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### How the coronavirus made us nostalgic & affected our consumption

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#### ABSTRACT

Consumption is usually seen as the way consumers purchase and consume in order to make sense of themselves, their surroundings and create meaning. However, the pandemic of Covid-19 has spread worldwide and previous research has just begun to address how this pandemic has affected us. Therefore, limited research exists about how consumers today consume in order to create meaning through consumption during a pandemic as Covid-19. Building on different literature about consumption and meaning creation through consumption, this research explores and illustrates *how consumers consume during the Covid-19 pandemic to create meaning and make sense of the current situation*. In addition, this article also reflects on branded products. This study indicates that consumers tend to create meaning and make sense of the pandemic by consuming in different ways, connected to; substitution, show-off, and memory consumption. These identified patterns of behavioural changes are suggesting that consumption during Covid-19 is appealing to and stimulated by (re-)enchanted responses and nostalgic stimulus.

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## **1. Introduction**

Consumption is usually seen as the way consumers purchase and consume in order to create meaning for themselves and to make sense of themselves and their surroundings. One consumes in order to get a feeling and/or to express oneself, which also could be connected to identity. Thus, a lot of industries and companies try to create brands and products that consumers can use to construct an identity for themselves and use to adapt their relationship with others (Kozinets, 2001 mentioned in Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumers can also consume in order to feel nostalgia, how something used to be (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). This has made it common among brand managers and marketers to use nostalgia within their marketing to create a feeling of enchantment for the customers'. This often makes customers' purchase the product or brand since it connects them to the past and a feeling of home and comfort. (ibid)

Why and how do consumers create meaning through their consumption? In general, consumption is defined as the process of using something or the amount of something that is being used, making it decrease. It is a process where one engages in the appreciation of either services, goods, information, ambience, or performances, regardless if it is bought or not, and used for a practical, expressive or meditative purpose (Warde, 2005). It is a dominant practice that constantly is negotiated among actors in the marketplace (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumers consume to feed both needs and desires, where desire can be saturated in many different ways.

Three relevant research streams are used in this research since they address the theme of consuming in order to create meaning and to make sense of something. The first research is the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which is a family of theoretical perspectives describing consumers' consumption choices and behaviours (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). CCT also discusses how commercially produced images and products can be consumed and used by consumers to adapt their relationships with others and construct an identity (ibid). Connected to this research stream is conspicuous consumption which also talks about how consumption can be used to display and symbolize status, wealth, and similar (Kenton, 2021). Additionally, conspicuous consumption elaborates on the idea that the idealized or obtained status also works as an identity carrier (Winkelmann, 2012). Thus both CCT and conspicuous consumption explain how consumers can use consumption to express themselves, create meaning, and be used as a sort of identity carrier. The second research stream is about interpretive strategies and sensemaking. It includes consumers' usage of different strategies and actions to create meaning and make sense of their consumption (McCracken, 1986; Weick, 1995). Finally, the third stream of relevance for this research is the research and theory about nostalgia. It highlights how nostalgia can have an effect on consumers' consumption and feelings towards it (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). How they can consume products or things to connect to another state of being, feeling comfortable and enchanted (ibid).

However, the pandemic of Covid-19 is something new to all of us and has never been affecting the world before. Thus, previous research about creating meaning through consumption has never addressed how it is to consume during a pandemic such as Covid-19.

One can find previous research about consumption during crises which are mentioned and included in this article. However, how consumers consume to create meaning and feelings during the pandemic Covid-19 is absent in previous literature.

*This research explores and illustrates how consumers consume during the Covid-19 pandemic to create meaning and make sense of the current situation.*

To clarify, make sense in this study refers to how customers try to understand and adapt to the pandemic by using consumption. Moreover, in the light of the pandemic Covid-19, most people around the world are limited in going out. Some countries, when this study is performed, are still in lockdown, unable to visit public places such as stores, bars, events, and restaurants. Compared to most other countries, in Sweden, there were only set recommendations and more gentle restrictions (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021a). Traveling is for example still available, however, the amount of places to visit is much more limited and the recommendation from the government is not to travel (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021b). A lot of people have therefore adapted to these recommendations and limited themselves in many parts of their everyday life. Hence, all of the restrictions and changes could possibly have changed consumers' consumption, how they create meaning and make sense of a disrupted state of being by using consumption.

In addition, this article also reflects on branded products since it often is connected to meaning creation through consumption. Brands in this theme are regarded as brands that are not sold through e.g. the larger clothing chains, but rather branded products sold in flagship or multi-brand stores. Thus data from observing consumers at a store in the center of Gothenburg selling luxury branded products are gathered along with semi-structured interviews, further explained in the methodology chapter.

To summarize, the contribution of this research is to add further theory to the marketing and consumption literature about the possibly changed consumption behaviour among consumers during a pandemic as Covid-19. This study aims to create more insights for both individuals and companies on how Covid-19 affects consumers' ways to create meaning through their consumption and how they make sense of the current pandemic situation through their consumption.

## **2. Theoretical background**

To get a better understanding of people's way of consuming during the pandemic of Covid-19, and how their meaning creation through consumption could be affected, different phenomena, perspectives, and theories having a connection to consumption are studied and used in this research. A short introduction is given to each one of these and the relevance of using them in this research, followed by a more in-depth description of them.

The phenomenon of consumption and what really defines it are included in this chapter in order to get a better understanding of what consumption really means. From this, the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is brought up since it is a perspective on how to view consumption choices and the relationships among consumers, their actions, cultural meanings, and the marketplace. This perspective is not a theory, however, it could provide a

wider comprehension and view on how consumers behave and make choices, which possibly could be useful in order to understand and compare to the current situation of today, with the ongoing pandemic Covid-19.

Theory about conspicuous consumption is also included since it is another way for consumers to create meaning through consumption. It describes how consumers sometimes consume to symbolize and represent themselves in a desired way. Moreover, to deeper insights, it could be interesting to investigate if consumers still use conspicuous consumption during the pandemic or if the way they use it to create meaning for themselves has been affected.

From this, the theory of interpretive strategies together with the theory of sensemaking is touched upon since these theories describe how consumers can be seen as interpretive beings who both use strategies and take action to make sense of something and create meaning for themselves. These theories could provide an understanding of how consumers during the pandemic use different strategies, perhaps such as consumption of things that connect them to their ordinary lives, to make sense of the current situation and create meaning for themselves.

Another phenomenon that involves meaning creation through consumption is nostalgia. The theory of nostalgia and its connection to consumption are presented since it involves how consumers can consume in order to connect to a nostalgic past and thus get a feeling of home and comfort. The pandemic of Covid-19 has affected people all around the world and most people have been or are still limited in living as usual due to set restrictions and recommendations. The theory of nostalgia is thus relevant in order to see if consumers during the pandemic Covid-19 consume to get a feeling of how it was before the pandemic or for the future when the pandemic is over, in other words, a nostalgic consumption to make sense of and create meaning.

Finally, since this study is investigating how consumers consume to create meaning and make sense of the current pandemic Covid-19, some previous theories about changed consumption during crises are reviewed.

## **Consumption**

Consumption is a social category constantly in the making which circles in almost every aspect of people's everyday life. People consume either for practical reasons, a meditative inner-directed meaning or to express themselves (Warde, 2005). The things consumed could be either a service, goods, ambience, information, or performance. It does not matter if it is bought, hired, or borrowed for it to be seen as consumption. Additionally, consumption is not itself a practice, it rather occurs within every practice one makes, where the things consumed are being used by the course of engagement in a particular practice. (ibid) The things consumed can be either immaterial or material and are driven by both desire and needs. Thus, in an affluent society, desire and consumption are constantly "in the making" and therefore assumed to be ever-increasing. Furthermore, consumption can be both symbolic (that it is connected to something meaningful; Levy, 1959), cultural (that the meaning of consumption can shift over places, time, and people; McCracken, 1986), and subjective (that the meaning of consumption can be different among individuals; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). To get an

even better understanding of consumption the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is studied.

### **Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)**

The Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that describes consumers' behaviours and consumption choices from a cultural and social point of view. Arnould and Thompson (2005) identify four research fields within CCT; marketplace cultures, consumer identity projects, the socio-historical patterning of consumption, and finally the mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies. These theoretical perspectives describe the relationships among consumers, the marketplace, consumers' actions, choices among products or services, and cultural meanings. Hence, CCT views consumption and markets as social creations. (Arnould & Thompson, 2005)

The one field within CCT presents an interconnected system of how commercially produced images and products can be used by consumers to adapt their relationships with others and construct an identity (Kozinets, 2001 mentioned in Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Thus, an identity-seeking process at a marketplace could be described as a process where narratives of oneself are being created by the usage of resources offered at the marketplace. In order to create these narratives, one must cope with several points of conflicts related to goal striving, show-off, and comparison. The phrase "show-off" mentioned through our article is thus related to the intention of how consumers possibly use brands in order to get direct or indirect attention from others and how brands could be used as an identity creator. Furthermore, to handle conflicts as the ones mentioned, consumers can use branded products as symbols to represent themselves. One could therefore say that norms, status, and social aspects often underline consumption within CCT, where people want to be part of something and use branded products as markers to connect to it and represent themselves in a certain way. (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) Additionally, "Consumer culture theory explores how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances, and further their identity and lifestyle goals" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 871).

### **Conspicuous consumption**

Another aspect in regards to consumption, status, and identity creation is the idea of conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption as a term originates from Thorstein Veblen and refers to social status, identity, wealth, and the importance of certain consumption in comparison to other consumers' consumption. It stems from the idea that one purchases in order to display and symbolize wealth and status, as previously mentioned, but also pecuniary strength when being perceived by the surrounding. (Kenton, 2021)

It is further argued by Winkelmann (2012) that the purchase and display of luxury consumption are coupled with satisfaction, happiness, and well-being.

