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Assessing the impact of product customization on improving customers experience of IKEA in Finland

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines how product customization impacts customer experience at IKEA Finland, addressing the challenge of balancing mass production efficiency with growing consumer demands for personalization. As Finnish consumers increasingly value sustainability, design aesthetics, and individualized solutions, understanding customization effectiveness becomes critical for maintaining competitive advantage in this mature market.

The research employs a mixed methods approach combining quantitative surveys with 103 respondents and qualitative interviews to examine customization experiences. Drawing on Experience Economy framework, Self-Congruity Theory, and Technology Acceptance Model, the study analyzes how different customization types, digital tools, and demographic factors influence customer satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty at IKEA Finland.

Findings reveal collaborative customization as both most preferred (39.81%) and most effective for creating superior experiences. Digital tool ease of use emerges as the strongest satisfaction predictor ($\beta=0.4222$, $p<0.001$). While overall satisfaction rates are high (4.61/5), the moderate Net Promoter Score (16.5) indicates opportunities for improvement. The research identifies significant demographic variations in customization preferences and highlights needs for Finnish-specific adaptations including authentic materials and climate-responsive solutions. These insights provide strategic guidance for enhancing customization offerings to convert satisfied customers into active brand advocates.

Keywords: IKEA Finland, Product Customization, Customer Experience, Digital Platforms, Brand Loyalty, Sustainability in Retail

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the research by discussing the im-portance of product customization for promoting customer experience, especially regarding IKEA in Finland. As consumer demands shift toward personalization and sustainability, global retailers such as IKEA needed to adapt their approaches to meet local expectations. This is a Core chapter; it covers the overview of the making information for the research study that the researchers are intending to research so the findings will be more reliable and applicable in practice.

1.1 Background

In this fast-paced world of competition, businesses have been realizing the importance of customer experience (CX) as the key differentiator. Recent studies acknowledge customer experience as an important as-pact of customer behaviour that contributes to brand loyalty, competitive advantage and long-term profitability (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). As consumer expectations have increased, businesses have been forced to move away from uniforms, generic offerings to more tailored experiences. A key strategy born from this trend is product customization. By enabling consumers to customize products to the best-fit of their needs, tastes, and ways of life, product customization creates ownership and satisfaction (Ballı, 2024).

As brands have evolved to become much more than just an e-commerce platform in this challenging retail landscape. This is especially true for a company such as IKEA, which is one of the world's largest re-tailers in the home furnishing space and one that has successfully updated its business model over time to match changing consumer expectations (Ollila, 2021). Product customization allows customers to personalize a product or service according to specific needs, tastes or preferences, an approach that resonates strongly with IKEA's commitment to democratizing design and functionality.

IKEA is operating in a dynamic Finnish retail environment where consumer behavior is influenced by sustainability, individualism and technology. Long-lasting but stylish Finnish consumers tend to appreciate products that are not just useful

but also add their personal touch or values (Roy, 2020). This trend is reflected in the growing popularity of consumer personalized home décor and customizable furniture, especially among younger generations and people who live in urban environments.

As e-commerce and digital tools have grown, IKEA has been able to better customize its offerings to individual customer preferences through tools like the IKEA Home Planner and IKEA Create Your Own ones that help customers design pieces of furniture and see them in their own spaces. According to Statista, the value added in Finland's furniture market is projected to reach $0.5 billion in 2025, with an expected com-pound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 0.52% from 2025 to 2029 (Statista, n.d.). This trend highlights the significance of recognizing how product customization not only enhances customer satisfaction but also leads to higher sales and brand loyalty.

IKEA, the world's biggest furniture retailer, is historically associated with homogenized, low-cost products. At the same time, as personalization becomes more important across countries and cultures, it could be both a challenge and an opportunity for the brand. Finnish consumers have a reputation for valuing functional design, distinctive individuality, and sustainability. Within this cultural context, exploring whether product customization can improve IKEA's customer experience in the Finnish market becomes an important topic of investigation. IKEA was started in 1943 by Ingvar Kamprad and has a global business model to sell affordable, functional and stylish furniture.

IKEA has over 450 stores in over 60 countries, and they focus on cost leadership and standardization (Moran, 2024). Two major aspects of such a model are flat packaging that focuses on economical shipping, as well as self-assembly items that help save on labor. The firm also enjoys economies of scale as it manufactures standardized designs at high volume. While this model has worked well for a lot of markets, it is in trouble in the world of changing consumer tastes. While IKEA has standardized its products and focuses on affordability, the question is

whether this approach will succeed in the long run as the demand for personalization increases.

Additionally, IKEA's model is predicated on mass production and little variation between markets, meaning that the new focus on localized adaptation presents a dilemma (Burt et al., 2011). In countries like Fin-land, where markets tend to be more mature and design-forward, users could be conditioned to expect options that are built around their specific needs in areas such as localization and comfort, and this could be seen as an added value, helping the company stay competitive. So, where IKEA finds global success in its highly efficient, standardized approach, it'll need to adapt by balancing efforts at operational efficiency with growing consumer demand for individualized and region-specific products.

Product customization (PC) refers to the consumer ease of tailoring the product to fit their specific requirements, including design, color, size, and functions (Pech and Vrchota, 2022). It is basically categorized into four types: collaborative customization when firms work directly with customers to specify their product needs; adaptive customization when users are able to customize a standardized product after it has been purchased; cosmetic customization when a product's appearance has been adjusted, but its basic functionality remains the same; and transparent customization where products are made to order without being told specifically to the customer.

However, although customization and high levels of customization can create advantages, they can also lead to operational challenges such as increased complexity in production and increased costs (Salvador, de Holan, and Piller, 2009).

Integration of customization within existing products for a low-cost company like IKEA requires an ample number of strategic experiments (strategic innovation) because the company has built its reputation on mass production and value for money. The company would have to reconcile its focus on standardized, affordable products with increasingly personalized consumer needs. This might involve developing new processes or using technology to empower customers to

customize their purchases while allowing businesses to remain efficient in production and logistics.

With consumers seeking ever more unique and tailored products, IKEA needs to pivot its traditionally streamlined approach in a way that meets these demands without losing its core value proposition of low prices. This may allow IKEA to broaden its reach in more developed and design-oriented business subsidiaries, while at the same time keeping up with global competition. Customer experience (CX) is defined as the totality of all perceived interactions that a customer has with a brand across different touchpoints, influencing their perceptions, emotions and behaviors (Gustafsson et al., 2024). It includes emotional, cognitive, sensory and behavioral responses that greatly impact future buying decisions and brand loyalty.

In the retail context, CX plays a crucial role in enhancing customer satisfaction, stimulating positive word-of-mouth, and promoting repurchase intentions (Verhoef et al., 2015). Personalization, convenience, aesthetics and emotional connection are some of the pivotal dimensions of customer experience. Personalization means offering up to each single customer offering that meets individual needs of specific customer and makes them feel valued and understood (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Convenience is making shopping easier and better when it comes to your experience and functionality.

Aesthetic appeal includes the visual elements of a retail environment such as store design and product presentation that creates the sensory experience of a customer and overall satisfaction. Finally, emotional connection focuses on creating interactions that customers will remember and where they will emotionally engage with the brand, which often results in customer loyalty. As e-commerce grows more competitive, providing excellent customer experience has become increasingly important for companies looking to stand out in the retail landscape. Good Customer Experience (CX) contributes to increased customer loyalty and can drive sales significantly (Pech and Vrchota, 2022).

To consider a feeling of responsibility and exclusivity and being more connected to the brand, retailers can allow customers to create their own products. This degree of personalization not only satisfies customers' cravings for unique products but also reinforces their emotional attachment to the brand, leading to higher satisfaction and long-term loyalty. This makes brands rely more and more on customization as a top strategy for improving CX and keeping up with the competition.

These include a few particularly adopted consumer trends that affect buying behavior and create demand for specific product types, which characterize the Finnish retail landscape. The trend of sustainability consciousness stands out of Finnish consumers, whom are undeniably more sensitive towards green products. This trend is indicative of increased concern regarding environmental issues and a commitment to supporting brands that align with those values. That has made sustainability an essential component of consumer choice and pushed retailers to focus on environmentally friendly product lines and sustainable practices. Another major trend is minimalist design.

Finnish consumers place great value on simple and aesthetically consistent products. This tendency dovetails with Scandinavian design aesthetics, which focus mainly on clean lines, functionality and a balanced, uncluttered visual aesthetic (Youvan,2024). Retailers targeting this segment need to ensure that their product offerings balance these design aspects without sacrificing convenience of use.

Finn consumers are also an extremely digitally savvy group. Online sales in Finland are growing, due to high internet penetration and the South Scandinavian countries' high use of e-commerce (Kivivuori and Tamminen, 2022). With online shopping being so easy and effortless, data on millions of products available impacts the buying behavior as online/offline retailers must create an enriching experience that are both online and offline to full fill the needs of the consumers.

Finnish consumers appreciate uniqueness and look for products that represent their personal identity. Cand uniqueness is highly appreciated, while consumers are seeking products that can be tailored according to their wishes. More than

71% of Finnish consumers pay a high premium for customized or sustainable products, indicating that personalized solutions are crucial (Kaupan liitto, 2024). Based on these trends, a personalized response has the potential to serve IKEA well in Finland, ensuring that the brand delivers what consumers want (sustainability, de-sign, and individuality) in a way that positions it as more competitive.

This follows from IKEA's global push into more customizable products, reflecting changing consumer preferences toward more personalized products with a unique touch. The IKEA Planning Studios are another initiative of the company, they are smaller sales facilities which target urban areas and act as personalized planning counters for kitchens and wardrobes (Cheng, 2019). These studios serve consumers who want customized solutions for their homes, emphasizing a more hands-on, personalized experience in smaller, more approachable spaces.

In some areas, IKEA is rolling out customized kitchen ranges that enable customers to choose specific designs, finishes and layouts to suit their personal requirements and style. It also partnered with third-party brands via projects like the 'DELAKTIG' project with celebrated designer Tom Dixon, an example of years-old IKEA taking steps in the field of customizable furniture. The outcome of this collaboration was a modular sofa system that allows customers to have individual materials and layouts, merging function with design flexibility.

In Finland, even IKEA has started offering some customization services. The company introduced online planning tools, offering customers the ability to create their own kitchen floor plans and home interiors, as well as custom kitchen configurations that they can then modify to suit their own space and preferences. IKEA also enables consumers to design their home specifications with design consultations available. Nevertheless, customization still falls short at IKEA Finland compared to Finnish competition like Isku and Finnish Design Shop. These Competitors, known for their customizability of quality Nordic furniture, cater to the sense of minimalist design requisite for Finnish consumers.

IKEA could enhance and expand its current offerings in Finland by adding more types of customizable products and services to remain competitive and cater to the consumer's growing desire for individuality, quality de-sign, and customization. This might mean adding a few more personalized furniture offerings, partnering with local designers or building up its in-store and online customization features. This way IKEA can target Finnish consumers better and enhance their share of the market.

Although IKEA has achieved global success, studies indicate that cultural differences lead to consumers having vastly different expectations of customer experience based on where they are (Gustafsson, Kristensson, and Witell, 2012). Thus, this study would analyze how product customization can better the customer experience at IKEA in Finland. The findings will help refine IKEA's strategic approach to personalization and provide broader insights into global retail brands facing similar challenges.

1.2 Research Gaps

Though product customization and consumer experience are some of the most researched areas globally, few studies have been done considering the Finnish furniture retail industry. Some of the research like Ballı, et al. (2024) and Pech and Vrchota (2022) focused on product personalization, customer satisfaction, and product customization but different country bases like Turkey and central European the Nordic countries like Finland.

Besides, Cultural factors such as minimalism, individualism, and sustain-ability are the most significant areas of the finished consumer, but they are ignored in the research area. Considering these gaps, this research has focused on addressing the gap by evaluating how customization im-pacts satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement in Finnish IKEA customers. This research has focused on providing practical knowledge of global re-tailers keeping in balance standardization with localized personalization that can contribute to cx and customization theory considering the design consciousness, and sustainability of the driven Finnish market.

1.3 Research Aim

The study aims to study perceptive effect of product customization on customer experience at IKEA- Finland. The study examines how great personalization of offering, enabled by usage of digital means and flexibility of design, shapes consumer satisfaction, engagement and brand loyalty within Finnish consumer market. By paradigm shifting the different consumer methodologies from IKEA's perspective relevant to the Finnish and their demands for design conscience and sustainable manufacturing practices, the research aims to map out how customizing processes can be leveraged for IKEA to cater to them uniquely and with a sustainably operating agenda.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study goal is designed to investigate the role of product customization on customer experience, with a focus on configurator tools and personalized offerings, and aims to evaluate how these interventions can enhance the level of customer satisfaction, engagement, and the overall experience of customers with IKEA in Finland. It delves into critical elements, including design adaptability, the depth of customization (both digital and tactile), and the usefulness of digital platforms like the IKEA Home Planner and the Create Your Own platform, to identify which factors best cater to the proclivities of Finnish consumers. It also looks at how demographic differences influence customization expectations, and whether these personalized experiences translate into long-term brand loyalty/ repeat purchasing.

- To analyze how product customization impacts customer experience at IKEA Fin-land, focusing on satisfaction, engagement, and brand loyalty.
- To identify key factors in IKEA’s customization process such as de-sign flexibility, digital tools, and material options that influence customer satisfaction.
- Comparing the effectiveness of IKEA’s digital customization tools versus in-store experiences in enhancing customer journey.

- To propose strategies for improving customer experience at IKEA Finland through advanced product personalization initiatives.

1.5 Research Questions

Thus, having well-defined research questions is important here to guide this study as the research questions should form the basis of our re-search which is to evaluate if customer experience is improved with a higher level of product customization at IKEA in Finland. These questions were developed in line with the goals of the research ensuring systematic investigation. Beyond general customer satisfaction, the study delves into frameworks such as digital assets, designed experience, and customer engagement mechanisms that help drive improved experiences through customization. It also explores how demographic differences and preferences for channels (digital versus in store) might drive perceptions of value, personalization, and brand loyalty.

1. How does product customization impact customer experience at IKEA Finland in terms of satisfaction, engagement, and brand loyalty?
2. What are the key factors in IKEA's customization process (e.g., design flexibility, digital tools, material options) that influence customer satisfaction?
3. How do IKEA's digital customization tools compare to in-store experiences in enhancing customer journey?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

As customers increasingly seek products that reflect their individual preferences, businesses are shifting from standardized production models to more flexible, customer-centered approaches. This shift is especially relevant for global brands like IKEA, which must balance mass production efficiency with localized customization demands. Scholars have explored various dimensions of customization, including technological enablers, strategic benefits, and impact on customer experience. Understanding these theoretical foundations is essential to assessing how customization affects consumer satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty. The following sections explore key concepts, frameworks, and empirical insights that inform the role of customization in enhancing customer experience, particularly in the context of the Finnish retail environment.

2.1 Definitions and Key Concepts

The concept of product customization has become increasingly central in both academic literature and business strategy, reflecting a fundamental shift from mass production paradigms towards meeting individual consumer needs more precisely. Scholars have defined product customization in various ways, often emphasizing the modification of products or services according to specific customer requirements. Pech and Vrchota (2022) argued that product customization pertains to the consumer's ability to tailor a product to fit their unique requirements, encompassing aspects like design, color, size, and functionality.

This definition aligns with the broader understanding that customization empowers customers to influence the final product they receive. At IKEA Finland, tools like the Kitchen Planner and the PAX wardrobe system let customers adjust layouts, materials, and components to suit their personal style and space. These practical examples show how IKEA applies customization to enhance customer satisfaction and ownership.

Further elaborating, research highlighted that product customization involves modifying and producing items based on customer specifications. This often entails offering customers more choices and being more adaptable to their extra requirements compared to standardized production. Many times, customers are part of the design process. They find value in the final product and in the creative experience itself. This helps them feel emotionally invested and express their uniqueness.

Franke et al. (2010) and Piller (2004) emphasized that mass customization, a related concept, enables customers to design individually tailored products and services which are then produced to order by the manufacturer. This capability is often facilitated by technology, allowing firms to offer variety efficiently. The core goal, as noted by Salvador et al. (2009), is to deliver superior customer value by creating products that better fit individual preferences.

On the other hand, there are challenges with customization. It can complicate things and raise costs for companies. This means they need good strategies for production and their supply chain. How much customization a company offers is a critical choice, because going too far can harm the product's performance or quality.

2.1.1 Distinction from Personalization

Understanding the difference between customization and personalization is key. Customization is when the customer actively makes choices to tailor a product, a process Hess et al. (2007) described as the customer proactively specifying elements. Think of it as being the designer. Personalization, on the other hand, is when a system, like a website, automatically adjusts things for you based on your past actions or information it has about you.

At IKEA Finland, the focus is heavily on customization. When Finnish customers use online tools like the PAX wardrobe planner or the METOD kitchen planner, they are engaging directly in this user driven process. They aren't just picking premade items; they are actively selecting specific modules, deciding on heights and widths, choosing door styles, picking colors and finishes, and arranging

interior organizers. As Griffiths (2019) noted, customization involves users making changes to meet their specific needs by configuring layout, content, or functionality exactly what happens with these IKEA tools. This process puts the Finnish customer firmly in control of the design outcome.

2.1.2 Customization in Service vs. Manufacturing Contexts

While the fundamental goal of meeting individual needs remains, the manifestation and challenges of customization differ significantly between manufacturing and service contexts.

In manufacturing, like how IKEA produces its furniture, customization often revolves around the physical product and the production process required to create variety efficiently. Research highlighted the importance of strategies like flexible manufacturing systems, modular product architectures, and platform-based development. Simpson (2004) emphasized that companies utilize product families and platforms, derived by adding, removing, substituting, or scaling modules, to offer variety while managing costs and lead times.

At IKEA Finland, this is evident in systems like PAX and METOD, which allow for varied configurations using standardized modules while maintaining cost efficiency. Customization in manufacturing can range from configuring options within a standard framework (e.g., choosing car features) to more complex design to order scenarios where unique components or configurations are created. The rise of Industry 4.0, digitalization, AI, and advanced manufacturing technologies like 3D printing is seen as a key enabler, allowing for greater flexibility and potentially moving towards "mass personification" or "smart customization" where products adapt even after purchase.

However, managing the resulting product complexity and its negative impact on operational performance (cost, time, quality) remains a significant challenge for manufacturers. Studies investigated the tradeoffs between the degree of customization offered and manufacturing performance. The focus is often on achieving efficiency in producing tangible, differentiated goods. Research by Pires

et al. (2018) noted that B2B (industrial) products generally require less customization compared to B2C (consumer) products in international markets.

