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PHYSICAL SALES CULTURE IN DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

– Case: Blue Tomato GmbH

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This thesis was performed for the Austrian omni market retailer, Blue Tomato GmbH. Blue Tomato is one of Europe's leading retailers in the areas of snowboarding, freestyle, surfing, skateboarding and street fashion. A customer satisfaction survey was performed during the research, which was used to find out the company's general level of customer satisfaction and to outline possible differences between different service channels. The research questions chosen for the thesis were: What are the differences between digital and physical customer journey? How does the customer benefit from the physical sales culture in digital channels? How can physical sales culture be utilized in digital channels? What are the reasons for shopping in a store and not online?

Quantitative research was chosen as the research method for the customer satisfaction measurement. The customer satisfaction survey was conducted with a survey that was shared into the stories of the company's Instagram account. Blue Tomato's followers provided a suitable target group for conducting the survey. The survey was divided into a background section and a customer satisfaction section. The background information section examined the customers' age and location, purchasing habits and whether the customer had been in contact with Blue Tomato's customer service. The customer satisfaction section examined how well Blue Tomato's customer service had met customer needs and the reasons why a customer would choose to use either physical or digital purchasing channels. At the end of the survey, information on brand image and brand loyalty was gathered. The last section of the survey provided an opportunity for open feedback.

The results revealed clear gaps between different service channels. To be able to minimize the differences between different channels, the study examined the strengths of store transactions, which could also be utilized in the context of digital channels and thus develop the level of customer satisfaction. Despite the criticism, the results show that customers have been satisfied with the company, especially when doing business in stores.

Based on the results, Blue Tomato will be able to develop its Omni-channel retail and reduce the differences between different service channels. This could potentially be achieved through country-specific optimization of transportation and return methods, enhanced e-commerce signage, and improved employee coaching. Adding an in-store training period to the customer service employee's training would be a relatively easy and cost-effective measure. This increase would significantly improve the practical product knowledge of customer service staff, which in turn would reduce level differences between different service channels.

KEYWORDS:

Customer satisfaction, customer experience, survey, physical sales culture

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (OR) SYMBOLS

BT	Blue Tomato
PSC	Physical Sales Culture
MOT	Moment of Truth
IG	Instagram
CTA	Call to action
DACH	Deutschland (Germany), Austria, Switzerland
SoMe	social media
RATER	reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, responsibility

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation

The author's entire employment history has been customer service focused. It started in Hyper Markets and developing social skills in shop-in-shop popups. After moving to Austria 2012 and having to change the daily language from Finnish to English and German, the author adapted to the local culture and further enriched his customer service skills. Being a social and sympathetic person, assuring the customers with the best possible service has been something the author has always taken for granted.

The direct and dynamic environment of customer service in the Business to Customer (B2C) or retail market is a key element in the customer's journey, whether it takes place in brick and mortars stores, online or both. Whenever there is a problem, customer expects them to be solved in the most efficient and customer-oriented manner. The customers often prefer to be served in their native language, with someone who understands them and the problem they are facing. A well performing customer service can turn a negative customer experience into a positive. The importance of customer centered service design has become obvious throughout my studies, and it is the foundation to a great customer journey.

Blue Tomato has well documented and well refined service culture in their brick-and-mortar stores. Within the company this is referred to as Physical Sales Culture (PSC). The store teams are constantly fine-tuned to improve their salesmanship on all levels. This brings out the best of each individual employee and gives the in-store customer experience that Blue Tomato brand that the customers recognize and appreciate.

Being a board sport enthusiast close to 20 years, the author found a dream internship position the Blue Tomato HQ as Online Marketing assistant. After the author had completed the interviews, the company offered him a full-time position as a Country Manager assistant Finland and Customer Service Finland. This cross-department insight has opened many opportunities for improvements in the customer experience. It has helped to identify and target problems more easily as well as understand our customers' needs better.

The goal of this research was to define the customer experience and journey as well as to find out whether certain elements from the PSC could be transferred to digital sales channels and if the customer would benefit from the selected elements. The author performed a case study to identify the service gap between digital and physical channels. The goal is to find possible solutions to narrow the gap and improve customer journeys in digital channels.

1.2 Company Information

Blue Tomato is one of the top B2C omni-channel players in Europe in the field of street style, skate, snow, and surf with over 50 brick and mortars stores as well as an online store that ships worldwide. Blue Tomato employs passionate international and diverse people who live the sport and lifestyle that the business represents. Blue Tomato supports projects that protect and strengthen communities and our beloved planet. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

Gerfried Schuller founded Blue Tomato snowboarding school in 1988, which laid the foundation for the company's future. After becoming the largest snowboard school in Austria and which still operates today, in 1991 Gerfried opened the first snowboard shop his mother's garage in Schladming under the name Gerry's garage. In a small 25m2 space the shop grew in fame and sold everything a snowboarder could need.

In 1991 the first official Blue Tomato shop opened in Schladming with more space and an ever-growing selection from hard goods to snow and street wear and accessories. Moving on to 1999 when the first Blue Tomato Online Shop was opened, which today offers customer an easy and safe shopping experience in 14 different languages and over 450,000 from over 500 brands. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

During 2012 the American action sports retailer Zumiez bought Blue Tomato. The two companies have since worked together sharing the passion and love for board sports. After Zumiez acquisition, Blue Tomato's physical shop count increased rapidly and stands today at 56 stores in five countries in Europe. (Reuters, 2012)

Blue Tomato's values focus on the customer as well as the team, and its passion for the board sports and lifestyle the company thoroughly lives by. The company aims to pass the spirit and passion to both the customers and the employees. The employees offer hands-on know-how to the customer and the training each customer service and

shop employee receives assures the team is prepared to approach and satisfy the customer with quality service with respect and friendliness. These attributes can be found inside out in the company. Blue Tomato also cares for their employee's ideas and offers a space for creativity as well as the possibility to further educate oneself. All of this adds to Blue Tomato's customer, and employee, centric approach and helps to improve not only the customer experience in all channels, but the customer journey. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

To identify essential components of Blue Tomato's physical sales culture and how they could be implemented to the digital channels to narrow the service gap and to develop a Blue Tomato customer journey.

The research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the differences between digital and physical customer journeys?

2. How does customer benefit from physical sales culture in digital channels?

3. How to utilize physical sales culture in digital channels?

4. What are the reasons to shop in-store and not online?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Omni-, Cross, Multi-, and Single Channel Retail

In the earlier times, companies would often operate through a single marketing channel and target a single segment of the customer audience. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017) An example of such single channel retailer could be a small old fashioned skate shop that operates solely via their physical store and has not considered the possibilities digitalization has brought to the market.

Multichannel retail the next step in the evolution and is in many ways like the much more refined omnichannel, but without integration between channels. Customer cannot hence return an online purchase to physical store, as the channels are functioning as separate entities. (Berman, et al., 2018).

Cross channel retail is another step closer to the ideal customer experience and has multiple touchpoints, some of which are connected but is lacking full integration and therefore is not able to offer a truly seamless experience to the customer (Thierry, 2015)

Omni is a prefix that means everywhere or everything. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021) Omnichannel retail thus refers to a seamlessly integrated multitude of channels where the customer has the option to buy products for example from the company's online store and then return the products to another channel, such as a physical store. There are no gaps between the channels and the customer gets to enjoy a seamless, unified experience between all touchpoints (Berman, et al., 2018), which is where Blue Tomato operates and is constantly working to improve.
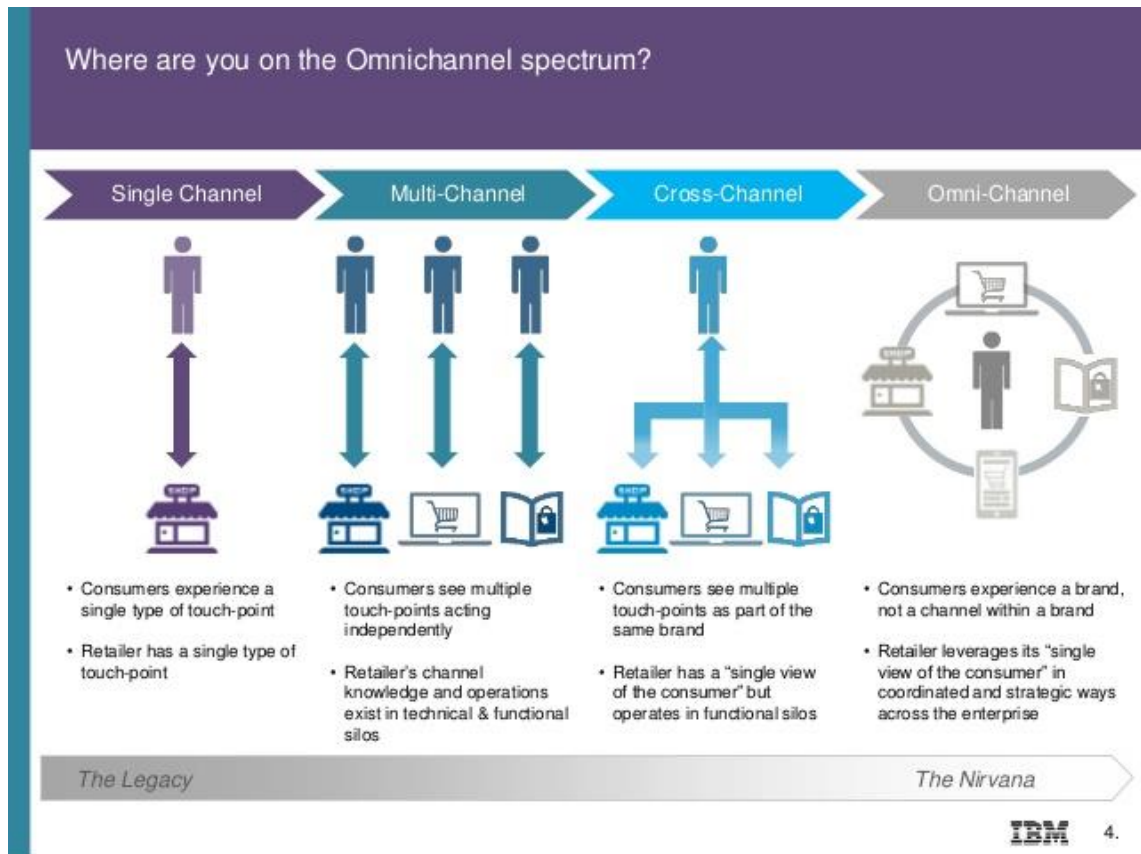
Picture 1. Omnichannel spectrum (Thierry, 2015)

2.2 Customer Satisfaction

In our volatile omnipresent market space, companies are not able to compete in terms of the products they offer. Instead, the companies are outperforming each other with polished customer experiences. (Kotler, et al., 2016) Through improved customer experience and relations, companies can increase the value perceived by the customer which leads to fulfilled expectations and satisfied customers. Customers rationally choose to do business with a brand that fulfils these factors as decision has a positive outcome for the customer. (Pride & Ferrell, 2017) Which means that customer satisfaction directly correlates to whether the level of customer's expectations regarding the product they are after are met, not met, or surpassed.

