CHANGES IN THE CONSUMPTION HABITS AND THEIR SUSTAINABILITY DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Author: Hanna Kaijalainen
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Supervisor: Marileena Mäkelä

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

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ABSTRACT

Author	
Hanna Kaijalainen	
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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced on the everyday lives of people ever since it started in 2020. Due to this global health crisis, people have been changing their consumption habits to adapt to the existing circumstances. This has raised the question in research literature if this crisis could provide a chance for transition towards more sustainable consumption.

The literature suggests that changes in consumption during crisis can be explained and influenced by available resources and beliefs, whereas successfully changing consumption habits requires considering how habits are formed in the first place. This Master's Thesis research explores the changes in the consumption habits of young adults in their mid 20's during the COVID-19 pandemic and after it. To answer the question raised from the literature, the objective of this research was to study if these consumption habits have changed more sustainable during the pandemic, and what is going to happen to them when the pandemic ends.

To reach this objective, four semi-structured online group interviews with four participants in each interview were conducted. The data received from the interviews was then analyzed by using thematic analysis. As the result of the analysis, it was found that the COVID-19 pandemic had influenced on the consumption habits regarding travelling and commuting; impulse purchases, shopping, and online shopping; services; free time and hobbies; and orderliness at grocery store. Changes towards more sustainable consumption habits concerned decreased overall level of travelling, commuting, and impulse purchases. Generally, the interviewees did not consider that the pandemic itself had changed their habits more sustainable. Yet, it was considered likely that the pre-covid habits will return after the pandemic ends with few exceptions.

The findings of this thesis alongside notions from the used literature in the theoretical framework further suggest that the lack of incentives and reinforcement of sustainable consumption habits ought to be studied in the future to support transition towards sustainable consumption. Also, as the COVID-19 pandemic is not likely to be the last crisis, modelling the consumer responses to what is seen as essential and discretional consumption during crisis might be worthwhile to better respond to these in future.

Key words

consumption habits, sustainable consumption, COVID-19, crisis

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tiivistelmä

Vuonna 2020 alkanut maailmanlaajuinen koronaviruspandemia on merkittävästi vaikuttanut ihmisten jokapäiväiseen elämään sen alkamisesta lähtien. Tämän globaalin terveyskriisin myötä ihmiset ovat muuttaneet kulutustottumuksiaan sopeutuakseen vallitseviin olosuhteisiin. Tämä onkin herättänyt tutkimuskirjallisuudessa kysymyksen siitä, voisiko tämä kriisi tarjota mahdollisuuden siirtymälle kohti kestävämpää kuluttamista.

Kirjallisuuden mukaan kulutuksen muutoksiin kriisien aikana vaikuttavat ja niitä selittävät saatavilla olevat resurssit ja uskomukset, kun taas menestyksellinen kulutustottumusten muuttaminen vaatii tapojen muodostumisen tarkastelemista. Tämä pro gradu -tutkimus käsittelee nuorten aikuisten kulutustottumuksien muutoksia globaalin koronapandemian aikana ja sen jälkeen. Vastatakseen kirjallisuudesta nousseeseen kysymykseen, tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää ovatko nämä kulutustottumukset muuttuneet kestävämmiksi pandemian aikana, ja mitä niille tapahtuu pandemian päätyttyä.

Saavuttaakseen tutkimustavoitteen tutkija toteutti neljä puolistrukturoitua neljän hengen verkkohaastattelua. Haastatteluista saatu tutkimusaineisto analysoitiin käyttämällä teema-analyysia. Analyysin tuloksena saatiin selville, että koronapandemia on vaikuttanut kulutustottumuksiin liittyen: matkustamiseen ja työmatkustamiseen; heräteostoksiin, shoppailuun ja nettishoppailuun; palveluihin; vapaa-aikaan ja harrastuksiin; ja suunnitelmallisuuteen ruokakaupassa. Muutokset kohti kestävämpiä kulutustottumuksia koskivat kaiken kaikkiaan vähentynyttä matkustamista, työmatkustamista, sekä heräteostoksien tekemistä. Yleisesti haastatellut kokivat, ettei koronaviruspandemia itsessään ole muuttanut heidän kulutustottumuksiaan kestävimmiksi. Odotettavaa kuitenkin on, että ennen koronaa olleet kulutustottumukset palaavat muutamin poikkeuksin.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset ja sen teoreettisen viitekehyksen huomiot kirjallisuudesta ehdottavat, että kestävän kuluttamisen kannusteiden ja sitä vahvistavien tekijöiden tutkiminen tulevaisuudessa voisi tukea siirtymää kohti kestävää kuluttamista. Koska koronaviruspandemia ei luultavasti tule olemaan viimeinen kohtaamamme kriisi, olisi kannattavaa mallintaa kuluttajien reaktioita siihen mikä on välttämätöntä ja mikä valinnaista kuluttamista kriisin aikana, jotta näihin pystytään tulevaisuudessa vastaamaan paremmin.

Asiasanat	
kulutustottumukset, kestävä kuluttaminen, koronaviruspandemia, kriisi	
Säilytyspaikka	
Jyväskylän yliopiston kirjasto	

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1 INTRODUCTION

As presented in the title of this Master's Thesis, this Master's Thesis studies the changes in consumption habits and their sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first part of this thesis starts by introducing the background of the research topic. It is followed by presenting the objective of the research alongside the research questions and justification of the study. Last, the structure of this thesis is outlined to present the different parts of this thesis to guide the reader.

1.1 Background

In the spring of 2020, everyday life in Finland and across the world was disrupted by the global pandemic of the COVID-19 disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Korkman et al., 2020; Ramkissoon, 2020; WHO, 2020). Ever since the outbreak of the virus, restrictions set by national governments and policy makers have varied from complete national lockdowns to smaller interventions depending on the existing infection rate (Benton, 2020; Bonaccorsi et al., 2020; Tupper et al., 2020; Korkman et al., 2020). On 15 November 2021, The World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) reported that there has been 251,788,329 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 5,007,907 deaths caused by the disease globally, whereas exactly one year from that date the number of confirmed cases was reported to be 631,367 and deaths to be 8,894. To prevent the spreading of the COVID-19 disease globally and locally, people across nations have been limiting their travelling and spending more time at home (Jribi et al., 2020; Ramkissoon, 2020), and thus introducing social distancing and quarantining to our everyday lives (Kirk & Rifkin, 2020). In addition to its influence on the health of global population, the pandemic has had significant effects on economies, production, ways of working, social interaction, transportation and tourism, education, and many other aspects (Freire-González & Vivanco, 2020; Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Therefore, it is arguable to say that we are facing a global crisis affecting many different areas in our lives.

  The pandemic has raised concerns about its effects to sustainability issues as the global crisis has revealed how unsustainable our existing system is when confronted with exogenous shocks (Freire-González & Vivanco, 2020; Perkins et al., 2021). Some researchers have even proposed the question if COVID-19 as a shock to our consumption-promoting economy could lead to the reconstruction and transition towards a more sustainable one (Benton, 2020; Cohen, 2020; Freire-González & Vivanco, 2020). For instance, Cohen (2020) notes that the COVID-19 pandemic can be considered as a concurrent experiment how to downsize the existing consumer economy. Whereas Benton (2020) sees that while relying on the consumption of globally accessible goods, our existing economy is fragile to external shocks, and the COVID-19 pandemic might just be the required disruptive shock for better adaptation in the era of human impact. Moreover, Donthu

& Gustafsson (2020) have been discussing the weakness and change of the current system by highlighting that our societies are fragile to pandemics and are likely to change permanently after the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic comes to its end. As for Perkins et al. (2021) present that the pandemic has shown just how intertwined our problems are by highlighting that both the global climate crisis and the global pandemic are crisis of the natural world.

For a long time, social scientists have concluded that disasters have a catalyzing effect to social changes (Cohen, 2020), and it is expected that events such as pandemics and different outbreaks will significantly influence on consumer behavior (Laato et al., 2020). Some past global events such as the World War II, Great Depression in the late 1920s, and the financial crisis of 2008-2009 have had significant disruptions to consumption (Sheth, 2020). As the pandemic has influenced different collective behaviors, it has also led to changes in consumption choices of individual consumers (Esposti et al., 2021). A number of scholars has been reporting changes in consumers' habitual consumption routines as they are rethinking, shifting, and adapting them to the environmental and social changes of the COVID-19 (Cohen, 2020; Esposti et al., 2021; Kirk & Rifkin, 2020; Knowles et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020).

While consumption is regulated by many different factors such as time and location, consumer behavior at the individual level can be quite predictable due to being habitual (Sheth, 2020). These kinds of habitual behavior patterns tend to endure until the circumstances change substantially and do not allow these patterns to continue anymore (Aro, 2017). Thus, it has been argued that the imposed uncertainty of the COVID-19 may affect consumer behavior and sentiment further leading to different changes in consumers, their adaptation, and responses to the new circumstances (Charm et al., 2020). However, it is difficult to estimate how long are these occurred changes going to withstand or what are the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Mehta et al., 2020).

The main causes of environmental deterioration according to Akenji and Bengtsson (2014) are the unsustainable consumption and production patterns. Adopting new more pro-social and pro-environmental behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to a more sustainable and long-term behavioral change in consumers (Ramkissoon, 2020). Already there has been a shift in thought from discretionary to essential consumption, as consumers have been re-evaluating what is necessary in the times of the pandemic (Charm et al., 2020). Therefore, the pandemic might provide a great opportunity for reshaping the existing markets and creating awareness about lifestyles that support the humans as part of ecosystems rather than acting superior to the natural environment (Mehta et al., 2020). Paying attention to the global climate crisis alongside while recovering from the global pandemic is needed as both global crises are parallel to one another (Perkins et al., 2021).

1.2   The aim of the study and justification

This Master's Thesis aims at exploring changes in the consumption habits of young adults in their mid 20's during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, the aim of this thesis is to study if the posed circumstances of the global pandemic have improved the sustainability of the consumption habits among young adults in Finland. Furthermore, the researcher hopes to provide insight into current consumer mindsets of young adults and changes in them as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To reach the objective of this thesis, three research questions were formed:

1. How has the consumption habits of young adults been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Has the COVID-19 pandemic provided a case for sustainable consumption among young adults?
3. What will happen to the existing consumption habits of young adults after the pandemic comes to its end?

The target group of young adults in their mid 20's was chosen as it has been concluded to be a rather vulnerable group during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Shanahan et al. (2020) have compared the emotional distress of young adults during the pandemic in Switzerland to the pre-covid levels of it and found that the levels of anger and stress perceived by the target group increased during the pandemic. Moreover, they concluded that economic and lifestyle disruptions caused emotional distress during the COVID-19 pandemic similarly as other stressors such as stressful life events pre-covid. As for Ranta et al. (2020) found in their study that young adults (aged 18-29) in Finland are notably more concerned about how the COVID-19 pandemic will affect their studies/career, economic situation, and mental well-being than older people (aged 30-65).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic as a global health crisis has significantly affected the everyday lives of the global population, it is a current and challenging research topic. Donthu and Gustafsson (2020) argue that it is important to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic to be able to moderate the effects of possible future viruses as it is likely that new pandemics will take place in the future as well. While studying the consumer expenditure during an epidemic outbreak, Jung et al. (2016) considered that when aiming at assessing the economic impacts of epidemics one should first understand the changes in behaviors of individual consumers as they influence on the expenditures. Reflecting on the aftermath of natural disasters Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012) conclude that consumers will eventually have a need to consume after profound disruptions in their lives. Whereas, considering the recent approaches of consumer research, Solomon (2016) argues that for the generation of new theoretical insights it is more suitable to study the human behaviors in a consumption context rather than merely the consumption context.

Thus, the objective of this thesis research can be considered to have theoretical importance in explaining how consumption habits are affected during and after a global pandemic. Moreover, it has societal importance as it is concentrated to study the consumption habits of a group of people that is considered to be rather vulnerable during the pandemic. And lastly, the objective may possibly provide some practical outcomes for business practitioners and decision makers aiming at supporting transition towards more sustainable consumption by explaining how young adults change their consumption habits.

1.3   The structure of thesis

This thesis is comprised of six parts and the structure is following. The Introduction at hand is the first part of this thesis introducing the background of the thesis topic, the objective of the thesis, the research questions, justification of the study, and the structure of the thesis. The second part presents the theoretical framework of this thesis familiarizing the reader with current literature concerning the formation and changing of consumption habits, sustainable consumption, the connections between changes in consumption as the result of different crisis, and the changes in consumption occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The third part of this thesis presents the methodological choices, data collection and data analysis methods, but also considers the validity, reliability, and research ethics related to the study. The fourth part comprises of the research findings of this thesis. These findings are further discussed in relation to the theoretical framework in the fifth part of this thesis. Lastly, the sixth part presents the conclusions of this thesis with some limitations, implications, and suggestions for future research. The Appendix 1, presented after the references, includes the interview questions both in English and in Finnish used in this research.