In the service context, customization often involves tailoring the service process, interaction, or information content rather than just a physical product. Hess et al. (2007) pointed out that the service industry has widely adopted personalization (system driven tailoring), citing examples like Sprint analyzing usage for plan recommendations or hotels using guest preference data for targeted offers.

Customization in services can involve users configuring aspects of a digital service, such as selecting content on a news website, adjusting features in online gaming, or specifying parameters in online dating apps. Flavián et al. (2019) highlighted the role of automated service interactions and customization tools (like online configurators for sportswear) in enabling value cocreation. In IKEA Finland's case, digital tools like the Kitchen Planner allow users to simulate and customize their space online, blending service customization with the physical product selection process.

Unlike manufacturing, where the physical object is central, service customization often occurs at the interface level or through information tailoring. Stokburger Sauer et al. (2020) argued that the customization process itself is a social exchange, and perceptions of fairness (balancing customer effort/input against company investment/output) significantly impact satisfaction, regardless of the number of options offered. The intangible nature of services means that managing the customer’s experience during the customization process is crucial. While manufacturing focuses on production efficiency for variety, services often focus on tailoring interactions and information flow, heavily leveraging digital technologies and data analytics.

Product customization has remained a central theme in consumer behaviour research for several decades, owing to its direct link to customer engagement, satisfaction, and perceived value. According to Spinoglio (2020), providing customers with the ability to customize products significantly increases emotional involvement, a psychological factor that plays a vital role in overall customer

satisfaction. When consumers are emotionally invested in a product, they are more likely to perceive it as valuable and meaningful.

However, while this theory highlights the emotional benefits of customization, it falls short of addressing the possible drawbacks. Specifically, when customization tools are poorly designed or fail to meet consumer expectations, they can lead to confusion, frustration, or dissatisfaction. This is particularly relevant to IKEA Finland, where some customers may find the online planning tools or self-service configurations difficult to navigate without in person support. In such cases, the very mechanism intended to foster satisfaction may instead erode trust and deter repeat purchases.

Moreover, although product customization is often positively correlated with customer satisfaction, it is not a guaranteed pathway to customer loyalty. Some consumers may find the customization process overwhelming, unclear, or overly complex, which may reduce their willingness to engage with the brand in the future. To address this, IKEA Finland has introduced Planning Studios and design consultations aimed at simplifying the customization journey for customers. This suggests that emotional engagement alone is insufficient; brands must also ensure that the customization journey is intuitive and rewarding.

Siltanen (2024) examined how IKEA’s introduction of modular furniture and advanced product configuration tools has significantly reshaped the way customers interact with home furnishings. Tools like the IKEA Home Planner have empowered consumers to visualize, configure, and personalize their spaces before making a purchase, bridging the gap between digital planning and real-world applications. However, IKEA’s approach is still rooted in a mass customization model, which inherently limits the scope of personalization.

While customers can select from a range of predefined options such as colors, materials, and component sizes the absence of deeper customization restricts the ability to create truly unique products. Thus, IKEA's current tools offer personalization at a surface level rather than a comprehensive, individualized

experience. Studies also point to a split in consumer tastes. More budget Puree down consumers who value convenience and cost, two of IKEA's basic brand promises may find the limited choices sufficient. Such customers seek a high degree of personal expression and lose interest in IKEA once they must open its doors. Consumer behavior in the Finnish context has been studied through research, and we accordingly have a good perspective on this dynamic.

For example, Stein and Ramaseshan (2020) highlighted that sustainability is one of the most important factors influencing Finnish consumer purchase decisions. These consumers are more likely to favor brands that actively promote environmental stewardship, and thus ecological integrity becomes a strategic advantage.

Sustainable Brands (2020) picked up this idea and observed that the Finnish consumer not only like the overall idea of sustainability communication but also want it in a more concrete and tailored way that corresponds to these values e.g., the freedom to select what type of sustainability they want from (an) eco-material(s). IKEA's lack of more tailored, sustainable options is a missed opportunity to stoke environ-mentalism, which is high among Gen Z.

Gustafsson and Olmarker (2021) cautioned that if IKEA does not move faster to implement its mass customization tools focusing on sustainability, over time the difference between what the customers expect and what the brand delivers in terms of sustainable products will increase, reduce satisfaction levels and the customers could eventually disengage with the brand. While there is not much empirical evidence around the use of IKEA's customization tools, extant research shows that digital configurators, e.g., "IKEA Create Your Own," drive higher customer satisfaction and engagement (Bookman and Hall, 2022). By opening the door for customization, these tools engage users in a similar manner during the product customization process and provide a "sense of 'ownership'".

Nevertheless, the inconsistent customer experience across various channels and touchpoints is a significant issue. Though IKEA's online configurators are typically "intuitive" and "end-user friendly," they often do not 'connect' well with the in-store context. For instance, a shopper could spend hours creating online products

and have them out of stock or incompatible with their home set up, resulting in a letdown. These disconnects between online planning and offline fulfilment highlight a structural shortcoming of the mass-customization rhetoric in IKEA's case: There can be disjuncture's between expectation and achievement.

In addition, the empirical evidence of Björkander et al. (2023) emphasize the increasing role of social media in enriching product customization experiences. Platforms like Pinterest and Instagram are digital inspiration boards where users can visualize home décor ideas and show off their own creativity. This social dimension motivates user participation whilst enhancing the brand user community. However, IKEA has not yet maximized the potential for user-generated content and social sharing related to customization.

The ubiquity of social media platforms among customers, and their propensity to share photos of products, and especially their homes and interior decoration, suggests one significant unintended effect of such community platform would be to change the way customers interact with and respond to IKEA as a brand. They are efforts that could potentially increase brand credibility and create even stronger emotional connections with consumers.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the key theories that provide a foundation for understanding the relationship between product customization and customer experience. Theoretical frameworks are important because they help explain how and why customers respond to customized products and services. They offer insights into the ways personalization affects customer satisfaction, emotional engagement, and brand loyalty. In this re-search, these theories also help clarify how Finnish consumers value personal, meaningful, and sustain-able retail experiences. By examining these ideas, the study can better evaluate how well IKEA's customization strategies align with the expectations of the Finnish market.

2.2.1 The Experience Economy

Björkander et al. (2023) argue that modern consumers seek memorable experiences rather than mere transactions. This aligns with the broader evolution of retail toward the “experience economy,” where the perceived value of a product is tied not only to its functionality but also to the emotional and sensory experience surrounding its purchase and use. IKEA’s gradual shift toward product customization fits within this trend; however, its execution currently falls short particularly for Finnish consumers, who exhibit higher expectations for immersive and meaningful retail interactions. Although modular systems like IKEA’s customizable kitchens offer a degree of personalization, they lack the emotional rich-ness and high-touch personalization that typify experiential retail environments.

2.2.2 Self-Congruity Theory

Weurlander (2023) explored how brand alignment with consumer self-image enhances brand attraction and loyalty. From this perspective, customization serves as a powerful tool for fostering alignment between consumer identity and product attributes. IKEA has the potential to leverage this theory through more advanced and expressive customization tools. However, the brand’s current offerings are primarily functional, focusing on tangible attributes like size or color. This limits the customer’s ability to express lifestyle choices, cultural identity, or personal aesthetics. As a result, the customization process may fail to achieve the full potential of self-congruity, weakening the emotional bond between customer and product.

2.2.3 The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Liaqat (2022) applied the Technology Acceptance Model to IKEA’s digital platforms, emphasizing the importance of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness in driving user adoption. While IKEA’s customization platforms are generally praised for their simplicity, they are often criticized for lacking depth.

For consumers seeking high levels of creative control, these platforms can feel restrictive or oversimplified. This mismatch may deter tech-savvy or design-

conscious users who de-sire more sophisticated customization features. In this context, the perceived usefulness of IKEA's customization tools becomes questionable, potentially limiting their impact on customer engagement and long-term loyalty.

2.3 Four Types of Product Customization

The transition from mass production to meeting individual customer needs has led to various strategies under the umbrella of mass customization. A seminal framework for under-standing the different approaches companies can take was proposed by Gilmore and Pine (1997). They argued that companies don't just customize products; they customize the representation of the product (how it's presented), the product itself, or both.

Based on whether the representation or the product is customized, and whether the customer is explicitly aware of the customization, Gilmore and Pine (1997) identified four distinct approaches: Collaborative, Adaptive, Cosmetic, and Transparent customization. This framework provides a valuable lens through which to analyze how a global retailer like IKEA, known for its standardized offerings, engages or could engage with customization.

2.3.1 Collaborative Customization

Gilmore and Pine (1997) defined collaborative customization as an approach where companies engage in a dialogue with individual customers to help them articulate their specific needs and then develop tailored products that meet those needs. IKEA engages in collaborative customization primarily through its planning services and digital tools. The IKEA Kitchen Planner, PAX Wardrobe Planner, and other configurators allow customers to design complex solutions by selecting modules, dimensions, finishes, and internal organizers. This process requires significant customer input and interaction with the tool (or an IKEA co-worker in-store/remotely) to articulate needs and design the final product.

IKEA Planning Studios, focused specifically on more complex purchases like kitchens and bedrooms, represent a move towards more intensive collaborative customization in dedicated physical spaces (Cheng, 2019). The DELAKTIG project, a collaboration with Tom Dixon, also had elements of collaborative customization, encouraging users to adapt and add to a modular sofa platform (IKEA, n.d.). This approach aligns well with complex home furnishing solutions where individual needs regarding space, function, and style are paramount, but it requires sophisticated tools and potentially higher customer effort. The challenge for IKEA is scaling this collaborative process while maintaining cost-efficiency.

2.3.2 Adaptive Customization

In adaptive customization, the company produces a standardized product, but this product is designed so that end-users can alter it without direct interaction with the company post-purchase. Gilmore and Pine (1997) emphasized that the product is designed to be inherently flexible and adjustable by the customer. Adaptive customization resonates strongly with IKEA's core concept of modularity and self-assembly. Many IKEA products are inherently adaptive. For instance, shelving systems like KALLAX or IVAR allow users to add or rearrange shelves, drawers, doors, and boxes long after the initial purchase to adapt to changing storage needs.

Adjustable desks, extendable tables, and modular sofas like SÖDERHAMN or VALLENTUNA, which allow users to reconfigure sections or change covers, are prime examples. Franke and Piller (2004) noted that user toolkits for customization, which empower users to adapt products, can increase perceived value. IKEA's entire flat-pack and self-assembly model encourages a degree of user adaptation, although the primary goal is cost reduction. This approach leverages IKEA's strength in modular design and empowers customers post-purchase, fitting well with the desire for flexibility, though the degree of adaptation is often limited by the initial product design.

2.3.3 Cosmetic Customization

Cosmetic customization involves presenting a standard product differently to various customers. Gilmore and Pine (1997) explained that the core product remains the same, but its packaging, marketing presentation, or superficial features (like color or labels) are tailored for different segments or individuals. IKEA utilizes cosmetic customization in several ways, albeit perhaps less extensively than other types.

Packaging and product names often vary regionally to suit local languages and cultural contexts, even if the core product is identical globally. In-store and online, the presentation of products can be tailored; room sets are designed to appeal to local tastes and living situations, showcasing the standard products in cosmetically different contexts. The IKEA Family loyalty program allows for personalized marketing communications and offers, which can be seen as a form of cosmetic customization of the overall service experience

2.3.4 Transparent Customization

Transparent customization occurs when a company provides unique products or services to individual customers without explicitly informing them that the offerings have been customized. Gilmore and Pine (1997) argued that the company observes customer behavior or uses data to anticipate needs and tailor the product accordingly, without requiring the customer's direct input for that specific transaction.

Transparent customization seems less directly applicable to IKEA's core product strategy, which emphasizes explicit choices (collaborative) or user modification (adaptive). However, elements might exist in their operations or logistics. For example, optimizing supply chain and inventory management based on predicted local demand patterns could be seen as a form of transparent customization of availability. Perhaps certain operational processes are adjusted based on customer data without the customer being aware.

However, applying this to the physical product itself without the customer's knowledge is difficult within IKEA's model. Where it might be more relevant is in the digital sphere. As noted by Montgomery and Smith (2009) in differentiating personalization (often system-driven and less visible) from customization (user-driven), IKEA's website or app might transparently customize the user interface, search results, or recommendations based on past behavior or inferred preferences, aiming to provide a seemingly standard but perfectly relevant experience. This aligns more with personalization but shares the characteristic of the user not being explicitly involved in the tailoring process for that specific interaction.

2.4 Strategic Benefits of Customization

Offering product customization is not merely a tactical choice but a strategic orientation with significant potential benefits across customer perceptions, market positioning, and operational effectiveness, although it also presents considerable challenges. Research conducted after 2015 continues to explore and validate the advantages initially proposed by scholars like Franke et al. (2009).

2.4.1 Increased Customer Satisfaction, Willingness to Pay, and Brand Attachment

A primary strategic benefit consistently highlighted in literature is the positive impact of customization on customer attitudes and behaviors. Ballı, et al. (2024) found a positive and significant effect of product personalization (closely related to customization outcomes) on both consumer purchase intention and customer satisfaction. This satisfaction stems from the core value proposition of customization: providing a product that better fits individual needs and preferences compared to standardized alternatives.

In the case of IKEA Finland, this is reflected in the growing consumer demand for modular, space efficient furniture tailored to urban living spaces and minimalist design preferences. Research emphasized that this closer preference fit is a key assumption driving the value of customization (Franke et al., 2009, as cited in Franke and Schreier, 2010). When customers actively participate in designing or

modifying a product, they often experience a sense of accomplishment and psychological ownership, further boosting satisfaction (Atakan et al., 2014; Buechel and Janiszewski, 2014).

Indeed, research by Saniuk, Grabowska and Gajdzik, (2020) demonstrated a high level of consumer satisfaction associated with purchasing personalized products, linking it to the better adaptation of the product to customer expectations. This is evident in IKEA Finland's Planning Studios, where consumers can cocreate kitchen and wardrobe configurations that align with their home dimensions and personal styles. Personalized recommendation systems, often used to facilitate customization choices, have also been shown to positively impact customer satisfaction by creating a more effortless and relevant experience (Louis, 2021).

Beyond satisfaction, customization often translates into increased willingness to pay (WTP). Customers perceive greater value in products tailored specifically to them and are often prepared to pay a premium for this enhanced fit and uniqueness (Franke et al., 2009). Moreau and Herd (2010) noted this benefit alongside increased purchase intentions and positive attitudes. This has clear implications for IKEA Finland, where studies show Finnish consumers are willing to pay extra for sustainably produced, individualized, and design-forward furniture solutions.

Research by Franke et al., 2009 reaffirmed that customized products can yield significantly higher benefits in terms of WTP compared to standard offerings, although this effect is moderated by factors like the customer's insight into their own preferences and their level of product involvement. Personalized pricing, which leverages customer data to infer WTP and tailor prices, is seen as a related strategy allowing firms to maximize profit while potentially offering lower prices to some segments (European Parliament, 2022; Tomczyk et al., 2022). The ability to charge a premium for customized options is a significant financial incentive for firms adopting these strategies.

Furthermore, customization can foster stronger emotional connections between the consumer and the brand, leading to increased brand attachment and loyalty. When customers invest time and effort in cocreating a product, they develop a deeper relationship with it and, by extension, the brand (Mugge et al., 2008). This sense of connection and perceived brand understanding enhances brand attachment (Park et al., 2010; Shimul, 2022). Ballı et al. (2024) confirmed that the increased satisfaction derived from personalization positively influences brand loyalty. In IKEA Finland's context, this is crucial as brand loyalty can secure repeat business in a relatively mature and design-savvy market where consumers are selective about both aesthetics and sustainability.

This loyalty manifests in repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth, and a reduced likelihood of switching to competitors (Mende et al., 2013; Rahehagh et al., 2020). Research by Han et al. (2022) linked emotional product attachment derived from customization contexts directly to consumption sustainability variables like product longevity, suggesting attachment can influence post-purchase behavior. This is particularly relevant for IKEA Finland, where sustainability and product longevity are key consumer values. Strong attachments built through customization can thus translate into significant long-term value for the brand (Loureiro et al., 2023).

2.4.2 Operational and Marketing Implications

While the customer facing benefits are compelling, implementing customization has profound operational and marketing implications. Operationally, mass customization presents a fundamental challenge: balancing variety and efficiency (Salvador et al., 2009). It often necessitates significant investments in flexible manufacturing systems, modular product design, sophisticated information technology, and agile supply chains (Piller, 2004; Zhang et al., 2018). The increased complexity in production planning, inventory management, and logistics can lead to higher operational costs if not managed effectively (Åhlström & Westbrook, 1999).

However, advancements associated with Industry 4.0, such as automation, AI, and digital twins, are seen as key enablers for overcoming these hurdles, allowing for

more efficient production of customized goods (Pech and Vrchota, 2022; Wolniak & Grebski, 2023). Successful implementation can lead to operational benefits like reduced waste (through make-to-order models), better inventory management, and potentially faster time-to-market for certain configurations (Wolniak & Grebski, 2023). Li et al. (2020) argued that personalized customization allows suppliers to guide demand, optimize supply chain efficiency, and strengthen competitive advantage. However, achieving these benefits requires a strategic alignment of operational capabilities with the chosen customization approach (Baranauskas, 2019).

From a marketing perspective, customization shifts the focus from broad segments to individual customer needs and preferences. This requires robust capabilities in collecting, analyzing, and utilizing customer data to inform product design, recommendations, and communication (Huang et al., 2024). AI enabled personalization is becoming increasingly central to this, allowing marketers to tailor interactions across the customer journey (Gao & Liu, 2022; Louis, 2021).

Effective customization serves as a powerful differentiation strategy, enabling firms to carve out unique market positions and gain a competitive advantage. It enables targeted marketing, which may improve campaign efficiency and the conversion ratio (Huang et al., 2024). But marketing must also balance the “personalization paradox”: even if relevance is appreciated among customers, if data tracking appears to be overly invading privacy, or if predictions are inaccurate, marketing can trigger undesired reactions as well as privacy concerns (Aguirre et al., 2015; Awad and Krishnan, 2006; Dahl & Fridh, 2019).

Striking the balance and maintaining transparency are touchy marketing strategies. Second, the marketing message should be able to successfully articulate the value of customization, helping them simplify what could be rather complex decisions (Moreau and Herd, 2010).

2.4.3 Global Trends in Product Customization

Product customization development is influenced to a remarkable extent by the condition of convergence between fast technological progress and changes in consumer demand at a global level. Companies in various industries are starting to see that the capability to provide customized products and experiences is not merely a nice-to-have, but sometimes also a must have to stay competitive. This chapter takes an in depth look at the major worldwide trends influencing product customization today and, in the years, ahead.