2.2.1 Gap Model of Service Quality

Gap model of Service quality is a framework that assists in understanding customer satisfaction. First introduced in 1985 by Parasuraman et al (Lapaas, 2019) the model illustrates five major satisfaction gaps that the companies need to address in order to match the expectations. (Geoghegan, 2018) In the Gap model, customer satisfaction correlates to how well the customer's expectations were met. If the expectations were met or surpassed, the customer is satisfied because the company had taken the five gaps into consideration. These five gaps are explained below from first to last. (Geoghegan, 2018)

GAP 1: *The knowledge gap* is the difference between the customer's expectations of the service and what the company is offering. The reason behind the existence of this gap orbits around not knowing what the customers expect. This can be caused because of ignoring customer feedback, interruptions in the cross departmental information flow or insufficient market research. (Lapaas, 2019) The gap can be solved by increased communication across the board and reactive customer feedback analysis.

Example: If Blue Tomato would suddenly stop offering free deliveries and returns for orders above 40.00€, the customers would be unhappy as this is what they have learned to expect from the company. Blue Tomato solves this be reintroducing the free deliveries based on customer feedback and communicates this clearly inside and outside of the company on all channels.

GAP 2: *The policy gap* depends on how well the management understands the customer needs and how well they can translate that into their service delivery policies and standards. These policies and standards need to keep UpToDate to meet the changing needs of the customer base. (Lapaas, 2019) The solution to this issue included improved training on the manager level, recalibrated service standards and measurable goals as well as rewarding the staff for fulfilling new standards. This can lead to customers searching for the same service somewhere else in better quality. (Geoghegan, 2018)

Example If Blue Tomato were to suffer from this gap, then it could be that they offer grip tape service for each skateboard bought, but the quality of the service would be unacceptable. Solution could be that Blue Tomato then continuously trains their

managers to be service quality leaders and to evaluate the quality of their services as well as reward employees upon succeeding.

Gap 3: *The delivery gap* might occur due to insufficient training, inability, or lack of will to meet the set service standards. This could be caused by misevaluation at the recruiting or training phase or job itself being unrewarding, whether it financially or emotionally. Another cause for the delivery gap is nonmatching ratio between demand and supply. (Lapaas, 2019) The solution to the delivery gap is the offer proper training, empowerment and tools as well as retaining highly suitable employees.

Example: If Blue Tomato were to list products to its online store that were not available, it would fall into this gap. To solve this, Blue Tomato would make sure tools used to maintain online store inventory are up to date and that the employees using these tools are trained sufficiently to know how they work and to understand why their work is valuable.

Gap 4: *The communication gap* results in customer dissatisfaction because what they received was not what they were originally promised. Hence, there is a difference what was advertised and what the customer got. This could culminate to losing customer trust and them seeking service somewhere else. (Geoghegan, 2018) This gap is closed by realistic approach to advertisement campaign and customer expectation management and ensuring campaigns are approved before launching them.

Example: If Blue Tomato advertised that each customer would get a free beanie to their order but failed to mention minimum order value of 100€, many customers would feel betrayed. This could be solved by improved quality control and assuring promises are kept.

Gap 5: *The customer gap* is the difference between customer's own expectations and what the perceived. This gap is the result of intentional or unintentional misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the service. This gap can materialize due to existence of the other four gaps and can be closed only if the company takes care of the other gaps first. (Geoghegan, 2018)
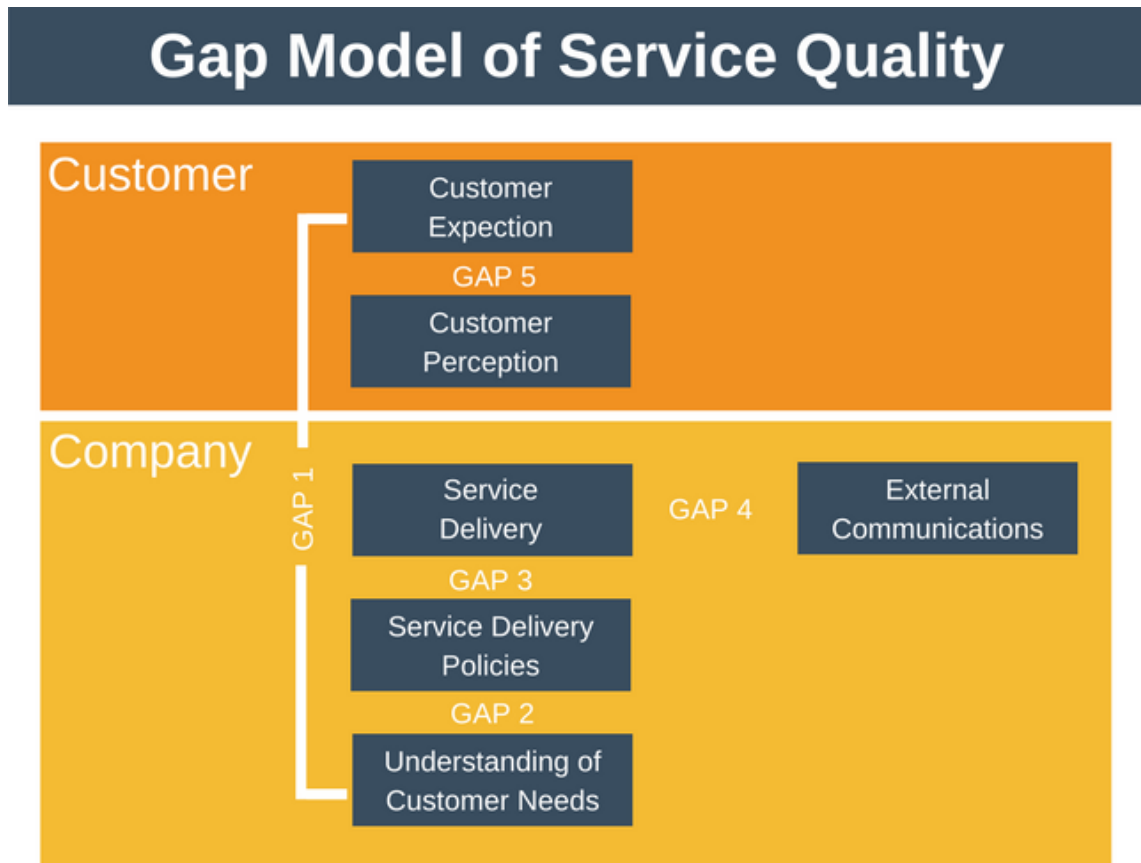
Picture 2. Gap Model of Service Quality (Geoghegan, 2018)

These gaps have an impact with customer satisfaction, thus understanding their consequences and finding improvements becomes important. Applying Gap model can reveal the existence of these gaps within a company. It can provide valuable information regarding service gaps such as a gap between physical and digital customer experiences. Applying the Gap model and reviewing its results carefully can provide already enough information to reduce the size of the information gap.

However, the Gap model has its limitations too. To begin, it does not provide detailed enough information. This could potentially lead to unsolved problems as often complex root causes could remain undetected. The success of Gap analysis lies in the hands of the people involved in the gap analysis process. Their level of knowledge and persistence are significantly important when researching issues, their causes, and solutions. Hence the outcomes of the analysis are highly prone to bias as the causes are evolving more and more frequently as the companies get bigger. (Bhasin, 2021)

2.2.2 Importance of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is important because it allows companies to evaluate how loyal their customers are, and how likely are they to recommend the services to their closed ones. Satisfied customers are of crucial value for any company's success as satisfied customer are less likely to seek for alternatives. (Le Bond, 2021) Satisfaction leads to loyalty and advocacy; hence it is importance to emphasize that satisfied customers are more likely to share their positive experience with their close ones. Not to mention the financial burden of gaining new customers. As retaining an old customer costs, a company as much as five times less than it would cost to attract a new one, according to Wertz J. (Wertz, 2018). Thus, a connection between customer satisfaction and customer retention can be made. Customers with high level of satisfaction are more likely to continue using said company's services or products than a dissatisfied customer would as long as the said company remains above competition. Customer retention is something that could have potentially catastrophic consequences for Blue Tomato, if not taken care off as many of Blue Tomato's customers are returning and loyal ones.

In their white paper, Selligent lists five main reasons why customers are loyal to a brand and found out that brand name service quality and pricing were the most important reasons behind loyalty. (Selligent, 2020) Blue Tomato has already addressed these by offering their customers best-price-guarantee as well as top-quality service. The survey will shine onto how evenly the service quality is being perceived between the physical and digital channels.

2.2.3 Factor Affecting Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is affected by a multitude of factors. The size of the gaps mentioned in above in subchapter 2.2.1, and the gaps themselves can have a negative impact on customer satisfaction. Customers' expectations are based on promises and opinions from advertisement and conversations with people around them. These can direct the customers' expectations one way or another and thus affect the preconception the customer has. Whereas the experience itself is based on what the company can deliver to the customer. These experiences can be assessed by using the RATER framework. (simplesat, 2021)

The RATER framework evolved from a 1988 SERVQUAL study. Psychologists Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry designed the study to measure difference between customer expectations and what the perceived afterwards. (Parasurman, et al., 1988) The RATER framework was developed on top of SERVQUAL by the same authors. The framework includes five dimensions: *Reliability*, does the company deliver what they have promised? *Assurance*: does the company's employees spark trust and confidence through their knowhow and consideration? *Tangibles*: does the company present itself physically? This includes facilities, employees, equipment, communication materials as well as the products the company provides. *Empathy*: Are the employees capable adapting to the needs of individual customers? *Responsiveness*: Are the employees willing to address customer queries efficiently and effectively? (Strawderman & Koubek, 2008).

Blue Tomato can apply the RATER framework when designing their customer satisfaction survey. Reliability can be for example Blue Tomato employees' firsthand products knowledge. Is the company delivering what it promotes via all service channels? Assurance, with the knowhow mentioned already, are the employees able to provide solutions the customers are expecting of them? Tangibles, are the psychical aspects in-line with the company standards? Is Blue Tomato able to deliver high quality service and products in the market leader level? Empathy refers to Blue Tomato employees' abilities to provide the customers with solutions that match or exceed their wishes. Responsiveness can be Blue Tomato's ability to react and deliver effective and timely solutions to the queries requested by the customers.

As mentioned above, a satisfied customer is likely to advocate the company. What are then factors that annoy customers and thus affect their experience negatively? According to the annual E-Commerce report by the Finnish Posti, bad reputation of the company and a plethora of issues related to payments, shipping and returns were listed. (Posti, 2020) Many of these are matters Blue Tomato can and should address.

	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90

Bad reputation of e-commerce: 76 / 82
Poor website performance: 76 / 82
High transportation costs: 78 / 82
Unclear delivery or return terms: 76 / 81
Complex return method: 71 / 75
Risks related to payment.: 70 / 75
Not the right delivery method for me: 65 / 72
Paid refund: 68 / 70
Not my favourite method of payment: 64 / 69
Long delivery times: 62 / 66
No exact delivery time information: 52 / 62
Long distance to pick-up point: 57 / 56
I must be home waiting for transportation: 56 / 56
Buying on a mobile device is tricky: 43 / 50

Picture 3. Which factors reduce your desire to buy from online stores? Illustration translated by the author, where most relevant factors are highlighted. 2020 values compared to the light blue 2019 values.

