prices of the same products offer online and in-shop, prices offered by competitors, and the delivery fees involved before making a purchase decision.
- Lastly, the availability and quality of the products. When unable to see the product of their choice or alternatives offered by the shop, consumers turn to go shopping in the stores. The quality of the products also influences their purchase behavior.

Overall, despite the odds relating to consumers' purchase behaviour, they have a positive attitude towards online grocery shopping.

4.2 Validity and Reliability

According to Roberts et al. (2006), research validity and reliability are ways of demonstrating the accuracy and trustworthiness of research findings. Therefore, the research should not be misleading to those who use the results, and also the research trustworthiness is influenced by several factors: how the data is collected, from who, how it is analyzed, the main research question, and conclusions drawn from the study.

For this research, reliability would be the ability of the research questionnaire to produce a similar result in a different circumstance, assuming everything remains the same while validity here would refer to the closeness of the results to what we expect based on some previous study.

In this research, both primary and secondary data were used. Secondary data came from previous studies/publications, while secondary data was collected by the author himself. The main data was collected as part of a survey. The survey was shared with the thesis supervisor and later was sent out to participants online. The survey was in English language as was sent out to participants on a Facebook group. This group included participants living in the Helsinki area to reflect the results tie to the main research question. Furthermore, the level of education, nationality, and age group were included to ensure the responses are not coming just from a certain category of individuals. Therefore, we can conclude the research was valid and reliable.

4.3 Recommendations

There has been a lot of research on online grocery shopping addressing different countries of the world with Finland inclusive. From the study, it can be recommended that individuals should get involved in shopping online for groceries as it is safe. Going to supermarkets and grocery stores to purchase utensils, food and drinks is a daily requirement. However, consumers find it easy to shop from the convenience of their homes. While shopping, consumers face some challenges and need someone to assist them. So, if retailers include chatbots in their online grocery channel, could it improve customers' experience? Therefore, the impact of the chatbot, its influence on sales, and in influencing consumers' purchases can further be examined.

In a nutshell, the key target of this research is stated through our research question. What the challenges in online grocery shopping are and how to develop them. The researcher figured out that the two biggest concerns in doing online grocery shopping are the quality

of products with regards to their freshness and list of ingredients. Therefore, it is recommended that retailers pay close attention to the freshness and quality of products and provide consumers with details of the list of ingredients/ products. Furthermore, the price was an issue concerning cost and delivery. So, it is recommended to the retailers improve in those areas. Also, further research should be done with much larger sample size.

5 Summary

In a nutshell, the key target of this research was stated through the research question, which was to understand consumers' behaviour toward online grocery shopping in the Helsinki Region. As 87.5% of the participants admit they would consider online grocery shopping in the future, this shows they have a positive attitude towards the grocery trade and hence a great potential for the grocery industry. This paper answers the main research question and two sub-questions.

The research consisted of two parts, the theoretical and empirical parts. In the theoretical part, secondary data was collected from previous studies and articles. The second chapter was about business models, consumer decision models, and information about the Finnish grocery market. The business models explain the methods used by retailers to reach out to consumers and the decision models describe what prompts consumers to purchase in the online channel. Lastly, this second chapter looked at the major retailers in the Finnish grocery market.

In the third chapter, the empirical part consisted of data acquisition and analysis. In the fourth chapter, the research validity and reliability were evaluated, recommendations for further research on the topic were given by the author and the report was summarized.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Research Questionnaire

Online grocery shopping habits

This questionnaire is compiled as part of a thesis report project. Will be please with your honest response and any additional feedback regarding this research. Your answers are completely anonymous. Thanks

1. Demographic details

Mark only one oval per row.

	<25	25-40	>40
age	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Demographic details

Mark only one oval per row.

	Finnish	Foreigner
Nationality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Demographic details

Mark only one oval per row.

	High school or less	University	Masters or greater
level of education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. 1. How has the coronavirus outbreak affected your online shopping habit for grocery?

Mark only one oval.

- Increase online grocery shopping De-
- crease online grocery shopping 1st time
- grocery shopper
- Not affected

5. 2. How often do you shop for groceries online?

Mark only one oval.

- More than once a week Less
 than once a week Once or less
 than 6 months Never

6. 3. How many individuals are in your household?

Mark only one oval.

- one
 two
 three or more

7. 4. Would you prefer online shopping for grocery over physical grocery shopping?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 other

8. 5. If you think that an online store can be an option for your grocery shopping, how important are the following factors when buying food online? Please use a checkmark (√) in the columns below.

Mark only one oval per row.

	less important	important	very important
Quality of products	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery fee Deliv-	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ery time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ease to use the website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. 6. Thinking about your shopping habits now, what you are buying more of in the past 3 weeks than prior to the crisis? Please select from all the categories below that apply.

Check all that apply.

- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Frozen foods
- chilled meat
- freshly baked produce
- drinks and alcohol
- confectionery Toiletries /
- Cosmetics
- Home cleaning products
- Home interior products (candles, bed linen, etc.)

10. 7. Do you think that online channel is safe?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

11. 8. How much time do you spend grocery shopping?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than one hour
- Two hours
- Three hours
- more than three hours

12. 9. Do you have difficulty relating to your buying situation?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

13. 10. What are the biggest concerns about buying products online?

14. 11. Would you consider online shopping for groceries in the future?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

15. 12. Which online grocery store do you often shop from?

Mark only one oval.

- K-group
- S-group
- Lidl others
- None