Conspicuous consumption research further elaborates on the idea that the idealized or obtained status also could work as an identity carrier, meaning that when the status is perceived, the identity creation process is active (Winkelmann, 2012). In addition,

conspicuous consumption in relation to the perceived importance of status is argued by Johansson-Stenman and Martinsson (2006) as being relevant when discussing status comparison by using and comparing consumption goods. This research stems from the fact that consumers commonly refer to and prioritize their own consumption in comparison to others. In the research of Johansson-Stenman and Martinsson (2006), it is further argued that consumers tend to choose consumption goods that easily can be compared to other consumers' choices of consumption. It is therefore relevant to suggest that this type of consumption is having an effect on status and that consumers choose to consume goods that are seen as status carriers when it comes to logos, visibility, and common knowledge (Johansson-Stenman & Martinsson, 2006; Winkelmann, 2012).

Continuing on the research of Thorstein Veblen, it is further argued that conspicuous consumption is having a coping effect on insecurities, originating from both the individual and the surroundings (Kenton, 2021). It highlights that during uncertainty, one is more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption (ibid). Instability and unstable experiences are also argued to be contributing to the adaptation of and the need for conspicuous consumption as it may have a positive effect on one's self-esteem, perceived level of status, and feeling of belonging (Kahneman & Thaler, 1991). In addition, according to Veblen's research, it is further suggested that conspicuous consumption in a consumer culture society is referring to the personal and collective perception of an individual (Kenton, 2021). This means that conspicuous consumption purchases are commonly made in order to satisfy an external self, the image and the displayed idea one has of oneself (ibid).

### **Interpretive strategies & sensemaking**

Consumers can be seen as interpretive beings, using different strategies and interpret their actions to the ideals displayed through marketing and advertising in order to create meaning, represent a lifestyle or identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Interpretive strategies originated from the symbolic culture of an organisation, with the meaning that internal and external norms, ideas, and opinions are affecting attitudes and the perception of one's surroundings (Chaffee, 1985). Furthermore, Chaffee (1985) noted how interpretive strategies are being used among individuals both to make sense of changes and disruptions in one's surroundings, but also as a clarifier when it comes to identity creation. In addition, Putnam and Banghart (2017) explain that from social theories interpretive strategies are based on the interpretation that the world is socially constructed by individuals that are creating meaning through shared attitudes, social interactions, and symbols. This implies that interpretive strategies are used as meaning guidance, where meaning is created when individuals can make sense of a variety of popular culture texts, including advertising, for their own life situation, highlighting that interpretations and meaning are the ground pillars in this approach (Putnam & Banghart, 2017).

Moreover, one research field within the CCT talks about mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies - how cultural product systems orient consumers towards certain ideologies or identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Hence, marketing communications and marketplace activities successively move consumers through predisposing by addressing focus towards their identity-creating processes. They use

ideas and mindsets to engage consumers in realizing these ideas in material objects so they will consume the goods. (ibid) The essentiality of consuming goods' is thus not the goods' concrete function, but rather the ability to communicate and carry meaning through its chain of activities (McCracken, 1986). Consumers' constructed meanings imply that they seem to make sense of their surroundings by interpreting brands (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001 mentioned in McCracken, 1986). This could be done by using interpretive strategies, beliefs, and actions, in order to make meaning of brands.

Furthermore, cultural categories such as age, gender, status, occupation, and class are all carriers of meanings (McCracken, 1986). They are important in order to understand consumers' creation of meaning from consumption. Why, to what extent, and how consumers use interpretive strategies or behave in certain ways. Therefore, cultural categories can be useful as a complementary part to understand how consumers make sense of their surroundings and consume goods to create meaning. This is achieved by consumers who use cultural distinctions, in other words, norms, to make sense of brands and certain goods by placing them in cultural categories such as status, gender, and class, to make the goods signalize these added values. (ibid)

Additionally, the term sensemaking is simply "the making of sense" (Weick, 1995, p. 4) and refers to how people structure the unknown in order to function in it. One could say that it involves coming up with an understanding, sort of guiding map, of a changing world. The map is then tested with others through things such as conversations, actions, and data collection. If the map is credible it could be improved to make it possible for people to "comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict" (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51) something. It is the process of "structuring the unknown" (Waterman, 1990, p. 41). The need for sensemaking is usually when people's understanding of the world becomes incomprehensible which mainly happens when their environment rapidly changes. This often comes with unprepared surprises which challenge people to act and solve adaptive problems. Sensemaking is thus not about finding the right or correct answer, it is rather about creating an emerging and comprehensive map of understanding for oneself (Heifetz, 2009).

## **Nostalgia**

Another way for consumers to create meaning through consumption is connected to the feeling of nostalgia. The word "Nostalgia" comes from the Greek words "Nóstos" and "Álgos" which means "Return home" and "Longing" (Boym, 2001). It could be defined as the longing for the past, comfort, and home (Davis, 1979; Holbrook, 1993; Stern, 1992) which no longer exists or never existed (Boym, 2001). Nostalgia together with enchantment is widely used within the marketing field. Previous sociological literature describes nostalgia as almost always connected to the feelings of a lack of belonging, displacement, and anxiety (May, 2011 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). In addition, there seems to be no limit to what objects can evoke or carry nostalgic feelings (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). It could be everything from large to small, expensive or inexpensive, decorative or functional, mass-produced or handmade. Other sources that could lead to nostalgic feelings are relations with other people which often leads to nostalgic bonding, as well as a comfortable place that provides security, such as a family environment. (ibid) Nostalgia thus seems to be evoked by

something more than just oldness or a past experience, for instance, only the extent of exposure does not seem to be enough, but rather other strong feelings need to be present to evoke nostalgia (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003) and enchantment (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018).

Enchantment can be explained as “a set of practices initiated by both manufacturers and consumers to incorporate non-functional sources of value in goods and services, and turn them into sources of hedonic, symbolic, and interpersonal value” (Badot & Filser, 2007, p.167 cited in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). Thus, enchantment means that one is “making the ordinary special” by contributing with moments of myth, romance, magic, and wonder (e.g. Ritzer, 2005). Consumers are striving for the feeling of being enchanted which means that in the rationalization of practices, consumers are searching for the enchanting stimulus.

The longing for the enchantment feeling which is something individuals seek has resulted in the growing consumption of products and other things that connect one to the past. Consequently, brands can use nostalgia to evoke enchantment (or a sort of re-enchantment) among consumers and differentiate and position themselves among their competitors (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). To be able to do this, they must create or strengthen people’s emotional longing for the past by referring to hedonic, symbolic, and interpersonal values to capture a greater meaning for the consumers. This could be compared to parts of CCT where consumer culture is “the ideological infrastructure that undergirds what and how people consume and sets the ground rules for marketers’ branding activities” (Holt, 2002, p.80), where nostalgia theory similarly is about how industries are striving to apply an enchanting feeling for their consumers’ and how consumers’ desire for a (re-)enchanting feeling affect how and what they consume (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018).

Furthermore, to fully understand how (re-)enchantment can be created in the near past and present, to satisfy the longing for home, comfort, and stability, one must know that the word “home” in this notion does not necessarily mean home as in being home, but rather the feeling of home, security, and something well known. (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018)

Moreover, situations where there are current concerns, existential worries, and/or rapid changes, run a greater chance to be predisposed for nostalgic responses since it increases the need for certain products in order to make sense of the current surrounding, find a home, and belonging. (ibid)

Nostalgia can appear in several different forms and it is argued that nostalgic stimulation also can be the outcome of longing for future opportunities and dreams - the next chapter (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). Thus, since nostalgia could be both forward-looking, as well as backward-oriented, comprehension must be placed in these different stages in order to understand how nostalgia is reached and how (re-)enchantment is created from it. This implies that multiple nostalgia modes and emotions are playing different roles in making sense of one’s surroundings, and as drivers for certain consumption. Three different routes have been described in literature by Hartmann and Brunk (2018) to explain how (re-)enchantment and meaning can be created by consumption through nostalgia marketing. The three identified routes are: *re-instantiation*, *re-enactment*, and *re-appropriation* (ibid).