2   THEORETHICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this Master's Thesis is presented in this part of the thesis, and it is comprised of four chapters. The first chapter introduces the definitions of consumption and habits and presents how habits and consumption habits can be formed and changed. The second chapter presents the concept of sustainable consumption and remarks of what drives sustainable consumption. The third chapter focuses on what influences the changes in consumption during crisis and provides examples from previous crisis and changes in consumption habits. The fourth and last chapter presents the existing literature about how consumption has been changing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1   Consumption, habits formation and changes in habits

This first chapter starts by defining what is meant by consumption in the context of this thesis. Then it is moved on to the description of habits formation as consumption and other behavioral actions can become habitual and resistant to change. Lastly, it is presented how habits and consumption habits can be changed.

2.1.1 Defining consumption

Consumption has been defined rather extensively in the literature. Halkier et al. (2016) argue that research on consumption is multidisciplinary across many different fields of research which influences on the differentiation of concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical questions and their methodological designs, and conclusions. For example, in economics consumption is commonly associated with the term of exchange or the context of purchasing, thus suggesting that consumption can be defined as demand (Warde, 2005; Peattie & Collins, 2009). This purchase-oriented perception of consumption is reasonable from economic and legal perspective as it is the moment when a consumer gains the ownership of a product and the company providing it receives a reward for the effort to satisfy and understand consumer needs and wants (Peattie & Collins, 2009).

While the exchange of value between two or more parties is essential part of marketing and consumer behavior too, these fields of research use a more expanded view on consumption as a process including different phases and issues within those phases before, during, and after the exchange of value (Solomon, 2016). However, as successful marketing is stated to build demand for products and services, marketing tends to focus on achieving purchases and generating customer loyalty and satisfaction to gain more purchases (Kotler & Keller, 2015; Peattie & Collins, 2009), and therefore might also hold a rather purchase-oriented perspective on consumption (Peattie & Collins, 2009).

Consistently to the perception of seeing consumption as a process, Warde (2005) approaches consumption from sociological perspective and understands consumption to be a process in which people appropriate and appreciate goods, services, ambiance, information, or performances with discretion by purchasing or not purchasing these things for different (expressive, utilitarian, or contemplative) purposes. Moreover, Warde (2005, p.137) defines that: "consumption is not itself a practice but is, rather, a moment in almost every practice". The author further elaborates that consumption is built into different practices making a similar conclusion as Stø et al. (2008) who suggest that consumption should be seen as bound to consumers' everyday life and its activities. However, Halkier et al. (2016) suggest that it is useful to use terms related to consumption processes such as acquisition, appropriation, appreciation, and disposal in structuring questions around consumption. Thus, in the context of this thesis, consumption is seen as an integral part of consumers' everyday activities (e.g., seeing one's friends, travelling, working) including different phases in them (before, during, and after), rather than just an exchange of value between two or more parties or using a product or a service.

2.1.2 Formed habits resist change

While seeing consumption as an integral part of the everyday life and activities of consumers, it is worthwhile considering and understanding how these activities are taken up or formed. Verplanken and Wood (2006) explain that the first-time people are doing something specific they start by determining what and how are they going to do it to avoid an outcome or to achieve another. The repetition of this action leads to receding decision making because the action is set in motion by certain environmental cues (Aarts et al., 1998; Verplanken & Wood, 2006). Aarts et al. (1998) demonstrate this by explaining that multiple well practiced behaviors like walking or driving can take place quite automatically and proceed effortlessly, but to be engaged in, they require a goal.

Continuing, Aarts et al. (1998) state that majority of people's behaviors take place in similar social and physical environment due to which these behaviors have a habitual character. The authors further present that behavioral habits have three conceptual features. First, habits are goal-directed automatic behaviors, meaning that habits can be performed quite automatically to reach a certain goal with little conscious effort. Second, habits are mentally represented behaviors which suggests that people connect these situational behaviors or actions in the past to reaching a certain goal. Third, habits can be environmentally cued, so they can be set in motion by triggering circumstances similar to which the behavior has taken place many times in the past. (Aarts et al., 1998.)

The formation of habits can be derived from their conceptual features, as Verplanken and Wood (2006, p.93) present that the formation of habits, or habit learning as they put it, is: "a cognitive and motivational process in which the control of action is outsourced to the environment so that sequences of prior actions are triggered automatically by the appropriate circumstances". Thus, they state that to form a habit one should have created connections in their memory

between the action or behavior and the stable circumstances it was performed in. Similarly, Solomon (2016) notes that consumers learn constantly without trying as their knowledge about the world is under constant exposure through new stimuli and feedback enabling them to modify behavior in similar situations.

It must be noted that the formation of habits is not solely based on repetition as reinforcement of the behavior is required (Aarts et al., 1998; Verplanken & Wood, 2006; Solomon, 2016). Aarts et al. (1998) state that positive reinforcement through satisfactory experiences strengthens the likelihood of repeating the same behavior, which strengthens the formation of a habit, whereas unsatisfactory experiences may weaken the formation of habit due to unlikely repetition. Similarly, Solomon (2016) notes on that consumers who get compliments about a specific product choice are likely to re-purchase it, whereas getting a food poisoning from a restaurant likely leads to avoiding it in the future, suggesting that consumption choices can become habitual as well as other behaviors or actions.

As the behavior and its connection to wanted outcome in the existing circumstances has been reinforced, repeated, and eventually formed into a habit, it becomes difficult to change (Aarts et al., 1998; Aro, 2017; Knowles et al., 2020; Solomon, 2016; Verplanken & Wood, 2006), because if the circumstances enable habitual patterns of behavior and thought to take place, they are prone to prevail as such (Aarts et al., 1998; Aro, 2017; Verplanken & Wood, 2006). Verplanken and Wood (2006) note that consumers with strong habits form expectations that previous experiences will be repeated due to which they dismiss small changes in the environment. The authors continue that these kinds of consumers tend to look for less information about alternatives and favor supporting information of their habits and use simple decision rules in familiar circumstances.Therefore, having strong habits leads to having informational and motivational biases rejecting alternative habitual information which also makes habits resist change (Verplanken & Wood, 2006).

2.1.3 Changing consumption habits

Since consumption can become habitual and routinized as well as other behaviors (Aro, 2017; Knowles et al., 2020; Verplanken & Wood, 2006), the contextual changes related to consumption may disturb or regulate it (Sheth, 2020; Verplanken & Roy, 2016). When changes in social context, technology, rules and regulations, or natural disasters occur, these circumstantial changes may significantly disrupt consumption habits (Sheth, 2020). Arising circumstances or changing contexts might limit or prevent habits from taking place and lead to opening a window of opportunity for behavioral change (Verplanken & Roy, 2016). However, Verplanken and Wood (2006) propose that merely disrupting a habit does not lead to change by suggesting that successful behavioral change interventions comprise of three phases. First, changing the contextual circumstances which cue the existing habit. Second, creating supportive incentives for the new action. Third, reinforcing the repetition of these actions in the environment to establish new associations between the action and the environment. (Verplanken & wood, 2006.)

Verplanken and Wood (2006) also discuss that interventions changing weak and strong consumer habits differ from each other due to the characteristics of these habits. The characteristics of strong habits presented in the end of previous chapter are influencing on why strong consumption habits are hard to change with downstream, informational interventions (e.g., education, counseling, informative campaigns, self-help programs) which aim at reducing existing negative outcomes of habits (Verplanken & Wood, 2006). Whereas, in the case of non-habitual behaviors when people are more receptive to new information, or in the case of strong habits when applied during naturally occurring changes in people's lives (e.g., moving to a new location), downstream interventions can be effective (Verplanken & Wood, 2006; Veplanken & Roy, 2016). In order to change strong consumption habits, one should use upstream interventions (Verplanken & Wood, 2006). According to Verplanken and Wood (2006) upstream interventions (e.g., structural changes in environment, economic incentives, legislation) aim at preventing the existing negative outcomes of habits from taking place by targeting social norms and contextual circumstances supporting more desired behavior. Thus, targeting the environmental circumstances that cue habits.

2.2   Sustainable consumption

This second chapter of the theoretical framework starts by presenting the concept of sustainable consumption, how it can be defined, and how the approaches to sustainability can affect what is considered as sustainable consumption. After which it is discussed what drives sustainable consumption and how consumption could possibly be changed more sustainable.

2.2.1 The concept of sustainable consumption

The concept of sustainable consumption is commonly considered to stem from the definition and concept of sustainability or sustainable development. It has been suggested that consumption could be seen as sustainable when meeting the needs of existing generations without compromising the needs of future generations (Heiskanen & Pantzar, 1997; Kostadinova, 2016), thus being align with the definition of sustainable development formed by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the Bruntland Report '*Our Common Future*' (WCED, 1987). Almost a decade after the definition of sustainable development, a definition for sustainable consumption and production was proposed at the 1994 Oslo Symposium on Sustainable consumption (Kostadinova, 2016; UN, 2020). This definition which is found from the website of United Nations suggests that sustainable consumption and production at the 1994 Oslo Symposium was defined as:

> "*The use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources*

and toxic materials as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations" (UN, 2020).

Moreover, it has been noted that the definition above highlights that sustainable consumption and production concerns the concepts of satisfying basic needs; prioritizing quality of life over material living standards; minimized wasting, resource use, and polluting; considering life-cycle approach; and considering the generations to come in making decisions (UN, 2020).

Yet, within the concept of sustainable consumption there are different approaches to sustainability. For example, weak and strong sustainable consumption are based on different conceptual assumptions; weak sustainable consumption stems from market approaches and optimism towards improvements in technology, whereas strong sustainable consumption has a more pessimistic approach to technology, and it gives weight to social innovations (Hobson, 2013; Lorek & Fuchs, 2013). To illustrate the difference between these two approaches, Fuchs and Lorek (2005) give very practical examples. One of these examples suggests that driving a car with lower petrol consumption than some other car would count as weak sustainable consumption, whereas taking the train or decreasing the travel frequency or travelled distances would count as strong sustainable consumption (Fuchs & Lorek, 2005).

Accordingly, in weak sustainable consumption achieving sustainable consumption is derived from efficiency improvements of technological solutions which will be spread to the markets as the outcome of rising consumer demand (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013). Much of the responsibility to changing consumption sustainable is therefore given to the consumers who are seen as active actors demanding ever more energy-efficient products (Akenji, 2014; Fuchs & Lorek, 2005), similar to the idea behind green consumerism (promotion, production, and consumption based on the pro-environmental claims of products and services) (Akenji, 2014). The end goal in weak sustainable consumption approach is that economic growth continues at the same time as socioecological wellbeing is improved and eventually sustainable consumption is achieved (Hobson, 2013). Thus, the weak sustainability paradigm considers that sufficient technological solutions improve the human well-being, and that human-made capital and natural capital are seen as substitutes (Ang & Van Passel, 2012).

Contractionary, it has been presented that improvements in energy efficiency may lead to increasing the overall consumption of energy and the expectations of greater comfort in daily life, further driving continuous invention and marketing of new even more energy-efficient and affordable consumer goods (Brown, 2010). Hence, even though weak sustainable consumption can improve the efficiency of consumption, it is notable that the resources on Earth and its resiliency to pollutants have limits, meaning that changes in the overall consumption patterns and levels are needed in achieving sustainable consumption (Fuchs & Lorek, 2005). In fact, strong sustainable consumption as an approach suggests that achieving sustainability in consumption requires changes in the

patterns of consumption and reductions in the levels of consumption (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013), thus having connections to degrowth (Aro, 2017).

In the paradigm of strong sustainability, natural capital can be complemented with human-made capital but not substituted with it, highlighting that some environmental processes and functions are irreplaceable (Perkins et al., 2021). Therefore, these forms of capital are seen as complements, and natural capital is a limiting factor due to which it should not be neglected (Ang & Van Passel, 2012). The end goal of strong sustainable consumption approach is that multilevel sociopolitical transformation provides well-being which is not solely based on consumption (Hobson, 2013).

2.2.2 Driving sustainable consumption

There are multiple perspectives and studies about what drives sustainable consumption presented in the sustainable consumption and sustainable consumer behavior literature. For example, Stø et al. (2008) present six potential drivers for change towards sustainable consumption including changes in values, attitudes, knowledge, the symbolic aspects of consumption and individual identity, routines and habits, and lastly the existence or non-existence of windows of opportunity. While Grikesvicius et al. (2010) present that people tend to use proenvironmental purchases to signal one's altruistic behavior and ability to buy these often more expensive products, thus suggesting that sustainable or pro-environmental consumption (especially in public) stems from status motivates. Whereas Molinario et al. (2020) suggest that the pro-environmental behaviors (e.g., sustainable food consumption) in the adulthood are relevantly influenced by exposure to pro-environmental social norms and nature experiences in the childhood.