2.4.4 Technological Enablers

A wide range of technological innovations have been instrumental in driving the growth and sophistication of product customization, fundamentally altering the way products are designed, manufactured, and delivered to customers. These technologies have not only made customization more accessible but have also enhanced the efficiency and scalability of customized offerings.

2.4.5 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Seemingly, product customization is a diversified case to use artificial intelligence (AI) one of the most disruptive tech contexts of customization of products. The capacity to analyze large amounts of customer data, to predict increasingly accurate preferences from individuals, automate complicated processes is revolutionizing the way that companies approach customization. Ricci et al. (2011) has suggested that perhaps using an AI enabled recommendation system, a firm may be able to offer an extremely personalized product recommendation computed from the customer's past purchase history, browsing patterns and even social media browsing activity. This feature provides a more joyful shopping experience for the customer and decently improves the chances of finding the right product.

However, design choices are also being designed by AI. For instance, generative AI models enable us to generate thousands of design alternatives from a few initial parameters, making it possible for the customers to explore a broader set of options. In manufacturing, AI can operate robotic systems to tailor make faster,

ensuring both accuracy and speed. Not only can AI forecast product preferences for custom products even before a customer overtly states them, but proactive and informed customization can be much more effective.

2.4.6 Augmented Reality (AR)

Augmented reality (AR) Another technology that is heavily influencing product customization, especially in those industries where visualization is important is AR. By overlaying digital information on top of the physical world, AR enables customers to enjoy interactive and immersive experiences. For instance, Yim et al. (2017) supported this application by a statement that AR apps allow customers to visualize how a personalized piece of furniture will look like within their room before they buy it. This can greatly mitigate the risks of purchasing personalized products and build customers' trust in them.

Visualizing a product in its context, as it should look, in the right furnished environment, with the real sizes and the right lighting, is a great help for the customer to get the feeling of what they are going to purchase and be able to feel more attached and satisfied with their customized product. Rauschnabel et al. (2022) noted that AR can facilitate the customers' cocreation process, as it enables the customers to see virtual product models and provide real-time feedback on design changes.

2.4.7 3D Modelling and Printing

3D modelling and 3D printing technology has enabled customized products to be widely available and custom designs and complex geometries previously considered unchangeable or cost-prohibitive to be made. Gibson et al. (2010) emphasized that from 3D modelling software it enables designers and even customers to design complete detailed 3D digital prototypes of products, which translate into blueprints for manufacturing. Such technology offers a lot of design flexibility where unique and complex product profiles can be achieved. Lipson and Kurman (2013) also pointed out that 3D printing, also referred to as additive

manufacturing, has taken the production of customized commodities to an exceptional level as well.

Making items from a digital design by adding one substrate layer on top of another, 3D printing is driving a growing interest in producing small batches of personalized products on demand, and at lower costs (because they don't require costly tooling or Molds). It is ideal for industries like footwear, eyewear, and jewelry, where customized fit and style are everything. Wong et al. (2021) pointed out the 3D printing capabilities to rapid prototyping and design iteration, which is essential for accelerating the development of personalized products.

2.5 Industry 4.0 and Digital Product Design

The concepts of Industry 4.0, which include the integration of digital technologies in manufacturing, are shaping how IKEA approaches product customization. According to Pech and Vrchota (2022), technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, and cyber-physical systems enable large scale customization by allowing data to be collected and applied throughout the production and user interaction process. For IKEA, especially in digitally advanced markets like Finland, these tools support a more responsive and personalized offering.

As Hozdić (2015) notes, IoT can help IKEA monitor customer preferences and usage patterns in real time, improving the customization process. Cloud computing, as highlighted by Lee et al. (2015), offers scalability for managing the vast amount of configuration data generated through tools like the IKEA Home Planner. Meanwhile, as Tseng and Jiao (2001) and Soori et al. (2023) emphasize, digital design tools and virtual simulations allow Finnish consumers to experiment with layouts and options before committing, enhancing satisfaction and reducing errors. These Industry 4.0 technologies enable IKEA Finland to offer greater flexibility and user involvement while maintaining efficiency in production and logistics.

2.6 Benchmarks and Comparisons for IKEA

In the analysis of IKEA's customization practices from a global perspective, it is important to consider the company's specific business model, customer base, and brand positioning. IKEA has historically focused on offering inexpensive, practical, and appealing furniture to a wide range of consumers. This has been achieved by standardized design of the product, efficient production lines and a self-assembly process that saves costs.

But as customer demands change, and the hunger for personalized products grows, IKEA is struggling with how to reconcile its commitment to low prices and high execution with the desire to offer customers more personalized, flexible options. IKEA's engagement in customization has been largely based on modularity and configurability. Items such as the PAX wardrobe system and the METOD kitchen system give consumers the opportunity to tailor their own solutions using a series of components, sizes and finishes. IKEA also offers online planning tools and store services to help customers see and configure their customized solutions.

Nike+ or Adidas miCoach products that empower individual expression, IKEA's personalization options may seem restricted. On the other hand, IKEA's heavy emphasis on modularity and configurability gives consumers at least some design freedom in their purchase of home furnishings, without sacrificing their brand image (affordability). Additional studies by Lampel and Mintzberg (1996) claim that the IKEA approach to customization may be regarded as a type of "mass customization" in which a relatively generalized plan is used to generate a range of end products in response to different customer demands.

2.7 Customer Experience (CX) in Retail

In today's highly competitive retail landscape, customer experience (CX) has emerged as a critical differentiator, often surpassing product and price as the key driver of customer loyalty and business success. This is particularly true for brands like IKEA, where offering affordable, functional products alone is no longer

enough. In markets such as Finland, where consumers value sustainability, design aesthetics, and digital convenience, delivering a superior customer experience is essential for maintaining competitiveness.

This section examines the multifaceted nature of CX, explores the methods used to measure it, identifies the key drivers of CX in the furniture retail sector, and analyses the profound impact of CX on brand loyalty, with specific attention to how these factors apply to IKEA Finland.

2.7.1 Defining and Measuring CX

Customer experience is a holistic concept that encompasses the totality of a customer's interaction with a brand across all touchpoints and stages of the customer journey. Lemon & Verhoef (2016) in their research Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey provided a comprehensive framework for understanding CX, emphasizing that it comprises the customer's cognitive, emotional, sensory, and behavioral responses to all brand related interactions. In the case of IKEA Finland, this includes the seamless integration of digital tools like the IKEA Home Planner, personalized planning services in physical stores, click-and-collect lockers, and the in-store environment itself all of which combine to shape the Finnish consumer’s overall brand experience.

2.7.2 Emotional Elements

Oliver (1999) highlighted that emotional element encompass the customer's feelings and affective responses to the brand, such as happiness, satisfaction, frustration, or disappointment. These emotional responses can significantly influence overall CX, and shape long-term attitudes towards the brand. IKEA Finland recognizes this by offering personalized kitchen and wardrobe planning consultations, which allow consumers to feel understood and valued.

Additionally, opportunities for customers to codesign their furniture layouts online or in Planning Studios help foster a sense of control and personal involvement, leading to stronger emotional connections and satisfaction. Schmitt (1999) further emphasized the importance of experiential marketing, arguing that brands should focus on creating positive and memorable emotional experiences

for customers something IKEA Finland actively works toward through its design conscious showrooms and community building initiatives like sustainable product launches.

2.7.3 Sensory Elements

Krishna (2012) added that sensory elements relate to the customer's experiences through their senses, including sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste, which can significantly influence their perception of the brand and its products. In a retail setting, sensory cues can play a crucial role in shaping the customer's mood, influencing their behavior, and creating a distinctive brand atmosphere. IKEA Finland’s stores make strategic use of this by showcasing Scandinavian inspired room sets, offering familiar scents from their café’s Swedish meatballs and cinnamon buns, and maintaining clean, minimalist layouts that appeal to local preferences for simplicity and calm environments. These sensory elements help to create a shopping atmosphere that feels uniquely tailored to Finnish tastes while reinforcing the IKEA brand identity.

2.8 Tools and Metrics for Measuring CX

To improve customer experience, businesses need simple ways to measure how customers feel about their services. These tools help companies understand what is working well and what needs to be better. For IKEA Finland, using clear and reliable customer experience metrics is important to stay competitive and meet customer expectations. The next sections explain some of the popular tools used to measure CX.

2.8.1 Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT)

Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) measures customer satisfaction with specific interactions or overall experience. Customers are typically asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale (e.g., from 1 to 5), and the average score is calculated (Hayes, 2008). IKEA Finland can use CSAT to measure how satisfied customers are

with services like the online Home Planner tool, in-store consultations, and click-and-collect options.

2.8.2 Customer Effort Score (CES)

Customer Effort Score (CES) measures the ease of customers' interactions with the company. It focuses on how much effort customers must expend to meet their needs, such as resolving an issue or making a purchase. A lower CES indicates better customer experience (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). For IKEA Finland, CES can help track how easy it is for customers to use digital planning tools, find products in-store, or arrange home deliveries.

2.9 CX Drivers in Furniture Retail

The furniture retail industry presents a unique set of CX drivers, reflecting the specific nature of the products and the customer's purchase journey. Kotler and Keller (2015) argued that aesthetic value is a major driver, as furniture is often a significant investment and plays a crucial role in shaping the look and feel of a home. Consequently, the aesthetic appeal of the furniture, as well as the overall store environment, is critical in this sector. Nielsen (1993) emphasized the importance of ease of use, stating that customers expect furniture to be comfortable, practical, and to meet their specific needs.

Anderson et al. (1997) highlighted that the post-purchase experience can significantly impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. The purchase of furniture often involves a complex process that includes delivery, assembly, and after-sales service. Bitner (1992) added that the design and layout of the physical store can influence the customer's shopping experience. For example, IKEA Finland enhances CX by offering modular, stylish products, modern Scandinavian room sets, flat pack solutions for easy transport and assembly, and post-purchase services like home delivery and digital planning tools. This creates a smoother, personalized experience that matches Finnish consumers' preferences.

2.10 The Impact of CX on Brand Loyalty

A growing body of research has demonstrated the strong link between positive customer experiences and brand loyalty. When customers have consistently positive interactions with a brand, they are more likely to develop trust, remain loyal, and even become brand advocates. Verhoef et al. (2015) in their study, from multichannel retailing to omnichannel retailing proposed a model that highlights the sequential relationship between customer satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and advocacy.

Oliver stated in his work (1999) that the foundation of this model is customer satisfaction, and only when customers' expectations are matched or exceeded will they feel satisfied. The authors Morgan and Hunt (1994) noted that trust forms through multiple positive experiences. If customers keep interacting with a brand and their needs are always met, they trust that the brand will deliver as promised.

Regular customers usually help promote the brand by chatting about it and recommending it to those around them. The model makes a big difference for companies like IKEA in the retail sector. Prioritizing good customer experiences everywhere allowed IKEA to make customers happy, trust them, and maintain their loyalty, which led to brand support. In markets like Finland, where customers are well-informed and can pick from many brands, this becomes very critical. , Anderson & Mittal (2000) also highlighted that high customer satisfaction boosts a company's ongoing financial performance, suggesting that CX investments can benefit IKEA over time.

2.11 Integration of Customization and CX in Finland

The Finnish market offers a special situation for exploring how to combine product customization with the customer experience. In this section, we will look at what makes the Finnish consumer unique, identify what IKEA must do in this market and explain why connecting customization to customer experience helps the company stay competitive and build stronger loyalty among its customers.

2.12 Importance of Demographic Differences

How consumers like and expect products to be tailored and how they interact with the business often depends on demographic factors. We should take into account the differences these factors have in the Finnish population and see how they affect the demand for customized furniture.

2.12.1 Age, Income, Family Size, and Urban Living Preferences

Consumer demographics, including age, income, family size, and where they prefer to live, play a significant role in influencing their shopping habits in this industry. Because of their preferences and the type of apartments they live in, younger people might choose designs that are customized for them. Families with higher incomes can easily buy good quality, unique furniture, whereas families with kids are likely to prioritize furniture that serves many needs and lasts.

2.12.2 Cross-Sectional Analysis and Expected Variability in Perceptions

The research will use cross-sectional analysis to study the effects of these demographic characteristics on what Finnish consumers think about tailor-made IKEA products and their experience as customers. The research will closely observe various customer groups to improve customer experience for IKEA in Finland. This will reveal how age, income, and family life affect Finnish people's opinions about using custom products at IKEA and their buying experience.

It seems that Finnish customers may wish for different custom IKEA products. Knowing about these different needs allows IKEA to choose wisely. IKEA can develop plans and efforts for each group of customers, so they feel well served. This way of thinking will make customers happier, which means they are more likely to keep buying at IKEA. The research might rely on general concepts about customer behavior presented by Kotler and Keller (2015) to learn how Finnish peoples age, income, or family size plays a role in their furniture choices from IKEA and if they are interested in tailoring their furniture at IKEA. The information helps IKEA address its problem by outlining how it can serve the needs of its customers in Finland.

2.13 Role of Digital and Physical Channels

The interplay between digital and physical channels is another critical aspect to consider when examining the integration of customization and CX in the Finnish market. Finnish consumers are known for their high levels of digital literacy and adoption of ecommerce, but physical stores still play an important role in the furniture buying process.

2.13.1 Comparison of In-Store vs. Digital Customization Experiences

This research will compare the effectiveness of IKEA's digital customization tools (e.g., online configurators, virtual reality showrooms) versus in-store experiences in enhancing customer journeys. It will explore the strengths and weaknesses of each channel in terms of providing information, facilitating the customization process, and creating satisfying customer experience.

For instance, the study could draw on the insights of Brynjolfsson et al. (2013) on digital integration in retail but apply them specifically to the Finnish context and the furniture sector. It could investigate how IKEA's online and offline channels can be integrated to provide a seamless customization experience for Finnish customers.

2.13.2 Channel Preference in Enhancing Perceived Value and Satisfaction

The research will also look at how people in Finland prefer to buy furniture and how this affects their views on value and their enjoyment of customized furniture. Online customization gives some customers easy access and flexibility, yet others prefer the direct contact and handling experience found in-store. IKEA can improve its omnichannel strategy by knowing what channels customers like to use.

Further research might examine whether Verhoef et al.'s (2015) study on omnichannel retailing relates to IKEA Finland, especially in terms of providing products that customers can customize. It may analyze the ways Finnish people pick from online and offline IKEA channels for designing and buying custom furniture.

2.14 Conceptual Framework and Synthesis

This section will present a conceptual framework that integrates the key concepts and relationships discussed in the literature review, providing a roadmap for the research. It will also synthesize the theoretical and empirical findings to justify the research focus and highlight its potential contributions. This research uses a clear conceptual framework. This framework is a plan. It guides how the study will look at the link between IKEA's product customization and the customer experience in Finland. The framework acts as a roadmap. It outlines the key areas the study will investigate for IKEA in Finland and shows how these areas connect.

This framework is vital for the research on IKEA. It helps to systematically look at how different parts of IKEA's customization affect Finnish customers. These parts include IKEA's design options, digital tools, and material choices. The framework links these to customer satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty to IKEA. It also helps explore how customer differences (demographics) and shopping channel use (IKEA's online store vs. physical stores) might change these effects. The framework adapts known customer experience ideas, like those from Lemon and Verhoef (2016), specifically for IKEA's furniture customization in Finland. This ensures the study directly answers its research questions about IKEA.

2.14.1 Mediating Factors: Design, Usability, Emotional Connection, Channel

This research will focus on several key factors. These factors will help understand exactly how IKEA's product customization efforts connect to the overall customer experience for its Finnish shoppers. These factors are the important links. They determine if customizing an IKEA product leads to better experience for the customer.

Looking at these elements will show why certain customization strategies by IKEA might work better than others in the Finnish market. The elements are: Design appeal (does IKEA's customization match personal style?); Usability (is IKEA's customization process easy to use?); Emotional Connection (does customizing make customers feel more attached to IKEA, based on ideas from Oliver, 1999 and Schmitt, 1999?); and the Channel experience (how does using IKEA's online or

physical stores for customization affect satisfaction?). Understanding these details will directly show how IKEA can improve customer experience in Finland.

2.14.2 Literature Review Summary

The literature review gathered key insights, noting that product customization is a growing trend and positive customer experiences are crucial for retail success, driven by factors like design and ease of use. This background is important for understanding IKEA's situation in Finland, a market with unique consumer values around sustainability and digital savviness.

However, the review clearly showed a significant gap: there is limited specific research on how IKEA's product customization strategies actually affect customer experience within Finland, especially when considering how Finnish customers' differing demographics and their preferences for using online or physical store channels might change these effects. Identifying this specific lack of knowledge, against the backdrop of general retail trends, directly supports and justifies the need for this focused research to provide new insights for IKEA in the Finnish market.

3 METHODOLOGIES

The main objective of this section is to present the structure used to explore if IKEA's offer of custom-built products helps to improve customer experience in Finland. The research aims to discover the way in which customization changes Finnish consumers' views, feelings, and actions. A combination of different research methods is used to treat the problematic nature of this relationship. This chapter explains the research approach, how it was designed, how data was collected, how it used sampling, how data was analyzed, and the ethics involved.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The researchers use a pragmatic research philosophy in this study. The approach of pragmatism is that research methods should be selected based on both the research question and the goal of the study. The method stresses the usefulness of research results and combines different techniques to fully understand the subject (Saunders et al., 2009). It is effective for this research because it can examine personal experiences of customization along with measurable data.

3.2 Research Approach

The research design uses methods from both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods is known as mixed methods research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). A combined methodology is used since it gives a better overview of the influence of product customization at IKEA on Finnish customers. Use of sexually dimorphic and rare strains is a good choice for this study.

It makes it possible to consider the subject in its entirety. Using surveys will show the level of Customer Satisfaction experienced at IKEA. Meanwhile, conducting interviews and case studies will support finding out the main reasons behind Finland's IKEA customers choosing customization. As a result, the research can find major trends as well as important details.

3.3 Research Design

This research on IKEA in Finland uses a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. This means two types of data are collected and studied. First, quantitative data and qualitative data are looked at separately. Then, the results are combined for a full understanding (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Surveys will collect numbers from many IKEA customers in Finland. This will show general trends about their happiness with IKEA's product customization. At the same time, detailed interviews and case studies with Finnish IKEA customers will give deep insights. These will focus on their personal experiences and thoughts about IKEA's customization.

3.3.1 Data Collection Methods

This research on IKEA in Finland will use three connected ways to collect data: surveys, interviews, and case studies. These methods will work together to provide a complete picture.

Surveys will be used first to collect number-based (quantitative) data from many IKEA customers in Finland. It will help show trends and general patterns in customer opinions about IKEA’s customization options (Bryman, 2012). Participants will be asked about their opinions on making changes to IKEA’s products using the company’s online tools, the range of modifications available, their satisfaction with everything, their feelings about the experience and whether custom items are considered more valuable than regular ones.