*Re-instantiation* can be explained as a (re-)enchantment route rooted in a backward-looking frame of nostalgia. Consumers value and tend to consume resources that symbolize a past lifeworld and could retroject them into a past condition. A sort of romanticized feeling of



belonging and backward dreaming of how everything was better before a specific event, time period, or experience. (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018) The dominant nostalgia mode connected to re-instantiation is called reluctant nostalgia and is seen as a negative nostalgia that has a focus on past times and the sorrow of not belonging (Flinders, 2018 & May, 2017 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). Thus, consumers experiencing this nostalgia mode could create (re-)enchantment by using consumption to re-instantiate certain aspects of the past and get a feeling of belonging, stability, and home - the way it used to be. (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018)

*Re-enactment* can be explained as wanting to re-enact past themed emotions that are connected to the past, by using nostalgic consumption to feel these emotions in the present and future surroundings. This further means that consumers are progressive in their mindsets and consume what is being coupled with re-enactment, to create a future better than the situation of today. It is about using a current situation, making sense of it, and taking control, in order to make sense of a future that holds the feeling of a better state of being. However, even if re-enactment is a way for consumers to reach a stage of (re-)enchantment, it should not be assumed to mean that consumers want to achieve a previous stage of living. Instead, consumers use brands, symbols, and similar, to create a meaning for the present and the future. They reach a feeling of belonging when consuming different products and practices that they used to consume. Thus, consumers' can reach (re-)enchantment through re-enactment and consumption of market resources connected to progressive nostalgia, which is the dominant nostalgia mode connected to re-enactment. (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018)

*Re-appropriation* is a route to reach (re-)enchantment by making sense of past brands, products, and ideas. It is used by consumers to make sense of themselves by using these past brands or products to create trends. The dominant nostalgia mode of re-appropriation is called playful nostalgia and is seen as the ironic and fun part of nostalgia, where consumers express cultural and creative identities with the present aspect as a core. Re-appropriation as a route to (re-)enchantment is explained as the search for the extravaganza, the strive for expressing oneself with past influences that appeal to certain eras of time, trends, and products, which both consumers' and market makers can re-appropriate the meaning of. Furthermore, re-appropriation is not directly translated into a time period or event but is rather connected to the re-appropriation of the meaning from that time period or event, the feeling, senses, and perception of it firmly focused on being applied into the present. (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018)

### **Changed consumption during crises**

The well-known company McKinsey & Company recently released a new study written by Kohli, Timelin, Fabius, and Veranen (2020), describing how consumers have successively changed their mindset regarding consumption. The study implies that consumers generally tend to stay even more loyal towards brands now during the pandemic Covid-19. They choose trusted brands in favour of other less known brands and shop less frequently. Additionally, the McKinsey study shows a relative relationship between brands and trust, which can be connected to loyalty, previous brand-related experiences, and expectations. The study also implies a changed consumer shopping experience and how it can differ when consumers value different consumption goods. (Kohli et al., 2020)

In opposition to this, a report published by KPMG (2020) implies that consumer trust in

multiple sectors has decreased due to the pandemic situation, resulting in a disruption in several ways when it comes to consumer behaviour and value. The Global Sector Head of Consumer and Retail in KPMG International Limited called René Vader discusses changes in consumer behaviour when it comes to trust. According to her, the construction of brand relationships among customers' will change due to the pandemic Covid-19 and all changes it has brought (KPMG, 2020).

Furthermore, another study made for McKinsey by Tonby, Wintels, and Kuijpers (2020), have analyzed seven countries in Asia, together with 5 000 consumers, and found four big shifts in food retail in Asia due to the pandemic Covid-19. Two of these big shifts are first that consumers have changed their consumer behaviour into purchasing things more online. The second shift is that consumers have started to consider their purchases more during the pandemic, instead of acting spontaneously, partly because of the financial impact. (ibid) This research will not have predominant attention in our study since it mostly refers to consumers' consumption of food in Asia, however, it investigates consumption under Covid-19 and it would be interesting to see if similar behaviour can be applied and seen within this study.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research design**

The research design provides and refers to the framework of how the data collection and data analysis of this study was done (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Based on the research purpose, research question, and involved literature, *a qualitative research strategy* was chosen. A qualitative approach enables a deeper understanding of the topic, provides knowledge, and goes into debt with people's individual opinions, experiences, and behaviour towards a certain problem or fact, which was relevant for this study. This approach is also good when interpreting data collected from only a few respondents in a developing and dynamic environment, arguably as the pandemic Covid-19. (ibid) The method forms used for this research were *ethnographic observations* and *semi-structured interviews (consisting of 10 interviews)*.

It is important to point out that qualitative research strategies are limited in the way that they could be subjective and lack objectivity when consisting of data from people's own beliefs and opinions. The researchers also have an effect on the study in qualitative research since they are different characters with their own judgment which could affect the study. Thus, when replicating this qualitative research there could arise some difficulties and it may be limited because people's feelings often change and social settings usually are dynamic (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This means that answers received in this study could possibly change over time even if the same respondents would be asked the same questions. It should also be mentioned that a small sample of 10 respondents from Sweden was used through this research and can therefore not necessarily be applied to the entire population (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Additionally, with the respondents' similar demographics it is important to consider that results from this study may only reflect consumers in Sweden rather than the actual global pandemic situation among consumers worldwide.

The approach for the study was inductive, where this research had the aim to examine existing theory, gather data, and analyze it in order to develop a new implication based on the data (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, the research review was done by reading and gathering information from different sources such as scientific articles from the well-known online sources Google Scholar and Gothenburg University Library. There are different types of review methodologies, where the integrative review was used for this research since it has the aim to assess and analyze literature on the research topic in such a way that it could provide new perspectives and theoretical frameworks to emerge (Torraco, 2005 mentioned in Snyder, 2019). An integrative literature review often also addresses new, mature, or emerging topics (Snyder, 2019), as the pandemic Covid-19 which one could argue is a new and emerging topic, making an integrative approach suitable. This article has not covered all articles published about the topic of this research, but instead combining insights and perspectives from different appropriate research and fields have been used, which is usual when using an integrative review approach (ibid).

### **3.2. Collection of empirical material**

The data collection is an important part of the research and is driven by the research question (Bell et al., 2019). The primary data collection was conducted from both qualitative *semi-structured interviews* and *ethnographic observations*.

*Semi-structured interviews* were chosen because it provides the opportunity to deviate from the subject and ask other questions than the ones set from the beginning of the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This could provide deeper conversations and perhaps a better understanding of the respondents' attitudes and thoughts of the subject (ibid).

The interview guide for this research included 12 main questions with a few supplementary questions, however, it was semi-structured, hence additional questions were developed during the interviews. The interview guide was therefore used as a guideline to perform the interviews, but during the interviews, the sequence of the questions could differ depending on the respondents' answers and fluctuations between the subjects. Furthermore, the questions were developed to not be leading and to bring a good flow to the interview. Two test interviews were also performed in order to evaluate if some questions had to be changed or further developed before the real interviews.

A total of 10 interviews were done and the sampling of respondents was collected with the sampling method called purposeful sampling (Omona, 2013). This sampling method was used since it enables one to select groups, people, or settings for the research based on if they are "information-rich" or not. The purposeful sampling method has an additional method called criterion sampling which is where the respondents in the sample are selected based on if they meet the criteria, commonly used for quality assurance. (ibid) Hence, with the use of purposeful sampling and criterion sampling, respondents were able to be gathered for this research that seemed to meet the criteria for the research question. The target group for this study was set to be both men and women, aged 20-35 years, located in Sweden. An age and geographical limitation were set to narrow the research, both because of limitations in time, resources, and ability to travel during the pandemic. In addition, the age limitation of men and women around 20-35 years was set since that seems to be a common age range making

these types of purchases that the research will observe and study. The respondents selected as a sample to include in this research, that seemed most suitable for the research purpose, were also around the ages of 20-35 years old, making that age range relevant.

Moreover, due to Covid-19 restrictions and recommendations in physical meetings, respondents were obtained from social and physical networks. The pandemic also resulted in the largest number of interviews being performed with the help of digital video calls. Video calls guaranteed more safe interviews and the ability to analyze the respondents' body language and facial expressions, contributing to a broader interpretation for the analysis part. However, some interviews were able to perform physically and some had to be done over phone calls.

Furthermore, for the interviews a funnel-shaped structure was used, meaning that the interviews started off with some broad, open-ended questions, which later were narrowed down using more specific ones (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). This structure was used in order to get the respondents' spontaneous views on the subject and not lead them into any specific answer. The total time for each interview varied between approximately 20 to 40 minutes and was recorded with permission from each respondent. The length of interviews usually varies and shorter interviews actually could provide more quality than longer interviews, which was seen in most of the performed interviews through this study (Bell et al., 2019). The recording part was also done since it is an advantage to have during the rest of the research to not forget certain and important parts from the respondents' answers (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Moreover, as all respondents collected were Swedish, the interviews were held in their native language in order to make the respondents feel more comfortable and able to express themselves in the best possible way. Afterward, during the transcription and for quotes used in the analysis a translation to English was done. Before the interviews started the respondents were also secured and informed about the purpose of the study, that their answers would be published in an academic report for Gothenburg University, and how full anonymity throughout the whole research would be given. The anonymity was set to make the respondents feel comfortable and hopefully give more truthful answers.

*Ethnographic observations* were chosen as the second primary data collection method used for this research. It is the most widely used ethnographic research method used for collecting data (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002 mentioned in Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). It was used for this research to observe different behaviours and patterns in a specific environment, providing transcripts useful to analyze the practices carried out during the observation time period (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The environment used through this research observation has been a famous store selling luxury branded products, located in the center of Gothenburg. One of the researchers of this study works part-time at the store and had previously before beginning this research observed a change among customers and their consumption behaviour due to the pandemic Covid-19. Thus, this store and the customers' visiting it seemed like an interesting location for an observation study and was therefore included in this research.

The observation study technique has been to pay close attention to things such as rhetoric and language in the studied area to understand the observed people (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, van Maanen, 1988, Atkinson, 1990 mentioned in Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Other things that have been paid close attention to and been observed are activities, feelings, and space

(Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Furthermore, the ethnography did also include some open-ended narrative or life history interviews, often called “ethnographic interviews” (Rooke et al., 2004 mentioned in Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). These ethnographic interviews were however more as a supplement to get a better understanding of the involved people (ibid). The people interviewed from the observation study were customers’ visiting the store which one of our researchers talked to during work, to get a deeper knowledge of their behaviour. These customers do also have full anonymity since both their names and age span are unknown. The observations were conducted during a time period of one month and notes during that period were written in order to remember what was observed. The notes included descriptions of what was remembered about specific events, analysis of the things learned from the setting, and reflections of thoughts, feelings, and what one has learned during the observations (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

### **3.3. Analysis of empirical material**

This research has used narrative analysis to analyze the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. Narrative analysis was used since it focuses on using people’s answers from qualitative methods, such as told stories and experiences, in order to answer the research question (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Furthermore, to enable an easier analysis a *transcription* and *coding* of the gathered data from the two qualitative methods was done.

