A study of consumer motivations regarding buying fashion online. ASOS UK CASE STUDY

Students ID Number (Do not include student name as anonymous marking is implemented)	ILI17441467		
Programme Title	BsC Business Management		
Module Title	Business and Management Dissertation		
Module Code (listed on Moodle and in LTAFP)	QAB020X602A & QAB020X604S		
Module Convenor			
Coursework Title	A study of consumer motivations regarding buying fashion online. ASOS UK CASE STUDY		
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Word Count	2702	Date Submitted	20.12.2019

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1.INTRODUCTION

According to Mintel (2019) fashion websites are nowadays the most attractive environments for UK buyers, outperforming the classical departments, such as music or books. Mintel (2019) determined that online fashion purchases continued to perform well, with an increase of 8.6% to £19 billion in 2018, with 41% of the consumers purchasing online due to cheaper prices compared to the one`s of physical stores.

In addition, constant increase has been observed in various continuous years, measured in the number of buyers within online environment, the amounts they are spending and how often are their visits. Nonetheless, although in 2018 a less rapid progress has been noticed, Mintel (2019) foresees that the online fashion market will accelerate over the following years, with online spending on fashion in UK being restored to double digit increase.

Modern consumers are happily browsing, exploring and buying fashion articles from websites in growing figures (Nielsen, 2005), thus businesses like ASOS are being changed by the internet.

As per McEleny(2009), pure play As Seen On Screen declares itself `The online fashion store`. Furthermore, the company gave its customers, very much alike fashion items as the celebrities are wearing and acquired more than 1.5 million engaged consumers (IMRG, 2010).

The aim of this research paper is to analyse why costumers purchase fashion online, with exceptional interest in ASOS company. In this case, the research objectives are to examine the literature with regards to fashion purchasing motivations, to establish the development of online shopping motivations and to determine if there are any discrepancies in the fashion purchasing motivations literature.

The judgement, examination and determination will lead to developing a Structure of Online Fashion Purchasing Motivations, linked to the `As Seen on Screen` Know-how Development Process, which approached the research question and provided up to date academic information. Furthermore, the findings and analysis of this research area, will benefit the online fashion retailers, enabling them to gain a better understanding of their consumers` motivations to purchase fashion online and in the same time, granting them a remarkable online shopping experience.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH FOCUS

2.1 Research Aim and Objectives

*The aim of this research paper is to analyse why consumers purchase fashion online, with exceptional interest in the pure play retailer: ASOS UK.

*Research Objectives:

-To examine the current literature with regards to fashion purchasing motivations;

-To establish the progress and expansion of online shopping motivations

-To determine if there are any discrepancies in the fashion purchasing motivations` literature.

*Potential Research Outcomes:

-To develop a new structure of online fashion purchasing motivations

-To determine a pattern of the online purchasing experience that fulfils the online consumers` motivations.

It is desired that the examination of this research paper will determine a clear insight on the online only pure play retailer, ASOS. Moreover, the findings are hoped to reveal up to date information about the online purchases for fashion. As a result of this, a better understanding will be provided, concerning relevant and vital aspects of the shopping experience on the internet from consumers` point of view. It is hoped that by understanding what is crucial for the consumers and what are their motives to

visit the online store in the first place, a great contribution towards the academic literature will be made. Furthermore, this will help in the progress of the retail sector by elaborating new key recommendations in how to please and fulfil the consumers needs, which are constantly changing, favouring a new fashion retail environment.

2.2 Literature review

As per Solomon and Rabolt (2004), shopping is the method of obtaining products and services that are necessary for the living. However, the entire experience of shopping has a vital importance, regardless of a purchase being made or not. Tauber (1972) reveals that shopping is an activity guided by motivations, thus it is imperative to acknowledge consumers behaviour and analyse the reasons behind their online fashion purchases (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004).

Fashion and consumer motivations are undoubtably linked, therefore fashion depends on change, on new trends that arise and on persistent motivation of consumers (Jackson, 2008). In addition, Tauber (1972) sustains that revealing consumers motivations it is crucial, and it would be a mistake to be ignored, as it can provide differentiation from the competitors.

Solomon and Rabolt (2004) defined the motivation as a process that people go through, when they need something, and they do not posses it. In agreement, Easey (2009) outlines that motivation is the essential effort that drives and empowers consumers to achieve goals and targets.