2.3 Customer Experience

Customer experience is the interaction between a customer and the company in any channel. Bolton breaks customer experience into a four-step ladder (Bolton, 2016). The first step in the customer's journey is to do a competitor and marketplace analysis. What all is there, who offers it, for what price and where. Blue Tomato performs regular customer online surveys to measure customer satisfaction as well as use Trustpilot as a platform for the customers to give their honest opinions about their experiences with the company.

The second step in the ladder is the expectations customers have. The expectations can be divided into unmatched, matched, and surpassed (Bolton, 2016). The third step is the Engagement. This step is the one where marketing has a big effect. Word of mouth and reviews/ratings on various platforms and social media are examples of Customer-to-customer interaction. Another important factor is, does the social identity of the customer fit the one of the companies? Brand image, value proposition and communities within brand. The fourth step in the stair set is Customer Experience itself. Does the company offer the customer something relative and fitting to their current space and time? Does the company match its reputation?

Blue Tomato offers more than just physical products. Blue Tomato offers for example snowboard testing, snowboard/ski service, snowboard school and events. Blue Tomato's in-store teams are constantly further trained to understand the equipment and to give firsthand knowledge of the products and thus be able to recommend products that match the customers need, as well as cross selling and upselling. An example situation for cross selling would be a customer buying shoes and then a water repellant spray to go along with the fresh new pair. An example of a Blue Tomato upselling experience on the other hand would be customer buying a new cheap snowboard. After a short consultation and having the right questions asked, the customer realizes that by buying a board and bindings that match the skill level and riding style of the customer, allows the customer to develop as a rider. The customer service team goes is trained in similar manner but are not provided with the same training material as the in-store teams are and lack the practical approach included in the training of the in-store personnel.

Blue Tomato encourages their employees to get out and live the lifestyles. The company is aware of the importance of the first-hand knowledge in the Blue Tomato customer experience. Blue Tomato wants the customers to have a consistent experience at each touch point and these experiences to be fun, true, and inspiring. Dynamic engagement with the customers is something the company is very committed to.

In the Sequence Magazine 2019 interview, the Blue Tomato's CEO Adam Ellis said, *we also want to provide value to customers even if they do not buy something. Value might be the inspiration to get out and have an experience on a board or sharing first-hand knowledge about a product or telling a brand story. This enrichment piece of the experience is key to driving loyalty.* (Rossato & Ellis, 2019)

2.4 Customer Journey

The significance of a customer journey stems from a growing number of possibilities for the companies to interact with their customers and takes place in all channels that the customer has interacted with the company and vice versa. (Lemon and Verhoef 2016) The customer journey includes multiple touchpoints, possibly in both digital and

physical channels. The journey includes steps and moments of truths (MOTs) as well. MOT expresses how the customer perceives the service and the company and compares it to the customer's expectations before using the service. (Hormess, et al., 2018) Customer companies can track their customer journeys using a customer journey map. A customer journey map creates a visualized tale from the customer's perspective of the interaction between the customer and the company.

The customer service mapping can help companies to highlight pain points and service gaps between different channels. Pain points can be described as matter that cause friction in the customer experience thus cause satisfaction to decrease. Or as Petrina simplified it in her blog post for Paldesk: pain points are problems (Petrina, 2021). Hence, after mapping the journeys and identifying potential issues, it is easier for the companies to concentrate solving and improving these matters within the journey. (Reason, et al., 2015) . Blue Tomato has not yet mapped their customer journey, which gave the author an opportunity to compute one later in this paper.

2.4.1 Traditional Customer Journey Model

Traditionally the customer journey has been illustrated using a funnel model. See image 1. (Court, et al., 2009)
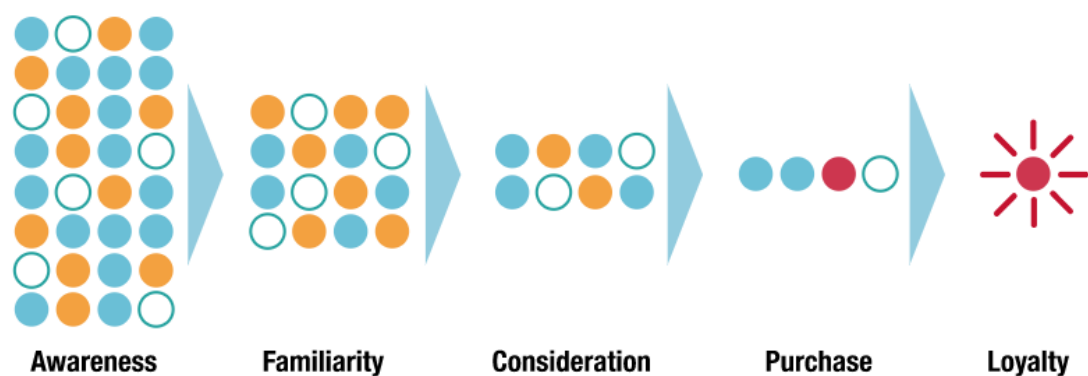

Picture 4. Funnel model (Court, et al., 2009)

The pre-purchase stage begins with awareness, where customer has become aware of a specific need and searches information regarding the product and or brand. (Aioma, 2021) After doing their research, the customer becomes familiar with the available

options and moves onto consideration. In this touchpoint, the customer evaluates and ranks the most suitable option before the actual purchase. (Court, et al., 2009) The purchase is the touchpoint where the customer has made the decision and buys the product either via digital or physical channels. (yukti, 2021) The vast number of touchpoints, options and information overflow resulted by them can have a negative impact on the buying process because it can over complicate the decision-making process. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016)

The last step is the ultimatum of customer satisfaction and only reachable if the other steps have been fulfilled. Loyalty occurs when the customer actively promotes and recommends the product/brand to others, resulting in a beyond expectations MOT. (CommBox, 2021) The impression the customer is left with depends on all the steps of the process. Exceeding expectations in one may cover for small hiccups but the overall
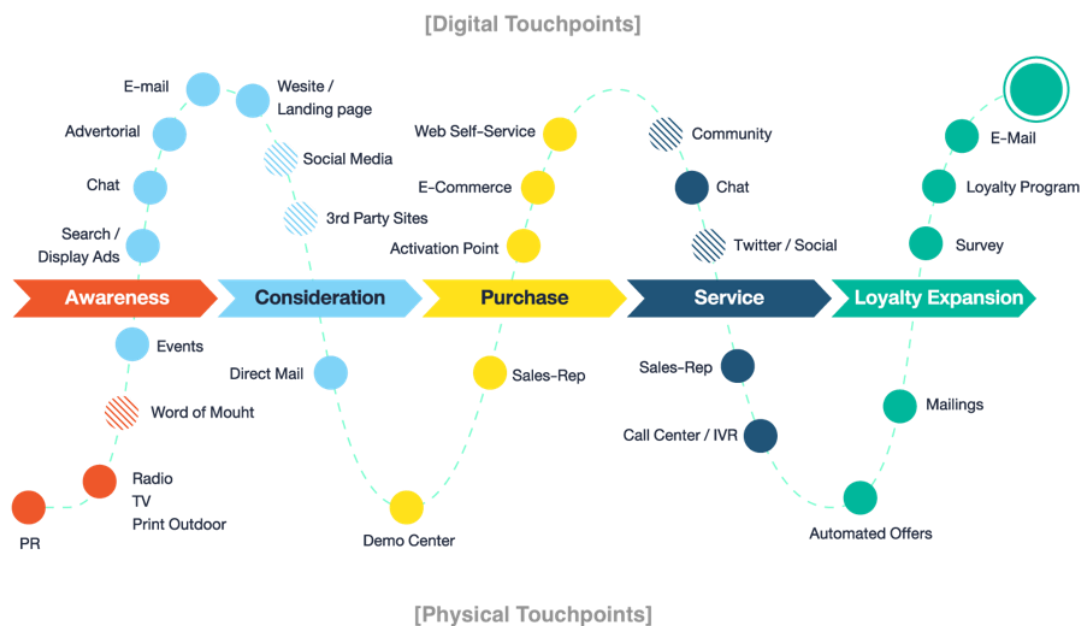
Picture 5. Digital and physical touchpoints (Marquardt, 2020)

impression must remain positive to manifest genuine loyalty. (yukti, 2021)

The funnel concept does not include all the touch points that have emerged after the exponential growth of the number of products available, digital channels together with increasingly better-informed customers (Court, et al., 2009) as image 2 illustrates.

The funnel model has other limitations as well. Firstly, it is too linear, assumes customer journey is infinite and that every journey is the same. Whereas the customer journey is now understood to be a cyclic loop and could potentially have multiple loops along the way making every journey as individual as the customer themselves. The funnel model out-dated because it focused on conversion and relied on a lot of attention. In the 1980 when the model was developed, times were different and searching information difficult, giving sellers a lot more power over the customer experience than in the modern world (Agius, 2019).

2.4.2 Modern Customer Journey Model

Because of the limitations of the traditional funnel model, a more refined version became necessary, such as the *customer decision journey.* As the image 2 below illustrates, instead of a funnel, the customer decision making process is a circular journey. The model is built around four key steps which resemble pain and gains for the company. These steps are initial consideration; active evaluation; purchase and post purchase experience. (Court, et al., 2009)
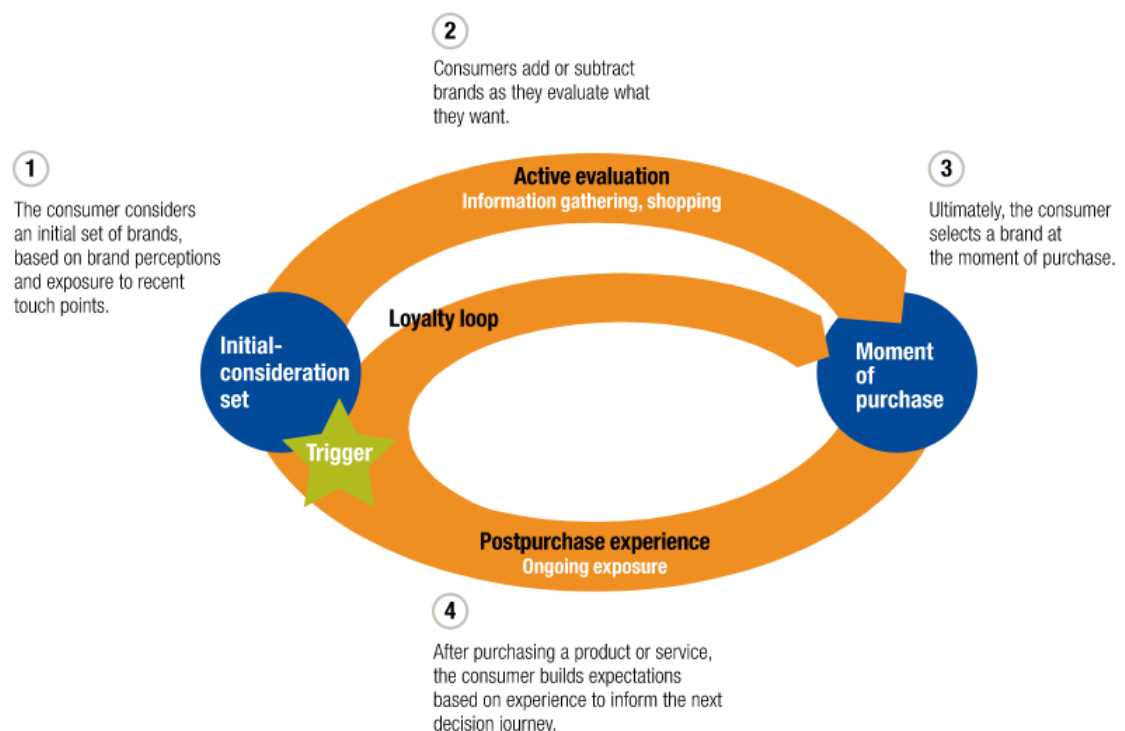
Picture 6. Customer Decision Journey (Court, et al., 2009)