The semi-structured interview *transcriptions* were done as edited transcriptions, which is common when publishing a transcript for an audience. This means that the content from the interviews was cleaned up and arranged to make it clear and readable. After the transcriptions, the qualitative coding was done. It is a process of categorizing parts of the given data and trying to find patterns or themes between the answers. This makes the data more systematic and transparent for both the researchers and others.

The first round of *coding* the data from the semi-structured interviews was done as structural coding (Saldaña, 2009). This means that the data was categorized into sections of smaller groups with a specific structure so that the data in each structure later could be further and easier analyzed (ibid).

The second round of *coding* was done with the thematic analysis coding. This coding method was used since it lets one look for patterns and themes within the gathered data. It helps to identify and describe the data set in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, after two rounds of coding the data, the final narrative was constructed, meaning that the set of coded findings were combined and analyzed with the theories picked, in order to reach a conclusion of the study.

The ethnographic observation analysis was done by reading through the field notes and all gathered data. This was done several times to first get an overall picture and then become more familiar with everything, which was helpful in order to interpret and analyse the data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). There is however no single approach to interpret and analyse ethnographic research materials but the things mentioned are good to keep in mind (ibid). It helped make the data more structured and find interesting and useful parts.

### 3.4. Ethical considerations

This qualitative research has followed the quality criteria of; credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity, in order to be more trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 mentioned in Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of this study, meaning that the participants and their answers have been represented without any false statements throughout this whole research and that the selection of literature and other parts are trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 mentioned in Moon et al., 2016). The credibility of this research has been secured by documenting all gathered data, both audio and video recordings from the interviews, all transcriptions, and the notes made from the observation study. This data and documents are all available on request in order to secure credibility (with an exception of the recorded video interviews due to the promised anonymity of the respondents). There has also been an explanation in the “3.3. *Analysis of empirical material*” of how the data collection was analyzed and coded. Furthermore, the circumstances of Covid-19 did affect the conduction of the interviews and resulted in that the main part was done through programs such as Zoom, Apple’s Facetime, and Facebook Messenger. This may have affected the result in some way compared to if it only had been physical interviews. Also, the number of respondents for this research was 10, due to the time limit of the study, which cannot be assumed to represent an entire population (Bryman & Bell, 2013). More studies with more respondents are needed to be able to claim this, even if this study could give a good indication of what people think and feel about this subject. Moreover, the ethnographic observations were also made during a limited time period due to the narrowness of the study. Hence, a longer time period for the observation and a different geographical setting could perhaps affect and provide a different outcome.

Transferability refers to how this study’s findings are useful and applicable by others, either by theory, practice, or for future research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 mentioned in Moon et al., 2016; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This study aims to create further aspects and insights to help both individuals and companies to get a better understanding and knowledge of how Covid-19 affects consumers’ ways to create meaning through their consumption and how they make sense of the current pandemic situation through their consumption. Furthermore, some similarities were found between the result and the different literatures used, which could be useful for future research, theory, or practice. However, due to limitations in time and resources, the theory and research were restricted.

Dependability refers to the stability of the research findings over time. It involves the participants’ evaluation of the findings, the recommendations, and interpretations of the study, for example, that everything is supported by the correct data given by the participants. Thus, all data collected for this study is fully documented, including the interview guide with all questions used for each interview. However, since the interviews were semi-structured not all interviews looked the same, but each interview had verbatim transcriptions where other arising questions during the interviews could be seen. All available and traceable on request, again with the exception of the video recordings. A description of the number of interviews, how long they lasted, and which age span involved has also been made.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings of this research could be

confirmed by other researchers (Moon et al., 2016). That the data and interpretations of the shown findings are derived from the data and not illusions from the researchers' imaginations. It shows the researchers' ability to be neutral and not add any personal understanding. The results should thus be linked to the conclusion in such a way that anyone can follow it and perform it in the same way. (ibid) However, using qualitative methods such as interviews could be critical since it is based on people's own analysis and attitudes.

Reflexivity refers to the process of being able to make a critical self-reflection about oneself as a researcher and any possible research relationship with for example the respondents and if it could have affected the answers during the interviews. One critical part is that a purposeful sampling method was used for the semi-structured interviews. This means that there is a limitation in addressing the result to an entire population since the respondents are based on the researchers' choice of suitable respondents based on the study (Bryman & Bell, 2013). It could also create a partisan role since the respondents were picked based on the researchers' opinions.

#### **4. Findings and analysis**

In the following section, empirical findings in relation to theoretical approaches are presented. The empirical material gathered from the observation and semi-structured interviews shows that there are some changes when it comes to how consumers with the help of consumption, make sense of and create meaning for themselves in the light of the pandemic Covid-19. The findings imply that consumers' consumption is affected by the pandemic and that consumers in different ways are trying to rationalize their consumption behaviour compared to pre-pandemic. The result indicated three different consumer behaviour patterns, showing how consumers make sense of the current pandemic situation and create meaning for themselves through their consumption:

- 1) *Substitution consumption*
- 2) *Show-off consumption*
- 3) *Memory consumption*

*Substitution consumption* includes how consumers during the pandemic still manage to create meaning through consumption by substituting practices, objects, and similar, for other things that still are manageable or available despite all the set restrictions and recommendations.

*Show-off consumption* includes how consumers consume material objects and brands to express themselves in the time of the pandemic Covid-19. During the pandemic with all restrictions and recommendations, it could be hard for consumers to show off and express themselves in public. Thus, how consumers have changed the way they show off and still manage to create meaning by expressing themselves through brands and similar are included.

*Memory consumption* includes how consumers during the pandemic of Covid-19 seem to purchase either similar to their pre-pandemic behaviour, because of a longing for their ordinary, or that a lot of the things consumed seem to give them a feeling and connection to

their ordinary lives.

#### **4.1. Substitution consumption**

Substitution is according to this study widely used among consumers during the pandemic of Covid-19. Consumers are increasing their situational control and create meaning by consuming objects that become substitutional objects for another pre-pandemic consumption behaviour. This could further be seen through respondent (10) statement, explaining that:

*“I get a kind of rush when I purchase a new really expensive bag and when wearing it. I would say that it is a similar feeling as when you get out of an airplane and know that you have a whole vacation to look forward to.”*

This argument indicates a situation where the respondent feels unable to travel and disconnected from the pre-pandemic and ordinary life. The respondent has however found consumption of an object that in some ways can make up for the disability to travel. This behaviour supports our assumption that respondents are using a substitution method to find home and comfort which to its extent describes a nostalgic response. This is in line with May (2011) discussing how nostalgia is evoked from a feeling of displacement and not belonging. It further implies that this potential type of substitution method could be a result of the displacement and feeling of not belonging that comes from the disability to travel due to the pandemic situation, which perhaps encourages consumers to consume brands and other products to compensate. Respondent (10) elaborates further on the statement above and develops it by stating:

*“(...) yeah I would say that an expensive bag will make me feel kind of the same as a vacation trip, at least the same day that I purchase it, and maybe the first time that I am wearing it.”*

This statement further implies that nostalgia is evoked and that (re-)enchantment seems to be created by the substitution in line with Ritzer (2005), stating that enchantment is about making the ordinary special by adding value to it, which in this case was an expensive branded bag. To a further extent, it could therefore be argued that respondent (10) is consuming branded products as a substitution method in order to reach an enchanting stimulus, and use consumption as a rationalized behaviour appealing to nostalgic responses. Furthermore, the statements from respondent (10) could also be considered as reluctant nostalgia with its focus on past times and the sorrow of not belonging (Flinders, 2018 & May, 2017 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). Where the individual is creating (re-)enchantment by re-instantiate the past, such as the pre-pandemic life, through certain consumption in line with Hartmann and Brunk (2018). One could further suggest that substitution might be appealing as a meaning creator by framing nostalgia, a feeling of belonging, home, and comfort.

Furthermore, on a question asked if there is anything that the respondents could purchase or do that would more or less make up for the disability to travel abroad, the respondents gave fairly scattered answers. Respondent (8) mentions that nothing can make up for the



disability to travel and three other respondents have been abroad but mention that it is not the same as it used to be before the pandemic. However, a predominant part of the respondents have not been traveling at all and describe other things that they partly feel could make up for the disability to travel. For example, being with friends and doing something fun with them could make them reach a similar feeling, such as happiness and excitement. The need for relationships in these terms could also be connected to nostalgia, since relations with other people often lead to nostalgic bonding, as well as a comfortable place that provides security, such as a family environment (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). Thus, one could argue that having a nice dinner with family and friends instead of traveling could connect the respondents to their ordinary lives and be a sort of substitution to reach similar feelings and still create meaning for themselves during Covid-19. Furthermore, the lack of not being able to travel abroad could possibly also increase the need for other substitution consumption, which perhaps could compensate for the traveling limitations and generate enchanting stimuli. This might be the case for respondent (4) who mentions that the purchasing of a new boat could give a similar feeling as purchasing a trip abroad. Respondent (10) mentions that purchasing an expensive designer bag and wearing it gives a similar feeling as a trip would as discussed above. In addition, respondent (5) mention that she has started to purchase a lot of smaller things to make up for not being able to travel and to reach a similar feeling as a trip would have given her:

*“No, I feel like purchasing things does not make me feel the same way as when I purchase a trip, and that is perhaps why I buy these smaller things much more often now since it gives me that little “yey” but it won’t get you that big “yey” as a trip would give you. So that is why I purchase much more now, to make me feel satisfied.”*

The arguments and statements above support the assumption that even though there is a pandemic with a lot of restrictions/recommendations, where consumers are limited in consuming and going on vacations abroad as they used to pre-pandemic, there still seems to be an ongoing consumption but with substitutions. The substitution consumption could be connected to Davis (1979 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018), arguing that in terms of uncertainty in ones surrounding, such as disrupted patterns and restrictions, one is more likely to materialize the situation by consuming objects in order to make sense of the situation and adapt to it. Thus, to adapt and make sense of the pandemic of Covid-19 one can assume that consumers still consume different objects and use substitution consumption to be stimulated. The behaviour of substitution could also be seen as an interpretive strategy and sensemaking used by consumers, where consumers use substitution consumption as a way to handle the pandemic, make sense of the changes that come with it, and still be able to use consumption to create meaning for themselves, in line with Chaffee (1985) arguing how interpretive strategies can be used to make sense of changes and disruptions in one’s surroundings, but also as a clarifier when it comes to identity creation.