In a literature review about sustainable consumption Kostadinova (2016) concludes that most of the factors influencing pro-environmental consumer behavior can be categorized under individual related (e.g., values, demographics, attitudes) or context-related factors (external factors influencing sustainable consumption). However, Kostadinova (2016) also draws a conclusion from the literature that if sustainable consumption is about consuming less and changing the ways of consumption, then successful long-lasting behavioral change is a great challenge for sustainability that should be dealt with to reach sustainable consumption. Furthermore, many authors call for a more systematic change which does not merely rely on the individual factors influencing consumers' pro-environmental behavior, as these factors are, at least partly, influenced by the existing social, political, or otherwise contextual circumstances consumers live in (Akenji, 2014; Csutora, 2012; Hobson, 2013). Csutora (2012) for example states that having pro-environmental attitude and behavior might not lead to reducing the environmental impacts of the consumption as they cannot reduce the impacts of existing lifestyle trends determined by socio-economic factors. Relating to this, Aro (2017) notes that the daily life of people in its socio-cultural and material surroundings transforms, reproduces, and generates the perceptions of accepted and right ways to live and consume. This brings us back to the central ideas about how

consumption habits are formed and how they can be changed as presented earlier.

2.3 Crises and consumption

This third part of the theoretical framework starts by defining crisis, how they can be characterized, and what mechanisms may influence and explain changes in consumption when confronted with a crisis. This is followed by presenting examples how different crisis in the past have affected consumption.

2.3.1 Crises disrupt and affect consumption

It has been concluded that crisis can interrupt the consumption habits of consumers as they may change the circumstances the consumption has taken place (Koos, 2017; Koos, 2017; Koos et al., 2017; Sarmento et al., 2019). Kutak (1938) describes that a common feature to all crisis is that they take place quite unexpectedly with little or no warning at all. The author further explains that due to the sudden nature of crisis and the possible lack of preparation for it; "-- a crisis usually results in a breakdown of the general organization of the community", hence disrupting the way of life in the community facing the crisis (Kutak, 1938, p.66). Another common feature according to Kutak (1938) is the psychological changes in the community members driven by fear, confusion, continuous emotional tension, or changing social life. Thus, crises in general are unpredictable events that disrupt and threat the everyday routines people are used to (Kutak, 1938). However, they can be characterized by their predictability, nature, duration of the impact and number of people affected by the crisis, all of which shape the used coping strategies by the affected parties (Koos, 2017).

Crises can significantly affect people's well-being, life changes, consumption and therefore are connected to changes in consumption patterns, routines, and lifestyle (Koos, 2017; Koos et al., 2017; Sarmento et al., 2019). According to Koos (2017), there are two basic mechanisms influencing and explaining the changes in consumption at the individual level when confronted with a crisis – resources and beliefs. Koos (2017) explains that a crisis can affect the available resources used for making consumption decisions which then again can lead to changes in consumption behavior. Becoming unemployed or having a decline in monetary income due to a crisis limits the consumption options of a household, whereas shortages in available products or growing prices caused by the crisis may also limit the available resources, and thus the degree of freedom in consumption becomes limited (Koos, 2017). Koos (2017) also presents that a crisis can cause the forming of different beliefs among people which accordingly affects their consumption practices and leads to changes in them. For example, the author notes that this kind of behavioral changes have occurred when the beliefs about rising prices and the fear of possible job loss have led to decreasing con-

sumption and changing behavior during an economic crisis. Therefore, the author suggests that beliefs can contribute to driving crisis forward due to the changing behavior which is driven by feelings and beliefs about possible outcome of the crisis (see also Alonso et al., 2015).

2.3.2 Changes in consumption habits caused by different crisis

As noted, the characteristics of the crisis influence on the coping mechanisms people use and how their consumption changes when confronted with a crisis (Koos, 2017). When studying Portuguese consumers during recession and post-recession, Sarmento et al. (2019) found that during recession, consumers seek for economic stability and adapt to new behaviors to better utilize declined monetary incomes with increased social responsibility. Furthermore, the authors describe that new adopted behaviors included increased shopping frequency, reduced stocking behavior, increased organization, and planning of behavior, and avoiding wasting, on top of finding more affordable options. Whereas McKenzie and Schargrodsky (2005) found out that consumers in Argentina tend to increase shopping frequency but decrease buying, switch partly to low-quality goods from high-quality goods, and seek for greater store variety in the time of economic crisis. Also, McKenzie (2006) found that during the peso crisis consumers in Mexico reduced consumption of luxury goods, and postponed consumption of durable and semidurable goods.

In their study about the Hurricane Katrina's impact on the buying behavior and consumption attitudes of the survivors, Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012) describe the different ways individual consumption can be affected in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Common changes in consumption behavior were for example, atypical purchases compared to prior purchasing behavior, explained with rewarding oneself or relieving one's anxiety; purchases related to restoring one's identity and overcoming the feeling of loss; increased spending on activities or services providing pleasure; and even compulsive buying (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012). Yet, the authors found some indications that people would not be so willing to overspend or overconsume in the future, suggesting that the mindsets and attitudes towards consumption changed as the result of the crisis.

During the 2003 SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic in Taiwan, the ridership of the Tapei underground was halved, suggesting that people tend to limit the use of public transports and outdoor activities to avoid getting infected in the times of airborne infectious disease epidemics (Wang, 2014). In China, travelling and everyday activities of people was affected by the SARS, policies and regulations, fearful beliefs of this unknown disease, and environmental pressures. Consequently, the decreased travelling was caused because of external compulsory measures and travel bans, but also internal motivation of people. (Wen et al., 2005.) Following the outbreak of MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) in South Korea in May 2015, consumers shifted their purchasing of electronics online, continued to do their groceries comprising of daily necessities offline, and delayed the offline purchase of semi-luxury goods (Jung & Sung,

2017). Coherently, the inbound tourism in South Korea was decreased significantly during the MERS epidemic, suggesting that people decrease their travelling to outbreak areas (Choe et al., 2021).

Table 1 below summarizes changes in consumption habits caused by economic crisis, natural disasters, and infectious disease epidemics found from the literature. Thus, it presents similarities and differences between different crisis based on the occurred changes in consumption habits and the timing of these changes.

Table 1: Changes in consumption caused by different crisis

Changes in consumption habits	Nature of the crisis	Timing of behavior	Author(s)
Increased shopping frequency	Economic	During crisis	Sarmento et al. (2019), McKenzie and Schargrodsky (2005)
Reduced buying/stocking behavior	Economic	During crisis	Sarmento et al. (2019), McKenzie and Schargrodsky (2005)
Increased planning/organizing one's behavior	Economic	During crisis	Sarmento et al. (2019)
Avoiding wasting/over-spending/ over-consuming	Economic, Natural disaster	During crisis, Post crisis	Sarmento et al. (2019), Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012)
Switching to more affordable options	Economic	During crisis	Sarmento et al. (2019), McKenzie and Schargrodsky (2005)
Abstaining or postponing the purchase of durable/semi-durable or luxury goods	Economic, Infectious disease epidemic	During crisis	McKenzie (2006), Jung & Sung (2017)
Atypical purchases compared to prior purchasing behavior	Natural disaster	Post crisis	Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012)
Purchases related to restoring one's identity	Natural disaster	Post crisis	Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012)
Increased spending on activities or services providing pleasure	Natural disaster	Post crisis	Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012)
Compulsive buying	Natural disaster	Post crisis	Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012)
Stockpiling	Natural disaster	Pre crisis	Pan et al. (2020)
Increased online purchases (in some categories)	Infectious disease epidemic	During crisis	Jung et al. (2016) Jung & Sung (2017)
Avoiding public transports/ outdoor activities/ travelling	Infectious disease epidemic	During crisis	Wang (2014), Jung & Sung (2017), Choe et al. (2021), Wen et al. (2005)

2.4   Consumption during COVID-19

This fourth and last part of the theoretical framework discusses the different changes in consumption that have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. First the changes in consumption are discussed in general. This is followed by forming of overarching trends in consumption during the pandemic which are summarized in a table with the occurred changes found from the literature. These overarching trends are further discussed in their own sub-chapters, and lastly the sustainable consumption during the COVID-19 is discussed.

2.4.1 Changes in consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic

Ever since the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars and researchers have been conducting studies and providing insight into the changes in consumer behavior. For instance, Sheth (2020) gives eight immediate impacts that the COVID-19 has had on consumer behavior and consumption: hoarding or stockpiling of products essential for daily consumption; improvisation in consumption as previous habits are prevented from taking place; pent-up demand as the result of postponing purchases; embracing digital technology as the result of restrictions and lockdowns; reversive flow of distributing products; blurring of work-life boundaries due to remote working; changing the ways to be in touch with friends and families; and discovery of one's talent via having more free time to experiment new things in life. Similarly, Charm et al. (2020) present five underlying themes of how consumer behavior and sentiment have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes include: a shift to essential consumption and cutting back on discretionary consumption; shock to customer loyalty as consumers have tried different shopping behaviors (e.g., new brands and places to shop); decreased engagement to out-of-home activities; increased online purchases; and reduced holiday spending (Charm et al., 2020). Considering the stages of the pandemic, Kirk and Rifkin (2020) divide different consumer behaviors under three phases – reacting, coping, and long-term adaptation. Reacting phase includes hoarding of possession and rejection of behavioral mandates such as refusing to use face masks even when they were highly recommended. Coping phase consists of maintaining one's social contacts to friends and families while social distancing, applying DIY (doing-it-yourself) mentality to different activities from cooking to renovating one's house, and changing one's view of brands according to their perceived response to the crisis. And the long-term adaptation concerns change in the way people consume, changes in people as consumers, and changes in people as humans. (Kirk & Rifkin, 2020.)

There is great uncertainty about the permanence of the behavioral changes which have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sheth, 2020; Ramkissoon, 2020). Sheth (2020) states that most behavioral habits consumers have taken up during the COVID-19 can be expected to shift back as they were before the pandemic. However, the author also considers that some new habits will replace the

old ones as consumers might have found more affordable, convenient, or accessible alternatives while living in the lockdown setting. Ramkissoon (2020) sees that shifting back to old habits can be expected if interventions are not carried out by governments or other actors.

Table 2 summarizes some of the occurred changes in consumer behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic and comprises overarching trends of these behaviors. The following sub-chapters discuss the overarching trends in more detail, after which sustainable consumption during the pandemic is elaborated on.

Table 2: Changes in consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic

Changes in consumption	Explanation	Mentioned in	Overarching trend in consumption
Blurring of work-life boundaries	The boundaries between one's work life and private life became blurred as people are staying at home, and performing activities related to both aspects of one's life from the same place.	Sheth (2020)	Staying at home
Clearing homes	As a response to the restrictions and having more time to spend at home, many people went through their belongings and disposed some of them.	Korkman et al. (2020)	From discretionary to essential
Discovery of talent / DIY	Since people have had more free time at home, they have had time to discover new recipes, new ways of shopping online, or practicing their talents.	Sheth (2020)	Going online, Trying new
Embracing digital technology	Due to the posed circumstances of the pandemic such as lockdowns and other restrictions, people have needed to adopt new technologies, and the time spent on using Internet and social media has increased.	Sheth (2020) Donthu & Gustafsson (2020)	Going online
Hoarding	Hoarding behavior includes stockpiling of different products that are purposed for daily consumption such as water and toilet paper.	Benton (2020), Cohen (2020), Donthu & Gustafsson (2020), Esposti et al. (2021), Knowles et al. (2020), Sheth (2020)	From discretionary to essential
Improvisation in consumption and trying different shopping behaviors	Because the normal consumer behaviors have been interrupted, consumers have had to discard the existing behaviors leading to improvising and trying new ways to consume.	Charm et al. (2020), Korkman et al. (2020), Sheth (2020)	Trying new

Pent-up demand	Postponing of discretionary consumption or purchases.	Donthu & Gustafsson (2020) Korkman et al. (2020), Sheth (2020)	From discretionary to essential
Support your local thinking	Preferring nationally produced products to better support local economy, and to have guarantee of the safety and quality of used raw materials.	Donthu & Gustafsson (2020) Korkman et al. (2020) Perkins et al. (2021) Esposti et al. (2021)	Individualism/nationalism in consumption
Reunions with friends and family	People have been reaching out to their friends and families, and in doing so they have had to find new ways of staying in touch.	Sheth (2020) Korkman, Greene and Hantula (2020)	Going online, Trying new
Decreased travelling/ Changing transportation form	Travelling in general has decreased during the pandemic, and the fear of infection has made people consider their choice of transportation.	Ozbilen et al. (2021), Korkman et al. (2020)	Individualism/nationalism in consumption, Staying at home
Decreased shopping frequency at grocery store	Consumers have been decreasing the frequency of going to the Supermarket as the result of fear of contagion.	Esposti et al. (2021)	Staying at home
Decreased consumption related to appearance	There was a quick decrease in the sales of clothes, shoes, and other similar categories.	Esposti et al. (2021), Mehta et al. (2020)	Staying at home, from discretionary to essential
Increased consumption of home entertainment products and services	Simultaneously to the decrease in sales of some product categories, the purchases of home entertainments like tv-series, books, and films increased.	Esposti et al. (2021)	Staying at home

2.4.2 From discretionary to essential

As mentioned, Charm et al. (2020) present five underlying themes of how consumer behavior and sentiment have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic of which a shift from discretionary spending to essential spending is one. Sheth (2020) refers to this kind of shift as pent-up demand, meaning that the demand of today will move on to the future. Furthermore, the author presents that this kind of behavior is common when confronted with crisis (see also Table 1) and uncertainty in life. Sheth (2020) continues that postponing the consumption and purchase of discretionary services and products usually applies to purchasing more expensive goods that are meant to last longer periods of time. Examples of these kinds of products are for instance homes and cars, whereas postponed services include going into restaurants, concerts, or sports occasions. (Sheth, 2020.)