The desire for the decision loop to start can initiated by triggers such as ads (both online and offline), word of mouth, blog posts as social media interactions with people followed by customer. In active evaluation, the customer actively researches potential options to purchase the product in which the customer research deeper into the products and brands offering them. (Court, et al., 2009) Brand awareness does not mean unknown brands cannot make their way under the microscope for example by cookie based targeted ads. Search retargeting uses user's search history data and web behaviour to target interesting ads, potentially even from formally unknown brands. (Santo, 2020). McKinsey research (2009) show that 66% of the touchpoints during active evaluation are actively pursued by the customer themselves. Examples of these touchpoints include word-of-mouth recommendations from family and friends as well as internet reviews in from of articles or review videos on platforms such as YouTube. (McKinsey, 2009)

Once the customer finalizes the purchase, the companies must ensure that their after sales services support the customer's post purchase experience. The importance of after sales services is crucial to build brand trust and loyalty. These services include assembly services, like mounting bindings to skis, replacing faulty products with functioning ones and contacting the customer how satisfied they were with their experience and product. A satisfied customer is likely to return as a customer to the company. (Haquel, 2017).

Returning, loyal customers can be divided into two groups: passive and active. Passively loyal customers are perhaps too stubborn to look for alternatives and stick with what has worked for them in the past. Active loyal customers on the other hand not only remain with the brand but also actively recommend it (Court, et al., 2009). In the McKinsey research (2009) found that up to 40% of customers who go visit a store to see the product in action are likely to change their mind because of what they discover during their visit. (McKinsey, 2009) Well trained store team with hands on experience are a key factor succeeding in this. Such store employees know can suggest and recommend alternatives based on their own experiences and include upsell products to further boost the sales. (Bernazzani, 2021)

An example of such scenario could be a customer visiting a Blue Tomato store after researching for a new snowboard. After entering a store, a store employee approaches the customer and ask the customer questions to better understand the needs, skill level and the current equipment status of the customer. With careful consideration the

employee can convince the customer to also upgrade the bindings and boots to create a product package that will satisfy the customer's needs and exceed their expectations. The satisfied customer is likely to return to Blue Tomato and recommend it within their circles.

2.4.3 Physical and Digital Touchpoints

The touchpoints take place prior, during and post purchase and can occur both online and offline. (Spectrio, 2021) Every touchpoint in the journey can affect the customers opinion about the brand and affect one of the five stages mentioned above. To create a coherent brand impression, both the digital and physical touchpoints must give the customer the same level of service and fulfill their expectations. (So, 2020) Also, the visual aspects of the physical and digital touchpoints should be similar, so that the customer will get the same impression in all the channels. (Lynk, 2018) Within omni-channel retail there should be no service or quality gap in the journey between the different channels. (So, 2020)

In Blue Tomato, a great attention is paid to improving not only the physical stores, but the online stores as well. Especially in 2020, the importance of the digital channels has been emphasized. The challenge is to keep the service quality, and thus the customer experience, universal throughout all channels.

An example from the author's experience is Click and Collect service that has been the newest edition in the omnichannel retail strategy of both their companies. Click and Collect service is a way for customer to order their purchase online and pick it up in a physical store of their choice. When the service was introduced, the focus was mainly on improving the digital touchpoints of the service, but the how the touchpoints concerning the brick-and-mortar store were not taken into consideration as much. This resulted in the service working while the customer encountered any of the digital touchpoints, but sometimes the service failed at the physical touchpoints.

Both digital and physical channels bring their own benefits in the customer journey, and it is a great possibility for companies to take advantage of this. Nevertheless, to make a seamless experience, it might be necessary to investigate the different steps and find

MOTs that create friction or service gaps in the customer experience and work on improving these. (Reason, et al., 2015)

2.5 Physical Sales Culture at Blue Tomato

Sales culture is part of organizational culture, which Bolton (2016, pg) refers to as service culture. Service culture takes time to develop and consist of shared values, belief, and norms. These give employees a sense of meaning and provide behavioral guidelines on how to behave within the company. Organizations can create a favorable service climate that can be recognized by having a strong and positive shared understanding and agreement of the organization's policies, practices, and procedures. Organizations can achieve favorable service climate by leadership management, HR management and system support. Leadership includes improving the customer experience by committing to everyday management activities whereas HR management focus on practices that promote high performance. Lastly system support includes support from functions that result in employees' internal service quality. (Bolton, 2016)

Blue Tomato has well documented and refined sales culture in their brick and mortars stores. The staff goes through a training basic program with theory and practical assessments. The shop and floor managers are responsible for the information flow and motivating the employees to constantly better themselves not only in performance, but in knowledge and their work practices. This is achieved by Train-the-Trainer (TTT). Which means that the regional managers train the shop managers, who then trains their shop teams. Almost half of managers time is devoted to team management and development. Questions like "How to approach the customer?" "What questions to ask?" and "How to cross- and upsell?" and more, will all be covered in both theory and practice. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

The shop sales culture has been crafted and improved for years, and it works in ways that benefits everyone involved and considers local cultural differences. The customer can receive better tailored service; thus, the customer experience is elevated. The employee's motivation to perform well is supported by provisions; hence the company creates more revenue.

2.6 Blue Tomato Customer Journey

Within his profession the author has guided numerous customers in their customer journeys and agree that after sale support is of the highest importance to retain unsatisfied customers as well as ideally manages to turn their experience from negative to positive. Being transparent and offering the customer enough and easy to find information in the pre-sale stages is important as well, as it lays the foundation for the actual purchase. As the author works in an Omni-channel market, the purchasing process needs to be equally easy across all channels.

Blue Tomato Customer Profile (data from Blue Tomato Customer Survey July 2020, N = 6500)

Majority of Blue Tomato's customers are Generation Y and Z, means they were born between 1980 – 2010. Blue Tomato customers are mostly students or full-time employees. They are digital natives, community-driven, creativity & individuality are important values to them. The customers are lifestyle -oriented and own high affinity to Snow, Surf & Skate, but are not necessarily part of the core community. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

Blue Tomato customers are explorers and people who seek to have fun (jester). To them, it is all about the feeling of unrestricted freedom, self-expression, and new experiences. They want to have fun, share experiences with their community and express their individuality. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

The customers are mostly well-situated young people, as over 60% of them stated they did not feel financial impact of the Covid-19 epidemic. They are orientating themselves towards self-actualization and buy products to support their passions and be part of a community They are looking for moments of wow & unique experiences (Blue Tomato, 2020)

Freedom and autonomy are central themes and important customer attributes. The desire for independence, singularity, self-realization is enormously important. Especially for Blue Tomato customers that closely resemble the explorer and jester types, the need for self-expression will remain. After a long period of rationality and self-control, the desire for spontaneity and the escape into adventure arises. During the lockdowns, people learned that personal freedom can also sometimes mean being

independent from the system, so the practice of sports or hobbies independent of infrastructure became more relevant. This can also have a lasting effect in favour of more individualized ways of life and sports such as skateboarding. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

Even when the environment changes, people still look for ways to fulfil their needs. Experiences are essential: they are rediscovering the familiar or experiencing something new. People are actively looking for new ways of how to express themselves and follow their passions. Blue Tomato sees them turning to new sports like skateboarding, SUP, or river surfing. More than 30% of Blue Tomato's customers recently started Skateboarding, more than 20 % started SUP. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

Blue Tomato community actively asks for specific content and engagement rates are higher than ever before. Blue Tomato could clearly see that customers are consuming more how-to-content, e.g. "How to learn skateboarding tricks for beginners" article was the 2nd most clicked Blue World story of business year 2020. The need for self-expression and exploration remains. Blue Tomato clearly focuses on executing their brand and vision. The company wants to create opportunities for their customers and employees to live their passions by doing everything to support their search for their own Moment of Wow. Blue Tomato inspires them, by sharing first-hand knowledge and providing the best products and service. Blue Tomato will continue to actively ask for and listen to their customer needs. Already during the pandemic peak spring 2020 the company had to find creative ways to engage with the customers and inspire them while having limited access to interact with them in shops and at events. Blue Tomato will keep on creating specific content tailored to their customer 's current needs by utilizing their first-hand knowledge to continue satisfying their customers. (Blue Tomato, 2020)

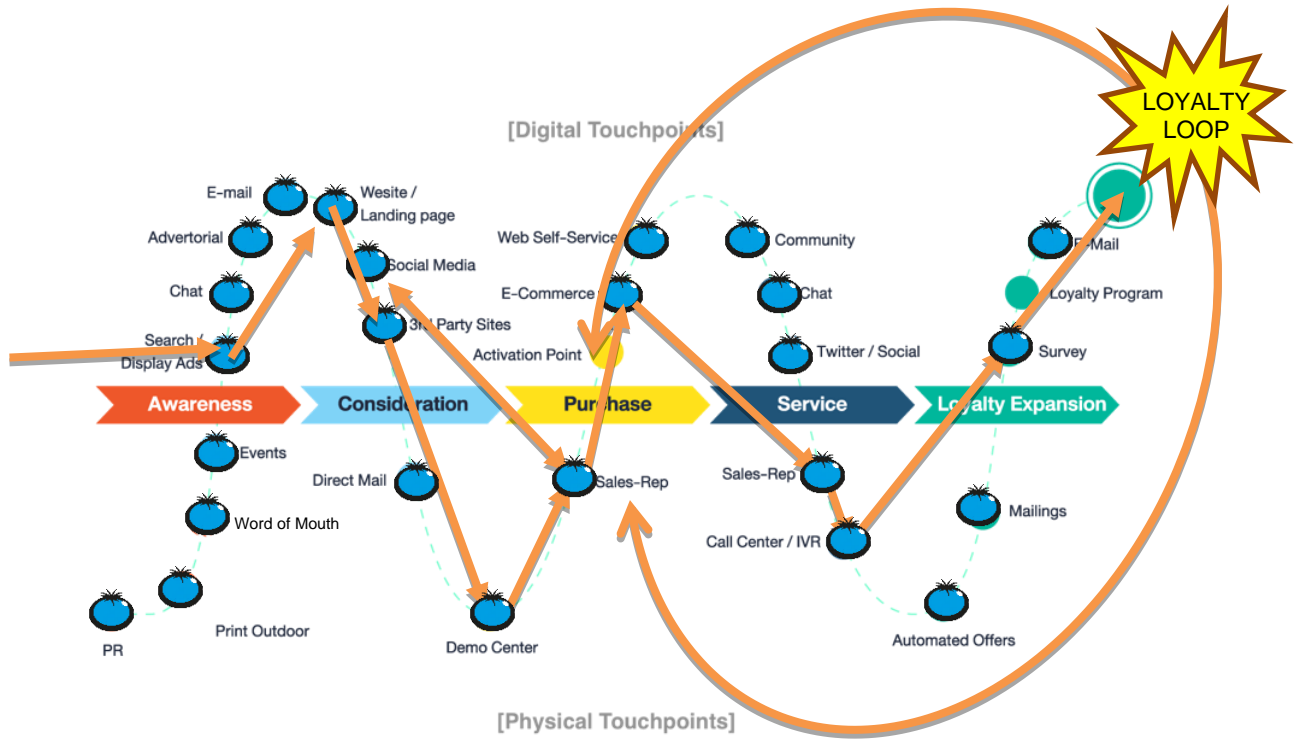2.6.1 Blue Tomato Customer Journey Map

The customer journey is made up of the stages of interactions between Blue Tomato and the customer. The Blue Tomato customer journey exists in an omnichannel landscape, with customers moving seamlessly between devices as they research products and services.