Furthermore, Putnam and Banghart (2017) argue that individuals are affected by the socially constructed society where they create meaning by aligning with one another through sharing attitudes, interactions, and symbols that are creating meaning. Thereby, these social constructions, shared attitudes, interactions, and symbols could possibly be an explanation to

why consumers, although they are advised against public places during Covid-19 still visit them, because of the importance of meaning creation. However, all respondents interviewed in this research mention that their social lives have been most affected by the pandemic and that they tend to spend much more time at home. In addition, a dominant part tends to visit physical stores much less and do more online shopping than they did before the pandemic, which could be seen as a substitution. Thus, it could be argued that the lack of visiting physical places and use the importance of shared attitudes, symbols, and interactions, as discussed by Putnam and Banghart (2017), possibly could be further connected to Kohli, et al. (2020), saying how consumers seem to have developed an increased loyalty towards brands they trust during the pandemic and shop less frequently. This study indicates that there is an increased loyalty towards trusted brands where brands could be seen as symbols used by consumers for meaning creation (further discussed in 4.2. *Show-off consumption*). It further highlights that during socially disrupted situations and crises people are more likely to apply to the creation of meaning (Heifetz, 2009; Waterman, 1990). The study also indicates that consumers shop less frequently in physical stores, however, as previously mentioned, the respondents interviewed in this research have instead substituted towards online shopping, which has resulted in similar amounts of consumption as pre-pandemic.

This could further be seen when asking the respondents if their saving accounts have gotten a higher priority during the pandemic. One could imagine that all the restrictions and recommendations, making people unable to travel and similar, would attract them to focus on saving and consider their purchases more as discussed by Tonby et al. (2020). However, seven of the respondents agree that they spend approximately the same amount today during the pandemic as they did before. The respondents mention that they instead have started to purchase more practical things rather than going on vacations, restaurants, buying party outfits, and similar. A substitution consumption is developed and the more practical things consumed could be things such as homewear, workout clothes, and skincare. Only three of the respondents admit that they have started to save more money during the pandemic, however, these respondents also describe how they purchase other things now during the pandemic. The substitution in these consumptions could imply that the respondents during the pandemic Covid-19 still are striving for enchanting effects, which could explain why they are substituting some consumption products for others, in order to add symbolic and hedonic value to the goods (Badot & Filser, 2007). The substituted products could for example be used for activities and other things more in line with the pandemic restrictions and recommendation. This implies that although the chosen products are substitutions, (re-)enchantment is still achieved.

Moreover, the substituted consumption behaviour that seems to occur during the pandemic Covid-19 may be linked to the theory of nostalgia, in addition to what has already been mentioned. For example, when overhearing a conversation between a couple observed visiting the store in Gothenburg, the woman in the couple expressed:

*“Do you think I should buy this bag? I mean we won’t be able to go on that trip to France this spring anyway because of Corona.”*, where the man replied:

*“But should you not save the money for when we are allowed to travel again and can go? Instead of buying that bag?”*, and the woman answered:

*“I will have saved up that money by that time anyway. I really want this bag, it makes me feel excited and I wanna have it when we are allowed to go to France! I can not wait until the pandemic is over and I can use this! I am gonna buy it.”*

Based on these statements one could argue that the woman observed at the store is having a nostalgic feeling of when the pandemic will be beyond us, a sort of forward-looking nostalgia, longing for future opportunities, dreams, and the next chapter (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). She also substitutes the trip by purchasing an expensive bag since she seems to feel that it gives her more excitement in this current state. This nostalgic substitutional consumption behaviour could further be seen in respondent (5) who mentions that she tends to purchase clothes to have in the future when being able to go back to the office. This could further imply that the customer and respondent are facing a re-enacting nostalgia mode where they are striving to re-enact past feelings, states of being, and emotional connections from the past, using a progressive mindset (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018), which may engage consumers to use brands, symbols, and similar, to reach (re-)enchantment, a state of belonging, and by that create meaning for themselves.

#### **4.2. Show-off consumption**

The pandemic situation with its multiple restrictions/recommendations preventing people from meeting others and going out in public might have an effect on how consumers consume material objects and brands to show off and express themselves. This could perhaps further affect the ways consumers tend to express themselves through brands and create meaning through their show-off consumption during the pandemic Covid-19.

All respondents included in this research mention that they prefer to consume branded products instead of unbranded ones. Primarily this statement was based on the perception that branded products often have higher quality. However, half of the interviewed respondents also prefer branded products since they can be used as identity carriers. These respondents mention that carrying brands is a way for them to express themselves. It is a way for them to show others who they are and how they want to be seen. Respondent (2) is highlighting that brands are actively shaping one's identity, stating that:

*“It is more or less only an identity question, brands signalize much and say much about a person. Of course, there is a difference between an H&M bag and a Chanel bag, it is signaling two different identities so of course, it is important.”* and:

*“Yes, I do. It is a class and status question, and our society is built on show-off in several ways, not just when discussing clothes and bags but overall.”*

Followed by respondent (4) statement:

*“Brands are not only about show-off, it’s also about how I identify myself. If I like that style and identify my style with that brand.”*

These statements are giving strength to the theory of brands having an active role in shaping identities and that consumers tend to use brands as a way of expressing themselves (Kenton, 2021). The show-off consumption behaviour pattern in this analysis could be connected to the theory of conspicuous consumption, arguing that consumers purchase goods that easily can be compared to others and to display and symbolize things such as wealth, status, and pecuniary strength when being perceived by the surrounding (Johansson-Stenman & Martinsson, 2006; Kenton, 2021). It is further argued by Winkelmann (2012) that the purchase and display of luxury consumption are coupled with satisfaction, happiness, and well-being. This could be seen in the respondents’ statements above, where they discuss how signals, markers, and brands are important in defining characteristics of how to be perceived by others, for example, that a brand possibly could be used to identify oneself and signalize a certain style. One could further connect this to the CCT perspective of how commercially produced images and products can be used by consumers to construct identities (Kozinets, 2001 mentioned in Arnould & Thompson, 2005), as well as how norms, status, and social aspects seem to underline consumption the most (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

It is further known that instability and unstable experiences are contributing to the need to engage in conspicuous consumption since it provides good self-esteem, status, and a feeling of belonging (Kahneman & Thaler, 1991). The pandemic could be argued as an unstable experience and increased consumption of reliable brands is shown among some respondents but not predominantly. However, all respondents mention that they prefer branded products over non-branded products (as discussed at the beginning of this chapter) and that their consumption has not decreased during Covid-19, which will be further discussed later in this chapter. It could therefore be suggested that respondents still entrust themselves to the brands they usually consume, even during the pandemic, and that the trust has not changed despite prevailing circumstances. One respondent expressing a favouring towards trusted brands during Covid-19 is respondent (10), who was asked to elaborate freely about the importance of trends and brands. Respondent (10) argue that trends are very important and mention that:

*“(...) I also feel a sort of comfort in purchasing products and brands that I recognize. I do not know why, but I trust them and they kind of make me feel safe.”*

This behaviour could further be supported by the McKinsey report made by Kohli et al. (2020), where research shows how brands and trust are shown to be strongly correlated during the pandemic Covid-19. Consumers choose to consume goods that are seen as status carriers when it comes to logos, visibility, and common knowledge (Winkelmann, 2012) and are during this pandemic more likely to favour trusted brands since they imply clarity which helps the consumers in these uncertainties (Kohli et al., 2020). The statement made by respondent (10) could further be connected to the interpretation of using brands because of the communicative and carried signals they are imposed by, highlighting that show-off consumption goods and trends are used by consumers to make sense of their surroundings

(Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001 mentioned in McCracken, 1986). One could therefore argue that during Covid-19 consumers show off through conspicuous consumption where they rely on known and trusted brands since it brings them clarity and helps them make sense and create meaning in such uncertain times.