2.2.1 Maslow`s Hierarchy of Needs

To gain a better understanding of consumers motivations in terms of purchasing fashion, an analysis of their needs and motivations must be conducted. Maslow (1970) expanded a hierarchy of needs, as it follows:

- Self-actualization
- Esteem Needs
- Social Needs
- Safety and Security Needs
- Physiological needs

It is believed that in this hierarchy, one level must be achieved in order to move on to the next one, with each level having different priorities, culminating with the most important aims and goals at the top of the triangle. Additionally, basic needs (food, sleep, shelter and security) must be satisfied before people are motivated to reach realisation and self-development. In this context, consumers that have a lower income will buy clothing to fulfil a basic need rather than for esteem or social needs (Easey, 2009). On the contrary, Solomon and Rabolt (2004) argues that this theory cannot be applied in all cases within the fashion market, and gives as an example various cultures that will not find it relevant to attain group needs, thus escalating the levels of the triangle will not provide clear and concise explanation of their motivations and

needs. Nevertheless, when implementing clothing to this hierarchy, it can be observed that fashion can fulfil needs within its most levels (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004).

A key analysis for revealing why consumer shop, is to segment the types of shoppers with regards to their shopping behaviours. Stone (1954) segmented the consumers by their behaviours, hence he was able to reveal four key consumer categories: economic, personalizing, apathetic and ethical.

Likewise, consumers shopping behaviours have been investigated by Westbrook and Black (1985) and further classified either hedonic or utilitarian. Moreover, Westbrook and Black (1985) recognised that applying consumers motivations to segment shoppers it is a commercial and innovative technique to set a targeted retail environment.

2.2.2 Utilitarian Motivations
*are of those goal-oriented and of those who have high interest in an effective, rapid and rational shopping experience.
In agreement with Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001), utilitarian shoppers must uncover and feel accomplishment in a way that brings them control or satisfaction. Also, the consumers motivations process will lead to the main goal, that of purchasing fashion items (Howard and Sheth, 1969).

2.2.3 Hedonic Motivations
In comparison, hedonic benefits from shopping or purchasing are perceived as being fun and entertaining (Babin et al., 1994). Hedonic shopping experience is seen as a real adventure and focusing its purpose on gaining positive mood by enjoying the entertainment (Childers, 2001). In order to enhance and maintain the presence of the consumer into the store, it is fundamental to understand and value the hedonic motivations of shopping.

As per Jayawardhena et al., (2007), it is outlined that the online consumers are looking for very much alike benefits to physical shopping experiences, with savings and price being the most important factor (Xu and Paulins, 2005), followed by time saving and convenience (Childers et al., 2001), fun and entertainment (Kukar-Kinney et al., 2009), social perspective (Kim and Stoel, 2004) and fashion knowledge and information (Parsons, 2002). As a result of this, these aspects can be segmented as it follows: hedonic and utilitarianism.

Correspondingly, the literature review exposes the relevant factors that motivate people to shop online (Dennis et al., 2009). Furthermore, the literature review is set to provide an insight on the values and benefits that can influence the consumers motivations, along with consumers brand loyalty (Reynolds, 2002) combined with previous online shopping experiences and trust (Chin et al., 2004).

In consequence, I will use the information obtained to develop an extended research framework, with the purpose of fulfilling this study`s aim and objectives.

2.3 Hypotheses

Hypotheses can be developed in this case, by collecting secondary data from the literature review. It is assumed from the anterior researches that the online consumers are divided by their motivations to purchase online, allowing several hypotheses to flourish.

The following hypotheses are to be tested:

H1: ASOS consumers are motivated by price, above all else.

H2: ASOS consumers are driven by convenience, above all else.

H3: ASOS consumers are driven by item and information searches, above all else.

H4: ASOS consumers purchase online for a fun experience, above all else.

H5: ASOS consumers have social implications in shopping online, before anything else.

H6: ASOS consumers are driven by fashion, above all else.

H7: ASOS consumers are driven by utilitarian causes, above all else.

H8: ASOS consumers are motivated by hedonic aspects, before anything else.

H9: ASOS consumers are driven fairly by utilitarian and hedonic aspects.

The proposed hypotheses are a result of the literature review and can be split into two major motivations of online purchasing: utilitarian and hedonic. The aim of this research is to set a beneficial framework of customers motivations, that will help the online fashion retailers to successfully face a thriving and fragmented online environment (Mintel, 2010).

3. Justification and contextualization

In order to set a foundation for this research and to outline why this research is important, it is vital to define and understand the UK online fashion market structure, to evaluate its players and to establish their roles and influence within the online fashion environment.