Developing the Blue Tomato customer journey strategy began with highlighting the available Blue Tomato touchpoints with the Blue Tomato logo in Image 6. and mapping the steps the customer takes on the way to a purchase. This mapping process can be complex as customers engage with touchpoints across multiple channels. Increasing use of mobile and socials have also multiplied the number and frequency of contacts during a typical journey. (Michael, 2014)

In the example journey, the customer began their prepurchase part of the journey by seeing a display ad based on their search history. The customer had Googled snowboard shoes and got targeted ads from Blue Tomato. The ads got the customer attention, and they clicked the ad and landed to the Blue Tomato online store using their laptop. While browsing the site, the customer went on to compare prices to a third-party site using their smart phone. After price comparison, the customer decided to go to a physical Blue Tomato to demo the products in person and to be able to get first-hand knowledge from the store employees. During the store visit, the customer used their smartphone to follow Blue Tomato on social media to get to engage more with the brand. Customer subscribed to BT newsletter as well and received 10€ welcome voucher as a reward.

After a demo, a product at the store, the customer and the store employee made an SOLD2 order, which means an online store order executed by the store employee. Via the SOLD2 order, the shop employee was able to collect provisions for the excellent service he had offered. This order was the processed by the central warehouse and shipped to the customer within the next days. Once the customer received the order, an email with a link to review Blue Tomato on Trustpilot and join the almost 3,900 other people that have left a review to the site.

After a week or so, the customer gets a customer satisfaction online survey sent to their email. Customer feels like he matters as an individual customer to the company and builds trust and loyalty to the brand. This triggers a loyalty loop, which mean the customer will return to shop to Blue Tomato whenever considering buying board sports equipment, streetwear clothing or for example backpacks.

Picture 7. Illustration of Blue Tomato touchpoints to map a possible customer journey in an omnichannel landscape.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Methodology

The author created an online customer satisfaction survey to gather data. The data was collected in quantitative manner by performing an online survey. The survey consisted of multiple-choice and open questions. The goal was to gather information that would help to answer the research questions. The questions focused on why the customers chose to shop in the store, instead of the online store. Which benefits did offline shopping offer compared to online (and vice versa). What were the weaknesses of the digital channels compared to physical? How often did the customer shop online / offline – which did they prefer and how satisfied the customer was in Blue Tomato's digital and physical channels?

There was no reward offered at the end of the interview. Although rewarding the responders could have increased the quality of the results as the customers would gain and benefit from taking part in it. (Sinopoli, et al., 2011) The online survey together with Blue Tomato Marketing team.

The customer satisfaction survey was shared to Blue Tomato's Instagram stories @Bluetomato. Blue Tomato Instagram page has a large and active follower base of over 143K followers (Instagram, 2021), making it a feasible channel to gain responses to the survey. The online survey included both single and multiple-choice questions as well as an option add an option of their own. The questions were prepared to remain as short and simple as possible, while providing enough data to draw conclusions, after analyzing it. The survey begins with basic background questions to give a rough idea of the responders location, age group and basic shopping behavior at Blue Tomato.

Instagram stories are maximum 15-second-long videos or pictures that can include interactive CTAs and features should as "swipe up" -links and polls. The page administrator can use these tools to create more engagement with their audience. (Instagram, 2021) The survey link was paired with an asset created by Blue Tomato

Design team and a swipe up link. The story lasted the maximum duration of 15 seconds.

3.2 Survey Design

The Blue Tomato customer satisfaction survey consisted of two main segments, background, and customer satisfaction segment as well as an optional open feedback at the end of the survey. The responders could see to which segment each question belonged. The survey was designed and executed in English, as that is the language Blue Tomato's main Instagram page operates mostly in and the language with the largest proficiency within our mostly European followers (Breene, 2016) making the choice both obvious and rational.

3.2.1 Background Segment

The motive behind the background segment was to be able to distinguish between different nationalities and age groups. As Blue Tomato has physical presence in five different European countries, at the time of this research (Blue Tomato, 2021), being able to compare the results by country was found beneficial. This segment starts the survey with eight single- or multiple-choice questions that built the basis for each individual responder. The questions were chosen to aid in dividing the responders not only by location and age, but by shopping frequency and behavior as well as which customer service touchpoints (see chapter 2.6) were the most used.

3.2.2 Customer Satisfaction Segment

This segment consisted of 11 questions designed to give insight on the levels of satisfaction between digital and physical channels as well as highlight pain points and reasons behind them. The answers could then be later used to determine how seamless the Blue Tomato customer journey in an omnichannel landscape was as well as revealing information about factors affecting customer satisfaction at Blue Tomato (see subchapter 2.2.3).

3.3 Survey Execution

The Blue Tomato customer satisfaction survey was administered using Survio. Survio is a Czech online survey company that has been operating since 2012. Survio offers its basic survey tools for free but offers premium accounts with more features. (Survio, 2021) This survey was completed using the free version which had its limitations. More of those limitations in the next chapter.

Survio offers a plethora of ready-made templates, or an option to create your own one. Once the survey was finalized, the link was shared first to Blue Tomato's marketing team, which evaluated and offered feedback. After adjusting the survey, a time slot for it was scheduled into Blue Tomato's Instagram page. The survey was then posted to the story paired with the asset below.
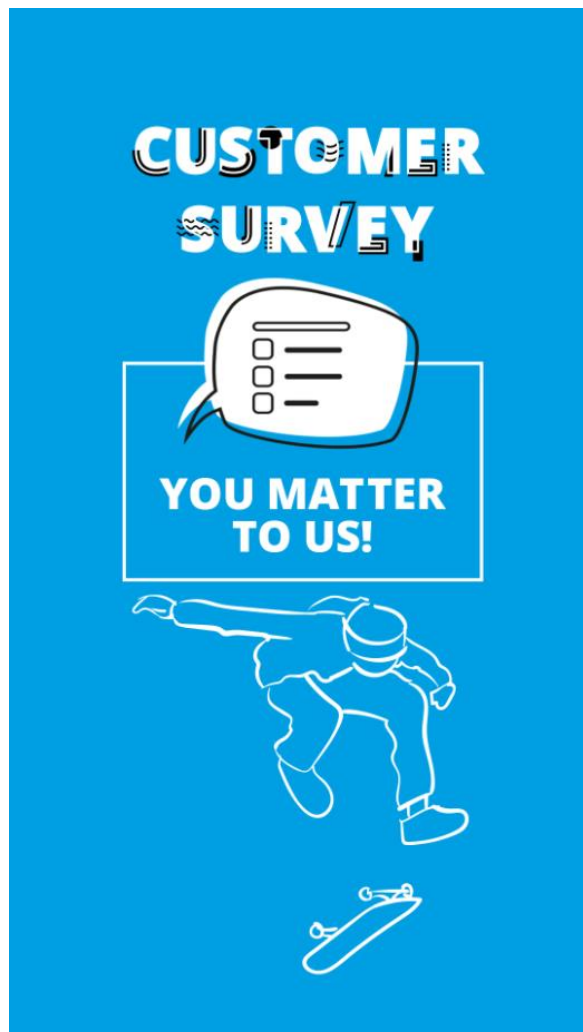
Picture 8. Survey asset for Instagram. (Blue Tomato Design Team, 2020)

From the over 143K plausible responders, the sample size was limited to 100, with the principle of first come, first serve. The non-probability sampling method, convenience sampling, was chosen as the attendance depends on availability and willingness of the responders (Barratt & Shantikumar, 2018). The 100 responds limit was fixed and set by Survio as part of their free service policies (Survio, 2021).

The Instagram story with the survey went live on Sunday 30.5.2021 19:00 and was visible for 24 hours. During this period, it was reached by 3696 people on Instagram and got 50 responds.

3.4 Limitations of the Research

This customer satisfaction survey had its limitations. Firstly, the chosen channel, Instagram stories, possessed its own risks of gaining too little data. This risk could possibly be compensated by the large and active follower base. Secondly, the maximum duration of 24 hours as well as the challenges of running a large and successful Instagram page with well-planned posting schedule made it difficult to find a suitable time slot. Most people are free on Sunday's hence Sunday was chosen to minimize the risks and maximize the exposure.

As mentioned earlier, the free version of Survio had its limitations as well. With the free version, there is a fixed limit of maximum 100 responses. While this amount is sufficient to the purposes of this research, it is something to consider when coordinating future surveys.
Survio did not allow to add company logos or other branded material to the survey either, as these are all premium features. Adding rules logic to the question was also not possible, for example: If answered "no" to a question, the next two questions would be skipped as they would not be relevant to the responder.

The number of questions had to be kept under control to prevent the survey's length reasonable. It would have been very interesting to implement multiple more specific questions into the survey, but all aspects considered, that would have been impossible. (Saunders, et al., 2007)

Lastly the used non-probability sampling method, convenience sampling is highly prone to considerable bias, as the attendance is based on both availability and willingness to take part in the survey. As an example, only younger generations might choose to

respond to the survey, whereas the older generations might not. (Barratt & Shantikumar, 2018) Thus, volunteer bias is a risk of non-probability sampling, and the sampled group might not represent the Blue Tomato customer base accurately.

3.5 Validity of the study

For the research method to have validity, it must measure what it was meant to measure. (Pride & Ferrell, 2017). Since survey and questionnaires should be based on already existing theories (Middleton, 2019), this research is based on the theories of customer experience and customer satisfaction to reach validity, to some extent at least. Like mentioned in the previous subchapter 3.5, the convenience sampling method could potentially decrease the level of validity for this research.