Furthermore, on a question asked about the biggest change in the respondents' lives due to the pandemic Covid-19 all respondents agree that their social life has been most affected. They tend to spend more time at home and not meet as many people as usual. This has among other things resulted in an inability to show oneself in social contexts. The inability to show off in public seems to have affected both the respondents but also how they believe others make sense of the current situation in order to express themselves. A question asked if the respondents think that people tend to express themselves and show off their branded products more online now, such as on Instagram or other social media, because one can not go out in public in the same amount as before the pandemic. All respondents answered that they believe that people express themselves more online now, due to Covid-19. For example respondent (8) argued that:

*“Yes, I think so. It becomes a way to get attention and confirmation from others that you perhaps would not get in the same amount otherwise since you can not go out in public and be around other people.”*

Based on the received answers there seems to be a limitation for consumers to physically express their identity through brands, products, and similar. This could be connected to conspicuous consumption and explain how consumers purchase in order to display and symbolize wealth and status (Kenton, 2021). It could also be connected to Winkelmann (2012), suggesting how an idealized status also could work as an identity carrier. In addition, one could argue that the inability to show-off the conspicuous consumption, thus could have effects on consumers' self-esteem and identities (Kenton, 2021). However, consumers are seen as interpretive beings using so-called interpretive strategies to make sense of changes in their surroundings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Chaffee, 1985), such as the pandemic with its multiple restrictions and recommendations. Hence, the innovation of showing off consumed products more online during Covid-19 could be seen as an interpretive strategy used as a clarifier among consumers when it comes to identity creation (Chaffee, 1985). It could also be discussed as a sort of sensemaking which is “the making of sense” (Weick, 1995, p. 4), meaning that the consumers are coming up with an understanding, sort of guiding map, of the changing world (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). The changed behaviour to showing off more online could be argued to be a sort of guiding map, used by consumers to make sense of and adapt to the pandemic, and still be able to create meaning through their consumption in this changing world. Additionally, trying to structure the unknown when the environment rapidly changes is common among consumers (Heifetz, 2009).

The inability to live as usual and be in social contexts further seems to have an effect on the show-off consumption, through the emergence of changing styles and new trends. The respondents mention that they have seen a change in how people dress now compared to the time before Covid-19. Some of the respondents bring up how their own style has changed, where respondent (1) mention:

*“I barely purchase anything of those ordinary clothes styles, such as a knotted sweater or similar. Everything has been practical, but it has to look a bit okay of course. Workout clothes especially, I have purchased a lot more this year. Both because I workout more than before, but also because you walk around in those every day now.”*

Together with respondent (8):

*“(...) But I really prefer workout clothes and more comfortable clothes. Like a nice shirt and some jeans. I think that this style has been quite developed now.”*

Further:

*“(...) I like being fresh now, just simple and easy, and it has probably developed during the pandemic since you really do not go out that much and are much more at home relaxing and such.”*

Followed by respondent (10):

*“Trends are very important for me and even though there is a pandemic there still are trends, which I think is cool. For example, the tracksuit trend that has developed during Corona (small pause), or that everyone is playing paddle. Following trends is a sort of interest to me, and I feel that it in some way makes me feel connected to the ordinary and has made this pandemic situation a bit easier. I also feel a sort of comfort in purchasing products and brands that I recognize. I do not know why, but I trust them and they kind of make me feel safe.”*

The trends that seem to develop even during the pandemic Covid-19 could be argued to symbolize the strength of show-off consumption, or the so-called conspicuous consumption. One could argue that consumers still consume and try to both develop and follow trends through the use of conspicuous consumption, meaning that even during a pandemic consumers seem to purchase products to create an identity and boost their self-esteem with the use of conspicuous consumption (Kahneman & Thaler, 1991). Thus, even if consumers are limited in expressing themselves in social public contexts there still seems to be an ambition to consume and follow trends because it creates meaning for consumers. It is also known that one is more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption in uncertainties (Kenton, 2021), as the pandemic Covid-19 could be argued to be. Following trends and engaging in conspicuous consumption in uncertainties could further be connected to the McKinsey study written by Kohli et al. (2020). It describes how consumers tend to stay even more loyal towards brands during the pandemic and choose to consume trusted brands (ibid), which could be seen in the statement above from respondent (10), arguing that consuming recognized products and brands provides trust and a feeling of safety for the respondent.

Furthermore, the trends and changing consumption of purchasing for example more homewear and workout clothes could further be seen as an interpretive strategy. That

consumers during the pandemic seem to use different strategies and actions to make sense of the new ideals displayed through marketing and advertising, in order to still be able to create an identity and meaning for themselves (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The essentiality of consuming the clothes and other products could thus be argued to not be their concrete function but rather their ability to communicate and carry meaning through its chain of activities (McCracken, 1986). Hence, interpretive strategies are useful both as a clarifier when it comes to identity creation, but also to make sense of changes and disruptions in the consumers' surroundings (Chaffee, 1985), such as the pandemic Covid-19.

Moreover, respondent (10) states that following trends have provided a feeling of connection to the ordinary and made this pandemic situation a bit easier, which further could be connected to the theory of nostalgia. That to follow trends makes respondent (10) get a connection to the ordinary and how something used to be, which could be argued to be a re-enactment, where respondent (10) re-enacts emotions connected to the past by using nostalgic consumption to feel these emotions in the present and future (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). This could imply that consumers possibly consume what is being coupled with re-enactment, to create a future better than the situation of today (ibid). One could further argue that respondent (10) interest in following trends and using show-off consumption thus is a sort of nostalgic consumption since it connects the respondent to the past ordinary life, and provides a sort of (re-)enchantment feeling (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018).

Continuing on the trail of nostalgia, some consumers seem to include nostalgia in their show-off consumption instead of hooking on to trends, in order to create meaning and make sense of their consumption during the pandemic Covid-19. An observation from the observed store is that some customers are, continuously while communicating, going back to the life before the pandemic. It is not unusual that they mention comments such as:

*“I used to always wear these kinds of high heels at parties, dinners, and such. I really miss those days.”*, and:

*“I will buy these (pointing at a branded beach basket bag and sandals) and as soon as the pandemic is beyond us I will go on a vacation and wear it.”*

These approaches towards show-off consumption could be discussed in terms of nostalgia. How the consumers long for the past which no longer exists (Davis 1979; Holbrook 1993; Stern 1992; Boym, 2001). Nostalgia can appear in several different forms and according to Cattaneo and Guerini (2012 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018), can nostalgic stimulation also be the longing for future opportunities and dreams - the next chapter. This could be seen in the statements from the observed customers' at the store, where one mentions how she always used to wear a pair of high heels on special occasions before Covid-19, and how it seems to evoke a backward-oriented nostalgia for the customer. The other customer mentions that he will purchase a beach basket bag and a pair of sandals to wear once being able to travel again, which could be argued to be a forward-looking nostalgia where the customer longs for the future and ordinary. Furthermore, the objects that could evoke these kinds of nostalgic feelings have according to Holbrook and Schindler (2003) no limit and could be anything from a pair of high heels to a beach basket bag. The important

part is that the objects represent something more to the consumers and how they can provide (re-)enchantment, “make the ordinary special” by contributing with moments of myth, romance, magic, and wonder (e.g. Ritzer 2005). Moreover, situations such as the pandemic Covid-19, where there are a lot of concerns and quick changes, run a greater chance to be predisposed for nostalgic responses, since it increases the need for certain products in order to make sense of the current surroundings, find a home and belonging (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018), which further could explain the consumption behaviour among the customers’.

Furthermore, the pandemic Covid-19 and the inability to go out in public, as usual, has made all of the respondents plan their outfits even more than before, once doing something during the pandemic, such as go to dinner or stroll around in the city. For instance, instead of planning their Saturday night outfit to go to a nightclub, they create meaning by planning their outfits when they are going out on smaller occasions, such as a dinner with a friend. Respondent (5) mentions that she still spends a lot of time planning her outfits just as she did before the pandemic. However, she thinks that she spends more time on her make-up now, for smaller occasions than before. Respondent (9) further mention:

*“Yes, I feel that it’s more fun those few times that you actually do something nowadays. Also since you have clothes at home that you have not worn that much since there are fewer social gatherings nowadays or that you work from home, so it’s more fun to be able to use them, they kind of remind you of the ordinary life before all this.”*

Additionally, all of the respondents are agreeing that they spend more time on their looks when doing something now compared to the time before the pandemic, even if they do it differently and in different amounts. This behaviour could be explained by the rationalizations and restrictions connected to the Covid-19 pandemic, where people can not show off and do the same things and thus may get less utterance for (re-)enchantment creation. Consumers are striving for the feeling of being enchanted, meaning that in the rationalization of practices, consumers are searching for the enchanting stimulus (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). Dressing up and doing something that is connected to the ordinary life before the pandemic could thus be argued to increase the feeling of satisfaction and (re-)enchantment. The respondents seem to make the pandemic situation special by contributing with sets of practices, such as dressing up more ones doing something, to add a source of hedonic, symbolic, and interpersonal value for themselves (Badot & Filser, 2007 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). This could possibly create a nostalgic stimulus, retrospective, and a positive expectation of what the future holds, post Covid-19, the home and comfort state of being (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018), as seen from respondent (9) statement mentioning that dressing up today kind of reminds one of the ordinary life before Covid-19. Dressing up more and using products for show-off from conspicuous consumption during unstable experiences as the pandemic Covid-19, may also have positive effects on the respondents’ self-esteem and feelings of belonging (Kahneman & Thaler, 1991).