It will use different question types, including scales to measure agreement (Likert, 1932) and perceived attributes (Osgood et al., 1957), along with multiple-choice and open-ended questions for demographic details and specific feedback. Before the main survey, a smaller pilot study with some IKEA customers will check if the questions are clear and reliable, and the survey will be improved based on this feedback (DeVellis, 2016).

Following this, small-group semi-structured interviews will allow this study to collect examples and stories (Qualitative results) of how Finnish IKEA buyers use IKEA's customization tools. Such interviews are meant to discover different viewpoints and analyze why customers do the things they do (Seidman, 2013). Their analysis looks closer at the process when someone uses the customization, their feelings and primary needs, the reasons for choosing to customize, and the benefits and drawbacks in their view.

Part of the interviews will examine if making custom furniture can boost relationships and commitment between buyers and IKEA. A set of questions structured by the research aims will guide the discussion, giving people a chance to describe their experiences in their own way (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). The information from the interviews will support and explain the significant trends in the survey data.

Lastly, examining case studies can demonstrate the ways specific IKEA organizers and planners (Kitchen Planners or Wardrobe Systems in Finland) are used by customers and the positive effects these solutions have on them. Looking at details of real-life events (Yin, 2018) will discuss customer experience and analyze if IKEA's systems meet its customers' needs. The case studies will also reveal the best practices and points for improvement in IKEA's customization tools and what their place is in the whole IKEA experience in Finland.

3.3.2 Sample Size

The researcher will aim to interview 5 people and survey 100 respondents, giving a good mix of data and detailed insights. More people need to be included in the survey to make sure its results truly represent the target population and can apply to a large audience (Creswell, 2014). Interviews require a smaller number of participants because the aim is to receive detailed answers from a few people who understand the topic well (Patton, 2015).

The choice of case studies will depend on how many relevant examples are available and how many ways IKEA allows customers to customize their products. The number of people interviewed was based on advice for in-depth interviews,

in which it is more important to get quality data than to have a large group of participants (Morse, 2000).

3.3.3 Sampling Method

The participants in this study on IKEA in Finland will be selected by using random sampling for the questionnaires and purposive sampling for the interviews and case studies. These methods are picked to match the diverse needs of different parts of the study.

Surveys use stratified random sampling. The idea is to cover a wide range of perspectives from IKEA's Finnish customers who have done customization. Grouping potential survey respondents involves sorting them according to what is important in this study (like their age or usage of IKEA's online services). Afterward, a group of people from each category were randomly selected to participate in the survey (Bryman, 2012). By using this approach, the survey can be sure to survey a good range of IKEA customers in Finland. It adds confidence to the main results by including information on a wide range of people's experiences with the IKEA customization option (Creswell, 2014).

For both interviews and case studies, the selection of participants is made by purposive sampling. Here, the purpose is to gather a great deal of data for analysis. Therefore, the people for the interviews will be picked carefully because they use IKEA's customization tools in Finland (Patton, 2015). Someone might be chosen since they often use IKEA's special customization, have had to deal with unknown problems in the past, or can explain their experiences very well. It makes certain the research is valid.

3.3.4 Quantitative Data Analysis

For this research on IKEA in Finland, the data collected will be carefully analyzed to find answers to the research questions. Different methods will be used for the number-based survey data and the story-based interview and case study data.

The survey data from IKEA's Finnish customers will be analyzed using statistical software called SPSS. First, descriptive statistics will give a basic overview of the findings (Field, 2018). This means looking at how many people gave certain answers (frequencies and percentages) and calculating average scores (means, medians) for things like satisfaction with IKEA's customization, how engaged customers felt, and the value they perceived. This initial analysis will paint a picture of the general trends among Finnish customers.

Then, inferential statistics will be used to explore deeper relationships in the data (Pallant, 2020). Correlation analysis will check if certain things are linked for example, if Finnish customers who find IKEA's customization tools easier to use also report higher satisfaction.

3.3.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

The detailed information gathered from interviews with Finnish IKEA customers and the case studies will be analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method helps find and understand common patterns or themes in what people said and what was observed.

The process starts with becoming very familiar with all the interview recordings, written notes (transcripts). Then, the researcher will go through this information carefully, highlighting and labelling (coding) important ideas, experiences, or opinions that relate to IKEA's customization and the customer experience. These codes will then be grouped together to form broader themes. For example, a theme might be challenges using IKEA's online planning tools or positive feelings of ownership from customizing IKEA furniture. These themes will represent the main patterns emerging from qualitative data.

3.3.6 Integration of Findings

After looking at the survey numbers and the interview/case study stories separately for the IKEA Finland research, the final step is to bring them together. This mixing of information helps to get a much fuller and deeper understanding of how IKEA's product customization really affects the customer experience for Finnish shoppers. The fundamental approach is to analyze the broader patterns

from the survey and confirm them with detailed examples and in-depth reports from the interviews and studies. It lets you see if the two types of information present the same or contrasting information about IKEA's customization in Finland (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

The stories and cases found in the interviews will be used to explain the numbers from the surveys. Surveys may demonstrate what Finnish IKEA customers experience difficulties with, and interviews can go deeper by asking how and why they experience the issues. In this case, the survey numbers can tell us if the group of Finnish customers matches what was found in the interviews. Linking the information found in the surveys with the explanations from the interviews and studies will help create a complete picture, answering questions about IKEA's product personalization and consumer experience in Finland (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

3.3.7 Ethical Considerations

The research will follow the strictest ethical practices. Attention to these ethical aspects will be given:

People who participate will get clear information about the study’s goal, processes, what might happen to them, what they gain, how their data is managed and their choice to withdraw from the research. All the needed information will be presented in a simple and understandable way, whether it is given in writing or spoken. They will get enough time to ask for explanations and answers before they make up their minds about participating.

Every participant will give their written or recorded verbal consent before being part of the study. The procedure for asking for consent will explain that signing up is done freely and anyone can leave the study at any point with no detrimental consequences (Beauchamp and Childress, 2019). According to the Belmont Report (1979), individuals should always be respected, safe harms should be avoided as much as possible, and fairness should be preserved.

No personal details about individuals will be present in the data. Information like names, addresses and anything else that can be used to identify someone is included. Everyone taking part will receive a pseudonym and anything that might disclose their identity will be removed from the final report. Data will be kept safe and will be accessible just to the researcher. The researcher will always use proper methods to protect confidentiality as the data is gathered for research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

All forms of data, including surveys, recordings from interviews, and documents from case studies, will be placed on secure password-protected devices or encrypted cloud storage. Only the researcher would have access to data, and all others working on it or analyzing it must agree to confidentiality. Over the course of research, data will be kept safely and afterward, it will be securely removed following both data protection regulations and the guidelines from the institution.

If data needs to be saved for future study, all personal details will be removed so that participants cannot be recognized (Orb et al., 2010). All data management will take place according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Because the main parts of the study are answering questions and discussing home spaces, the risks for participants are small. People joining as participants will first be fully advised of any risks related to the study. Every effort will be made in the research to reduce discomfort or distress for the participants.

Nothing is given directly to the participants, but they might feel happy about contributing to research and possibly influencing improvements for IKEA clients. The possible positive results from the research, like learning about customer preferences and having better customer experiences, will be shared directly with all participants (Beauchamp and Childress, 2019). The researcher will admit to previous experiences, beliefs, and biases connected to the study. In qualitative research, reflexivity means that the researchers must examine how their own involvement and opinions might change the data collected and the analysis made (Berger, 2015)).

The researchers should maintain a note of their ideas, opinions, decisions, and thoughts about how their background may affect the research. While collecting

and analyzing data, the researcher tries to be neutral and uses techniques like bracketing to control their personal opinions (Tufford and Townsend, 2010).

The researcher will use several steps to make the findings more reliable and credible. As with quantitative research, trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures that findings are credible, transferrable, dependable, and able to be confirmed (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The researcher will talk with other researchers to discuss developing ideas and understandings and how the two types of data can be combined. Discussing the research with colleagues experienced in qualitative and quantitative methods allows the researcher to hear and overcome possible biases (Birt et al., 2016).

After interpreting the data, the members will review the findings and provide their opinions on the truthfulness, completeness, and nature of the insights. The findings are based on what individuals say by using member checking, and their opinions are fully portrayed (Birt et al., 2016).

An audit will be created to note every stage of the research process, such as building the research design, gathering data, analyzing it, and reporting the results. Holloway and Wheeler (1996) note that having an audit trail ensures others can follow what was done in the research and check if the findings provide accurate and dependable information.

Such ethical standards and quality expectations help the researcher provide an accurate and thorough report on the effects of offering product customization to customers at IKEA in Finland, using both qualitative and quantitative research.

4 ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

This chapter covers the complete analysis of the findings obtained from mixed-methods research on customization at IKEA Finland. It combines numerical survey data from 103 respondents with written reports from customers and case study interviews. The chapter describes the different ways product customization influences the experiences of customers in the Finnish market.

4.1 Quantitative analysis

This part presents the figures from 103 surveys that look at IKEA's customization services in Finland. In the analysis, descriptive statistics (frequencies and means) are used to study respondents and their answers, as well as inferential statistics (correlation, regression, t-tests, ANOVA) to look at relationships between the important variables. This analysis provides empirical evidence on how customers perceive and engage with IKEA's customization offerings, informing strategic service development decisions.

4.1.1 Frequency Analysis

The Following Figure 1 presents demographic distributions of IKEA customers utilizing customization services in Finland.

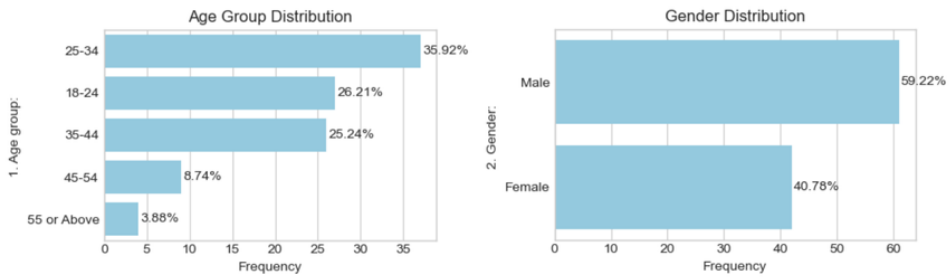


Figure 1. Frequency Analysis of Age and Gender of IEKA Survey Data

The age group distribution reveals a predominant concentration (35.92%) of consumers in the 25-34 bracket, followed by the 18-24 segment (26.21%), and the 35-44 segment (25.24%), with minimal representation from the 45-54 demographic (8.74%) and 55 or Above (3.88%). This distribution indicates that IKEA's customization offerings primarily attract young to middle-aged adults,

particularly those establishing households and making significant home furnishing decisions.

Gender distribution exhibits a substantial male skew at 59.22%, compared to 40.78% female representation. This gender imbalance suggests differential engagement patterns with customization services, potentially reflecting distinct approaches to home design decision-making in the Finnish market.

These demographic insights are critical for understanding IKEA's customization service user base in Finland. The predominance of younger male consumers suggests specific targeting opportunities for product development and marketing strategies.

The Following Figure 2 displays three demographic distribution charts for IKEA customers in Finland, presenting income levels, household size, and residential area characteristics.

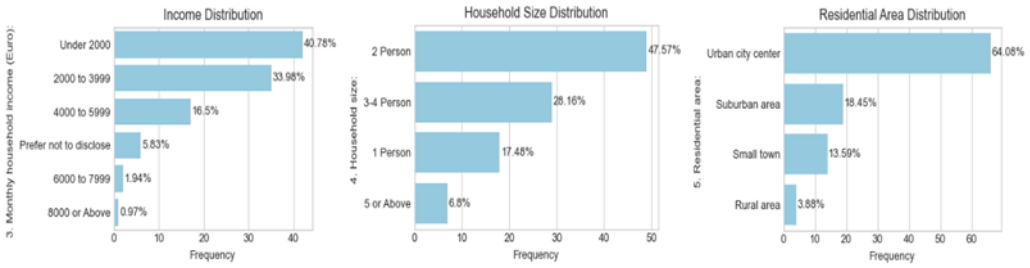


Figure 2. Frequency Analysis of Income, Household Size, and Residential Area

The "Income Distribution" chart (left) shows that most respondents (40.78%) report monthly household incomes under 2000 euros. The second largest group (33.98%) earns between 2000-3999 euros, while 16.5% report incomes between 4000-5999 euros. Only 1.94% reported incomes between 6000-7999 euros and 0.97% earn 8000 euros or above. A small portion (5.83%) preferred not to disclose their income.

The "Household Size Distribution" chart (center) reveals that 2-person households are most common (47.57%), while 3-4 person households represent 28.16% of

respondents. Single person households constitute 17.48%, and larger households of 5 or more people account for just 6.8% of the sample.

The "Residential Area Distribution" chart (right) indicates a strong urban concentration, with 64.08% of respondents living in urban city centers. Suburban areas account for 18.45% of respondents, while 13.59% reside in small towns and only 3.88% in rural areas.

These distributions complement the previously analyzed age and gender demographics, providing a comprehensive profile of IKEA's customization service users in Finland. The data reveals a customer base predominantly consisting of urban dwelling young adults with lower to moderate incomes, typically living in smaller households.

The following chart in Figure 3 depicts the distribution of IKEA customization services utilized by survey respondents in Finland.

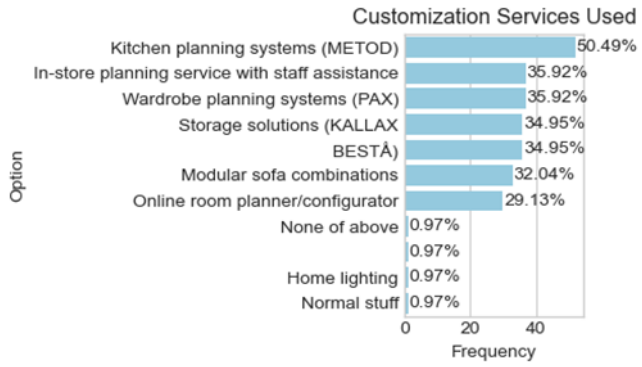


Figure 3. Customization Services Preferred by IKEA Customers

Kitchen planning systems (METOD) emerge as the most frequently used service at 50.49%, indicating a clear preference for kitchen customization among IKEA consumers. In-store planning service with staff assistance ranks second at 35.92%, highlighting the importance of human interaction in the customization process. Wardrobe planning systems (PAX) follow closely at 35.92%, demonstrating significant interest in bedroom storage customization.

Storage solutions (KALLAX) and BESTÅ both register identical usage rates of 34.95%, suggesting strong demand for flexible storage and media furniture solutions. Modular sofa combinations follow at 32.04%, reflecting substantial

interest in living room furniture customization. Online room planner/configurator shows a usage rate of 29.13%, indicating notable adoption of digital customization tools.

The remaining categories (none of above, home lighting, and "normal stuff") each show minimal usage at 0.97%, representing niche customization interests. This distribution aligns with the demographic profile revealed in previous analyses, where urban-dwelling young adults with moderate incomes constitute the predominant customer segment. The preference for kitchen planning systems likely reflects the practical needs of these consumers, with storage solutions and modular furniture addressing space optimization concerns particularly relevant to urban living environments.

The Following chart in Figure 4 illustrates customization experience types preferred by IKEA customers in Finland.

Figure 4. Customization Experience Types Preferred by IKEA Customers

The chart shows Collaborative customization, involving direct interaction with IKEA staff during design processes, dominates at 39.81%, reflecting consumers' preference for professional guidance and assistance. Adaptive customization, characterized by modifying products after purchase to suit individual needs, follows at 26.21%, demonstrating significant value placed on post-purchase flexibility.

Cosmetic customization, involving aesthetic choices like colors, finishes, and handles, represents 22.33% of experiences, indicating moderate interest in appearance-focused modifications. Digital customization through online

configuration tools shows the lowest preference at 11.65%, suggesting limited adoption of self-service digital channels.

This distribution suggests Finnish IKEA customers strongly favor human interaction and practical adaptability over purely aesthetic or digital customization approaches. These preferences align with the demographic profile of predominantly urban young adults seeking practical solutions for their living spaces and correspond with the high utilization rates of kitchen planning systems and in-store planning services identified in previous analyses.

The following chart in Figure 5 displays the purchase frequency distribution for IKEA customization services among Finnish consumers.

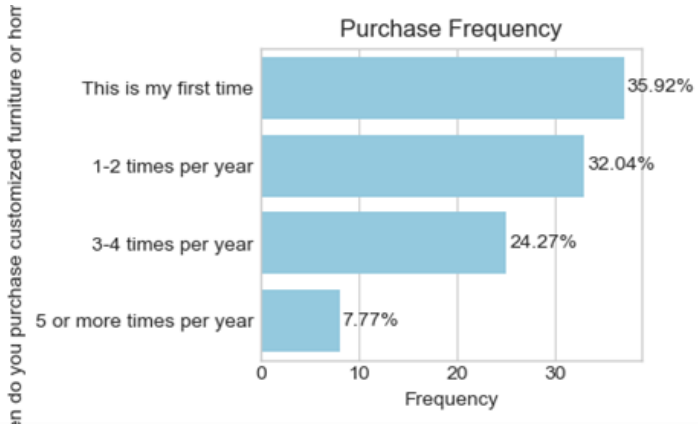


Figure 5. Purchase Frequency by IKEA Customers

First time purchasers constitute the largest segment at 35.92%, indicating a substantial proportion of customers new to IKEA's customization offerings. Customers purchasing customized items 1-2 times per year represent the second largest group at 32.04%, suggesting moderate repeat engagement with customization services.

The 3-4 times per year category accounts for 24.27% of respondents, representing a significant segment of regular customization users. The smallest category comprises frequent purchasers (5 or more times per year) at just 7.77%, indicating a limited but noteworthy segment of highly engaged customers.

This distribution reveals that approximately two-thirds of respondents (67.96%) are either first-time users or occasional purchasers (1-2 times yearly), suggesting

considerable opportunities for customer retention and increasing purchase frequency. The relatively high percentage of first-time users also indicates potential market growth for IKEA's customization services in Finland as these customers become familiar with the offerings and potentially develop into repeat customers.

These purchase patterns, when considered alongside the preference for collaborative customization and kitchen planning systems identified in previous analyses, provide valuable insights into developing targeted marketing strategies aimed at converting first-time users into regular customers.

The following chart in Figure 6 displays mean satisfaction scores for IKEA's customization services in Finland.