A research method is considered to have reliability if it can consistently produce almost identical results under the same circumstances. (Pride & Ferrell, 2017). This means that if another author were to use the same parameters to perform a similar survey, they should be able attain close to identical results. (Middleton, 2019)

4. ANALYSIS

The Blue Tomato customer satisfaction survey ran on Blue Tomato's Instagram stories for 24 hours and it reached 3696 people. The story had a reach rate of 2.58%. Out of that amount, 50 people took their time and swiped up to open the survey link and to share their thoughts about Blue Tomato, in both physical and digital channels. According to (Willott, 2019, pg) average survey response rates are 5 – 30%. QuestionPro went more specific when estimating that for B2C surveys, the respond rate is significantly lower, 13 – 16%. (QuestionPro, 2021) This in mind, the survey executed had a response rate of 1.35%. From these values and variables, the conclusion can be made that the response rate at the Blue Tomato customer satisfaction journey was below average. Blue Tomato Marketing team provided some insight on the low response rate and stated that since there was no raffle tied to the survey and the weather was exceptionally good during the period of the survey being live, these factors pushed the willingness to participate down. As mentioned in subchapter 3.2, having a reward or a raffle tied to the survey could have increased the motivation of the viewers to participate. (Sinopoli, et al., 2011)

4.1 Responder Background

The survey started with a question: *1. Where are you from?* Of the 50 Blue Tomato customer satisfaction survey participants 68% came from Blue Tomato's main German speaking DACH market as demonstrated see Figure 1. 16% came from Blue Tomato's focus countries, Finland, and the Netherlands. 17% of the participants came from elsewhere, including as far as Australia. These values correspond relatively accurately to Blue Tomato Audience Location from Google Analytics where 44% of our customers come from DACH countries and 11% from focus countries. (Blue Tomato, 2021)
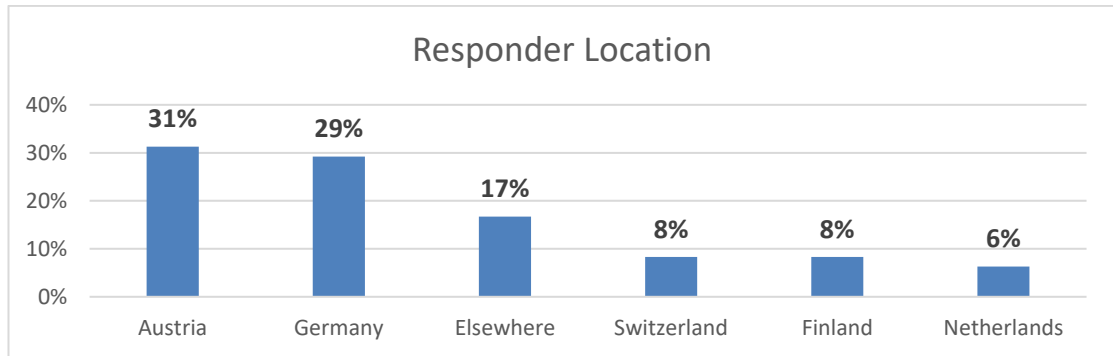
Figure 1. Responses based on location.

The second question was: *2. When were you born?* 80% of the responders were aged 20 - 40 years old which somewhat corresponds to the demographics data available at Blue Tomato's Google Analytics' where 18 – 44 old make up 69% of the company's customer base. (Blue Tomato, 2021)
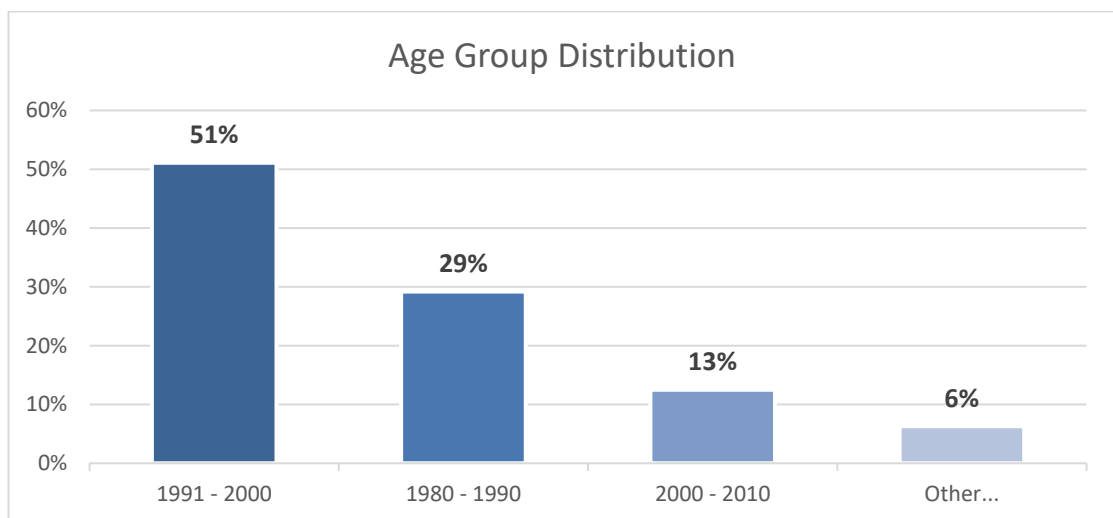

Figure 2 . Responder age group distribution.

4.1.1 Buyer Behavior

The Blue Tomato customer satisfaction survey's background segment's next questions focused to distinguish basic shopping behavior of the responders. Questions 3 – 6 collected information about how Blue Tomato customers shop and how regularly as well as whether they like returning products to stores and why:

3. *How do you normally shop at Blue Tomato?*
4. *How often do you shop online per year at Blue Tomato?*
5. *How often do you shop in store per year at Blue Tomato?*
6. *Do you like to return in store? If yes, why? If no, what needs to happen so you would? (Open answer)*

Over 60% of the responders have used both digital and physical channels of Blue Tomato. 35% shopped strictly online and only 2% only in-store. This clearly suggests that vast majority of Blue Tomato customers are taking advantage of the omnichannel landscape Blue Tomato is operating in as shown by the chart in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Showing the ratio between different channels

How many times did the responders shop then via physical and digital channels per year? According to the survey data, only 15% of responders shopped less than three times per year online where as in-store that number was 42%, see Figure 4. These values reflect importance of seamless online shopping, especially since the COVID-19 shook the world. According Selligent Global Connected Consumer Index, 36% of consumers now shop online weekly, an increase from 28% before the pandemic. (Selligent, 2020)

Shopping online per year

- 3-5: 40%
- 6-8: 25%
- 8-10: 19%
- 0-2: 15%
- More: 2%

Times

Shopping in store per year

- 0-2: 42%
- 3-5: 31%
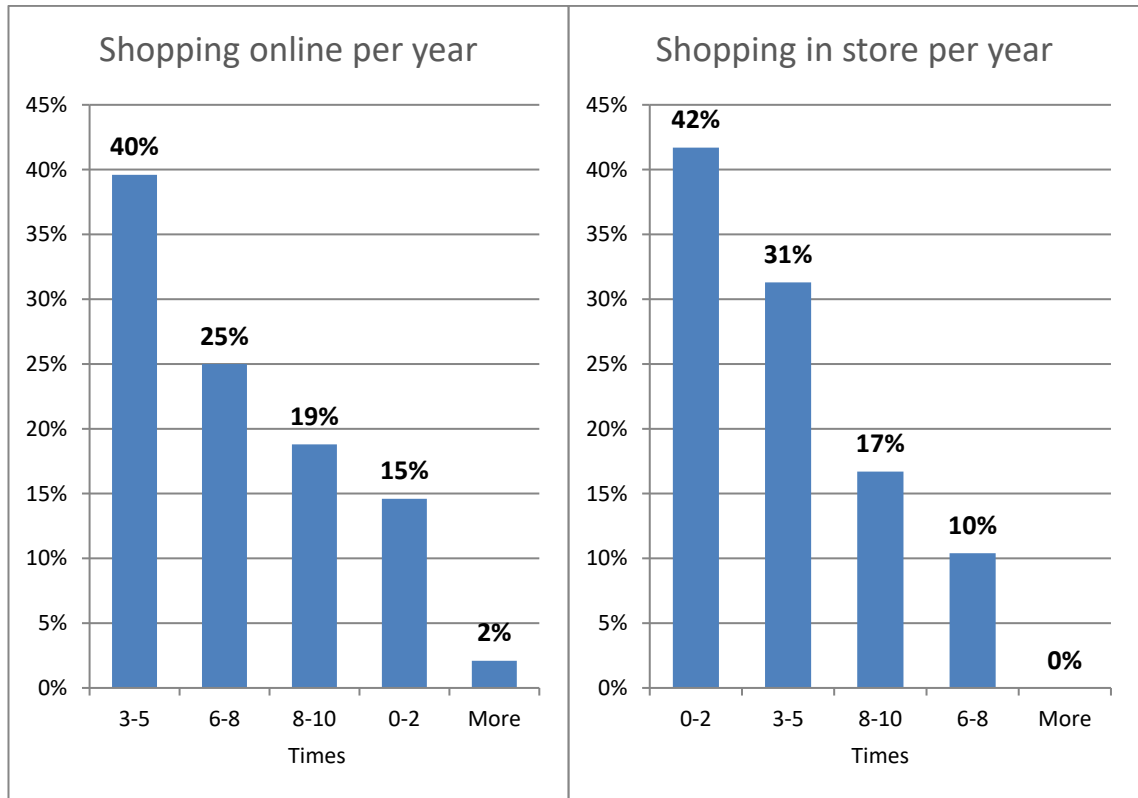- 8-10: 17%
- 6-8: 10%
- More: 0%

Times

Figure 4 How often responders shop online and in-store per year.

First open answered question of the survey is the question number 6.: *Do you like to return in store? If yes, why? If no, what needs to happen so you would?* After manually analyzing the responses, the author was able to categorize the responses. 58% to return in store because it is easier, faster, and more sustainable. Returning to store makes changing products more convenient and people like the atmosphere in the shops. 36% of the responders did not like to return to stores because they preferred online shopping and found returns by post to be both faster and easier. They also did not like to *depend on store opening hours*. Another reason not to use store returns was *no stores near by the respondent's locatio*n. 6% of the responses said they might return products to stores if it was easier than by post or if they had known about it. This shines some light to the research question "What are the reasons to shop in store and not online?" although in Blue Tomato's case, it does not matter whether the products were bought online or in-store as they can be returned to any channel – a true omnichannel advantage.