According to Ashworth et al. (2005) the internet is considered further channel that helps communicating with the consumers, but in the same time it can be seen and used as a tool to penetrate the market at a lower cost.

Hines and Bruce (2001) had foreseen in the 2000` s that the internet will prevail as a fashion retail distribution channel.

E-commerce`s expansion changed the way businesses are engaging with their consumers and enabled easy access and low costs for new competitors entering the market (Hines and Bruce, 2001). The ultimate speed of communication owned by e-commerce and the unique capability of gathering data had a positive impact upon the entire fashion retail sector.

Despite the UK`S economy being in recession, Mintel (2019) foresees that the online consumer spending on fashion continues to thrive, rising by 13.4% to £22.9 billion in 2019.

Researchers observed a less rapid growth in present but predicted to reach a figure of £35.4 billion (54,4%) in the following 5 years (Mintel, 2019).

Marciniak and Bruce (2004) believed that despite the accelerated increase of online fashion sales and the fact that the consumers are more likely to spend bigger amounts on fashion, the engagement of online purchases and fashion retail industry, has not been fully investigated.

Mc Goldrick (2002) agreed that electronic commerce has no broadly acknowledged definition. In addition, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argued that the electronic commerce does not necessarily mean that you need to purchase a product or a service, justifying his opinion by the fact that even without purchase, e-commerce can be used as competitive strategic tool.

Online shopping can be defined as trading personal and household items online (Keynote, 2009), thus for the aim of this research, the UK online fashion market is outlined as all purchases of fashion clothing for women, men and children, obtained through business`s website and brought to the consumer in UK.

Westbrook and Black (1985), Jayawardhena et al. (2007), Hansen and Jensen (2008) and Dias (2003), all argued that the online purchases for fashion are connected to consumers` different typologies and demographics. As a result of this, it is recognised that in order to have an in-depth understanding of this particular group of shoppers, it is of paramount importance to review the consumer typologies by demographics and specifically analyse what are the factors that influence the way they shop online. Therefore, this will help the online fashion retailers to establish what are the vital factors and considerations when penetrating the online market and will help in finding the answer to the main research question.

The aim of this chapter is to outline the online fashion market in UK for a better understanding of its players and their positioning in the market, thus establishing the importance and role of this research. By analysing and reviewing theories and themes, I will provide a foundation for this research paper. Also, the knowledge obtained by analysing the online fashion consumer, will reveal factors that have the potential to contribute in the decision making of the sample group for this research.

4. Methodology

The potential methodologies will be discussed further and for the aim of this research paper, the most suitable will be used, to help answering the research question.

4.1 Research Plan

In line with Mc Daniel and Gates (1986) a research plan is required for a systematic process to be initiated, hence maximising the possibility of fulfilling the research objectives and to answer the research hypotheses.

The problem identification is the first step, followed by the research design, choice of method, selection of sample, collecting the data, analysing the obtained data, writing and presenting the present paper and finally, follow up.

This process will be carried out during this research, in order to provide a guide and a systematic process when drawing the conclusion.

4.2 Research Paradigm

According to Hussey and Hussey (1997), a research paradigm can be perceived as a framework that can have a powerful impact on the way the research is conducted and designed, along with how the data is collected and interpreted. The authors argue that the main paradigms in research are the positivist/quantitative and the interpretivist/qualitative, showing different perspectives and spotlight for the researcher.

Initially, both paradigms will be considered, for the purpose of deciding on the most relevant research methodology.

4.3 Sample Selection

This method it is very efficient, involving less costs, thus being more accurate than many other cases. (Yu and Cooper, 1983). The size sample of this study will depend on the level of accuracy, so it will consider both qualitative and quantitative criteria to determine the relevant size and if any form of compromise is needed (Webb, 2002).

4.4 Sampling techniques

The sampling techniques will be the next step after the sample selection stage and will consider both methods available: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Tull and Hawkins,1993).

4.5 Data collection techniques

Primary and secondary data will be used specifically to answer the main research question and to understand why this research is important and how the study can be built upon the existing literature. In order to set a foundation for this study, I will use the secondary data, followed by primary data that will provide with an understanding of the intentions and motivations to shop online (Perea, 2004).

4.6 Access and ethics

Access to data will be through online environment, academic websites and articles. Also, by designing a questionnaire and by extending, researching and interpreting secondary data appropriate hypotheses can be formulated and further tested. The questionnaire will be administered in a group environment: a class of undergraduate business students, enabling control over the method of distribution and having a higher rate of response (Oppenheim, 1966).