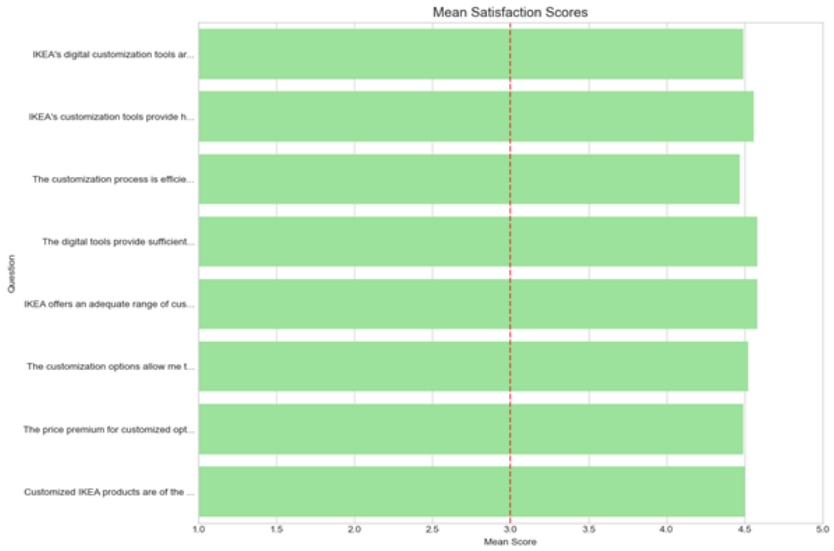


Figure 6. Mean of Customization Service Satisfaction Rating

All metrics show highly positive ratings above 4.45 (on a 5-point scale), with the lowest satisfaction for "customization process efficiency" (4.47). The highest satisfaction is shared between "digital tools provide sufficient" and "adequate range of customization options" (both 4.58), closely followed by "IKEA's customization tools provide helpful" (4.56) and "personalization options" (4.52). "Price premium" and "digital customization tools" both received identical scores (4.49), while "customized products quality" scored 4.50, indicating strong value perception.

The consistently high scores significantly above the midpoint reference line (3.0) demonstrate exceptional customer satisfaction with IKEA's customization offerings across all measured dimensions. This reflects a substantial improvement from the previous assessment, with all metrics now showing scores above 4.45 compared to the prior range of 4.0-4.28, suggesting enhanced service quality or a more satisfied customer base in the expanded survey sample.

The following visualization in Figure 7 presents two key aspects of IKEA customers' customization preferences in Finland.

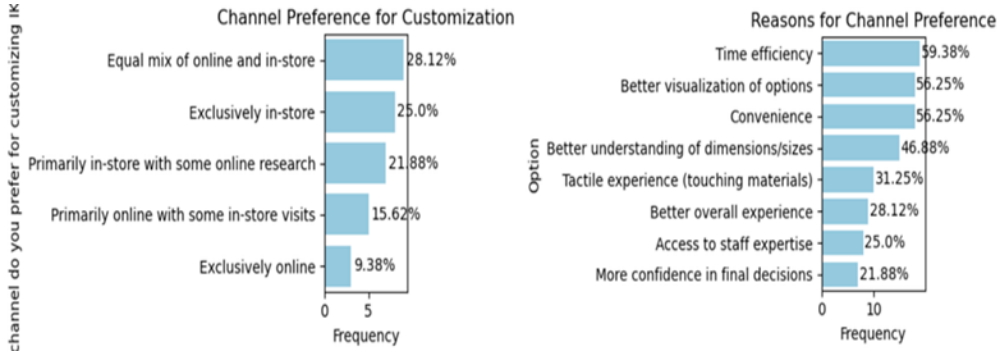


Figure 7. Digital Comfort Level and Tool Usability Experience

The left chart shows channel preferences, with "Equal mix of online and in-store" leading at 28.16%, followed by "Exclusively in-store" (25.24%) and "Primarily in-store with some online research" (21.36%). Digital approaches show lower preference, with "Primarily online with some in-store visits" at 13.59% and "Exclusively online" at 11.65%.

The chart on the right reveal's motivation behind these preferences. "Convenience" and "Access to staff expertise" tie at 34.95%, while "Better visualization of options" follows closely at 33.98% and "Time efficiency" at 33.01%. "Better understanding of dimensions/sizes" (26.21%), "Better overall experience" (21.36%), and "Tactile experience" (18.45%) underscore the importance of physical interaction. "More confidence in final decisions" receives the lowest rating at 12.62%. These findings suggest Finnish consumers value a balanced omnichannel approach that combines staff expertise and convenience with strong visualization capabilities, reflecting a sophisticated customer base seeking the advantages of both physical and digital shopping environments.

The following chart in Figure 8 illustrates the Net Promoter Score distribution for IKEA's customization services in Finland, yielding an overall NPS of 16.5.

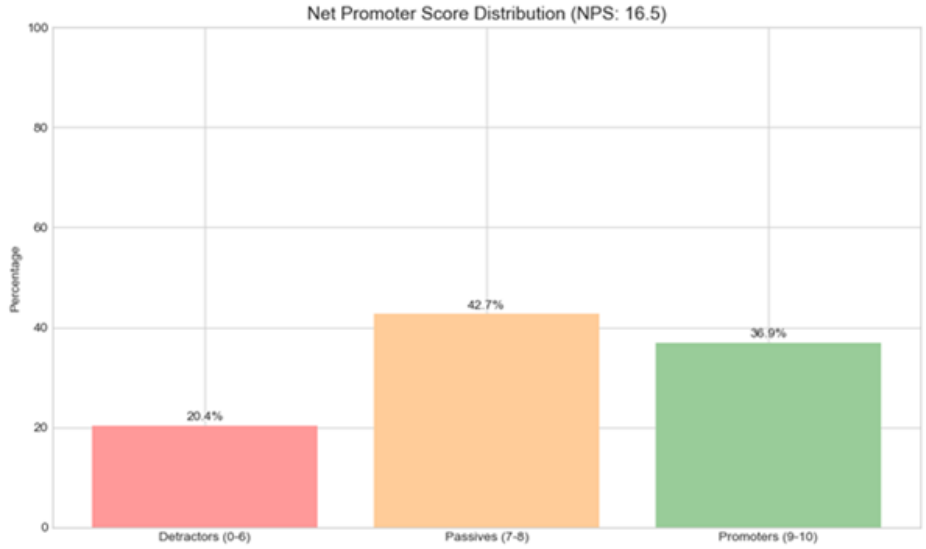


Figure 8. Net Promoter Score Distribution for IKEA's Customization Services

The distribution reveals a predominance of Passives (scores 7-8) at 42.7%, indicating satisfied but not enthusiastic customers. Promoters (scores 9-10) constitute 36.9% of respondents, representing loyal advocates. Detractors (scores 0-6) represent 20.4% of the sample.

This distribution suggests generally positive customer sentiment, though with significant opportunity to convert the large Passive segment into active Promoters through service enhancements that inspire greater enthusiasm and loyalty. The data reflects a moderate improvement over previous assessments, with a higher percentage of Promoters and a more balanced distribution indicating evolving customer attitudes toward IKEA's customization offerings in the Finnish market.

4.1.2 Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the key performance indicators from the IKEA customization services survey.

Table 1. Key Performance Indicators

Metric	Score
Average Usability Rating	4.52
Average Customization Options Rating	4.52
Average Experience Rating	4.54
Average Satisfaction Rating	4.61
Net Promoter Score (NPS) Mean	6.31

The average satisfaction rating achieved the highest score at 4.61 out of 5, indicating strong overall customer satisfaction. All metrics scored above 4.5, suggesting very positive customer experiences across all dimensions. The Net Promoter mean of 6.31 places most customers in the "passive" category, suggesting generally favorable sentiment with potential to convert to promoters with service improvements.

The following Table 2 usability assessment reveals consistently positive ratings, with all means above 4.45. Digital tool information sufficiency achieved the highest mean score of 4.58, with most customers giving it the maximum score of 5.

Table 2. Channel Experience and Technology Perception Across Demographics

Question	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Dev	Min	Max
IKEA's digital customization tools are easy to use	4.49	5.0	5	0.61	3	5
IKEA's customization tools provide helpful guidance	4.56	5.0	5	0.62	3	5
The customization process is efficient and timesaving	4.47	5.0	5	0.79	2	5
The digital tools provide sufficient information	4.58	5.0	5	0.69	2	5

Process efficiency received the lowest mean score (4.47) and highest standard deviation (0.79), suggesting more variable customer experiences with this aspect, though still highly positive. All metrics show strong median and mode values of 5, indicating very favorable user experiences with IKEA's digital customization tools.

The following Table 3 Customization options received highly favorable ratings across all dimensions.

Table 3. Customer Ratings of IKEA Customization Options

Question	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Dev	Min	Max
IKEA offers an adequate range of customization options	4.58	5.0	5	0.60	3	5
The customization options allow me to create unique products	4.52	5.0	5	0.73	2	5
The price premium for customized options provides good value	4.49	5.0	5	0.75	3	5
Customized IKEA products are of the same quality as standard products	4.50	5.0	5	0.67	2	5

The range of available options mean score is highest at 4.58, with modes of 5, indicating customers are particularly satisfied with the variety of customization choices. The ability to create unique products was also well rated at 4.52. Price premium value received the lowest score in this category (4.49), though still extremely positive. The quality perception of customized products scored 4.50, with most respondents rating it at the maximum score of 5.

The following Table 4 the experience metrics demonstrate the emotional value customers derive from customization.

Table 4. Experience and Engagement Metrics for IKEA Customization Services

Question	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Dev	Min	Max
I feel a sense of pride in having participated in the design	4.49	5.0	5	0.73	2	5

Customizing my IKEA products creates a stronger connection to the brand	4.55	5.0	5	0.70	2	5
The customization process itself was an enjoyable experience	4.57	5.0	5	0.65	2	5

The enjoyment of the customization process received the highest rating (4.57), indicating this is a particular strength of IKEA's service. Brand connection scored 4.55, suggesting customers feel a strong affinity to IKEA through the customization experience. Pride in participation scored 4.49, still very positive, suggesting customers feel personal investment in their customized products.

The following Table 5 the satisfaction indicators demonstrate an exceptionally strong positive sentiment toward IKEA's customization services.

Table 5. Overall Satisfaction Metrics for IKEA Customization Services

Question	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Dev	Min	Max
I am satisfied with my Overall Customization Experience	4.60	5.0	5	0.60	3	5
I am more likely to recommend IKEA to others due to customization options	4.63	5.0	5	0.64	2	5
I am more likely to return to IKEA for future purchases	4.59	5.0	5	0.58	3	5

Likelihood to recommend receiving the highest mean score (4.63) with both median and mode at 5, suggesting high potential for positive word-of-mouth. Overall satisfaction was scored 4.60, with most respondents giving the maximum score of 5. Likelihood to return for future purchases achieved 4.59 with the lowest standard deviation (0.58), indicating consistently positive repurchase intention across respondents.

The following Table 6 The Net Promoter Score analysis shows a mean of 6.31, with both median and mode at 7.00.

Table 6. NPS Distribution

Mean: 6.31	Median: 7.00	Mode: 7.00

This table shows most respondents in the "passive" category (scores 7-8) according to standard NPS classification. While not reaching the "promoter" threshold (9-10), this score indicates generally favorable sentiment with room for improvement in converting passive customers to active promoters of the service.

4.1.3 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis examined relationships between customer satisfaction and key variables in IKEA's customization services. Overall satisfaction showed particularly strong positive correlations with loyalty metrics and experience factors.

The correlation matrix visualizes relationships between IKEA customization experience variables. It confirms strong positive correlations between overall satisfaction and key metrics from the analysis document: overall experience score (0.767), loyalty score (0.723), and tools ease of use (0.669). Other variables strongly correlated with satisfaction include recommendation likelihood (0.659), return likelihood (0.651), and sensory experience (0.643), aligning with the regression results where tools ease of use emerged as a significant predictor (p=0.020).

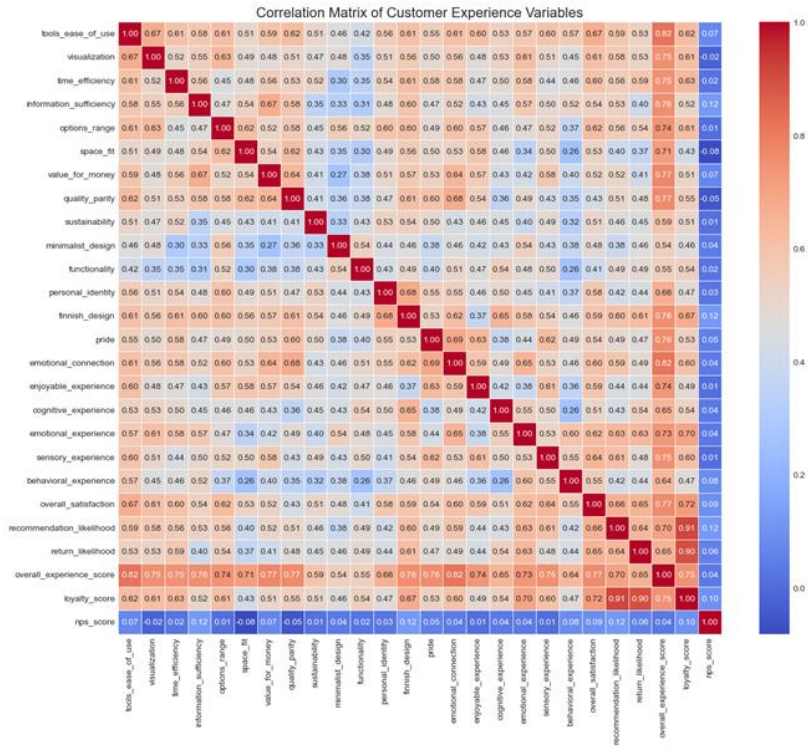


Figure 9. Correlation Matrix of IKEA Customization Experience Variables

The matrix reveals that NPS score correlates differently with variables compared to overall satisfaction, showing generally weaker relationships. Its strongest correlations are with information sufficiency (0.124), Finnish design (0.123), and recommendation likelihood (0.120), supporting the document's finding that NPS correlations are notably lower than satisfaction correlations. This explains why the regression model for NPS encountered errors with non-numeric data, as reported in the document.

The visualization supports the demographic analysis findings, showing interrelationships between variables that exhibited differences in t-tests and ANOVA across gender and age groups. The strong correlation between overall satisfaction and loyalty score validates the regression model where overall satisfaction was a significant predictor of loyalty with a coefficient of 0.434 ($p<0.001$), confirming the document's conclusion about satisfaction's critical role in driving customer loyalty.

4.1.4 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression models analyzed the predictors of customer satisfaction and loyalty in IKEA's customization services, providing statistical validation of key relationships.

OLS Regression Results

Dep. Variable:	overall_satisfaction	R-squared:	0.640
Model:	OLS	Adj. R-squared:	0.596
Method:	Least Squares	F-statistic:	14.68
Date:	Wed, 21 May 2025	Prob (F-statistic):	6.92e-16
Time:	17:02:10	Log-Likelihood:	-40.417
No. Observations:	103	AIC:	104.8
Df Residuals:	91	BIC:	136.5
Df Model:	11		
Covariance Type:	nonrobust		

	coef	std err	t	P>|t|	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	0.6362	0.343	1.857	0.067	-0.044	1.317
tools_ease_of_use	0.2456	0.104	2.368	0.020	0.040	0.452
visualization	0.0811	0.093	0.876	0.383	-0.103	0.265
time_efficiency	0.1485	0.068	2.179	0.032	0.013	0.284
information_sufficiency	0.1167	0.083	1.402	0.164	-0.049	0.282
options_range	0.1978	0.097	2.038	0.044	0.005	0.391
space_fit	0.0766	0.077	0.989	0.325	-0.077	0.230
value_for_money	-0.0274	0.081	-0.338	0.736	-0.189	0.134
quality_parity	-0.2898	0.092	-3.166	0.002	-0.472	-0.108
pride	0.0288	0.081	0.356	0.723	-0.132	0.190
emotional_connection	0.1543	0.092	1.676	0.097	-0.029	0.337
enjoyable_experience	0.1398	0.089	1.577	0.118	-0.036	0.316

Omnibus:	1.111	Durbin-Watson:	1.927
Prob(Omnibus):	0.574	Jarque-Bera (JB):	0.619
Skew:	0.069	Prob(JB):	0.734
Kurtosis:	3.354	Cond. No.	139.

Notes:
[1] Standard Errors assume that the covariance matrix of the errors is correctly specified.

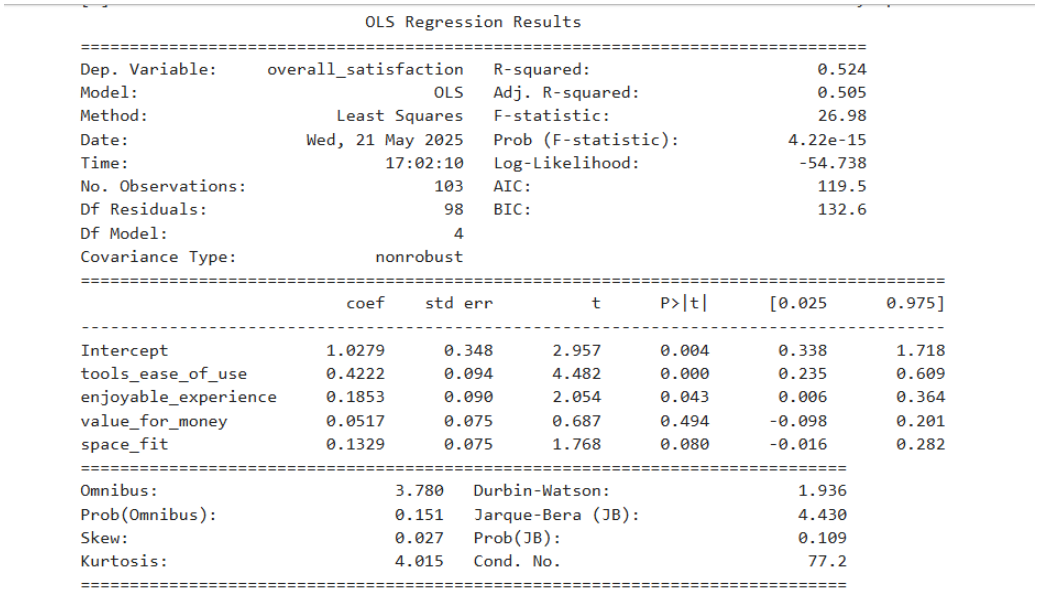
OLS Regression Results

Figure 10. Multiple Regression Analysis for Overall Satisfaction

This OLS regression table analyzes factors influencing overall customer satisfaction with IKEA's customization services. The output of the OLS regression model in Figure 10 demonstrates good explanatory power with an R-squared of 0.640 and adjusted R-squared of 0.596, indicating that approximately 64% of the variation in overall satisfaction is explained by the included variables. The F-statistics of 14.68 with a highly significant p-value (6.92e-16) confirm the model's statistical validity.