The last two questions of the background segment were:

7. *Have you ever contacted Blue Tomato Customer service?*

8. *If yes, how?*

The author found out that close to 70% of the responders had been in contact with Blue Tomato's customer service and that email and phone calls were clearly the most used channels in the multiple-choice question. 30% of the responders had never been in contact with Blue Tomato's customer service. In their whitepaper, Selligent stated that phone, email, and other digital channels each had a 33% share of most preferred channel to contact customer service (Selligent, 2020). The results from this survey are somewhat appliable, although emailing the customer service was clearly the most popular channel.
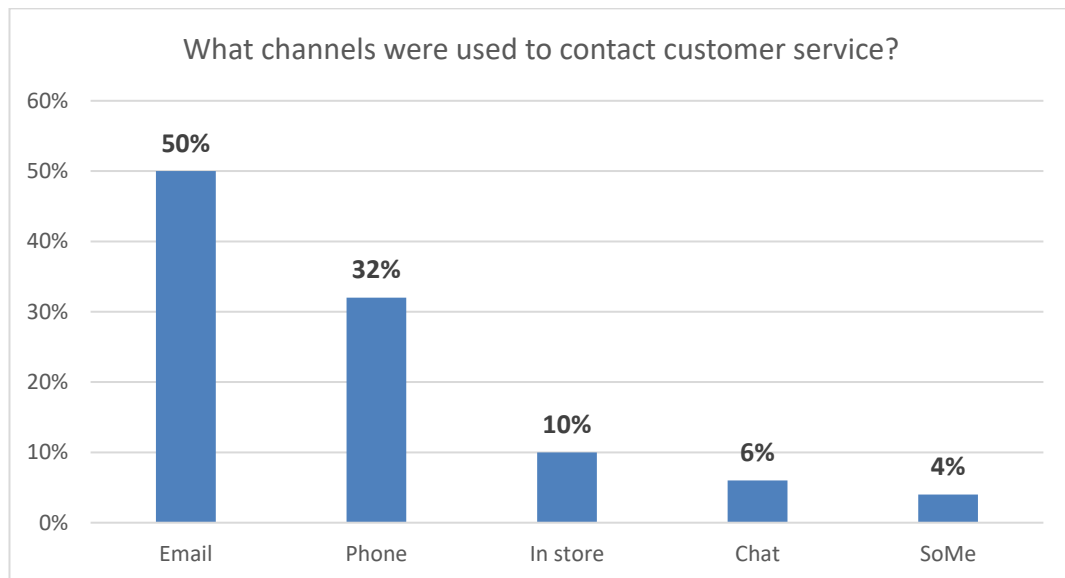

Figure 5. Customer service channels used by responders.

4.1.2 Discovering the Service Gap Between Physical and Digital Channels

The customer satisfaction segment began with three multiple choice questions, determining customer service satisfaction between digital and physical channels.

9. *How well did Blue Tomato customer service answer your questions?*
10. *Overall, are you satisfied with the employees at our stores?*
11. *Overall, are you satisfied with the employees at our digital channel (customer service)?*

In general, 75% of the responds were very satisfied how the customer service answered their queries and only 9% were unhappy or very unhappy with the quality of the service. One of the objectives of this research was to narrow down possible service gaps, thus the next two questions had a look into customer satisfaction and customer experience quality both in-store and digitally:

12. *How do you rank your customer experience in store?*
13. *How do you rank your customer experience online?*

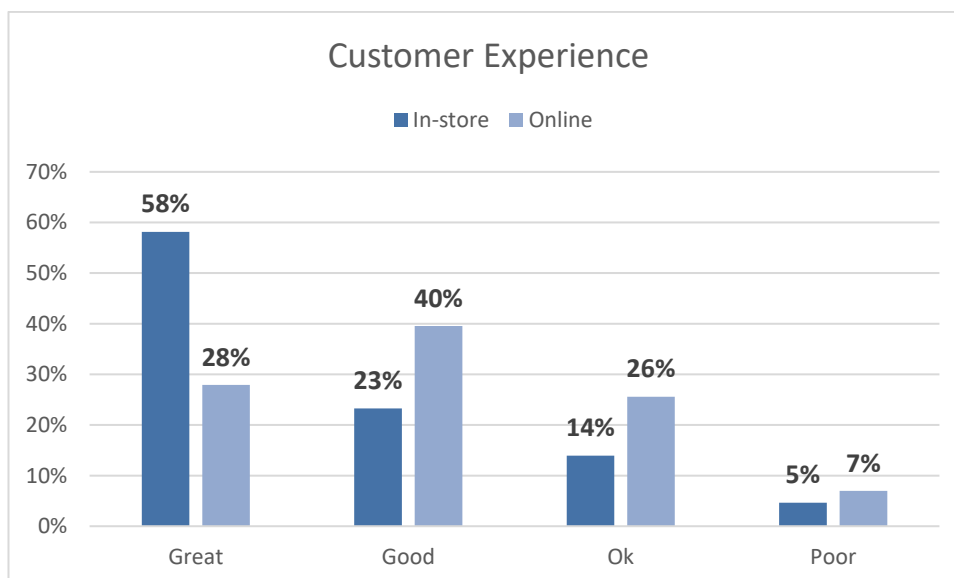Figure 6. Compares customer satisfaction in-store and online.

Figure 7. Compares customer experience quality in-store and online.

As the figures above illustrate, there were both knowledge and delivery gaps (see subchapter 2.2.1) between digital and physical channels. After each individual response was analyzed, the author collected both the applauds and the critics. The responders seemed to be more satisfied with the customer experience in-stores, as over 81% replied with either *Great* (58%) or *Good* (23%). Most of them appreciated the friendly, helpful, and active staff with great knowhow and are willing to go an extra mile for the customers. Others reported inconsistencies within the employees – passive, not nice, and potentially even intoxicated. The design of the stores was also criticized to be weird and too crammed with products. Which meant the RATER framework's (subchapter 2.2.3) tangibles and assurance factors might not have been aligned with the company image. It must be stated though, that Blue Tomato stores do vary in their sizes as each shop is unique but share a uniform indistinguishable style (Blue Tomato, 2021).

Online satisfaction and service quality were notably lower. Although 68% responded positively, the amount of *Great* (28%) -answers was significantly lower and people had a lot more areas they would like to improve. This further supported the existence of both the knowledge and delivery gaps. The responders criticized *the inconsistent customer service quality* were often multiple agents try to solve the same case. In their whitepaper, Selligent stated that 77% of customer find it the most annoying when brands do *not properly communicate* with their customers (Selligent, 2020). *Delayed and or lost deliveries* were also addressed but this is unfortunately a problem that is out

of Blue Tomato's direct control, as the deliveries are performed by external companies. But nevertheless, this made it evident, that a communication gap existed as well. As the customers were informed about a delivery time X but they received their deliveries later at time Y.

Customer service was described both *helpful and passive*, which further highlights the inconsistencies connected to the delivery gap, that other respondents had brought to daylight as well. PostNord as a non-favorable delivery company was also pinpointed multiple times, but that problem has been addressed and solved spring 2021. The author was actively working solving this issue and has noticed significant improvements immediately after the solution was put to action. This potentially resulted in narrowing the knowledge and delivery gaps regarding this pain point, thus emphasizing the responsiveness factor of RATER framework.

What the online customers liked was the great quality of Blue Tomato online store, although parts of it could be updated, important information could made more accessible (store availability), and the orders processed faster. Blue Tomato's extensive buyers guides, and size charts were on the list of highly appreciated features as well.

4.1.3 Motivations and Dislikes

The next four questions gave the survey respondents an opportunity to reflect what motivates them to shop in-store and online as well as what did they dislike about them. Due to giving the responders an option to include their own answers, the author will summarize these replies under.

14. *What motivates you to shop in store?*
15. *What don't you like about shopping in store?*
16. *What motivates you to shop online?*
17. *What don't you like about shopping online?*

The motive to shop in-store springs from the social aspect of going to a store, looking for inspiration and finding Blue Tomato stores cool. From the options defined by the author, the biggest reason to shop in-store is the possibility to test and try products

prior purchasing, 90% of the responders agreed with this, see figure 8. About 40% go to stores for the help they receive and for hassle free shopping and returns. If there is a need to get the products immediately, buying from the store is the only viable option, assuming the desired product was in stock.

When choosing to shop online, the responders found it motivating to have a larger selection 74%, higher convenience 68%, and flexibility 65%, since the online stores are open around the clock all year around, see figure 9. The possibility to shop with ease 53% from no matter what device was also mentioned coupled with online specific discounts.

In this section the customers were also asked to pinpoint what they disliked about both in-store and online experiences. When shopping in-store 24% of the responders did not like the limited selection, the stores have when compared to the online store, limited skateboard deck selection was pointed out three times. The second most frequent response was that the responders do not like the act of going to the store by 18%. This could be due to either time or distance to store limitations. Opening hours were also mentioned. 14% of the responders addressed disliking the store employees because of feeling supervised or insisted to shop. On the contrary, responders also brought up not receiving help when needing it. This passiveness was already mentioned above. 4% of the responders did not like shopping in-store because of other customers.

Biggest complain about shopping online was found out to be of an intangible kind – the fact that products nor materials cannot be tried before purchasing was mentioned by 29% of the responders. Other complains focused on delivery and return problems of numerous kinds (communication and knowledge gap). The responders mentioned longer than promoted delivery and return times (33%) and delivery problems related to PostNord – where parcels were not delivered or lost. 8% mentioned difficult customer service experience and lack of live chat, which Blue Tomato does offer.

What was interesting to notice that despite asking for what the customers disliked about shopping in-store or online, in both queries over 35% of the responders stated that they liked everything or had no complains whatsoever.

Motives to Shop in-store

Figure 8. Motives to shop in-store.

Motives to Shop Online

Figure 9. Motives to shop in-store.

4.1.4 General Opinion of Blue Tomato and Loyalty

The last two compulsory questions focused on general brand image and loyalty in terms of recommending Blue Tomato to others. Blue Tomato as brand was not disliked

by any of the responders and thus liked by 96%. Only 4% of the responders had a neutral opinion of Blue Tomato.

> *18. Do you like Blue Tomato?*
> *19. How likely are you to recommend Blue Tomato to people you know?*
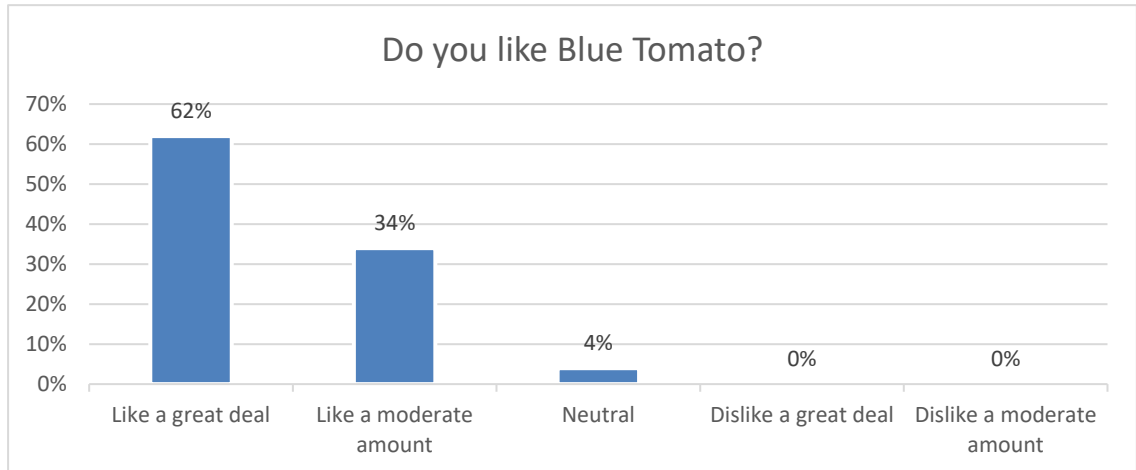
Figure 10. How do you like Blue Tomato?