Even though some new ways to create meaning and make sense of the pandemic Covid-19 connected to show-off consumption seem to have arisen, some consumers indicate to have a different approach. The inability to show oneself in social context due to the pandemic Covid-19 with all its restrictions and recommendations has made some respondents feel



unnecessary in consuming branded products and other things that could be used to show off. For example, a few customers' from the observation at the store are highlighting the unnecessary in purchasing designer products when it is not possible to use them in public to the same extent as before the pandemic. This feeling is also seen among some of the respondents, where respondent (5) highlights:

*“I would have liked to purchase a designer bag, but since there is a pandemic and I can not go out in a physical store I wanna wait with that, otherwise I think that I would have purchased that now, like if I could go looking at it in real life, feel it and try it on. Since it's such a big affair I don't wanna do that now and not be able to wear it in public.”*

This could be connected to the study made by Tonby et al. (2020), saying that consumers during Covid-19 are considering their purchases more when it comes to groceries, which after this study also seems to be applicable to other products, such as designer bags. Purchasing a designer bag could also be seen as a conspicuous consumption where the respondent purchases the bag as a status carrier to show off and compare to others (Johansson-Stenman and Martinsson, 2006). Which the respondent (5) admitted when asked further why she would purchase a branded bag and if she thinks it has some connection to wanting to show it off. Hence, due to the pandemic and not being able to show off the branded bag in real life seem to have affected the meaning of it and the reception of satisfaction, happiness, and well-being, which otherwise are connected to conspicuous consumption (Winkelmann, 2012). However, as further mentioned by Tonby et al. (2020), consumers during Covid-19 are shown to consider their purchases more now in some sectors, hence the trust towards some brands might make consumers feel safer to consume as seen by the McKinsey report (Kohli et al., 2020). Thus, even if respondent (5) mentioned that she will wait to purchase a luxury branded bag until after the pandemic, the statement seems more connected to the inability to wear the bag and purchase it in a physical store, and not so much connected to the lack of trust in a certain brand. One could imagine that if respondent (5) had considered a specific branded bag for a long time and seen it in real life at a physical store before Covid-19, she perhaps would have had the courage to purchase it even though there was a pandemic. That is because she already has seen it and might have been able to develop trust towards the brand daring to purchase it online.

Finally, another interesting part connected to show-off consumption is that the majority of the respondents and observed consumers in this research still tend to shop to the same extent as they did before the pandemic Covid-19. Adding to the value of substitution consumption mentioned in chapter 4.1., from a show-off consumption perspective, one could argue that consumers are accustomed to consumption. That the feeling of consumption is strongly connected with their idealized image of themselves and other people's perception of them. Which further could imply that consumption to some extent can be argued as being important for one's identity-creating process and thus the amount of consumption has not changed even if there is a deterrent pandemic. This could to a further extent be connected to how consumers would get disenchanted by the inability to consume goods and turn them into a symbolic and interpersonal value for themselves (Badot & Filser, 2007 mentioned in Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). This could be assumed and strengthened by respondent (3)

statement, vice versa:

*"(...) I have gotten so much positive response for my clothes and that makes it even more fun to purchase new. Because it really has become like my thing, that I am the one that always has like dressed up clothes and people become inspired and such."*

From this statement, one can assume that the respondent gets an enchanted feeling about showing off the new clothes and that it has become her thing to dress up and inspire people. As stated by Hartmann and Brunk (2018) consumers are desiring enchanting stimuli in the rationalization of practices, implying that in the case of respondent (3) an enchanting stimulus is reached when the respondent is consuming and the surrounding is stimulating the enchantment stimulus. Respondent (3) also mentions that she recently has moved to another country during the pandemic and that the new community and friends have had effects on her amount of shopping. One could thus argue that during Covid-19 the respondent makes sense and creates meaning for herself through consumption by showing off. This can perhaps be further connected to the theory of conspicuous consumption, where consumers reach satisfaction and happiness through the consumption of goods that could be used as identity carriers (Johansson-Stenman & Martinsson, 2006; Winkelmann, 2012). Similar to what is discussed within a field of the CCT perspective, how consumers use commercially produced images and products to adapt their relationships with others and construct an identity (Kozinets, 2001 mentioned in Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These types of behaviour and using conspicuous consumption are common during unstable experiences as the pandemic Covid-19, since it may have positive effects on one's self-esteem, perceived level of status, and feeling of belonging (Kahneman & Thaler, 1991).

#### **4.3. Memory consumption**

Memory consumption is connected to how a memory of the life before the pandemic and the longing for what the future holds can affect consumption during the pandemic Covid-19. Memory consumption also investigates how memories can be connected to meaning creation, and how to make sense of a situation with reference to another state of being.

Multiple customers' from the observation are explaining how they are looking forward to the future and summer, trying not to focus on the pandemic situation. Instead, some customers explain how they rather try to focus on how they spend their summer vacations, what they usually wear, and similar. They are describing a dream of living their ordinary lives, strongly connected to what they usually consume in relation to the activities they then perform. It is arguable that this could be a sort of evoked feeling of nostalgia, as Hartmann and Brunk (2018) call it. Where the customers' emotions through consumption are being connected to their ordinary lives before the pandemic, which further could be connected to the feeling of home and comfort, in other words, the reach for a (re-)enchanted feeling and nostalgic stimulus to appeal to meaning creation. This described dream of living is also present when it comes to the respondents' arguments about how this pandemic situation has made them recall other states of being. For instance, when respondent (2) got a question

regarding if the saving account has gotten a higher priority during the pandemic, the answer was:

*“Unfortunately not. I have purchased more clothing, bags, and so on because I can not wait for the pandemic to be over. I can not pause my life anymore. These things satisfy me, they keep me going.”*

This argument implies a longing for the post-Covid-19 state of being. It is also indicating how consumption used to be a great part of the respondent’s pre-pandemic behaviour since it provides satisfaction and can not be paused. Therefore the respondent perhaps is trying to compensate for the set restrictions and recommendations, such as not being able to travel, by focusing on the memories of a pre-pandemic situation in order to manage the current situation and create meaning within it. This could further be connected to the theory about sensemaking and how to create meaning in one’s surroundings in order to make sense of it (e.g Chaffee, 1985; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Putnam & Banghart, 2017). Moreover, it could also be arguable that respondent (2) is having a feeling of progressive nostalgia (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018) where the respondent is re-enacting the past by consuming products in line with the respondent’s pre-pandemic behaviour. One could also argue that respondent (2) is facing a re-instantiating mode of nostalgia as a route to (re-)enchantment, meaning that the respondent is having a backward-oriented viewpoint during the current pandemic situation (ibid). The respondent might, therefore, re-instantiating a pre-pandemic situation by using the memories from that time and consuming resources that symbolize the ordinary life which could retroject one into past conditions, to reach (re-)enchantment and create meaning for oneself through consumption during the pandemic Covid-19. This further implies that these memories are connected to nostalgia and are therefore a route to (re-)enchantment, resulting in a meaning creation situation.

Respondent (5) further highlights the importance of creating meaning even during the circumstances derived from the pandemic situation and does that by consuming. On a question regarding how the respondents would say that their shopping behaviour has been affected by Covid-19 and all the restrictions/recommendations that come with it, respondent (5) mentions:

*“I window-shop probably every day. Like looking around online at clothes, and that’s something that I haven’t done before, then it was more like if I really needed something I would look at different pages, but now it’s like all the time, and it can go on for hours each day. It has resulted in that I tend to purchase a lot more now than before since I look a lot and the phone has become a huge part of your everyday life now during the pandemic.”*

On a further question asking why the respondent think that she purchase more online now during the pandemic, the answer is:

*“Because I don’t have anything else to do, so thus...I mean social media has its limits and if I don’t look at that what should I do instead, so that’s why I look at clothes.”*

While discussing routes to (re-)enchantment and meaning creation in the terms of memory consumption, one could argue that the respondent, and perhaps other consumers as well, are re-instantiating a pre-Covid-19 state of being through this current pandemic situation (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018), which suggests that consumers through their memory consumption are inducing these feelings by consuming in line with what they were appreciating before Covid-19. This could further be seen from respondent (2), explaining that:

*“(...) I do think that the longing for traveling, visiting physical stores, and so on are really interesting factors. That we want what we had before. It is a part of the freedom I explained earlier.”*

The explanation from respondent (2) suggests that returning to pre-Covid-19 and the normal state of being, is memorable and desired when arguing that *“(...) we want what we had before.”*, aligning with Hartmann and Brunk (2018) arguing that individuals' route to (re-)enchantment can be retrospective. Moreover, a customer from the observation study further explains that some branded products are desired by the customer because they represent the life before Covid-19, arguing:

*“I feel kind of nostalgic when looking at this bag, it makes me think about my vintage Chanel bag at home. How I used to wear it with a nice outfit on my way to some event, a weekend trip, or something similar...Just having fun and feeling free.”*

This suggests that the customer is retrospective in the way of interpreting this consumption, connecting it to the time before Covid-19. It also implies that the customer is having a re-appropriating feeling of nostalgia by making sense of past products, in line with this theoretical approach. This further suggests that the customer is connecting a certain consumption with feelings of fun, fantasies, and memories from the life before Covid-19. However, the customer is not only re-appropriating a feeling of nostalgia aligned with (re-)enchantment through memory consumption but also seems to be explaining a situation in line with progressive nostalgia. Progressive nostalgia is explained by Hartmann and Brunk (2018) as the dominant nostalgia mode connected to re-enactment, which further means that consumers are wanting to re-enact past themed emotions and memories of before, by using nostalgic consumption to place them in a setting of today and the future. This further suggests that the customer is having memories connected with a pre-pandemic feeling of belonging, satisfaction, and enjoyment connected to the Chanel bag and how this bag is reconnecting the customer to how it used to be, highlighting an idealized image of how it is supposed to be. Moreover, this suggests how branded products could have an impact on memory creation and how memories of a past can have a meaningful function in this current pandemic situation. This further implies that progressive nostalgia seems to have an effect on meaning creation and that it can serve as (re-)enchantment in line with Hartmann and Brunk (2018).