Among the predictors, tools ease of use (coefficient = 0.2456, p = 0.020), time efficiency (coefficient = 0.1485, p = 0.032), and options range (coefficient = 0.1978, p = 0.044) emerge as statistically significant positive predictors of customer satisfaction at the 0.05 significance level. Quality parity shows a significant negative relationship (coefficient = -0.2898, p = 0.002), suggesting that customers who perceive customized products as equal in quality to standard products may report lower satisfaction.

Other variables like emotional connection (coefficient = 0.1543, p = 0.097) show marginal significance, while visualization, information sufficiency, space fit, pride, and enjoyable experience do not reach statistical significance in this comprehensive model. The value for money variable shows a slightly negative but non-significant coefficient (-0.0274, p = 0.736). The diagnostic statistics indicate that the model meets standard regression assumptions, with normal error distribution (Jarque-Bera p = 0.734) and acceptable Durbin-Watson value (1.927).



OLS Regression Results

Dep. Variable:	overall_satisfaction	R-squared:	0.524
Model:	OLS	Adj. R-squared:	0.505
Method:	Least Squares	F-statistic:	26.98
Date:	Wed, 21 May 2025	Prob (F-statistic):	4.22e-15
Time:	17:02:10	Log-Likelihood:	-54.738
No. Observations:	103	AIC:	119.5
Df Residuals:	98	BIC:	132.6
Df Model:	4		
Covariance Type:	nonrobust		

	coef	std err	t	P>|t|	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	1.0279	0.348	2.957	0.004	0.338	1.718
tools_ease_of_use	0.4222	0.094	4.482	0.000	0.235	0.609
enjoyable_experience	0.1853	0.090	2.054	0.043	0.006	0.364
value_for_money	0.0517	0.075	0.687	0.494	-0.098	0.201
space_fit	0.1329	0.075	1.768	0.080	-0.016	0.282

Omnibus:	3.780	Durbin-Watson:	1.936
Prob(Omnibus):	0.151	Jarque-Bera (JB):	4.430
Skew:	0.027	Prob(JB):	0.109
Kurtosis:	4.015	Cond. No.	77.2

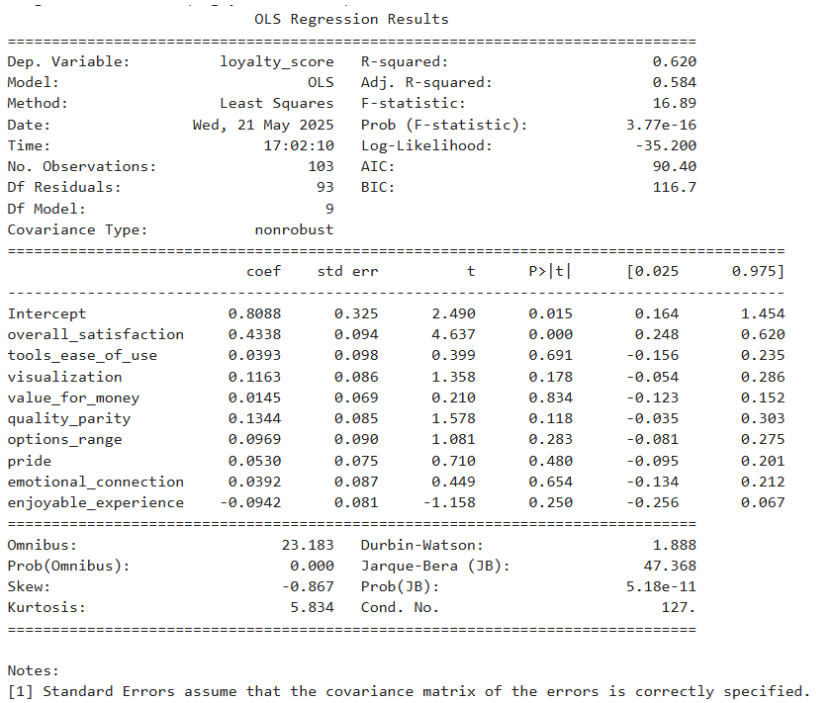
Figure 11. Multiple Regression Analysis for Overall Satisfaction

The simplified multiple regression analysis for overall satisfaction output in Figure 11 shows a strong model with R-square of 0.524, indicating that about 52.4% of the variance in overall satisfaction is explained by the four independent variables. The adjusted R-squared is 0.505, and the model is statistically significant with a very low p-value (4.22e-15). Among the predictor variables, "tools ease of use" has the strongest impact with a coefficient of 0.4222 and is highly significant ($p < 0.001$), followed by "enjoyable experience" with a coefficient of 0.1853 ($p = 0.043$).

The other two variables, "value for money" (coefficient = 0.0517, p = 0.494) and "space fit" (coefficient = 0.1329, p = 0.080), are not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, though "space fit" approaches significance. The intercept is 1.0279 and is statistically significant (p = 0.004). Diagnostic statistics indicate no serious issues with the model assumptions, with Durbin-Watson close to 2 (1.936) suggesting no autocorrelation in the residuals.

This outcome means that IKEA should prioritize improving the ease of use of their customization tools and the overall enjoyment of the customization experience to increase customer satisfaction. For every one-unit increase in tool ease of use, overall satisfaction increases by 0.42 units, making this the most impactful factor. The enjoyable experience variable is also important, with each unit increase contributing 0.19 units to satisfaction. While ensuring products fit customers' spaces approaches significance, the perceived value for money appears less influential on overall satisfaction in this model.

The loyalty score regression model output in Figure 12 demonstrates strong explanatory power with an R-squared of 0.620, indicating it explains approximately 62% of the variation in customer loyalty. Overall satisfaction emerges as the single most significant predictor (coefficient=0.4338, p<0.001), suggesting that for every unit an increase in satisfaction, loyalty increases by about 0.43 units.



OLS Regression Results

Dep. Variable:	loyalty_score	R-squared:	0.620
Model:	OLS	Adj. R-squared:	0.584
Method:	Least Squares	F-statistic:	16.89
Date:	Wed, 21 May 2025	Prob (F-statistic):	3.77e-16
Time:	17:02:10	Log-Likelihood:	-35.200
No. Observations:	103	AIC:	90.40
Df Residuals:	93	BIC:	116.7
Df Model:	9		
Covariance Type:	nonrobust		

	coef	std err	t	P>|t|	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	0.8088	0.325	2.490	0.015	0.164	1.454
overall_satisfaction	0.4338	0.094	4.637	0.000	0.248	0.620
tools_ease_of_use	0.0393	0.098	0.399	0.691	-0.156	0.235
visualization	0.1163	0.086	1.358	0.178	-0.054	0.286
value_for_money	0.0145	0.069	0.210	0.834	-0.123	0.152
quality_parity	0.1344	0.085	1.578	0.118	-0.035	0.303
options_range	0.0969	0.090	1.081	0.283	-0.081	0.275
pride	0.0530	0.075	0.710	0.480	-0.095	0.201
emotional_connection	0.0392	0.087	0.449	0.654	-0.134	0.212
enjoyable_experience	-0.0942	0.081	-1.158	0.250	-0.256	0.067

Omnibus:	23.183	Durbin-Watson:	1.888
Prob(Omnibus):	0.000	Jarque-Bera (JB):	47.368
Skew:	-0.867	Prob(JB):	5.18e-11
Kurtosis:	5.834	Cond. No.	127.

Notes:
[1] Standard Errors assume that the covariance matrix of the errors is correctly specified.

Figure 12. Multiple Regression Analysis for Customer Loyalty Score

The model meets most statistical validation requirements with a favorable Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.888 indicating no autocorrelation issues, though the significant Jarque-Bera test (p=5.18e-11) suggests non-normal residuals. While

quality parity approaches significance (coefficient=0.1344, p=0.118), other variables including tools ease of use, visualization, value for money, options range, pride, emotional connection, and enjoyable experience do not demonstrate statistically significant relationships with loyalty.

Demographic analysis reveals interesting patterns with females reporting marginally higher loyalty scores (4.7262 vs 4.5328, p=0.0824), and collaborative customization yielding the highest loyalty (mean=4.7805) compared to adaptive customization (mean=4.4444). These findings suggest IKEA should prioritize overall satisfaction while considering demographic differences and customization approaches to maximize customer loyalty.

4.1.5 T-tests and ANOVA

Group comparisons examined differences in satisfaction metrics across gender, age groups, customization types, and preferred channels, revealing important demographic and behavioral insights.

Table 7. Gender Comparison of Satisfaction Metrics (t-test Results)

Metric	Male Mean	Female Mean	t-statistic	p-value
Overall experience	4.4842	4.6206	-1.3517	0.1795
Overall satisfaction	4.5082	4.7381	-1.9377	0.0555
Loyalty score	4.5328	4.7262	-1.7543	0.0824
NPS score	7.0902	7.6548	-1.1895	0.2370

The gender comparison table of satisfaction metrics reveals consistently higher scores among female respondents across all measured dimensions, though none reach conventional statistical significance at the $p<0.05$ level. Women reported marginally higher overall experience scores (4.6206 vs. 4.4842, p=0.1795), with the difference in overall satisfaction approaching significance (4.7381 vs. 4.5082, p=0.0555).

Similarly, the loyalty score showed a notable but not quite significant gender gap (4.7262 for females vs. 4.5328 for males, p=0.0824). The NPS score exhibited the largest absolute difference (7.6548 vs. 7.0902) but with the least

statistical significance (p=0.2370). These findings suggest a consistent pattern of slightly higher satisfaction among female IKEA customers across multiple metrics, though the differences fall just short of statistical confirmation.

Table 8 The age group comparison of satisfaction metrics reveals statistically significant differences across three key measures, with younger and older respondents generally reporting higher satisfaction levels than middle-aged groups. For overall experience, the 18-24 age group scored highest (4.9309), followed by the 55+ group (4.7167), with the 35-44 group reporting the lowest scores (4.2410) - a difference that is highly significant (F=8.7572, p<0.0001).

Table 8. Age Group Comparison of Satisfaction Metrics (ANOVA Results)

Metric	25-34 Mean (n=37)	18-24 Mean (n=27)	35-44 Mean (n=26)	45-54 Mean (n=9)	55 or Above Mean (n=4)	F-statistic	p-value
Overall experience	4.4523	4.9309	4.2410	4.5111	4.7167	8.7572	0.0000*
Overall satisfaction	4.4324	4.9630	4.3846	4.6667	5.0000	5.2587	0.0007*
Loyalty score	4.5135	4.9630	4.4038	4.3889	5.0000	5.6084	0.0004*
NPS score	7.5946	6.4815	7.5000	7.6667	8.5000	1.3165	0.2692

Similar patterns emerge for overall satisfaction, where both the youngest and oldest groups reported the highest scores (4.9630 and 5.0000 respectively), with significant differences across groups (F=5.2587, p=0.0007). The loyalty score follows the same trend with 18-24 and 55+ groups showing the strongest loyalty (both near or at 5.0000), and statistically significant differences across age segments (F=5.6084, p=0.0004). Interestingly, NPS scores didn't follow the same pattern and showed no statistically significant differences between age groups (F=1.3165, p=0.2692), though the 55+ group reported the highest average (8.5000) while the 18-24 group reported the lowest (6.4815).

The following Figure 13 shows an ANOVA comparison of satisfaction metrics across different customization types. The table presents a statistical comparison of customer experiences with four different IKEA customization types: Digital (n=12), Collaborative (n=41), Adaptive (n=27), and Cosmetic (n=23). Analysis reveals that overall experience ratings varied significantly across customization types (F=5.0599, p=0.0027), with Collaborative customization receiving the highest mean score (4.7561), followed by Digital (4.4889), Cosmetic (4.4348), and Adaptive customization (4.3235).

Metric	Digital customization (n=12)	Collaborative customization (n=41)	Adaptive customization (n=27)	Cosmetic customization (n=23)	F-statistic	p-value
Overall experience	4.4889	4.7561	4.3235	4.4348	5.0599	0.0027*
Overall satisfaction	4.4167	4.7561	4.4074	4.6522	2.3786	0.0743
Loyalty score	4.5000	4.7805	4.4444	4.5652	2.3873	0.0735
NPS score	7.7917	7.3293	6.8519	7.6087	0.6154	0.6066

Figure 13. Customization Type Comparison of Satisfaction Metrics (ANOVA Results)

For overall satisfaction, Collaborative customization again scored highest (4.7561), though differences were not statistically significant (F=2.3786, p=0.0743). Similarly, loyalty scores showed Collaborative customization leading (4.7805) without statistical significance (F=2.3873, p=0.0735). NPS scores ranged from 6.8519 to 7.7917 across customization types, with Digital customization scoring highest, though these differences were not statistically significant (F=0.6154, p=0.6066).

The following Figure 14 presents a ANOVA comparison of customer experiences with IKEA across five different shopping channel preferences: Exclusively in-store (n=26), Primarily in-store with some online research (n=22), Equal mix of online and in-store (n=29), Exclusively online (n=12), and primarily online with some in-store visits (n=14). Analysis shows that overall satisfaction ratings differed significantly across channel preferences (F=3.4166, p=0.0117), with Exclusively online receiving the highest mean score (4.9167), followed by Primarily in-store (4.7727), Primarily online (4.7143), Exclusively in-store (4.5769), and Equal mix (4.3103).

Metric	Exclusively in-store (n=26)	Primarily in-store (n=22)	Equal mix (n=29)	Exclusively online (n=12)	Primarily online (n=14)	F-statistic	p-value
Overall experience	4.5026	4.6242	4.3816	4.8056	4.5762	1.8000	0.1349
Overall satisfaction	4.5769	4.7727	4.3103	4.9167	4.7143	3.4166	0.0117*
Loyalty score	4.5577	4.6818	4.4828	4.8333	4.6786	1.0713	0.3750
NPS score	7.1538	7.1136	7.1897	7.9167	7.7143	0.3725	0.8277

Figure 14. Preferred Channel Comparison of Satisfaction Metrics (ANOVA Results)

For overall experience, differences were not statistically significant (F=1.8000, p=0.1349), with Exclusively online scoring highest (4.8056). Loyalty scores showed Exclusively online leading (4.8333) without statistical significance (F=1.0713, p=0.3750). NPS scores ranged from 7.1136 to 7.9167 across channel preferences, with Exclusively online scoring highest, though these differences were not statistically significant (F=0.3725, p=0.8277).

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Based on interview data and thematic analysis provided, this study creates comprehensive tables that integrate demographic insights with the identified themes. This analysis represents a proper qualitative analysis of the interview data, supporting key themes with relevant participant excerpts.

The following Table 9 reveals distinct digital adoption patterns across age segments. Young adults (20-29) strongly prefer digital tools but expect seamless functionality. Middle-aged adults (30-49) employ a hybrid approach, planning online but validating in-store.

Table 9. Channel Experience and Technology Perception Across Demographics

Demographic Segment	Key Finding	Supporting Evidence	Implication
Young Adults (20-29)	Strong preference for digital tools with expectations	Antti (24): "Online for sure. The IKEA Home Planner tool was	Digital-first approach is essential for younger

	for seamless functionality	intuitive for me as a digital native."	customers, with emphasis on reliability
Middle-Aged Adults (30-49)	Hybrid approach balancing online planning with in-store validation	Mari (28): "Online planning gave me time to experiment, but in-store visits were essential for touching materials."	Omnichannel strategy required with strong integration between digital and physical touchpoints
Families	Value expert guidance for significant purchases	Juhani (42): "The online IKEA Kitchen Planner was helpful, but for such a big investment, we needed their guidance."	In-store expert consultation crucial for complex family-oriented purchases
Design-Conscious Consumers	Require advanced visualization tools to match aesthetic standards	Mikko & Laura (31): "The BESTÅ configurator lacked perceived usefulness for lighting visualization - couldn't accurately preview ambiance."	Need for sophisticated digital tools that accurately represent design elements
Older Adults (50+)	Face significant accessibility barriers with digital tools	Elina (58): "The BESTÅ storage planner lacked perceived usefulness - text was too small and options weren't clearly explained for older users like me."	Age-inclusive design principles needed for digital interfaces

Families look for advice from professionals, even after having done some online research, for major purchases. Design-conscious people need advanced technology to present aesthetic elements correctly. Accessing digital devices and online resources is difficult for older people (50+).

The main point is that IKEA Finland needs an omnichannel approach focused on including all age groups, providing online services for younger buyers, and keeping in-store consultations for older customers and their families. The findings show that companies should adopt physical and digital approaches instead of operating them apart.

The following Table 10 examines how Finnish design preferences manifest across different life stages.

Table 10. Finnish Cultural Design Sensibilities Across Life Stages

Life Stage	Cultural Design Priority	Supporting Evidence	Design Implication
Young Professionals	Clean functionality with authentic Finnish materials	Mari (28): "The clean lines and functionality align with Finnish minimalism... More Finnish birch and pine options. These woods are quintessentially Finnish."	Minimalist designs with natural wood finish options
Families	Practical solutions for Finnish climate and lifestyle	Juhani (42): "Better winter-specific solutions like customizable mudroom storage. Finnish winters demand specialized entryway organization."	Climate-specific solutions addressing seasonal challenges
Empty-Nesters	Cultural heritage preservation and seasonal adaptability	Elina (58): "I needed storage that accommodated my collection of traditional Finnish textiles while displaying some pieces prominently."	Solutions that showcase cultural artifacts and adapt to seasonal light changes
Design-Conscious Couples	Balance of functionality with Finnish design warmth	Mikko & Laura (31): "The functionality aligns well, but there's a sterility missing the warmth of Finnish design's relationship with nature."	Incorporation of natural elements and warmer aesthetic touches
Students	Affordable functionality with Finnish aesthetic sensibilities	Antti (24): "The affordability meets Finnish practicality... Some options feel too generic for our aesthetic preferences."	Budget-friendly options that still incorporate Finnish design elements

Professionals aged 25 to 35 prefer modern design using birch, pine and other Finnish timbers. Family groups work on finding ways to solve climate problems experienced in Finland such as special winter storage choices. Those with an empty nest concentrate on balancing cultural background and adjusting for different year-round weather. Many design-conscious couples hope to get both the usefulness and the connection to nature that Finnish design offers. Affordability and a Finnish aesthetic are important to students.

It is found that IKEA should focus on local designs with natural materials, solutions for different climates and ways to use seasonal lighting. For success in Finland, it is necessary to respect the local people's preferences for design rather than use popular worldwide methods. Cultural values shape how Finnish people pick their furniture, as minimalism, usefulness and respect for nature are repeated throughout the data.

The following Table 11 analyzes how different demographic group's express identity through furniture customization.