Similar positivity continued to loyalty. None of the respondents would not recommend Blue Tomato at all. This clearly states that despite all the factors and gaps affecting customer satisfaction that were highlighted in this research, they did not have a significant effect on the brand image amongst the survey participants. Meaning in general, Blue Tomato customers are satisfied and thus likely to shop with the company again as well as to advocate it (subchapter 2.2).
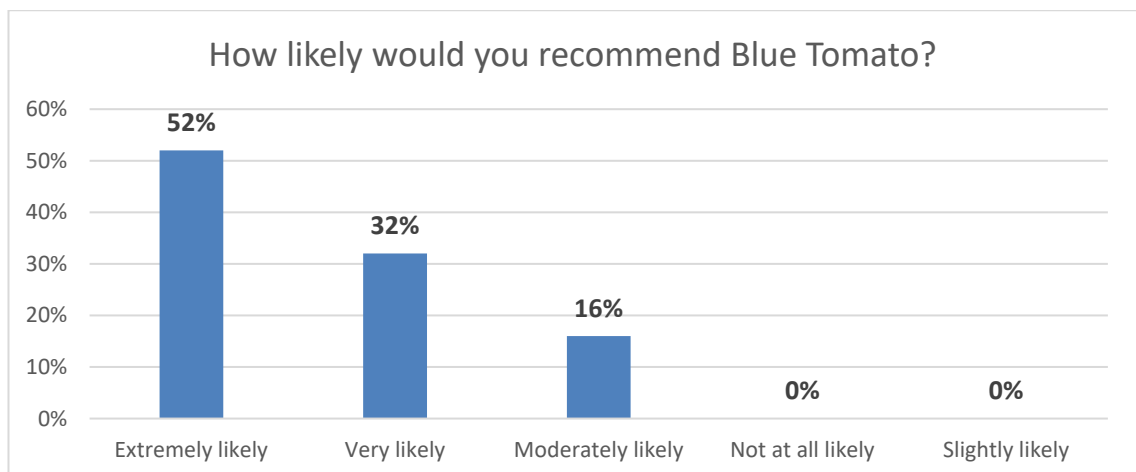

Figure 11. How likely would you recommend Blue Tomato?

4.1.5 Open Feedback

The last part of the Blue Tomato customer satisfaction survey was a noncompulsory open feedback box: *20. Open feedback (open and optional).* 70% of the responders skipped this part completely.16% of survey participants left *mostly encouraging* short feedback or *greetings* but the remaining 14% had some *criticism* to state. Customer service and delivery got similar criticism that had already surfaced earlier in the survey. It was suggested to *revamp* the email customer service to be *more customer centered*, not to have multiple agents working on a same case and to learn from the store employees how to *better help customers*. *PostNord* was highlighted here as well with suggestions to stop using their services completely or to switch from door deliveries to using *parcel machines or stations*. One comment addressed a need for another store in Finland. Since Finland is one of Blue Tomato's highest performing focus countries, the possibility for further retail expansion exists.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1.1 Conclusions and Potential Future Improvements

It is evident that knowledge, delivery, and communication gaps exist between physical and digital channels. Shops have better product knowhow and rewards to serve customers well. Digital channels do not have same rewards and level of knowhow. Better product knowhow increases satisfaction and the quality of the customer experience in a holistically.

The key factors that motivate customers to shop in-store were found to be chance to try products before purchasing them, help received while in the store as well as convenience. When shopping in-store the customer gets the products immediately and can get their returns processed much faster than by post. The factors against shopping in-store focused on limited selection, opening hours, distance and not *always* receiving the help expected. On the other hand, the key factors that motivated customers to shop online were the greater selection of products, convenience, ease, and flexibility of being able to shop around the clock all year around with support for multiple devices. Here, the author noticed a clear connection between the weakness of one channel and the strengths of another. Intangibility of shopping online was a factor that was highlighted the most. Customers are not able to try nor feel the products upon receiving them. Customers also mentioned delivery delays and issues regarding returns as well as quality of the digital customer service.

What could be done differently in the future to tackle the issues mentioned above? Blue Tomato could improve the product knowhow of their digital customer service employees by introducing in-store training periods and reward success with store-like provision system. This would assist narrowing the knowledge and delivery gaps. As Blue Tomato has both two stores in Graz, from where customer service is operated, it would be easy and cost efficient to coordinate in-store training for the digital customer service employees.

Additionally, to narrow the communication gap, country specific optimization to delivery and return methods for digital could be researched and introduced to increase *reliability* and match the convenience of shopping in a store.

Finally, it is recommended to develop Blue Tomato Omnichannel Customer Journey. Via mapping their omnichannel customer journey, Blue Tomato could more efficiently focus on improving individual touchpoints after pain points had been identified which would lead to an overall enhanced customer experience and thus higher customer satisfaction throughout the different service channels,

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Customer Satisfaction Survey

An online copy of the survey is accessible via:

https://www.survio.com/survey/d/I4J9V2W9H7L6G8D1U
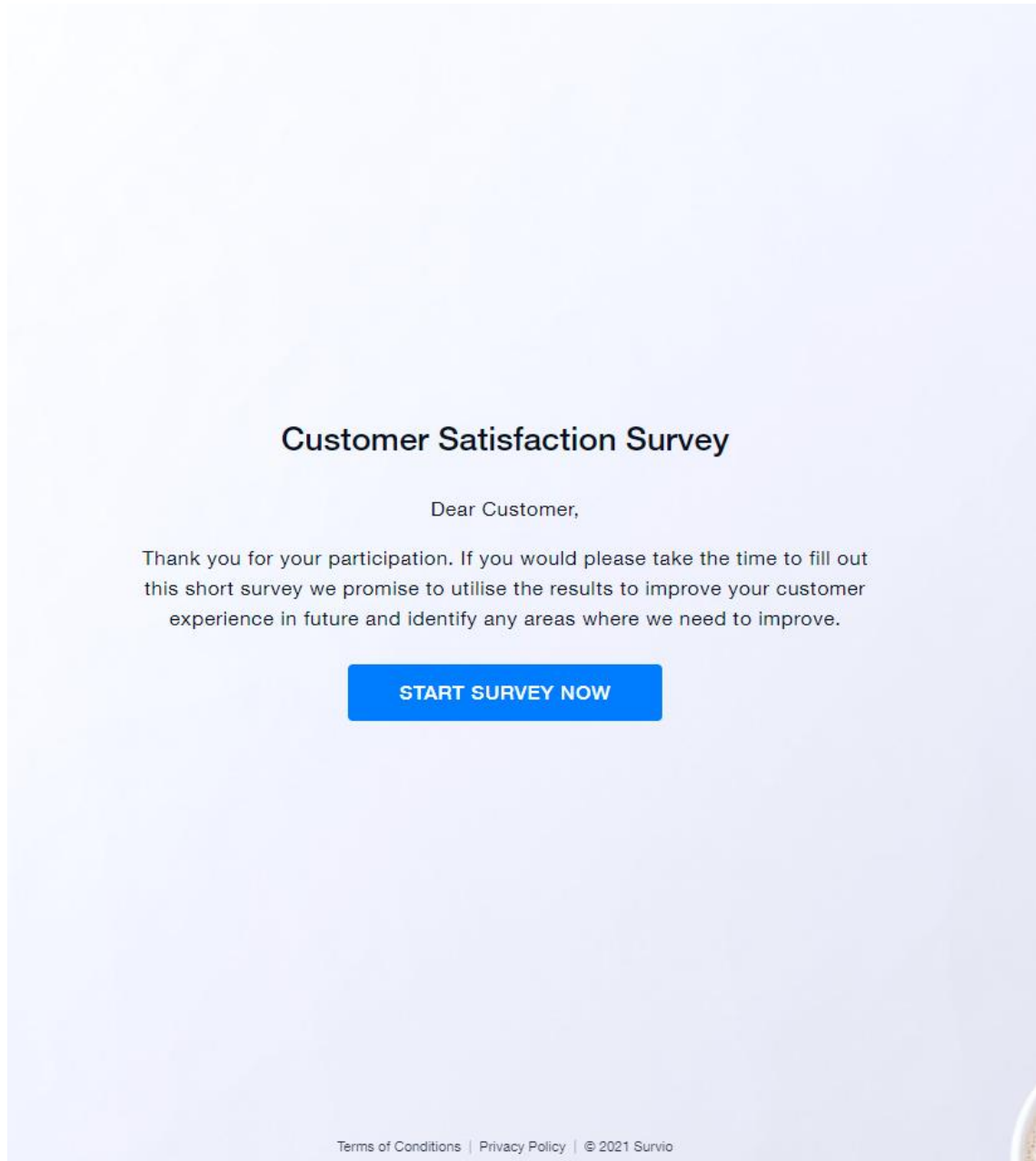
Customer Satisfaction Survey

1. Where are you from?*
Background section

Austria

Finland

Germany

Netherlands

Switzerland

Elsewhere:

2. When were you born?*
Background

1980 - 1990

1991 - 2000

2000 - 2010

Other...

3. How do you normally shop at Blue Tomato?*

Background. Select one or more answers.

Online
In store
Both

## 4. How often do you shop online per year at Blue Tomato?*

Background

0 - 2
3 - 5
6 - 8
8 - 10
More

5. How often do you shop in-store per year at Blue Tomato?*

Background

0 - 2
3 - 5
6 - 8
8 - 10
More

6. Do you like to return in Store? If Yes, why? If No, what needs to happen so you would?*

Background

Type one or a few words...

500

7. Have you ever contacted Blue Tomato customer service?*

Background

Yes

No

Cannot remember

8. If yes, how?*

Background. Select one or more answers.

Phone

Chat / Skype

In store

Social Media

Email

No contact

9. How well did Blue Tomato customer service answer your questions?

Customer satisfaction segment

Extremely well
Very well
Moderately well
Slightly well
Not at all well

10. Overall, are you satisfied with the employees at our stores?*

Customer satisfaction segment

Extremely satisfied
Moderately satisfied
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Moderately dissatisfied
Extremely dissatisfied

11. Overall, are you satisfied with the employees at our digital channel (customer service)?*

Customer satisfaction segment

- Extremely satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Moderately dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

12. How do you rank your customer experience in store? poor – ok – good – great and why?*

Customer satisfaction

Type one or a few words...

500

## 13. How do you rank your customer experience online? poor – ok – good – great and why?*

Customer satisfaction

Type one or a few words...

500

14. What motivates you to shop in store?*

Customer satisfaction segment.

Being able to try products

Help you receive at the store

Easier shopping and returns

Something else, what?

15. What don't you like about shopping in store?

Customer satisfaction segment.

Type one or a few words...

500

16. What motivates you to shop online?*

Customer satisfaction segment.

Selection

Flexibility

Easy

Convenience

Something else

17. What don't you like about shopping online?

Customer satisfaction segment.

Type one or a few words...

500

18. Do you like Blue Tomato?*

Customer satisfaction segment.

Like a great deal

Like a moderate amount

Neither like nor dislike

Dislike a moderate amount

Dislike a great deal

19. How likely are you to recommend Blue Tomato to people you know?*

Customer satisfaction segment.

Extremely likely

Very likely

Moderately likely

Slightly likely

Not at all likely

20. Open feedback:

Optional

Type one or a few words...

500

Thank you for completing this survey.

Share this survey and help us get more responses...