Furthermore, respondent (2) were also connecting to a future state of being when explaining a current consumption plan, arguing what will be the focus on consuming during this pandemic:

*“Yes, more expensive branded pieces. I am trying to build a new wardrobe now, so it will be perfect when the pandemic is over. I also have the money for it now since I can not travel. I always used to love planning outfits and buying new clothes, so it makes me feel good to do that now as well. It makes me feel as usual and how life was before the pandemic.”*

This statement strengthens how meaning could be created by using re-enactment, to re-enact emotions that are connected to the past, by using nostalgic memory consumption to feel these emotions in the present and future surroundings. Thus, the respondent seems to have a sort of progressive nostalgia connected to this consumption and gets (re-)enchanted through the consumption practices, in line with Hartmann and Brunk (2018). This progressive approach could also be seen from the conducted observation where some customers' express how they now during the pandemic tend to shop luxury branded handbags from fashion houses. This is because having such products at home and seeing them makes customers long and connect to their ordinary lives, how it used to be before Covid-19, and for when the pandemic is over. Some customers further express relief when purchasing luxury branded handbags and similar, since it makes them hopeful for the future beyond the pandemic, as well as satisfies them in the restricted life of today. For a short period of time, a feeling of normal everyday life in a well-known setting came back to them emotionally. The explanations from the observed consumers could further suggest how backward- and forward-looking nostalgia simultaneously could be in a relationship with one another, and it is further suggested that these different routes to (re-)enchantment discussed by Hartmann and Brunk (2018) could be simultaneously active in time and space.

Another appearance that could be connected to memory consumption and nostalgia is the two women observed visiting the store in Gothenburg, where the observational study was carried out. One of these women were overheard expressing:

*“Oh! Look at this suitcase! How nice! I can not wait to start using my old suitcase again and go on a holiday. Do you remember when we were on that trip to Spain? Haha! I miss those days.”* and:

*“We have to go on another trip like that! Perhaps I should buy a new suitcase and use it when we are allowed to travel again?”*

These statements could be argued to be understood as re-instantiation, as discussed by Hartmann and Brunk (2018), where the woman indicates having a backward-oriented feeling of nostalgia, meaning that she seems to connect the consumption to the longing of previous events, surroundings, and state of being. The statements are not only suggesting how backward nostalgia in terms of meaning, created through the lens of re-instantiation works. They also indicate how consumers are connecting consumption to certain events, for example, a trip to Spain.

Furthermore, on a question asking if there is anything the respondents have started to purchase during the pandemic since it makes them connect to the time before Covid-19, respondents (3), (5), and (10) all explain that clothes in some way make them connect to their

ordinary lives. Respondent (5) explain that:

*“Maybe the purchase of the clothes for the future, because I wanna wear that later when I can do things and meet family and friends again.”*

Unlike the above-mentioned respondents, respondent (4) instead argues how perhaps a boat and other things could provide a connection to ordinary life before the pandemic:

*“Ehm I don’t know, well we have thought of buying a boat, so perhaps that. But I think that many, or what I have understood from the market is that a lot of people have started to purchase boats and country places instead of going abroad.”*

All these statements could both be seen as substitution (as discussed in 4.1. *Substitution consumption*), but also as memory consumption connecting to nostalgia. The argument from respondent (4) implies that there is a general change in consumption which aligns with previous discussions about how consumption seems to have changed during Covid-19 instead of being rejected. One could argue that this aspect of consumption, as explained by respondent (4), could be the respondent’s way of finding home and comfort, by purchasing a boat, which further possibly could result in (re-)enchantment and a connection to the ordinary life pre-pandemic (Hartmann & Brunk, 2018). Furthermore, it could also be suggested that respondent (5) is facing a progressive nostalgia mode when referring to consuming for the future. This means that in terms of being uncomfortable and not belonging, one is more likely to consume different products and practices that one used to consume, trying to reach a feeling of belonging (ibid). It could be argued that the respondent’s consumption of clothes for the future is a way to re-enact emotions that are connected to the past and feel these emotions in the present time and future as well. It could further be suggested that the uncertainties related to the pandemic Covid-19 have made respondent (5) predisposed for nostalgic responses in line with research from Hartmann and Brunk (2018) which could explain the purchases for the post-pandemic future.

## **5. Conclusion**

This research is illustrating and exploring how Covid-19 affects consumers’ ways to create meaning through their consumption and how they make sense of the current pandemic situation through their consumption. The research is thus investigating consumption, with additional focus on branded products, by the use of qualitative observation and semi-structured interviews, where; *Substitution consumption*, *Show-off consumption*, and *Memory consumption* represent three different consumer behaviour patterns, showing how consumers make sense of the current pandemic situation and create meaning for themselves through their consumption during Covid-19.

Findings in this study indicate that consumption during the Covid-19 pandemic has not decreased, rather there seems to have occurred a *Substitution consumption*, meaning that consumers may still rely on their trusted brands although they have found substitution of consuming other products to create meaning for themselves during this pandemic. This

assumption is strengthened in this study when the respondents and the observed participants are declaring that their savings have not increased higher priority and how they have been spending approximately the same amount as before the pandemic, but that they prioritize differently compared to pre-pandemic. Furthermore, instead of traveling abroad, consumers seem to find other ways to create meaning, for example by socializing with friends and family, which could give somewhat similar feelings. Other consumers substitute their inability to go on vacations for products they could use in the future which further shows a sort of re-enacting nostalgia. The substitution consumption indicators noted during this research can possibly be linked to consumers still wanting to consume because it allows them to adapt to and make sense of the pandemic. In addition, substitution consumption seems to make them create meaning by being (re-)enchanted and get a kind of nostalgic connection to their ordinary lives.

Furthermore, *Show-off consumption* highlights how consumers consume material objects and brands to express themselves, which could be connected to the theory of conspicuous consumption. An unstable experience as the pandemic Covid-19 seems to contribute to the need to engage in conspicuous consumption, where trusted brands appear to be preferred because it could provide increased self-esteem, status, and a feeling of belonging. It could therefore be suggested that consumers still entrust themselves to the brands they usually consume, even during the pandemic, and that the trust has not changed despite prevailing circumstances. These brands seem to imply clarity and value which helps the consumers during times of uncertainties.

Moreover, consumers' social lives seem to have been most affected by the pandemic Covid-19, and more time is spent at home. Consumers are more limited to social contexts and this indicates to have affected their way of showing off, among other things through their conspicuous consumption. Nonetheless, consumers are interpretive beings who use strategies and take action to make sense of the pandemic and create meaning for themselves. Thus, to compensate for the loss of showing off as they did pre-pandemic, consumers' engagement in showing off seems to have increased in other available ways, where the consumers could get others' attention. This could be seen as a way for consumers to still be able to express themselves and shape their identities despite the decreased possibilities due to Covid-19.

The pandemics' effect on consumers' social lives, with more time spent at home, also seems to make them actively plan their outfits even more than before. It seems to be a way for consumers to both show-off and express themselves, but also as a way to connect to their ordinary lives before the pandemic. This could further create a nostalgic stimulus, retrospective, and a positive expectation of what the future holds, post Covid-19, increasing the feeling of satisfaction and (re-)enchantment.

Furthermore, consumers are according to this study equally likely to adapt to trends during Covid-19. The trends instead seem to be shifted, suggested as compensation for the disability to show off in a similar way as before the pandemic. The loss of show-off opportunities seems to be compensated by adapting to new trends. It suggests that show-off through conspicuous consumption is coupled with satisfaction, happiness, and well-being which even during the pandemic is desired by consumers, where new ways to display and symbolize wealth, status, and an idealized identity of themselves are created.

Moreover, it can be debated if there is a decreased need in purchasing products to show off

during the pandemic Covid-19 since one is limited in being on public occasions and thus can not show it to anyone. However, the overhanging part seems to consume the same amount of products as they did pre-pandemic. Thus, the shifts in show-off consumption and trends that could be seen through this study do not imply that show-off or trends are less important or are disabled due to the pandemic Covid-19. The loss of showing off is rather being compensated for in another setting, in order for the consumers to still be able to create meaning for themselves and make sense of the pandemic situation.

Finally, the third way to consume analyzed in this study represents *Memory consumption* among consumers. This analysis implies that memories and longing can be connected to and appeal to a feeling of (re-)enchantment, which further is connected to nostalgia. The relationship between memories and nostalgia could be highlighted in this research as to when the consumers are expressing how they miss pre-pandemic situations and events, closely connected to their consumption, and similarly how they are longing for post-covid. This also highlights how nostalgia can be active in time and space, and that it is not only appealing to backward events. Thus, it indicates that consumers create meaning by consuming products and other things that connect them to their ordinary lives which provide meaning and a feeling of home and comfort.

In summary, this study suggests a connection between substitution, show-off, and memory consumption as three different consumer behaviour patterns used by consumers to create meaning for themselves and make sense of the Covid-19 pandemic through their consumption. It is further suggested that this evokes (re-)enchantment and appeals to nostalgic stimulus among consumers, highlighting how nostalgia and (re-)enchantment are creators of meaning and could be felt near the past.

## **6. Recommendations for Future Research**

For future research, it would be interesting to involve and analyze more interpretive research connected to sensemaking and meaning creation, and also investigate whether other alternative interpretation strategies could form the basis for how consumers adapt and make sense of the surroundings when their ordinary lives are disrupted. Future research also needs to be broadened and deepened, i.e. larger samples need to be collected and analyzed, applied globally, and include all ages. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that this study is conducted in an active pandemic environment. For future engagement, it would be interesting to compare and analyze post-pandemic meaning creation and sensemaking among consumers and clear out the attachment to trends, the substitution process as well as the importance of memories as a sensemaking character. In addition, it could be questionable if consumers' post-pandemic consumption in order to create meaning and to make sense of the current situation will be similar to their behaviour pre-pandemic, or if the effects of the pandemic Covid-19 has changed some things permanently.

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