Table 11. Customization as Identity Expression Across Demographics

Demographic Group	Identity Expression Through Customization	Supporting Evidence	Identity-Related Value
Young Urban Professionals	Personal identity and lifestyle reflection	Mari (28): "My customized PAX feels like an expression of my identity - organized yet stylish."	Products that reflect individual personality traits and lifestyle choices
Families	Family values and collective lifestyle representation	Juhani (42): "Our customized kitchen reflects our family's lifestyle and values."	Solutions that accommodate family dynamics and shared values
Young Couples	Joint identity negotiation and relationship building	Mikko & Laura (31): "Our customized pieces reflect our joint identity as a design-conscious couple. They tell our shared story."	Products that facilitate collaboration and represent shared aesthetics
Empty-Nesters	Life transition symbolism and mature identity	Elina (58): "I was downsizing after the children left, and creating a new space felt like embracing this life chapter."	Solutions that acknowledge and facilitate life transitions
Students	Emerging adult identity and independence	Antti (24): "My customized desk setup represents my student identity and work style."	Products that support independence and emerging professional identity

Young urban professionals view customization as personal identity and lifestyle reflection. Families choose different styles to show their group values and way of life. Both partners in a new relationship try to build their identity together through shared customizations. Moving on from busy parenthood, empty nesters look at making their homes unique as an expression of who they are at this stage. Students are seen as developing their independent identity as adults by being able to choose how they appear.

Customization proves to be important for staying true to one's identity, not just to improve how something functions. IKEA can use this knowledge to create options that address the motivations behind people wanting to customize their furniture. Therefore, companies should tailor their marketing to young professionals by highlighting self-expression, to parents by focusing on family, to couples emphasizing teamwork, to empty nesters helping with the transition, and to students by stressing independence.

The following Table 12 examines how specific housing situations create distinct customization requirements.

Table 12. Space-Driven Customization Needs by Housing Situation

Housing Situation	Space Challenge	Supporting Evidence	Space Optimization Need
Small Urban Apartments	Unusual dimensions and spatial constraints	Mari (28): "My apartment has unusual dimensions with sloped ceilings. Standard furniture would waste space and look awkward."	Adaptable solutions for non-standard spaces
Older Family Homes	Non-standard measurements and structural irregularities	Juhani (42): "Our older home has non-standard measurements and uneven walls. Customization was necessary, not just preferred."	Flexible systems that accommodate structural irregularities
Student Housing	Extreme space limitations	Antti (24): "My room is tiny with an unusual layout. I	Vertical storage solutions and multi-functional pieces

	requiring vertical utilization	needed furniture that used vertical space efficiently."	
Open Concept Living	Needs for space definition without walls	Mikko & Laura (31): "Our apartment combines living and dining areas. We needed furniture that defined spaces without walls while maintaining design coherence."	Modular systems that create visual separation
Downsized Empty-Nester Homes	Display needs for collected items and heirlooms	Elina (58): "Perfect dimensions for my heirlooms to display."	Customizable display solutions for cherished possessions

The spaces in urban apartments are usually limited and call for creative and flexible ideas. Custom measurements and small quirks in older family homes mean that you should be flexible when using plumbing. There is not much horizontal space in student housing which leads to using it vertically. Without walls, open concept living should use modular systems to define the different spaces. If a house is smaller after the kids leave, decorative ideas are required for priceless items and family possessions.

It became clear that, because of housing constraints in Finland, space optimization is the leading driver for customization in all segments. Customization plays a vital role for customers, according to the study and is not only about personal choices. Addressing the problems of sloped ceilings, uneven walls and strange room layouts more strongly could help IKEA position customization as something that addresses space challenges, not just as an extra feature.

The following Table 13 explores how perceived value differs across life stages.

Table 13. Value Perception Variations Across Life Stages

Life Stage	Value Priority	Supporting Evidence	Value Proposition Opportunity
Students	Budget-friendly adaptability	Antti (24): "More budget-conscious modular options. Many young Finns want	Entry-level customization with future expansion possibilities

		customization but at student-friendly prices."	
Young Professionals	Space maximization worth premium	Mari (28): "The extra cost was worth it to utilize every centimeter in my small apartment."	Premium pricing justified by space optimization benefits
Families	Practical functionality for daily life	Juhani (42): "Family-specific features like lower drawers for kids and higher cabinets for dangerous items. Worth every euro for practicality."	Safety and functionality benefits that justify higher costs
Design-Conscious Couples	High-end look at mid-range price	Mikko & Laura (31): "We achieved a high-end look for mid-range price. Our customized BESTÅ looks like designer furniture but cost significantly less."	Value through perceived aesthetic quality relative to cost
Empty-Nesters	Quality investment in later-life enjoyment	Elina (58): "The extra cost was justified by how it shows my precious items."	Premium positioning focused on quality and meaningful display

Students want features and options that are accessible now and can be changed or added on as needs grow. People starting their careers believe that getting the most space is valuable enough to pay extra. Families appreciate the usefulness of safety features, which makes them willing to pay more for these cars. Most design-conscious couples are looking for luxury-level style but still want to stay within the midrange budget. Personalizing their homes is an investment in a happy retirement for empty nesters.

Based on the outcome, there is a big difference in value perception, which means that different strategies and tradeoffs are needed for each group. It was shown that each segment favors a different reason for premium pricing: space efficiency for young professionals, family practicality for parents, appealing design for style lovers, and quality/heritage for seniors. The company should create unique messages highlighting the advantages that are important to people at every stage of life.

The following Table 14 examines how sustainability values manifest across age segments.

Table 14. Sustainability and Longevity Expectations Across Age Groups

Age Group	Sustainability Focus	Supporting Evidence	Sustainability Value Proposition
Young Adults (20-29)	Future adaptability and reconfigurability	Antti (24): "I chose items I can take apart and reconfigure later. As Finns, we're taught not to waste."	Modular systems with clear upgrade paths
Middle-Aged Adults (30-49)	Minimalism and material efficiency	Mari (28): "I chose fewer, more versatile components. The minimalist approach helped me create a more sustainable solution with less material."	Versatile components that reduce overall material usage
Family-Oriented Consumers	Multi-purpose solutions aligned with values	Juhani (42): "We chose fewer, multi-purpose cabinets and recycled materials when available. Our Finnish values guided these decisions."	Value-aligned sustainability messaging emphasizing family values
Design-Conscious Consumers	Timeless design that transcends trends	Mikko & Laura (31): "We prioritized timeless design over trends. We wanted pieces that wouldn't look dated in five years - very Finnish thinking."	Design longevity as a sustainability feature
Older Adults (50+)	Quality materials for multi-generational use	Elina (58): "I chose quality materials intended to last decades. As Finns, we value durability over disposable trends."	Heritage-quality positioning with emphasis on durability

Young adults (20-29) focus on future adaptability and reconfigurability. Middle-aged adults (30-49) value minimalism and material efficiency. Family-oriented consumers seek multi-purpose solutions aligned with values. Design-conscious consumers prioritize timeless design that transcends trends. Older adults (50+) value quality materials for multi-generational use. The outcome reveals sustainability as a cross-generational Finnish value expressed differently across age groups.

The findings demonstrate how sustainability messaging should be tailored emphasizing adaptability for younger segments, material efficiency for middle-aged adults, value alignment for families, design longevity for style-conscious consumers, and heritage quality for older adults. IKEA can leverage these insights to develop sustainability messaging that resonates specifically with each segment's unique interpretation of sustainability.

The following Table 15 tracks how brand perception changes through customization experience.

Table 15. Brand Relationship Evolution Through Customization

Demographic Segment	Pre-Customization Brand Perception	Post-Customization Brand Perception	Supporting Evidence	Brand Evolution Opportunity
Young Adults	Budget retailer with standard options	Versatile design partner	Antti (24): "I see it as more versatile now. Before I thought IKEA meant standard options only."	Messaging targeting versatility and personalization
Urban Professionals	Budget furniture provider	Premium design solution	Mari (28): "I see IKEA as more premium now. Customization elevates them from just budget furniture to personalized design solutions."	Positioning customization as premium service
Families	Occasional shopping destination	Home creation partner	Juhani (42): "It transformed IKEA from a place we occasionally	Long-term relationship building through collaborative customization

			visit to a genuine partner in creating our home."	
Design-Conscious Consumers	Affordable but generic	Legitimate design resource	Mikko & Laura (31): "We now see IKEA as a legitimate design resource, not just affordable furniture."	Design credibility messaging targeting style-conscious consumers
Older Adults	Youth-oriented furniture retailer	Lifetime quality provider	Elina (58): "It's elevated IKEA from student furniture to lifetime pieces. I now recommend it to friends my age."	Age-inclusive marketing highlighting quality and longevity

Young adults shift from seeing IKEA as a budget retailer to viewing it as a versatile design partner. Urban professionals elevate their perception from budget furniture providers to premium design solutions. Families transition from viewing IKEA as an occasional shopping destination to a home creation partner.

Design-conscious consumers shift from seeing affordable but generic furniture to recognizing IKEA as a legitimate design resource. Older adults transform their perception from youth-oriented retailer to lifetime quality provider. The outcome reveals customization as a powerful brand perception transformer across all segments. The findings demonstrate customization's strategic importance beyond immediate sales, serving as a tool for brand elevation and relationship deepening, with segment-specific messaging opportunities.

The following Table 16 analyzes digital tool experiences across comfort levels.

Table 16. Tool Usability Experience Across Digital Comfort Levels

Digital Comfort Level	Tool Experience	Supporting Evidence	Digital Tool Improvement Opportunity
Digital Natives	Generally positive with specific pain points	Antti (24): "The KALLAX configurator was easy to use and highly useful. The PAX wardrobe tool was confusing in terms of which accessories were compatible."	Compatibility clarification and simplified accessories selection
Digitally Comfortable	Variable experiences across platforms	Mari (28): "The IKEA Home Planner was intuitive and useful for visualizing my space. But the METOD kitchen configurator had a steeper learning curve."	Consistent user experience across planning tools
Mixed Digital Comfort	Preference for guided digital experiences	Juhani (42): "The METOD kitchen planner was highly useful but not perfectly intuitive."	Built-in guidance and simplified navigation
Design-Focused Users	Advanced visualization limitations	Mikko & Laura (31): "The BESTÅ configurator lacked perceived usefulness for lighting visualization - couldn't accurately preview ambiance."	Enhanced visualization capabilities for lighting and ambiance
Digitally Hesitant	Significant accessibility and comfort barriers	Elina (58): "The BESTÅ storage planner lacked perceived usefulness - text was too small and options weren't clearly explained for older users like me."	Accessibility features and simplified interfaces for older users

Digital natives report generally positive experiences with specific pain points around compatibility clarification. Digitally comfortable users experience variable quality across planning platforms. Users with mixed digital comfort prefer guided digital experiences. Design-focused users note advanced visualization limitations. Digitally hesitant users face significant accessibility barriers.

The outcome reveals inconsistent digital tool experiences requiring targeted improvements for different user segments. The findings demonstrate the need for

compatibility clarification and simplified accessories selection for digital natives, consistent experiences across planning tools for comfortable users, built-in guidance for those with mixed comfort, enhanced visualization capabilities for design-focused users, and accessibility features for older segments. IKEA should prioritize age-inclusive digital design principles to serve the full spectrum of digital comfort levels.

4.3 Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

This section presents an integrated analysis of qualitative and quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of how product customization affects customer experience at IKEA Finland. The following table summarizes key convergence and divergence patterns across major thematic dimensions, highlighting how different methodological approaches complement and validate each other.

4.3.1 Integration Patterns Summary

This integration demonstrates that customization success at IKEA Finland requires balanced investment in digital capabilities and human guidance, tailored to segment-specific needs and Finnish cultural context.

Table 17. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

Key Theme	Qualitative Findings	Quantitative Findings	Convergence/Divergence	Integrated Insights & Implications
Omnichannel Experience	Segment-specific channel preferences: **Young adults**: Digital first **Middle-aged:** Hybrid approach **Older adults**: In-store guidance	28.16% prefer "equal mix of online/in-store" 25.24% prefer "exclusively in-store" Only 11.65% prefer "exclusively online"	**Convergence** Both datasets confirm hybrid approach dominance with segment variation	**Strategic Direction**: Develop segment-targeted channel strategies rather than one-size-fits-all digital transformation
Digital Tool Usability	Visualization limitations identified by design-focused users - Accessibility barriers for older adults -	Tools ease-of-use emerged as strongest satisfaction predictor in simplified model (β=0.4222,	**Strong Convergence** Both methods identify tool quality as critical success factor	**Strategic Priority**: Invest in visualization capabilities and age-inclusive interface

	Compatibility confusion for younger users	p<0.001) Time efficiency also significant (β=0.1485, p=0.032)		design with statistical justification
Customization Type Preferences	- Collaborative customization described as deepening brand relationship - Adaptive customization valued for Finnish sustainability values	- Collaborative customization is most preferred (39.81%) - Collaborative customization received highest experience ratings (mean=4.700, p=0.012)	**Strong Convergence** Agreement on collaborative creating superior experience	**Service Design**: Expand collaborative customization opportunities to capitalize on high satisfaction ratings
Cultural Context	- Strong Finnish design preferences (birch/pine materials, minimalism) - Climate adaptations needed (winter storage) - Connection to nature emphasized	- High satisfaction with options range (mean=4.58) - Moderate NPS (16.5) with 42.7% passive respondents suggests localization gaps	**Convergence** suggests unmet localization opportunities	**Product Development**: Create Finland-specific material options and climate-adapted solutions to convert passive customers to promoters
Demographic Differences	- Life stage drives distinct customization needs - young professionals: Space maximization - Families: Safety/functionality - Empty-nesters: Heritage display	- Significant satisfaction differences across age groups (p<0.001) - Gender differences in loyalty approaching significance (female mean=4.7262 vs. male mean=4.5328, p=0.0824)	**Strong Convergence** Both methods confirm demographic variation in customization experience	**Marketing Strategy**: Develop segment-specific value messaging addressing unique drivers for each life stage
Value Perception	Segment-specific value drivers: - Young adults: Space efficiency - Families: Practical functionality - Design-conscious: Aesthetic quality	- Price premium received moderate-high rating (mean=4.49) - Satisfaction strongly predicts loyalty (coefficient=0.4338, p<0.001)	**Complementary** Qualitative data explains quantitative value ratings	**Pricing Strategy**: Justify premium pricing through segment-relevant value propositions
Brand Relationship Evolution	Customization transforms brand perception from "budget retailer" to: - "Design partner" (young adults) - "Home	- High recommendation likelihood (mean=4.63) - Moderate NPS (16.5) with large	**Complementary** Qualitative insights explain why many customers remain passive despite satisfaction	**Loyalty Strategy**: Leverage identified perception shifts in marketing

	creation partner" (families) - "Lifetime quality provider" (older adults)	passive segment (42.7%)		while addressing specific improvement opportunities

The statistical validation of digital tools ease-of-use (β=0.4222, p<0.001) and enjoyable experience (β=0.1853, p=0.043) as primary satisfaction drivers provide quantifiable justification for technological investment, while qualitative insights offer precise guidance on addressing cultural and demographic nuances. By addressing the identified experience gaps while leveraging confirmed strengths, IKEA can transform the substantial passive customer segment (42.7%) into active promoters, driving growth through enhanced customization experiences.

4.3.2 Key Thematic Integrations

Omnichannel Experience and Digital Tool Effectiveness:

The integration reveals clear alignment between methodologies regarding channel preferences and digital tool effectiveness. Quantitative data confirms most customers prefer hybrid shopping approaches (28.16% preferring "equal mix of online and in-store"), while qualitative findings provide context for why different segments adopt varying strategies. Families seek expert validation for significant purchases, while older adults encounter accessibility barriers with digital interfaces.

The regression analysis statistically validates the critical importance of tools ease-of-use (β=0.4222, p<0.001) and enjoyable experience (β=0.1853, p=0.043) in driving satisfaction, lending quantitative weight to the qualitative observations about user experience challenges. This convergence suggests investment priority should focus on improved digital usability and creating enjoyable customization experiences, addressing specific pain points identified in interviews while targeting the statistically significant drivers of satisfaction identified through regression analysis.

Customization Types and Their Effectiveness:

Both methodologies reveal a strong pattern regarding customization approaches: collaborative customization dominates preference share (39.81% in survey data) and creates superior experience outcomes based on the ANOVA results. This pattern is explained by qualitative insights, which state that the Finnish way of making customers feel involved helps meet their need for advice and connection. The added insight means IKEA should enlarge its customization program for people making important and pricey purchases since evidence indicates their involvement positively impacts the customer experience.

Finnish Cultural Context and Localization Requirements:

The integration highlights areas with high localization potential that account for why 42.7% of customers were passive NPS respondents. Although the data from surveys and interviews indicates satisfaction with the current choices of furniture (mean=4.58), these insights also point out that Finns would like additional options for birch and pine wood, winter storage in their furniture, a natural look and furniture suited to narrow and tall spaces inside Finnish homes.

Because of these localization issues, businesses now have a strategical opportunity to turn plain customers into supporters through effective product development that addresses local cultures. According to the study's statistics, stronger satisfaction leads to more loyalty (coefficient=0.4338, $p<0.001$), proving that corporate cultural activities bring business benefits.

Demographic Differences and Segment-Specific Value Drivers:

Integrative analysis shows that ratios of customizations differ widely across groups with differing demographic backgrounds. The evaluation confirms that loyalty behavior differs across age as a factor ($p<0.0001$) and, although not statistically significant, shows a trend of differences by gender as well ($p=0.0824$), supporting why the marketing team customizes segment strategies.

Space optimization is important for young professionals, safety and practical design for families, high quality for people who like style and heritage appeal for

older people who are empty nesters. Because of this integration, marketing and product development should focus on companies rather than people, adapting their information and solutions to the different segments.

Brand Relationship Evolution Through Customization:

The results from both studies confirm that making a brand unique can greatly affect how it is viewed by people. The scoring system shows that customers highly recommend the brand (with a 4.63 rating), but the Net Promoter Score is moderate at 16.5. Further analysis reveals that what changes for customers is their perception of the brand, shifting from calling it a budget retailer to various other higher rankings, depending on the customer. It proves that by using segment-specific expressions, brands elevate themselves, something that cannot be shown only by standard, standardized measures. This study shows that customer satisfaction predicts brand loyalty (coefficient=0.4338, $p<0.001$) because of the strong impact customization has on both.

4.3.3 Methodological Reflection

Integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods has resulted in new advantages that are not possible for each approach on its own. Having 103 respondents in this study strengthens the findings and covers the results with high statistical power and reliability. Qualitative data allowed us to understand better the reasons, experiences, and cultural elements behind personalization, and quantitative data provided numbers and evidence of the important patterns we saw. Consistencies among methods made the results more reliable, while each method explained one aspect of the findings. Regression analysis made it clear that ease of use matters most, and interviews showed what impairs the usability experience for design-conscious people.