At the early stages of the COVID-19, consumers were stockpiling nonperishable food items, daily essentials, and other supplies from toilet paper to bread, which lead to temporary shortages or stockouts and struggles in supply chains (Benton, 2020; Cohen, 2020; Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Knowles et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020). Kirk and Rifkin (2020) explain that as consumers are used to availability of different products, scarcity of the products can make consumers feel powerless as their freedom to choose from the various products has been diminished. The feeling of powerlessness can therefore lead consumers to hoard possessions just to regain their power (Kirk & Rifkin, 2020). Stockpiling has been found to be a common change in consumption also right before predicted natural disasters as presented earlier (see Pan et al., 2020).

Even though hoarding and stockpiling is about buying over ones needs momentarily (Wilska et al., 2020) it is argued that during the COVID-19 pandemic people have started to rethink what things in life are essential, valuable, or meaningful (Korkman et al., 2020). In fact, Knowles et al. (2020) note that as the actual consumer behavior has been changing, so has the attitudes and mindsets of consumers. For instance, consumers have been expressing less interest in status-driven purchases that are displayed in public (Knowles et al., 2020). Also, Mehta et al. (2020) present that consumers have been reported to spend less money on so called "nice-to-have" products such as make-up, games and electronics, shoes, jewelers, shoes, and clothing. Esposti et al. (2021) agree on that the consumption of clothes and other appearance related products has decreased as being perceived unnecessary in the existing circumstances.

Korkman et al. (2020) found that majority of the Finnish people attending their study in June 2020, had been going through their possession at home and getting rid of unnecessary things during the restrictions, while only a minority had been purchasing new things to decorate their homes. Also, they found that owning less was seen as desirable, and the functionality of a home was considered important.

2.4.3 Trying new

Charm et al. (2020) state that consumers globally have tried different shopping behaviors as a response to the crisis and its disruptive nature to the normal consumer behaviors. They continue that approximately 65% of the consumers who responded to their survey expressed a high intent to continue acting according to these new behaviors in the future. The authors state that value was presented to be a key reason for trying out new places to purchase or brands to purchase from, but also availability and convenience were given consideration as key drivers for choosing where to shop. Coherently, Knowles et al. (2020) suggest that many brands are confronted with a real-life experiment of customer loyalty during the COVID-19 pandemic. They present a shift in consumers' attitudes and mindsets according to which purchase behavior is driven by the benefits and availability of the product rather than brand preferences. Therefore, they state that consumers are more focused on the function of the product or service and have expressed more interest to try direct-to-consumer offerings. In addition to

this, consumers have given emphasis on the pro-social behavior of the brands and how are they treating their employees alongside the functionality of the products (Knowles et al., 2020).

Explaining some of the changes in consumption Sheth (2020) presents that while consumers were confronted with restrictions, they had to come up with new consumption habits and many used their creativity while doing so. As having more free time at home, consumers were reported to practice their talents such as playing musical instruments, shop online, try out new cooking recipes and share their knowledge and learning with others via online video-sharing platforms like YouTube (Sheth, 2020). According to Laato et al. (2020) making unusual purchases during COVID-19 was strongly predicted by one's intention to self-isolate, meaning that while preparing for quarantine people might make unusual purchases. Furthermore, they state that this empirical result partly explains the unusual purchase behavior of consumers globally in March 2020 that included for example panic buying and hoarding presented previously. As this kind of hoarding stabilized quite quickly, the authors predict in the light of their results that consumers will continue making unusual purchases as long as quarantining and self-isolation continues.

2.4.4 Going online and staying at home

Due to the social distancing and lockdowns, consumers have been embracing digital technology in many ways to fulfill multiple purposes (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Freire-González & Font Vivanco, 2020; Sheth, 2020). For example, staying in touch with friends and family, remote classes for education, and working remotely have led consumers to learn using video conferencing tools such as Zoom (Sheth, 2020). The use of social media has also been increasing during the pandemic and lockdowns (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Thus, implementing and using information and communication technologies has been accelerating during the pandemic (Freire-González & Font Vivanco, 2020).

According to Sheth (2020) the social distancing has also led diminishing variety of locations to purchase products and services. The author continues that when some countries were under a complete lockdown, consumers were unable to go to grocery stores at any given time which led to reversive flow of consumption. Consumers expressed willingness to try shopping online at stores providing home delivery for their products (Knowles et al., 2020), and delivering from stores to home started to replace the habit of going physically to the stores (Sheth, 2020). Also, Korkman et al. (2020) note that the fear of being infected has driven consumers to do more of their groceries online, visit grocery stores less, use takeaway food services more often, and plan their groceries more precisely than before. Xu et al. (2021) found that in China the offline consumption was less resilient than the online consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic as consumers were able to shift their consumption of gyms, cinemas, and bookstores online when these places were closed due to lockdown restrictions. This finding is aligned

with the findings of Jung and Sung (2017) and Jung et al. (2016) that online consumption is more resilient that offline consumption during infectious disease epidemics.

2.4.5 Individualism and nationalism in consumption

When discussing about the predicted lasting effects of COVID-19, Donthu and Gustafsson (2020) state that countries might become less globalized and more nationalistic as a response to this external threat they are facing. They elaborate further that as people from other countries have been portrayed as dangerous due to the possibility of being infected and long global supply chains can be vulnerable to interruptions, countries and people might start to save resources to prepare for similar unpredictable events and favor locally produced products. What Donthu and Gustafsson (2020) find concerning, is that this kind of development might be dangerous when considering that sharing resources and global effort are likely to be needed in the long-term protection from the pandemic's consequences. Moreover, they highlight that these kinds of actions are further needed to tackle other global challenges. Relating to this, Perkins et al. (2021) have stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that redefining the individual's position in relation to others should be done to tackle both the pandemic and its consequences but also the global climate crisis.

According to Esposti et al. (2021) consumers in Italy have been changing their criteria for purchasing during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. Consumers have been reported to show more support to their local economy and purchased products that are made in Italy. A shift behind the action was motivated by the better guarantee of safety and quality of the products and raw materials that local producers could provide. (Esposti et al., 2021.) In Finland, Korkman et al. (2020) report that there has been observed a rise in the progressive and open national pride during the COVID-19 pandemic. During periods of restrictions in Finland, one third of the population purchased more Finnish food than before which has been seen supportive act for the Finnish producers (Korkman et al., 2020).

Evidently travelling has decreased during the pandemic as concerns of one's health and travel restrictions have put international travel on hold (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Korkman et al., 2020), and the individuals' out-of-home activities have been disrupted (Ozbilen et al., 2021). Similar to the findings of Wang (2014) about limiting the use of public transportations and outdoor activities during SARS epidemic in Taiwan, Ozbilen et al. (2021) note that on average people find shared modes of transport riskier than individual modes during the COVID-19 pandemic which has led to decreased use of them. Moreover, Korkman et al. (2020) note that the use of public transportations has decreased as people are working and studying remotely, but they also present that the fear of being infection has led to increased use of private cars more than before the COVID-19 crisis.

2.4.6 Sustainable consumption during COVID-19

Perkins et al. (2021) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a chance for strong sustainability agenda. According to the authors, virtual meetings, online education, and telecommuting are examples of developed new skills which reduce the use of energy-intensive transportation forms. Moreover, they highlight that by normalizing and creating incentives for green transportation, working remotely, and greener supply chain practices are a start for introducing intermediate or strong sustainability agenda into everyday practices. Related to this, Korkman et al. (2020) note that the work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the possibilities and opportunities of making work more sustainable and flexible. They add that while seeing the benefits of it, employees themselves are pushing for a change towards more flexible working conditions to make these arrangements a more permanent approach to working.

According to the study conducted by Severo et al. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic had positive influence on sustainable consumption in Brazil and Portugal. Whereas Korkman et al. (2020) found that Finnish people have been planning their groceries even more than before the pandemic, and that half of the people that took part in their study aim to continue planning groceries before going into the store after the pandemic ends. The authors note that this change might provide a chance to encourage more sustainable food consumption habits. As for when studying Tunisian consumers, Jribi et al. (2020) found that they have been showing positive behavioral change towards reducing food waste and positive attitude towards prevention of food waste generation during COVID-19. They state that the existing conditions and restrictions of lockdowns made consumers to rethink and evaluate their basic needs in everyday life, which might possibly lead to increased awareness about food waste prevention. Nevertheless, the authors note that it seems that other factors such as loss of income, food availability or restricted movements, might have driven this behavioral change rather than pro-environmental concerns which is in accordance with the ideas of Koos (2017) that the availability of resources can explain and influence on the changes in consumption when faced with crisis.

3   RESEARCH METHODS

The methodological choices made in this thesis are presented in this part of the thesis which comprises of four chapters. First, the formation of the research design used in this thesis is presented. Second, the data collection process is described. Third, the data analysis process is explained. Fourth, some notions about the validity and reliability of this research are given alongside with remarks about research ethics.

3.1   Research design

This research started by choosing the research topic, formulating the research objective, and research questions providing answers to reach the objective as presented in the Introduction. The interests of the researcher regarding studying changes in consumption habits and sustainable consumption were joined with the current topic of the COVID-19 pandemic to study the question proposed in the literature if the pandemic could lead to sustainable consumption transition (see for example Cohen, 2020) but from the perspective of individual consumers. To provide coherency throughout the research, the choices made when formulating the research design should be influenced by the research topic and research questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019), thus the research design presented here is influenced by the aim to explore changes in the consumption habits of young adults in their mid 20's during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to find out if the posed circumstances have affected the sustainability of the consumption habits.

As Saunders et al. (2019) have suggested, the formulation of the research design started with making a methodological choice between quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research design. Differentiating qualitative research from quantitative research has generally followed the non-numeric data and numeric data differentiation, thus also referring to certain kind of data collection method (e.g., interview vs. questionnaire) and data analysis procedure (e.g., categorizing data vs. graphs and statistics) used (Saunders et al., 2019). Saunders et al. (2019) present that this is an important, yet narrow and problematic way of differentiating the methodological choice as both can include elements from the other, due to which other means of differentiating were also considered when choosing the research method.

Hair et al. (2015) present that there are four cases when qualitative research is more preferred than quantitative research method. First, when there is little knowledge about the research problem. Second, when the current knowledge involves cultural, subconscious, or psychological material which cannot be accessed using surveys and experiments. Third, when previous research explains the research question incompletely or partially. And fourth, when the purpose of the research is to form new hypotheses and ideas which are tested

later with quantitative research. (Hair et al., 2015.) Consistently, Saunders et al. (2019) suggest that generally quantitative research uses deductive approach to theory development by collecting data and analyzing it to test existing theory, whereas qualitative research aims at generating and building theory with inductive approach to theory development. Therefore, qualitative research focuses on the development of conceptual frameworks and theoretical contribution through studying relationships and meanings, whereas quantitative research focuses on examining relationships between different variables and testing hypotheses derived from existing theories (Hair et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2019).

The research topic of this Master's Thesis is still studied as the current knowledge about it is evolving. Thus, the existing research about the topic can only partially explain the research questions of this thesis. Therefore, gaining deeper understanding of the topic requires other means than using experiments or surveys as there is no distinct theory concerning the topic of this thesis to be tested. Out of these remarks it was considered that qualitative research method with using inductive reasoning would best support the objective of this thesis research. However, the approach is not considered completely inductive as much of the existing literature was reviewed before conducting primary data collection or analyzing it.

As already implied in the research objective, this thesis research project can be considered as exploratory by its nature. Exploratory studies are valuable when discovering what is happening and useful when wanting to clarify understanding about a phenomenon by producing insights about it (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, when there is little existing theory helping to guide the development of hypotheses exploratory studies are useful (Hair et al., 2015). Thus, the research questions of exploratory study will likely start with 'How' and 'What' (Saunders et al., 2019), which is also the case in this research (see Chapter 1.2). Furthermore, this research is time constrained because of being a Master's Thesis and studying an ongoing pandemic and its effects on consumption habits, so the time horizon of this research was chosen to be cross-sectional. This choice is reasonable as Saunders et al. (2019) describe cross-sectional studies to focus on a certain phenomenon at specific time, and this research provides a limited portrayal of the topic studied.

To summarize, this research is an exploratory qualitative research with cross-sectional time horizon aiming at exploring changes in the consumption habits during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to find out if the posed circumstances have affected the sustainability of the consumption habits. Moreover, this research leans more towards inductive reasoning than deductive reasoning as it is not aiming at testing hypotheses derived from the existing theory or literature about the subject. Yet, as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) have pointed out that most research uses both inductive and deductive reasoning at some point of the research process, so labelling one's research as inductive or deductive can be challenging and misleading.

3.2 Data collection

After forming the research design, the decisions about which data collection method and data analysis method to use were made. To fit the purpose and the exploratory nature of this qualitative thesis research, search of literature and semi-structured online group interviews (primary data collection) were chosen as data collection methods over other suitable methods such as interviewing experts in the subject, holding focus group interviews, in-depth interviews, case studies, examining digital video recordings or photographs, experience surveys, document observation, or projective techniques (Hair et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). These data collection choices are further discussed in this chapter while the data collection process is simultaneously presented.

The data collection of this thesis research started by reviewing the literature. As Hair et al. (2015) explain literature review prevents from duplicating previous research and it may even answer the initial research questions, thus leading to the conclusion that the research might not be worthwhile conducting. Moreover, literature reviews are useful in developing and expanding the research ideas, and they make sure one is familiar with the current developments of the research topic and other relevant topics (Hair et al., 2015). Following the two general stages presented by Hair et al. (2015) the researcher reviewed literature. First, relationships, themes, and trends from the existing literature concerning consumption and the COVID-19 pandemic were identified to generate ideas which have not been researched. Second, previous theoretical research associated to the topic of this thesis was identified and eventually described by forming the chapters of the theoretical framework. As the outcome of reviewing literature, the theoretical framework of this thesis was outlined and formed to provide background information, prevent duplication of existing research, and present the current research related to the research topic.

Moving on, interviews were chosen as the method for primary data collection as the researcher hopes to provide in-depth understanding of the complex changes in consumption habits which requires the use of open-ended questions (Hair et al., 2015). More importantly, out of the two main qualitative data collection approaches (observation and interviews) interviews were more suitable as the researcher is also trying to understand why changes in consumption habits are occurring instead of examining the consumption habits in action (Hair et al., 2015). Furthermore, the interviews were chosen to be conducted as semi-structured interviews with an overall structure and list of questions related to predetermined themes guiding the conduct of each interview (Hair et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). It was considered that semi-structured interviews would best suit the objective of exploring changes in consumption habits as this interview type allows flexibility in the form of asking additional questions which are not included in the original list of questions unlike structured interviews which require precise repetition in interviewing (Hair et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2019).

The way of conducting these semi-structured interviews was chosen to be online group interviews as group interviews allow the interviewees to reflect on

what other interviewees have answered and enable interviewing more individuals than by conducting one-to-one interviews. Also, group interviews are used when being more interested in the meanings behind what participants say rather than how the participants form and go on with the discussion as is the case in focus groups which is another form of non-standardized (semi-structured and in-depth) interview fitting to exploratory studies. (Saunders et al., 2019.) Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it was considered that conducting the interviews online via Zoom -video conference tool accessed with the university credentials would be the best way to ensure participation and the safety of the participants. Taking into consideration that the topic of the interview is to some extinct personal and complex, and this being the first time of conducting group interviews for the researcher the number of participants four interview groups with four participants per each interview was chosen as a suitable and efficient data collection method.

After it was decided how the interviews were going to be conducted, the search for interviewees began. As the research is studying the consumption habits of young adults in their mid 20's, it was considered that they would be reached most conveniently by sending an interview invitation to different students studying at the University of Jyväskylä and at the University of Applied Sciences of Jyväskylä. The researcher first approached different people in charge of the communication in their faculty or department at the University of Jyväskylä and the head of student affairs at the University of Applied Sciences to ask if it would be possible to forward an invitation to the students. An open invitation with description of the research and the way of conducting the interview was eventually forwarded by email to the students of three faculties (Faculty of Information Technology, Faculty of Mathematics and Science, Faculty of Sport and Health Science) and one department (Jyväskylä University School of Business and Economics) at the University of Jyväskylä. Simultaneously, the researcher posted the same open invitation to social media platform. As the result of these efforts six people approached the researcher as willing to participate in the interview. Rest of the participants were gathered with snowballing and asking if the acquaintances of the researcher knew people who would be interested in the topic of the research as nonrandom methods can be used while recruiting participants to qualitative research (Hennink, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). Eventually the age of the participants ranged from 23 years to 26 years.

Each interview was conducted after a group of four people was gathered, and after a suitable time and date was agreed on. Two of the interviews were held in the spring of 2021, and two were held in the autumn of 2021. As already mentioned, the interviews were held by using the Zoom -video conference tool which helped to bring the participants and the researcher together despite varying geographical locations. Approximately one hour was reserved for conducting each of the interview, and all of them fitted this time frame. The Table 3 below summarizes descriptions of the participants by their current life situation described during the interviews.

Table 3: Description of the interviewees

No.	Interview group	Life situation as presented in the interview (e.g., studies, work, hobbies, interests)
1	A	Recently graduated from university; works in the field of studies; likes the current situation in life
2	A	Master's degree student; interested in arts, cooking, and reading
3	A	Master's degree student; works as trainee; reads, jogs, and works out at gym
4	A	Bachelor's degree student; works in customer service; photographs in free time
5	B	Bachelor's degree student; works at a grocery store; no special hobbies
6	B	Bachelor's degree student; works at small convenience store; hobbies include chilling
7	B	Bachelor's degree student; works in customer service; no hobbies
8	B	Master's degree student; part time assistant in municipality elections; hobbies include sports
9	C	Master's degree student; moved back to Finland as the result of the pandemic; hobbies and interests include student life and events
10	C	Recently graduated from university; works in the field of studies; hobbies include pole dancing, circle trapeze, acrobatics, reading, painting, and watching
11	C	Master's degree student; works part time; hobbies include sports
12	C	Master's degree student; works in the field of studies; hobbies include pole dancing and running
13	D	Master's degree student; transition phase from studies to work life; hobbies include working out at the gym, outdoor activities, and watching series
14	D	Master's degree student; works in the field of studies; goes to fitness classes, watches Netflix and Ruutu+
15	D	Master's degree student; finishing studies; moved recently to another city; hobbies include outdoor activities and gym; likes interior design and visuality
16	D	Master's degree student; transition phase from studies to work life; recently moved to a new city; likes interior design and travelling abroad

Before conducting the interviews, the participants were informed about the privacy policy of the interviews and how the answers given during the interview are used in this research. The interviews were recorded with the permission of each of the participants to be transcribed into a written form later, after which the video recordings were destroyed. The interview questions can be found from the Appendix 1. It must be noted that all of the interviews were held in Finnish as it was the first language of the interviewees and the researcher, but also because of wanting to make the interview situation more approachable and relaxed

for the interviewees. Consistently, the interview extracts presented in the research findings are translated into English by the researcher.

3.3   Thematic data analysis

In this thesis the data analysis was carried out by using a thematic analysis. This approach to analyzing qualitative data sets is widely used method in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2008; Gavin, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019). Braun and Clarke (2008) have even stated that it ought to be considered as foundational method of qualitative analysis. The main purpose of thematic analysis is to search, identify, analyze, and report different occurring patterns or themes from the qualitative data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019) such as observations, documents, websites, or interviews (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, Clarke and Braun (2017) note that thematic analysis should not be used only to summarize the content from data, but also to search key features of it. Therefore, they are suggesting that not all features of the data are necessary in relation to the research question(s).

For carrying out a thematic analysis there are many ways and outlines guiding from phase to phase how to conduct it (see for example Braun & Clarke, 2008; Gavin, 2008; and Saunders et al., 2019). The analysis of this thesis followed the procedure outlined by Saunders at al. (2019) comprising of four steps. First, becoming familiar with one's data. Second, coding one's data. Third, searching for themes and recognizing relationships. And fourth, redefining themes and testing propositions. The Figure 1 below summarizes how the thematic analysis of this thesis proceeded.
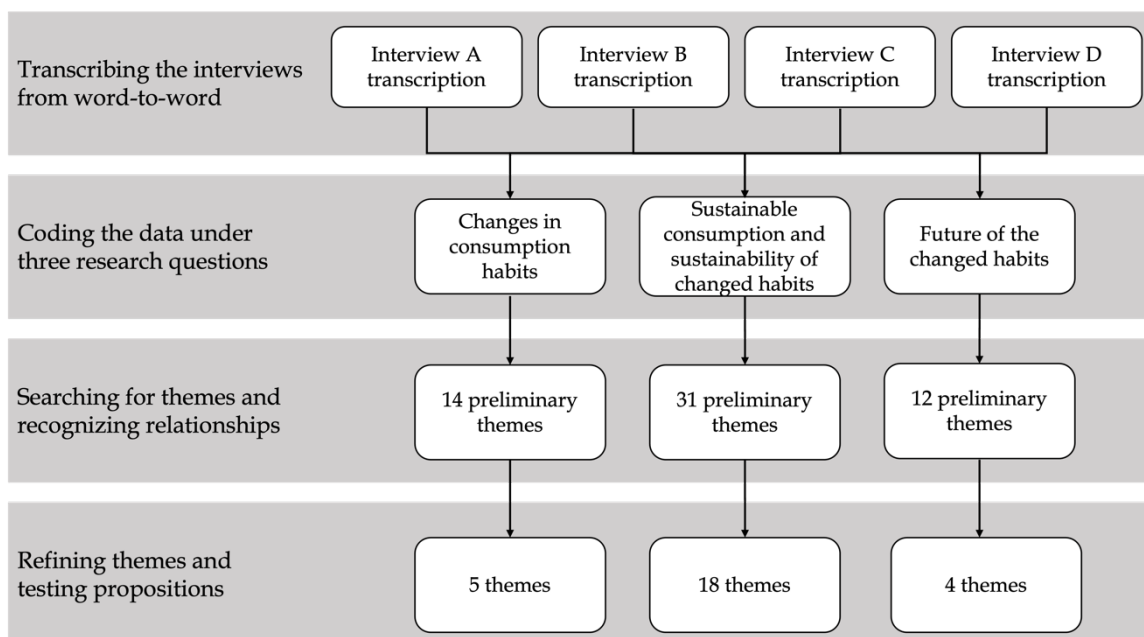

Figure 1: Summary of the thematic analysis process

In this thesis the first step of familiarizing oneself with the data started by transcribing the interviews word-to-word into a written form soon after holding them. The transcribing of each interview was made to a separate file to avoid confusion between interviews and the answers of participants. Transcribing from word-to-word has been considered simultaneously laborious and time-consuming step, but also useful in familiarizing oneself with the data in depth (Braun & Clarke, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019) due to which the researcher considered it to be a good way to have a continuously updating overall perception of the data while conducting and transcribing the interviews. Transcribing proceeded the process of immersion (reading and re-reading of the data continuously through the research project) which is acknowledged as important for familiarity and for being able to engage in following analytical procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, the interview transcriptions were re-red multiple times during the data analysis.

The second step of coding one's data started by reading through each of the interview transcriptions and highlighting different units of data with three colors referring to the changes in consumption habits during COVID-19; sustainable consumption and the sustainability of changed consumption habits; and the future of changed habits. The above-described way of starting the coding process was chosen because when using inductive approach and having defined research questions, these questions can be used to help selecting which data to code (Saunders et al., 2019). The highlighted codes ranged from single words symbolizing or summarizing the meaning of that extract to entire paragraphs described by a code as Saunders et al. (2019) have suggested. These codes were then gathered under the headings they were related to in each of the interview transcription files.

At this point, it should be noted that the thematic analysis of this thesis has features from both inductive and deductive thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2008) present that in inductive analysis the coding process of data does not aim at fitting it into existing coding frame, thus making it data driven. As for in the deductive thematic analysis, the researcher's theoretical or analytic interests tend to drive the coding process to provide a detailed analysis of a specific aspect of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Considering the notion of Braun and Clarke (2008) that a researcher cannot brake out from their theoretical commitments or ideas and code the data in an epistemological vacuum, it is considered that for example the themes about changed consumption habits during COVID-19 pandemic are affected by both the theoretical examples found from the existing literature addressing these changes and by the notions made from the answers of the interviewees to different questions.

Moving on to the third step of searching for themes and recognizing relationships, the researcher started to go through all the codes under the three headings used in the coding phase. Consistently, similar codes were grouped together to form preliminary themes as this phase of the thematic analysis comprises of searching for relationships and patterns from the codes to come up with list of themes relating to the research question(s) (Saunders et al., 2019). The grouping of codes resulted in 14 preliminary themes formed under the heading of the

changes in consumption habits during COVID-19. Whereas under the sustainable consumption and the sustainability of changed consumption habits 31 preliminary themes were formed of which 20 were related to sustainable consumption and 11 were related to sustainability of changed consumption habits. As for under the heading of the future of changed habits, 12 preliminary themes were comprised.