By using both methods, the study tackled the problems found in each method independently. The in-depth analysis of qualitative data gave insight, and the large sample size in the survey made important patterns reliable. This combination of methods makes it possible to see both the significance and the reasons behind the changes in customer experience at IKEA Finland caused by customization.

4.4 IKEA Customization Tools: Case Studies

Case Study 1: PAX Wardrobe System Customization

The PAX wardrobe system from IKEA stands out because it helps customers design their own storage solutions either with online tools or help in stores.

Customization Process from Customer Perspective: To begin their customer journey, people can use IKEA's 3D PAX planner to plan and design their wardrobes on the Internet. Customers can use the tool just by visiting the webpage, as no software needs to be downloaded, and ideas can be tried out immediately. Customers can change the heights (usually 79¼ or 93⅛ inches), widths (19⅝, 29½ or 39¼ inches), and depths (13¾ or 22⅞ inches) of their frames, along with picking from different door styles, organizers, and colors.

Tool Effectiveness Analysis: The planner takes care of a key issue people face when buying furniture not knowing how things will fit beforehand. By giving people specific sizes and the choice to combine parts online, it greatly reduces risk of worry and returns. Many find the effectiveness of the tool in how it allows changes while still being easy to use, but researchers note that a few users have problems with complex options.

According to research in customer experience, although young people usually find the tool user-friendly, some older users find the platform hard to understand. It agrees with what is seen in Finland, where differences in using digital tools are especially clear between age groups.

Best Practices and Areas for Improvement: The PAX customization experience succeeds through its:

- Flexible, modular design approach
- Visual representation of options
- Integration with both online and in-store experiences

Areas for improvement identified in studies include:

- Enhanced compatibility information for accessories
- Improved accessibility features for older users
- Better integration between digital planning and physical inventory systems

Impact on Customer Interaction: Customer studies indicate the collaborative nature of the PAX planning process often transforms IKEA's relationship with customers. Purchasing something from IKEA turns into a sharing of ideas and styles which repositions the brand from a budget store to a design partner, especially in countries with a keen interest in stylish design.

Case Study 2: IKEA Kitchen Planning Tools

Kitchen planning at IKEA is the most involved way to customize, as it combines working online with the help of experienced advisors.

Customization Process Analysis: Most people start by assessing their space, collecting ideas, and then either trying the IKEA Kitchen Planner or meeting with kitchen planners. The system supports planning the layout, such as setting up cabinets, deciding where appliances go, and selecting the finishing touches. In Finland many people use the online service and get advice from kitchen experts in person or over the phone.

Tool Effectiveness Research: People who take part in kitchen planner studies stay deeply involved, though some never finish. Some customers start by creating their designs on the website but ask a specialist to help finish them. Customers in Finland seem to favor online shopping with the extra reassurance of talking to a salesperson before making an expensive decision.

Nearly all technology solutions have shifted from simple 2D design to detailed 3D planning with a connection to product details. But looking at the data suggests that lighting and texture effects could still be better, which is something Finnish consumers with design in mind commonly look for in improvement.

Integration with Overall Customer Experience: The process of planning the kitchen reflects IKEA’s omnichannel strategy as everything flows smoothly from one channel to another. Such as:

- Digital planning tools for initial concept development
- Expert consultations (virtual or in-person) for refinement
- In-store verification of material selections
- Delivery and installation services

This integration proves especially valuable for complex purchases like kitchens, where customers report higher satisfaction when combining digital and human touchpoints throughout their journey.

5 DISCUSSIONS

This chapter describes the findings on product customization at IKEA Finland by looking at relevant theories and past research, discussing relationships, making comparisons, identifying surprising results and addressing the research methods.

5.1 Theoretical Connections

This section assesses how well the findings fit within and enhance prior theories about customization and customer experience. In the analysis, the theories are reviewed and spaces for further advancement are pointed out.

5.1.1 Experience Economy Framework

The findings strongly support Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy framework, with high satisfaction ratings for the customization process as an experience (mean=4.57). This confirms the framework's central premise that modern consumers seek memorable experiences rather than mere transactions, particularly in high involvement purchases like furniture. The very high customization process enjoyment ratings (mean=4.57) clearly illustrate this shift from functional consumption to experiential engagement in the Finnish retail context.

However, the study extends this theory by identifying significant demographic variations, with younger consumers (18-24) reporting significantly higher experience ratings than middle-aged consumers (35-44) ($F=8.7572$, $p<0.0001$). This pronounced demographic variation suggests that experience expectations are not uniform even within a single cultural context, requiring age-specific experience design considerations. The qualitative data reveals IKEA's current customization offerings fall short of creating truly immersive experiences demanded by Finnish consumers, particularly in visualization capabilities that would enable complete experiential engagement creating an experience gap between consumer expectations and current capabilities.

This gap is most pronounced among design-conscious consumers, who reported significant limitations in lighting and material visualization, preventing full

experiential immersion in the customization process. The finding contributes to the Experience Economy literature by demonstrating how technological limitations can create experiential boundaries, even when the overall experience is positively rated.

5.1.2 Self-Congruity Theory

The study validates Weurlander's (2023) Self-Congruity Theory through evidence of customization functioning as identity expression across demographic segments. While regression analysis showed collaborative customization creating stronger brand connections, qualitative data provided deeper evidence with participants explicitly describing customized furniture as extensions of personal or family identity. However, the findings suggest limitations in IKEA's ability to facilitate complete self-congruity, as customization remains primarily functional rather than deeply expressive potentially explaining the moderate NPS (16.5) despite high satisfaction ratings.

5.1.3 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The findings confirm TAM's central principles, with tools ease-of-use emerging as a significant satisfaction predictor ($\beta=0.4222$, $p<0.001$) in the simplified model and time efficiency also showing statistical significance ($\beta=0.1485$, $p=0.032$). The study extends Liaqat's (2022) application of TAM to IKEA by demonstrating how perceived usefulness varies across customer segments design-conscious users prioritize visualization capabilities, while families value collaborative functions. This suggests TAM should incorporate demographic nuance when applied to retail customization technologies.

5.2 Comparative Analysis with Previous Research

This section describes the study's findings within the existing body of knowledge, highlighting areas of confirmation, contradiction, and extension of established theories through empirical validation and cultural context analysis.

5.2.1 Customization Types and Effectiveness

The findings both support and extend Gilmore and Pine's (1997) framework, with collaborative customization most preferred (39.81%) and creating superior experiences (mean=4.700, p=0.012). This reinforces Salvador et al.'s (2009) research by demonstrating alignment between customization preference and experience quality. The study contributes novel insights into how cultural factors influence customization preferences, with collaborative customization aligning with Finnish values of expert guidance while still supporting individual expression a dimension inadequately explored in previous research.

5.2.2 Satisfaction-Loyalty Relationship

The research strongly supports Anderson and Mittal's (2000) satisfaction-loyalty link, with regression analysis confirming satisfaction as a significant loyalty predictor (coefficient=0.4338, $p<0.001$, $R^2=0.620$). However, the proportion of passive NPS respondents (42.7%) despite high satisfaction metrics suggests a more complex relationship in the Finnish context. The finding that collaborative customization generates the highest loyalty metrics compared to other customization types represents a new insight into how customization type influences loyalty formation, extending Ballı et al. (2024) work on personalization and brand loyalty.

5.2.3 Cultural Context and Localization

The findings extend Roy's (2020) characterization of Finnish consumers by identifying specific attributes required for successful customization in this market: authentic materials (birch/pine), climate adaptations (winter specific storage), and nature-connected design elements. It validates Gustafsson et al.'s (2012) belief that client preferences vary due to culture while also pointing out unique aspects that differ from the Nordic-wide trends found by Youvan (2024). Even with some cultural needs not being met, customers are pleased with the many customization options (4.58), suggesting that global brands should alter their expectations. However, the many passive NPS members show that further localization could help improve customer experience.

5.2.4 Omnichannel Integration

The evidence backs Verhoef et al.'s (2015) framework. It shows that while Finland has a high rate of online use, only 11.65% prefer shopping purely online, indicating more complex channel preferences than some had assumed. This study expands on Björkander et al.'s (2023) work by revealing that not all customers rely entirely on one channel and that digital and physical options are helpful along the customization journey for important purchases.

5.3 Distinctive Findings and Theoretical Implications

This section discusses important findings that add information and help change popular views on customization by showing empirical results and demographic findings.

5.3.1 Gender Differences

There was a surprising difference in the satisfaction levels of males and females, with females consistently ranking higher. Loyalty showed a big difference between men and women, though it was close to being significant (females: 4.7262, males: 4.5328, p=0.0824). This contradicts assumptions that gender has no effect on customization research, showing that furniture customization experiences may be influenced by gender, primarily in its ability to touch emotions and how much effort is invested.

5.3.2 Collaborative vs. Adaptive Customization Paradox

The discrepancy between customization preference and experience quality represents another significant finding is the strong alignment between preference and experience quality. Collaborative customization is both the most preferred (39.81%) and creates superior experience outcomes (F=5.0599, p=0.0027). This challenges previous research suggesting misalignments between customer preferences and optimal experiences and suggests IKEA has successfully identified the customization approach that best satisfies Finnish customers.

5.3.3 Digital Tool Satisfaction Variations

The quantitative analysis showed very high ratings for digital tools (mean=4.49-4.58) while qualitative findings identified significant usability issues across user segments. This apparent contradiction reveals how demographic factors influence technology perception beyond standard usability metrics, with digital natives reporting positive experiences while older adults described significant accessibility barriers extending traditional usability research and demonstrating substantial business implications of demographic-specific design requirements.

5.4 Methodological Strengths and Limitations

The mixed-methods approach provided significant strengths through methodological triangulation, with convergent findings across methods enhancing confidence in key conclusions regarding tools ease-of-use, collaborative customization effectiveness, and demographic variations. The sequential design allowed qualitative insights to inform survey construction and quantitative interpretation, creating a more integrated analytical framework than either method alone.

Having 103 respondents in the study significantly improves the reliability of the results. A bigger sample size enabled the researchers to run many regression models and ANOVAs more accurately.

Among the drawbacks are that the data was collected at a single point and that it depends on people's self-reporting, which makes it hard to apply it to other retailers. The survey only included a small number of people over 65 (3.88%), people who live in rural areas (3.88%), and families of more than five people (6.8%), so it could have introduced some bias into the study.

Even with these limitations, the combination of approaches made the results more solid than could be achieved by using only one method. Even with the variations in the data, the findings converge on the tool's ease of use, effective co-customization, and demographic variations, demonstrating that the outcomes can still be seen as powerful.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter illustrates the main conclusions of this study on product customization and customer experience at IKEA Finland. The report is organized so that results are based on the research objectives, theoretical viewpoints are discussed, the implications for the industry are presented, and directions for future progress are mentioned.

6.1 Addressing Research Objectives

This section studies research to determine whether all the original goals were accomplished by examining satisfaction, customization, channel choices, and improvement plans.

6.1.1 Impact of Product Customization on Customer Experience

The first research objective sought to analyze how product customization impacts customer experience at IKEA Finland. The findings demonstrate that product customization significantly enhances customer experience when executed effectively, with overall satisfaction ratings averaging 4.61 out of 5. Customization transforms IKEA from being perceived as merely a "budget retailer" to a "design partner" (for young adults), "home creation partner" (for families), or "lifetime quality provider" (for older adults).

However, this impact varies substantially across demographic segments and customization types. Collaborative customization creates superior experiences (mean=4.700, p=0.0027) compared to other approaches. The moderate Net Promoter Score (16.5) with a large proportion of passive respondents (42.7%) indicates that while customization positively influences experience, significant enhancement opportunities remain to convert satisfied customers into active advocates.

6.1.2 Key Factors in IKEA's Customization Process

The second objective aimed to identify key factors in IKEA's customization process that influence customer satisfaction. Regression analysis identified tools ease-of-use ($\beta=0.4222$, $p<0.001$) and enjoyable experience ($\beta=0.1853$, $p=0.043$) as statistically significant drivers of satisfaction. The range of customization options also received very high ratings (mean=4.58), indicating customer satisfaction with the variety of choices available.

Qualitative findings revealed segment-specific priorities: young professionals value space optimization in small apartments, families prioritize safety features and practical functionality, design-conscious consumers emphasize aesthetic quality, and empty-nesters focus on heritage display capabilities. Finnish cultural preferences for authentic materials (particularly birch and pine), climate-adaptive solutions, and connection to nature emerged as cross-segment factors influencing satisfaction with customization options.

6.1.3 Digital Tools Versus In-Store Experiences

The third research objective compared the effectiveness of digital customization tools versus in-store experiences. The findings revealed complex omnichannel behavior rather than channel dominance, with only 11.65% preferring "exclusively online" experiences and 25.24% preferring "exclusively in-store" experiences. Most customers (28.16%) reported preferring an "equal mix of online and in-store" engagement, using different channels for different stages of the customization journey.

Channel preferences demonstrated significant demographic variation. Digital natives reported generally positive experiences with online tools but identified specific usability issues with compatibility clarification. Middle-aged adults employed a hybrid approach, planning online but validating in-store. Older adults faced substantial accessibility barriers with digital interfaces, strongly preferring in-store guidance. These patterns suggest complementary rather than competing channel roles, with digital tools excelling at visualization and exploration while physical experiences provide tactile confirmation and expert guidance.

6.1.4 Strategies for Improved Customer Experience

The fourth research objective aimed to propose strategies for enhancing customer experience through advanced personalization. Based on the statistical significance of tools ease-of-use ($\beta=0.4222$, $p<0.001$) as a satisfaction driver, enhancing digital tool usability represents the highest-impact improvement opportunity. Developing Finland-specific mate-rial options (particularly birch and pine) and climate-adaptive solutions would address the cultural preferences identified in qualitative analysis.

The finding that collaborative customization is both preferred (39.81%) and creates superior experiences (mean=4.700, $p=0.0027$) suggests continuing to focus on guided customization opportunities, particularly for complex purchases. Age-inclusive interface design would address the documented accessibility barriers faced by older adults, while segment-specific marketing could leverage the distinct value drivers identified across demographic groups. These targeted enhancements could potentially convert the substantial passive NPS segment (42.7%) into active promoters.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

This research advances customization theory and customer experience frameworks in several ways. First, it extends the Experience Economy framework by demonstrating how experience expectations vary significantly across demographic segments within a single cultural context. The finding that younger consumers (18-24) report significantly higher experience ratings than middle-aged consumers (35-44) ($F=8.7572$, $p<0.0001$) challenges assumptions of uniform experiential preferences.

Second, the study enriches Self-Congruity Theory by documenting how customization functions as identity expressions differently across life stages from personal identity reflection for young professionals to family values representation for parents to life transition symbolism for emp-ty-nesters. This

life-stage dimension has been underexplored in previous customization research and represents a valuable theoretical extension.

Third, the research enhances Technology Acceptance Model applications in retail contexts by demonstrating how perceived usefulness varies across customer segments. The finding that design-conscious users evaluate digital tools primarily through visualization capabilities while families prioritize decision confidence extends TAM's explanatory power for customization technologies.

Most significantly, the study contributes new knowledge about the inter-section of cultural values and customization by identifying specific Finnish design preferences that influence customization expectations. It shows that Finnish people tend to prefer professional guidance while wanting to express their personal style, a fresh perspective not seen in earlier studies on customization.

6.3 Industry Implications

Besides IKEA Finland, this research is significant for retailers around the world trying to balance global branding with local culture. Results point out that well-made digital solutions can still be experienced differently among demographic groups, so using the same design for all may not work in different markets.

The research points out that identifying the right cultural designs should be based on local common trends, not general assumptions. By choosing local materials and climate adjustments, Finnish companies clearly show how little details can strongly affect how customers view and support a brand.

Retailers should consider both what appeals to customers most and what makes for the best experience while deciding on types of product customization. This may warrant continued investment in collaborative approaches for complex, high-involvement purchases.

The evident preference for omnichannel customization journeys challenges digital only transformation strategies, suggesting successful retailers must integrate physical and digital customization experiences rather than treating them as separate channels. The documented variation in channel preferences across

demographics indicates segmented channel strategies may outperform uniform approaches.

6.4 Future Research Directions

This study reveals several promising directions for future research. First, longitudinal studies tracking how customization experiences influence loyalty behaviors over time would address the limitations of the current cross-sectional design. Such research could determine whether positive customization experiences translate into actual repeat purchases and increased share of wallet.

Second, comparative studies across Nordic countries could isolate Finland-specific customization preferences from broader Scandinavian patterns. This would help multinational retailers determine which elements require country-specific adaptation versus regional standardization, enhancing localization efficiency.

Third, experimental research testing enhanced visualization technologies (such as augmented reality and advanced lighting simulations) could quantify the impact of addressing the visualization limitations identified in this study. Such research could establish return-on-investment metrics for technological enhancements to customization tools.

Fourth, investigations into accessibility requirements for different age groups would expand understanding of how to create truly inclusive digital customization experiences. The significant barriers faced by older adults warrant dedicated research on interface design principles that accommodate age-related perceptual and cognitive differences.

Finally, research on the environmental impacts of customization in furniture retail could explore whether customized products demonstrate greater longevity and emotional durability as suggested by the qualitative findings on sustainability values. This could advance understanding of customization's role in promoting more sustainable consumption patterns.

These future research directions would build upon the current study's findings to further enhance customization theory and practice, particularly in culturally distinctive markets where global standardization approaches may prove insufficient.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Thesis passport

Thesis passport (to be given to the supervisor for filing after the thesis is finished).

Name of student _____

Group _____

Contact information_____

Topic of thesis _____

Client _____

	At latest	Date	Signature
1. Introduction to thesis and related assignments completed	_____	_____	_____
2. Approval of topic	_____	_____	_____
3. Thesis plan approved	_____	_____	_____
4. Interim seminar presentation held	_____	_____	_____
5. Contents of thesis approved	_____	_____	_____
6. Layout and language approved	_____	_____	_____
7. Abstract in foreign language accepted	_____	_____	_____
8. Thesis submitted to the opponent	_____	_____	_____
9. Participation in presentation seminars			
- excluding acting as an opponent and own presentation			
1. _____		_____	_____
2. _____		_____	_____
3. _____		_____	_____
4. _____		_____	_____
5. _____		_____	_____
6. _____		_____	_____
10. Presentation of own thesis held		_____	_____
11. Acting as an opponent (title/student)			
_____		_____	_____
12. Maturity test accepted		_____	_____
13. A hardbound version of the thesis submitted to the supervisor (if not submitted to Theseus)		_____	_____

14. I hereby assure that I saved my thesis in electronic form into Theseus at the address

VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

_____

___

Address

Signature of the student

VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Appendix 2. IKEA Survey Data