The fourth and the last step of the thematic analysis concerned refining themes and testing propositions. During this step, the preliminary themes formed in the previous step were refined by first reading them through again and organizing them under different sub-themes. After this they were once again viewed and some of these themes were combined together, and some were discarded as they were not relevant for this thesis research. Eventually, under the heading of the changes in consumption habits during COVID-19 was left 5 themes as the result of above-presented method. Similarly, the themes under sustainable consumption decreased to 13, whereas the themes under sustainability of changed consumption habits came down to 5 themes. As for under the last heading concerning the future of changed habits 4 themes were formed eventually. According to Saunders et al. (2019) this step in the thematic analysis is important part concerning the analytical process as it helps to form a well-structured analytical framework to be used in the analysis. Most importantly, in this phase reorganizing coded data units under relevant sub-themes or themes is done to evaluate their meaningfulness to each other inside a theme, but also evaluate if the themes are meaningful to each other and the data set (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.4   Reliability, validity, and research ethics

As qualitative research portrays usually a specific socially constructed interpretations of time and setting, they might not be intended to be repeated as such (Saunders et al., 2019). In the case of this thesis research the interviews have taken place during extraordinary circumstances which might not be take place again, so considering the reliability of this thesis based on being able to replicate the research design and achieve same results (Saunders et al., 2019) might not be possible. However, the researcher aimed at improving the internal reliability of the research as ensuring consistency throughout the research project by for example making notes how the analysis process proceeded and how the themes were formed (Saunders et al., 2019).

The validity of the research, meaning the appropriateness of methods, accuracy of analysis, and findings' generalizability (Saunders et al., 2019), was improved by testing if the interview questions assess the phenomenon studied and to see if they are appropriate for the purpose. One test interview with four people was conducted to test the interview questions, to gain experience from the interview situation, and to test the recording of the interview in advance to be sure that the platform works for the purpose of the interview. Based on the feedback

received from the test interview the researcher modified the way of conducting the online group interview by for example posting the questions to the chat to be seen instead of stating them only out loud as the participants of the test interview stated that it would help answering the questions.

As mentioned, the interviews were held in Finnish and the interview extracts presented in the results are translated by the researcher. Since the researcher is not a professional translator nor a native speaker of both English and Finnish, the translations were done as precise as the researcher was capable of doing with the aim of retaining the meanings of the answers.

As the general ethical issue in research is that no risk of pain, harm, embarrassment, or material disadvantage should be caused to the participants of the research (Saunders et al., 2019). Taking this into consideration, the researcher changed the privacy settings in Zoom -video conference tool so that the participants themselves were not able to record the interview. The interviewees were also informed that they are not allowed to record the interview in any way to preserve the personal data of all interviewees presented during the interviews, and that by participating to the interview they agree on this term.

4   RESEARCH FINDINGS

This part presents the research findings of this thesis in three chapters. First, the changes in consumption habits of young adults during the COVID-19 are discussed. Second, the findings concerning the changes in the sustainability of consumption during the COVID-19 are presented. Third, the possible changes in the consumption that are likely to take place after the pandemic ends are explored.

4.1   Changes in consumption habits during COVID-19

The found changes in consumption habits during COVID-19 consist of changes in travelling and commuting; impulse purchases, shopping, and online shopping; services; free time and hobbies; and orderliness at grocery store. It must be noted that even though these changes are here presented under specific themes and headlines, there is some overlapping within these themes. For example, it seems that the pandemic has significantly influenced the interviewees' social life which then again has touched upon their consumption related to travelling, services, shopping, and hobbies as they have been presented to be connected to the social life of the interviewees. Another overlapping issue relates to making savings from different areas of consumption, but similarly using more money on other areas of consumption, thus making it hard to evaluate if savings were made in the end or not.

4.1.1 Travelling and commuting

Majority of the interviewees stated that travelling locally, nationally, or internationally decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Decreased travelling from one's current hometown to see one's family and friends was considered as burdensome and frustrating, as many plans were cancelled or there was uncertainty about upcoming events and activities.

"What I was most irritated about, was that those plans and weekend trips planned with friends were cancelled. And maybe the uncertainty in planning due to which they were cancelled."
-Interviewee 1

Yet, some interviewees considered it as a positive thing that they were able to put away money as they were not travelling nationally as much as they would have been if there was not a pandemic. Also, the use of local public transports and private motoring was decreased by those interviewees that normally would use them on daily basis. This was mainly caused by the common transition to telecommuting and remote studying.

4.1.2 Impulse purchases, shopping, and online shopping

Majority of the interviewees presented that there was a notable decrease in impulse purchases. A common explanation for this change in consumption was that people were no longer going just to browse flea markets or different stores at shopping centers the way they had been used to before the COVID-19. For some, walking around shopping centers or browsing flea markets just to find something nice has been a habit to pass time, and for some the location of a shopping center has been conveniently on the way home. Moreover, this change in consumption behavior led to savings for some interviewees, but some shifted their shopping behavior online which is further discussed later in this chapter.

"There's no impulse purchases anymore. Overall, I feel that when you live next to a shopping center and you walk through it during winter or it's cold when you get off the bus, you always remember 'Oh I was supposed to get this thing', 'Oh yeah and this one' or you see something or think you could just stop by there and blaa blaa blaa. Now that I haven't been walking there, I haven't bought anything."
-Interviewee 10

Many interviewees stated that they have not been shopping for new clothes during the COVID-19 as much as they probably would have without the pandemic. One often mentioned explanation for this behavioral change was stated to be the lack of social events. Thus, it was implied that if there's upcoming social events, people tend to look for new clothes. Yet, some interviewees considered that the consumption of clothes has not diminished substantially, but rather changed its purpose and form. Commonly agreed view among the interviewees was that because there's no need to leave home often, one can wear sweatpants or fleece shirts since no one sees them. Consistently, some stated that purchasing and consuming makeup and cosmetics decreased as they were considered discretional in the time of social distancing. Nevertheless, it was also presented that there has been fluctuating in the consumption of clothes following the changes in local restrictions.

"Especially when the coronavirus started, I didn't buy any clothes like in months because I felt I didn't need them as I was home all the time. […] But it has been fluctuating because for example last spring when places started to open up again and I was about to start in my summer job I bought new clothes again."
-Interviewee 14

Few interviewees told that online shopping became even a form of entertainment for them as they have been spending more time at home. One interviewee that used to go browsing at shopping centers described that they moved their browsing and shopping to online stores leading to a high peak in online shopping. Another interviewee told that even though they hardly ever buy anything from online stores, they started to browse them more during the pandemic to gain comfort and joy, as there were not many things bringing them joy. Also,

it was suggested that browsing or buying more expensive or more responsibly produced products online became more common during the COVID-19 pandemic than before it.

> *"When corona came my online shopping increased because there wasn't really anything to do, so I ordered something new from online stores every week. Some home stuff and maybe books. And, well clothes also even though I didn't wear them anywhere, and still I bought them. So, that was something that increased as I like to go walk around the city and look for everything and shop, so it shifted to online platforms."*
> *-Interviewee 16*

> *"… I maybe have been even shopping for boredom. So, like during lectures or when sitting elsewhere you have online shopping open there at the same time. And because there's way less consumption it is maybe easier to press 'buy' -button for more expensive products than before."*
> *-Interviewee 5*

4.1.3 Services

Most mentioned services that were consumed more during the COVID-19 were food delivery services and streaming services. Whereas, eating out, going to hairdresser, bars, festivals, gyms, movies, or different events were most mentioned to be only little consumed if at all during the pandemic.

> *"… I've been using Wolt [food delivery service] more often ja ordered food home when I haven't bothered to go to the store every time. […] And then of course entertainment, if you see it that way, using restaurant services and like bars among others have diminished notably and I consume more like Netflix and other entertainments at home. Streaming services maybe even more than earlier, I think."*
> *-Interviewee 9*

However, as shopping for new clothes has gone in waves according to loosen restrictions and lower infection rates, so has the consumption of restaurant services. Moreover, it seems that when it has been possible to go eat at restaurants people have been doing it more often and have not been worrying about the bill since they have been able to save money from these services beforehand.

> *"If I have been going to the restaurants, I haven't been stingy because I have been thinking that if we were living normally and there would be student parties, I would have been using like hundreds of euros more per month. So, I have been using money with a good conscience. And when there has been a better period, I have been eating out more than normally, but there have been also long periods during which I haven't gone to restaurants at all. So, that goes also in waves."*
> *-Interviewee 14*

4.1.4 Free time and hobbies

It was often stated that interviewees had more free time during the COVID-19 which was mainly due to working or studying at home, cancelled hobbies and social events. As the result of emptying calendars and slowing pace of one's daily life, many felt that scheduling things became easier and slower pace in life was considered as relieving. For some interviewees having more free time while staying at home led to repairing broken belongings or going through unnecessary things and disposing them. In general, the interviewees coped by coming up with new ways of passing the increased free time. As already mentioned, some spent time browsing online stores, whereas some started making daily walks outside, and some started to cook their meals from scratch.

"All my hobbies didn't necessarily disappear due to the corona, but they rather changed their form so that I had something to do during covid. For example, I used to go to instructed exercise classes or dance classes etc., but then during corona I found independent hobbies such as jogging, sowing, or something you can do alone."
-Interviewee 13

It was noted that the social circles of many interviewees became smaller as the result of COVID-19. Few interviewees told that the way of seeing or being in touch with ones' friends did not necessarily decrease but it rather changed its form. One interviewee stated for example that during the highest infection rates they did things together with friends remotely. Another interviewee described that they met at someone's house rather than doing some specific activities.

4.1.5 Orderliness at grocery store

One quite distinguished change in the consumption habits of most interviewees was that during COVID-19 people made shopping lists and planned their meals and groceries more carefully than pre-covid. Evidently, they decreased the times of going to stores and bought more at once which differed significantly from their previous habits. This behavioral change was explained by avoiding public spaces to avoid contact with numerous people who might have the infection. However, it seems that for some this kind of planning has not lasted for long, and they have already started to do their groceries more frequently again by going to the store when only few things have run out.

"Going to the groceries store has become more orderliness than before. I've been going there less and bought more with the help of a shopping list. And I haven't been using so much of those kinds of proper shopping lists, so it has become during corona."
-Interviewee 2

4.2 Changes in the sustainability of consumption during COVID-19

This second chapter of the research findings presents the changes in the sustainability of consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. To better understand how the interviewees consider the sustainability of the changes in their consumption, their perceptions about sustainable consumption are first presented. This is followed by the changes that support more sustainable consumption, and how the circumstances of the pandemic have supported existing consumer mindsets about sustainable consumption.

4.2.1 Perceptions on sustainable consumption

Figure 2 below summarizes what kind of perceptions the interviewees have about sustainable consumption, and they are further discussed in this chapter.
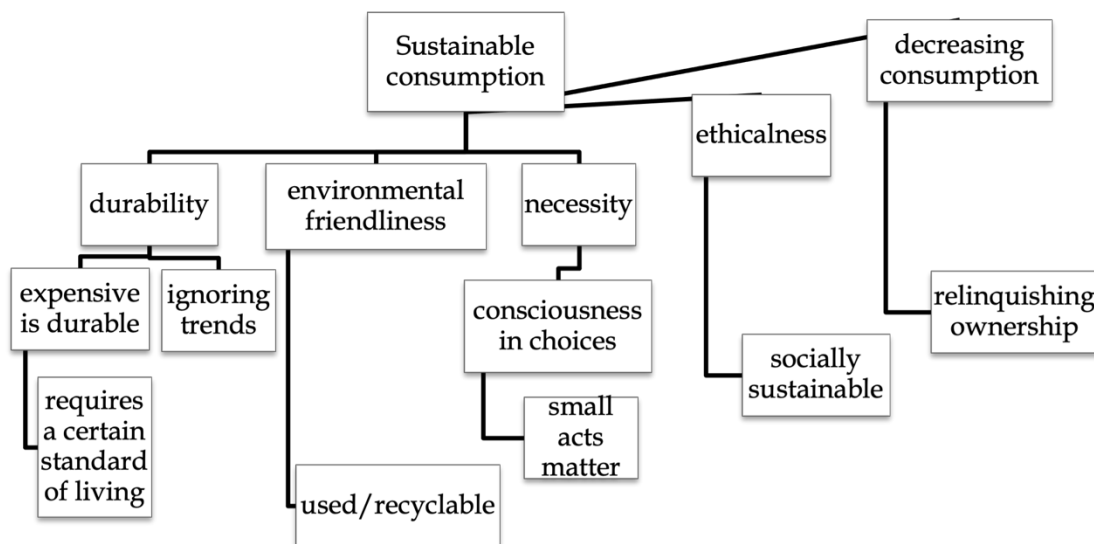

Figure 2: Summary of the interviewees' perceptions on sustainable consumption

When asked to define what sustainable consumption means for the interviewees', most often stated perception was that durability and purchasing goods or services that have a long lifecycle is sustainable. The durability of a purchase was often connected to its quality and being more expensive.

"Sustainable consumption on the other hand… Well, it is that you acquire for a need, and maybe try to consider the whole life cycle of that product, which is something I aim at doing with clothes, electronics, etc., like all durable goods. So, you buy higher quality which is more expensive, and it lasts longer. Like you don't buy any 20€ jeans from H&M that break down after first wash, but rather buy more expensive ones that last for years."

-Interviewee 11

Few interviewees shared the perception that they were not able to consume as sustainably as they would like to due to their existing living standard, suggesting that sustainable consumption requires a certain standard of living. Whereas one interviewee stated that ignoring trends and buying durable goods not only because of better durability, but also because one is willing to use it longer time is part of sustainable consumption for them.

"I'm not able to achieve sustainable consumption in the scale I would like to because I live on a student budget, and I haven't had so much work during the coronavirus, so I can't make all the choices I would like to do."
-Interviewee 6

Environmental friendliness in general was another commonly mentioned perception related to sustainable consumption. Some interviewees connected it with durability and used or recyclable products.

"And of course, environmental friendliness for me comes out most in that you try to use durable products. And concerning some basic products, if you have the possibility, you should look for them as recycled so that one product would be in use for long time."
-Interviewee 9

Necessity was also one of the most mentioned and highlighted perception. It was stated that to consume sustainably, one should purchase or acquire goods and services only when it is necessary. Thus, making conscious consumption decisions was connected to sustainable consumption as well. Furthermore, two interviewee described that they feel like small conscious acts such as choosing not to buy so many plastic bags or buying products with cardboard packaging instead of products packaged into plastic matter as well when trying to improve the sustainability of one's consumption.

"Sustainable for me is mostly about not buying anything unnecessary and always thinking twice if I really need it or not, because on top of being more environmentally friendly when buying less, it's better for my mental health as I don't like to own so much stuff."
-Interviewee 13

Less mentioned perceptions concerned ethicalness in consumption choices, supporting social sustainability by not trampling other's rights, decreasing the level of consumption in general, and relinquishing ownership by renting or sharing things and services.

4.2.2 Changes in the sustainability of consumption habits

As presented before, during the COVID-19 pandemic most of the interviewees were travelling less than they would have if there was no pandemic. When discussing if the consumption habits of the interviewees had changed more sustainable during this time in their opinion, some considered that since they were travelling less, their consumption habits concerning travelling had become a little more sustainable than before the pandemic.

"It is hard to say what is because of corona, and what is because of my own interests. But actually, I did the lifestyle test by Sitra [calculation of one's carbon footprint] last week, and my result was better than it was before corona, but I think that it was because I haven't flown or travelled at all."
-Interviewee 14

One interviewee felt that the circumstances posed by the pandemic helped with the social pressure to travel. Another noted that they did not drive their car on daily basis as there was no need for commuting. And one switched from buses to trains as the result of diminished bus connections. Also, few interviewees described that the circumstances prevented them from travelling as much as they would normally have. Nevertheless, they all considered that their travelling during the COVID-19 was more sustainable compared to their travelling pre-covid, mainly caused by the circumstances that COVID-19 posed to travelling and commuting.

"Flying has decreased, stopped in fact during the last two years, so that is something I have been behaving on more sustainably than I normally would. I would have had at least one trip during this time."
-Interviewee 13

Another mentioned change towards more sustainable consumption was the decreased number of impulse purchases that usually were made during browsing at stores or at flea markets. Also, it was implied that having more free time led to having more time to consider if something is necessary to be acquired in the first place and from where it could be acquired. As the result, some of the interviewees stated to have become more deliberating in their consumption choices during the pandemic.

In general, the interviewees had hard time in evaluating if their consumption habits had changed more sustainable during the COVID-19 pandemic. It seemed that the interviewees that had somehow brought up or emphasized during the interview that they aim to consume sustainably, value sustainability in life, or are interested in sustainable lifestyle, were more able to point out if their consumption habits had changed more sustainable or not compared to their pre-covid consumption habits. Consistently, interviewees who did not brought up whether they consider themselves consuming sustainably or not had harder time in evaluating the sustainability of changes in their consumption habits during the

pandemic. However, these interviewees were able to clarify if their consumption habits had changed or not during the pandemic.

"Now that I think about it, I think my consumption habits have changed but I don't know if they're more sustainable. I wrote down online stores, but I don't know if they're sustainable or not. Isn't it like more harmful when things are shifted around the world or something? Isn't it?"
-Interviewee 7

The overall opinion of the interviewees was that the COVID-19 pandemic itself had not changed their consumption habits significantly more sustainable, even though some smaller improvements in sustainability had taken place according to a few interviewees. Some presented that they have consciously changed their consumption habits more sustainable before the pandemic, so their habits have been quite set already. Whereas some said that they have changed habits more sustainable pre-covid, but the circumstances of the pandemic have helped to support a more sustainable mindset regarding consumption. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees acknowledged that their consumption is partly influenced by the circumstantial changes, and some even noted that if there would not be so much discussion in the social media about sustainability their consumption habits would probably be less sustainable as they are influenced by the research and information around them.

4.3 Changes in consumption after the COVID-19

The last chapter of the research findings discusses the possible changes in consumption after the COVID-19 pandemic comes to its end. These changes include consuming more services and events than products and goods, increased appearance related consumption, forming of new habits from learnt routines, and increased travelling. Overall, it seems that the interviewees are looking for getting back to the life without restrictions, especially concerning their social life.

4.3.1 Services and events over goods

A common opinion among the interviewees was that when the pandemic ends, the consumption of services and events will increase more than the consumption of goods. Most often mentioned reason for this kind of possible change was that the COVID-19 pandemic has not prevented from consuming products as much as it has prevented from consuming services. Furthermore, it was highlighted that consumption of services will be targeted to services outside one's home such as bars, restaurants, music events, and going to the movies. Some interviewees presented wanting to dive into new experiences that bring excitement on top the normal services. Consistently, it was stated that the consumption of streaming

services and other services consumed at home will decrease as their offline counterparts are once again available.

"I believe that the consumption will be targeted outside from home, because now groceries and interior decorating have been a trend. So, I think it will be directed to everything one can do outside home. […] Not necessarily on goods, but services that I haven't been able to consume."
-Interviewee 1

Majority of the interviewees stated that their consumption habits concerning services will return to the ones they had pre-covid. However, there were differences in the pace of returning to ones' old habits. The first interview group considered that the consumption of different services will return after the pandemic ends but they did not describe the pace of it, as for the second interview group considered there to be a rather sharp decrease in the consumption of services when it is possible but there would also be hesitation to participate larger events such as festivals. As in the case of the third group, the consumption habits concerning services will recover slowly as they considered the existing condition to be quite 'normal' for them already. And the fourth group considered there to be slow recovery with few years of high consumption of services and then returning to more modest consumption of services.

4.3.2 Social pressure and appearance related consumption

When discussing what happens to the consumption habits of the interviewees' when the pandemic ends, many expressed that they would start to take more care about their appearance. Thus, going to the hairdresser, using more cosmetics and makeup, buying and browsing new clothes, or using different kinds of clothes than during the pandemic. The interviewees explained this with the social pressure to look a certain way in different occasions in life (e.g., going to work, going to social events and parties, being in a public place).

"I think that using cosmetics, as I mentioned in the beginning, it will go back to what it was before because now there hasn't been a need for it. For example, using make up has decreased significantly, so it will increase when starting to move around more outside one's home and so on. So, it will go back to normal."
-Interviewee 15

4.3.3 Learnt routines become habits

Interviewees that formed new routines or skills such as planning one's groceries, going to the store less and buying more at once, or shopping online more than before, were routines these interviewees planned to continue when the pandemic ends. The interviewees explained that for example the orderliness at grocery stores was considered as more convenient when one could save time if planning the groceries properly and going less frequently to the grocery store.

"What I have learnt from this coronavirus or from doing groceries, is that you should buy more at once so that you save your own time. I wouldn't say that I have saved any money, because I manage to spend money every time I go to the store even if I go three times a week or once a week. But somehow when you can save your own time by going once properly, that's a habit I'll stick with anyway."
-Interviewee 7

4.3.4 Travelling increases

As a response to the ending of the pandemic many interviewees stated that their travelling will increase from its current levels. It was stated that travelling locally, nationally, or internationally will increase when it is possible again. Some interviewees stated that they will continue flying when going abroad after the pandemic, but these interviewees also stated that they might consider other means of transportations or making longer trips when flying. It was also implied that travelling and otherwise living more active life outside one's home will lead to spending more money on for example snacks, public transportations, or other transportation tickets than during the pandemic.

5   DISCUSSION

This part reflects on the research findings and their connections to the theoretical framework in following four chapters. The first chapter discusses the connections between the theoretical framework and the results in relation to the first research question about how the consumption habits have been affected during the pandemic. Whereas the second chapter discusses the connections between the theoretical framework and the results in relation to the second questions about has the COVID-19 pandemic provided a case for sustainable consumption. As for the third chapter discusses what happens to the consumption habits when the pandemic ends. Lastly, the fourth chapter aims to provide insight on why the consumption habits might not have changed more sustainable.

5.1   Beliefs and available resources influencing changes

As presented in relation to consumption and crisis in the theoretical framework, Koos (2017) has explained that beliefs and available resources influence and explain the changes in consumption during different crisis. Relating to the availability of options, the results of this thesis suggest that the consumption of products was not affected as much as the consumption of services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This might be explained by the answers of the interviewees expressing that their consumption of products was not limited as much as the consumption of services because products could be ordered online whereas services like going to the hairdresser required physical contact. Moreover, some of the interviewees expressed that their consumption of products ordered from online stores increased momentarily as browsing at stores was not as safe as before. These results are in accordance with the findings in literature that the online consumption is more resilient than offline consumption in times of COVID-19 pandemic and in times of other infectious disease epidemics (Jung et al., 2016; Jung & Sung, 2017; Xu et al., 2021).

Moreover, the results of this thesis suggest that the limited availability of free time activities and hobbies influenced on the changes in consumption habits related to them. Many of the hobbies of the interviewees were cancelled so they coped by creating new, sometimes more individualistic, ways of passing their increased free time. This result is in accordance with the notion of Sheth (2020) that when confronted with restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers adapt by creating new habits to pass their free time at home.

Regarding the beliefs, it seemed that the perceptions of what was considered as discretional or essential consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic differed from the perceptions of these in normal life. Considering the changes in consumption habits between different crisis presented in the theoretical framework (see Sub-chapter 2.3.2), there are some similarities to the idea of changing

perception about what is essential consumption and what is discretional consumption in times of crisis. For example, the results of this thesis showed that most distinctly the appearance related consumption was seen as discretional during the times of social distancing and the pandemic, but when the pandemic ends the interviewees expressed to continue care for their appearance as the result of social pressure to look certain way in public. Accordingly, the findings of Mehta et al. (2020) and Esposti et al. (2021) support this result by stating that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a drop in consumption of make-up and purchasing of clothes or other 'nice-to-have' products. Moreover, Donthu & Gustafsson (2020), Korkman et al. (2020) and Sheth (2020) all have presented that during the COVID-19 pandemic people have been postponing purchases or discretionary consumption, suggesting that consumers have changed their perception of what is considered essential during COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, it has been concluded that consumers tend to postpone the purchase of durable, semi-durable, or luxury goods in times of economic crisis and infectious disease epidemics (Jung & Sung, 2017; McKenzie, 2006). Thus, it seems that there are some connections between economic crises and infectious disease epidemics in regards of changing one's perceptions about discretional and essential consumption during the crisis.

The results of this thesis also suggest that the beliefs and fear of being infected expressed by the interviewees influenced on their increased orderliness at grocery stores. Esposti et al. (2021) made a similar conclusion that because of the fear of contagion, consumers decreased the frequency of going to the Supermarket during the COVID-19. Whereas Korkman et al. (2020) found that fear of contagion led Finnish people visit grocery stores less, order more takeout food, do groceries online, and plan their groceries more than pre-covid. There are similar findings to changing one's behaviour at public places due to the fear of contagion in the literature concerning other infectious disease epidemics such as SARS and MERS (Choe et al., 2021; Jung & Sung, 2017; Wang, 2014; Wen et al., 2005). One of these examples from the literature is the avoidance of public transports and decreasing of travelling in the times of infectious diseases to avoid getting infected (Wang, 2014; Wen et al., 2005). The results of this thesis are in accordance with the above-presented finding from the literature about decreasing the use of public transports and travelling.

5.2   Changed habits? Yes. More sustainable? Maybe.

The research findings of this thesis suggest that the consumption habits of the interviewees related to travelling became more sustainable when compared to their pre-covid travelling. This change in the sustainability of consumption habits related to travelling could be even seen as a step towards strong sustainable consumption. As presented in the theoretical framework of this thesis, strong sustainable consumption is achieved by changing the patterns of consumption and reducing the overall level of consumption (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013). Therefore, in

the context of this thesis replacing commuting to work or school with telecommuting can be considered as changing the pattern of consumption, whereas restricting travelling abroad could be seen as reducing the overall level of consumption. As noted in the theoretical framework, Perkins et al. (2021) support this by stating that telecommuting, online education, and virtual meetings reduce the level of consumption of energy-intensive transportation modes. Yet, this might not be so straightforward as Korkman et al. (2020) note that telecommuting and fear of getting infection have led to decrease in the use of public transports but simultaneously increased private motoring. Nevertheless, in this thesis the consumption habits of the interviewees related to travelling changed by decreasing the overall level of consumption of different transport modes.

Another area of improvement in the sustainability of the consumption habits of the interviewees was acknowledged to be the decrease in impulse purchases. If we consider this change in consumption habits with the perspectives of weak and strong sustainable consumption, it clearly leans more towards strong sustainable consumption than weak sustainable consumption as the overall level of consumption decreased. In this case the COVID-19 pandemic significantly changed and interrupted the environmental circumstances which formerly cued the habit, thus making it unpleasant to go just browsing stores or flea markets due to the risk of getting infected. However, some of the interviewees merely shifted their browsing and purchasing to online stores which led to a high peak in online shopping in the beginning of the pandemic. This might be explained with what Kirk and Rifkin (2020) have noted about hoarding, as they suggested that being used to wide range of available products, consumers might start feeling powerless when faced with scarcity and try to regain their power with increased purchasing.

5.3   Old habits die hard

Evidently it seems that the interviewees will return to their pre-covid consumption habits (sustainable or not) with few exceptions. This is in accordance with the notion made by Sheth (2020) that most habits can be expected to return back normal, but some new habits formed during the lockdown setting may replace old ones as being more accessible, convenient, or affordable. Planning one's groceries more carefully by planning meals and making precise shopping lists to save time seemed to be the most common new habit replacing previous habits. This result is supported by Korkmann et al. (2020) who present the same result that Finnish people have planned their groceries more than pre-covid and that many plan to do so after the pandemic ends. Similar to other types of crises, Sarmento et al. (2019) describe that during recession consumers tend to increase the planning and organizing of one's behaviour, suggesting that there are some connections in how consumers respond to economic crisis and crisis similar to c COVID-19 pandemic.

The explanation of why some habits have changed and presumably will prevail as such might be derived from the successful change of strongly established consumption habits presented in the Sub-chapter 2.1.3. As noted, successful change of strong consumption habits is derived from the formation of habits, thus changing contextual circumstances that cue the habit, creating supportive incentives for new action, and positively reinforcing the repetition of this new action in the environment to form new memory associations between the action and a goal (Verplanken & Wood, 2006). It might be possible that the old habits related to making groceries were interrupted by the pandemic and its circumstantial effects which made it more preferrable to plan ahead and act efficiently at the store to avoid social contacts and the possibility of getting the infection while simultaneously making groceries. This might have eventually led to saving one's free time which may be reinforcing the behaviour also after the pandemic ends as it is considered more convenient way of making groceries.

In a similar manner it could be possible to consider why some other consumption habits formed during the pandemic are not going to prevail. For example, the results related to the travelling habits of the interviewees suggest that most will return to their old habits. As the pandemic has prevented people from going abroad as much as they would have without the pandemic it has interrupted and changed the circumstances which make the habit possible leading to forming of adaptative habit of not going abroad. The answers of the interviewees suggest that there might be a lack of incentives or lack of positive reinforcement of the new habit (not going abroad) as they are going to return to old habits. Yet, instead of considering the positive reinforcement, the resistance of travelling habits could also be considered from the perspective of unsatisfactory experiences weakening the habit formation by unlikely repetition. Making similar notions Aarts et al. (1998) and Solomon (2016) have both considered that unsatisfactory or unwanted experiences can also direct the habit formation to a certain direction as the result of unpleasant connections in the memory between the action and the result of it (see Sub-chapter 2.1.2). Considering from this perspective it seems consistent that as not travelling to see one's friends and family felt burdensome, the interviewees wish to travel see their close ones as soon as possible, thus leading back to pre-covid habits.

5.4   Lack of incentives or reinforcement of habit?

Perhaps the most interesting question raised from the results of this thesis is that why the consumption habits have not changed more sustainable. Drawing from the remarks of Sheth (2020) and Verplanken and Roy (2016), changes in different contexts or circumstances disrupting and limiting consumption habits may lead to a window of opportunity for behavioural change, so it would seem consistent that there has been an opportunity for changing consumption habits as the result of the pandemics interruptive nature to consumers everyday life. Moreover, the interviewees of this research noted that the circumstances of the pandemic have

helped to support a more sustainable consumer mindset and that their consumption is at least partly influenced by the circumstantial changes. To discuss this question, the ideas from habit formation, changing strong habits, strong sustainable consumption and what drives sustainable consumption presented in the theoretical framework (Sub-chapters 2.1.2-2.2.3) are bridged together.

First, to be established as a strong habit, the behaviour needs repetition in stable circumstances cuing the behaviour but also reinforcement that supports the memory connections between the behaviour and reached goal which then again supports the continuity of the behaviour (examples of positive reinforcement were presented in the Sub-chapter 2.1.3). As the behaviour is formed into a strong habit, it is resistant to change due to different biases such as expectations dismissing small changes in environment, favouring supportive information of the behaviour, and simplified decision making. (Aarts et al., 1998; Verplanken & Wood, 2006; Solomon, 2016.) Second, successful change of consumption habits can be derived from the formation of habits. Thus, changing the contextual circumstances that cue the habit, creating supportive incentives for the new behaviour, and reinforcing the repetition of this new behaviour in the environmental circumstances to form new memory associations. In the case of strong habits Verplanken and Wood (2006) suggested that upstream interventions preventing existing negative outcomes of the behaviour from taking place by targeting social norms and contextual circumstances are best suited when trying to change these strong habits. (Verplanken & Wood, 2006.) Third, as presented earlier strong sustainable consumption paradigm considers that the sustainability in consumption is achieved by changes in the patterns of consumption and reductions in the levels of consumption. Whereas the change in behavioural habits according to this paradigm is achieved through multilevel socio-political transformation. (Fuchs & Lorek, 2005; Hobson, 2013; Lorek & Fuchs, 2013; Perkins et al., 2021.)

Considering the results of this thesis, when the pandemic started it disrupted the established consumption habits of the interviewees by changing the circumstances, they were used to perform these habits in. As the result of this interruption, the interviewees changed their consumption habits to adapt to the new circumstances. During the pandemic some of the habits such as planning one's groceries has been positively reinforced by saving one's free time, whereas some habits such as travelling to see one's friends and family has been negatively reinforced due to being burdensome. In general it seems that there has not been much positive reinforcement of more sustainable consumption habits, negative reinforcement of unsustainable consumption habits, nor incentives to drive even more sustainable consumption habits. This is in accordance with the notion of Ramkissoon (2020) who stated that the old pre-covid habits are expected to return if interventions are not carried out by governments or other actors.

6   CONCLUSIONS

This is the sixth and final part of this thesis consisting of three chapters. First, the key parts of the research are revised. Second, some limitations concerning the research are presented. Third, the implications of this thesis are discussed, and some possible future research directions are presented.

6.1   Summary of the research

This Master's Thesis focused on exploring the changes in consumption habits of young adults in their mid 20's during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to study if their consumption habits changed more sustainable during the pandemic and what will happen to these habits when the pandemic ends. To achieve the objective of this thesis, the researcher conducted four online group interviews to a sample of 16 representatives of the target group. The primary data received from the interviews was then analyzed by using a thematic analysis during which different themes were formed to provide answers to the research questions and thus the objective of this thesis.

It was found that as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviewees' consumption habits related to travelling and commuting; impulse purchases, shopping, and online shopping; services; free time and hobbies; and orderliness at grocery store were affected by the posed circumstances. Importantly, it was noticed that much of the consumption habits of the interviewees are influenced by their social life in the normal setting without an ongoing pandemic. Some of the changes could be explained by the available resources and beliefs about the ongoing crisis as Koos (2017) has presented. For example, beliefs of what is considered as discretional consumption in times of social distancing and the COVID-19 pandemic led to decreased consumption of appearance related products and services.

Regarding the sustainability of these occurred changes, decreased overall level of travelling, commuting, and impulse purchases were considered to have changed the consumption habits a little more sustainable during the pandemic. Also, the perceptions of the interviewees about sustainable consumption were gathered to shed light on how sustainable consumption is seen by the target group. In general, the interviewees considered that their consumption habits have not become more sustainable because of the pandemic, but rather because of their conscious choices or the influence of current discussion and research communicated about sustainability. Yet, some considered that the pandemic has helped supporting a more sustainable mindset related to consumption by for example relieving social pressure to travel.

The research findings of this thesis also suggest that when the pandemic ends the consumption habits will evidently change again. Likely the changes include consuming more services and events than products and goods, thus the

interviewees expressed to return to their pre-covid consumption habits of services and events. The consumption habits relating to appearance were expressed to return as social pressure to look certain way guides it. Some of the learnt routines such as planning one's groceries are likely to form into routines to save one's free time despite its initial motivation to avoid social contacts. And lastly travelling will increase from its overall level during the pandemic.

6.2   Limitations

This thesis research has its own limitations as research usually has. First of all, the interviewed sample of 16 participants is rather small, suggesting that the findings of this thesis cannot necessarily be generalized. Yet, as noted in the Chapter 3.4 that qualitative research might not necessarily be carried out to be repeated due to the specific characteristics it portrays regarding socially constructed interpretations. Regarding this thesis research and what kind of interpretations it portrays about the COVID-19 pandemic, the generalization has not been included to the purpose of this research when choosing the topic.

Second of all, the primary data was collected during the spring of 2021 and the autumn of 2021, thus the answers of the interviewees most likely reflect on the existed restrictions, infection rates, and were based on their thoughts and knowledge of that time. The answers between different interview groups may lack consistency or cannot necessarily provide a coherent picture of the development of the consumption habits alongside the pandemic, but it has been acknowledged when choosing a cross-sectional time frame for the research.

Third of all, the levels of how sustainable the pre-covid consumption habits of the interviewees were not assessed. Therefore, making comparison between the sustainability of the consumption habits before, during, or possibly after the pandemic based on the data collected from the interviews might not be so straightforward. However, this would have required the assessment of the sustainability of these habits before the pandemic, during which time the research topic and objective was not even formed.

Last of all, the role of researcher has been highlighted in this research regarding reviewed literature, presumptions made from the literature, and thematic data analysis which all might have had impacts on the research findings of this thesis. Thus, complete objectivity has not been reached in conducting this thesis research.

6.3   Implications and future research

The research findings of this thesis contribute to better understanding of the occurred changes in consumption habits of young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the findings provide insight to what is likely to happen

to these habits when the pandemic comes to its end, and what kind of perceptions young adults have about sustainable consumption.

For business practitioners the key takeaway from this thesis is the resilience of online consumption during times of infectious disease epidemics such as the COVID-19, MERS and SARS as previous literature and the result of this thesis have suggested. Providing reversive flow of products and services could help to maintain business during long infectious disease epidemics. Whereas for policy practitioners and decision makers the key takeaway from this thesis is the possible lack of incentives and reinforcement of sustainable consumption. As the pandemic still influences on the everyday lives of consumers, both positive reinforcement to support more sustainable consumption habits and negative reinforcement to discourage unsustainable consumption habits are needed alongside incentives to drive the transition towards more sustainable consumption.

The researcher suggests that possible future research could focus on what kind of incentives and reinforcement (positive or negative) could support change towards more sustainable consumption habits when the existing consumption habits are interrupted significantly by circumstantial changes in the habit environment. This research could include for example studying both positive and negative economic incentives of some certain product or a service based on its sustainability. Moreover, as the COVID-19 pandemic might not be the last global crisis people are faced with, modelling the consumer responses to what is considered as essential and discretional in times of crisis might provide fruitful topic for further research and help with preparing for possible future crises.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview questions in English

1. Present yourself briefly to others and describe your current life situation (age, studies, work, hobbies, interests, etc.)
2. How has coronavirus affected your everyday life?
3. How has the coronavirus affected your consumption habits? (e.g., products, services, place, time, amount, quality)
4. What does essential consumption and sustainable consumption mean to you? Have you stopped to ponder your consumption habits during the coronavirus?
5. Comparing to the time before coronavirus, has your consumption habits changed more sustainable in your opinion? If yes, how? If not, why?
6. Do you consider that changes in your consumption are conscious decisions, or have they been formed due to the circumstances?
7. What do you think will happen to your consumption habits when the coronavirus pandemic comes to its end? If coronavirus ended now, how would it affect?

Interview questions in Finnish

1. Esittele itsesi lyhyesti muille ja kuvaile nykyistä elämäntilannettasi (ikä, opinnot, työ, harrastukset, kiinnostuksen kohteet, tms.)
2. Miten korona on vaikuttanut arkeesi/ elämääsi?
3. Miten korona on vaikuttanut kulutustapoihisi? (esim. tuotteet, palvelut, paikka, aika, määrä, laatu)
4. Mitä välttämätön kuluttaminen ja kestävä kuluttaminen tarkoittavat sinulle? Ja oletko koronan aikana pysähtynyt miettimään omia kulutustottumuksiasi?
5. Verratessa aikaan ennen koronaa, ovatko kulutustottumuksesi muuttuneet omasta mielestäsi kestävämmiksi koronan aikana? Jos kyllä, miten? Jos ei, miksi?
6. Koetko, että muutokset kuluttamisessasi ovat tietoisia päätöksiä vai ovatko ne muotoutuneet olosuhteiden myötä?
7. Mitä uskot tapahtuvan kulutustottumuksillesi, kun pandemia päättyy? Jos korona nyt päättyisi niin miten se vaikuttaisi?