The questions will be designed to be clear, with less than 25 words, and guided by exact instructions. Upon completion, the questionnaire will be found in the Appendix section. Further studies will be analysed, and the results will be discussed and outlined within the appropriate section.

In summary, the research design will follow include all methods and the sample will be selected after considering the literature and weighting the possibilities. The primary data will be collected and analysed, and the results will be presented and interpreted as per the research question and objectives.

All alternatives will be considered, in order to provide with the most accurate answer to the research question and to be able to fulfil the aim of this analysis.

4.7 Limitations

No further limitations are present, and no potential disadvantages can be revealed at this stage of the research.

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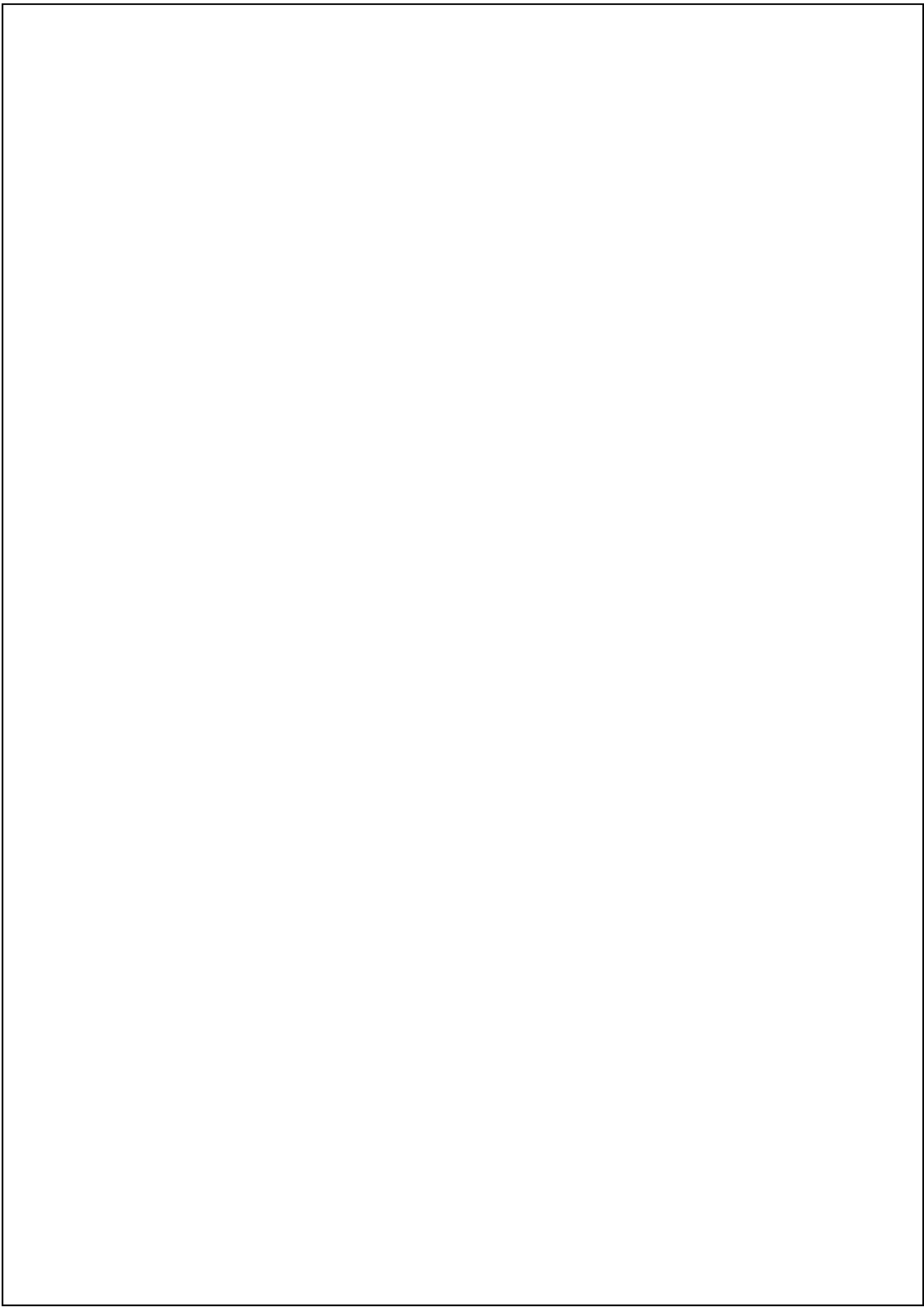
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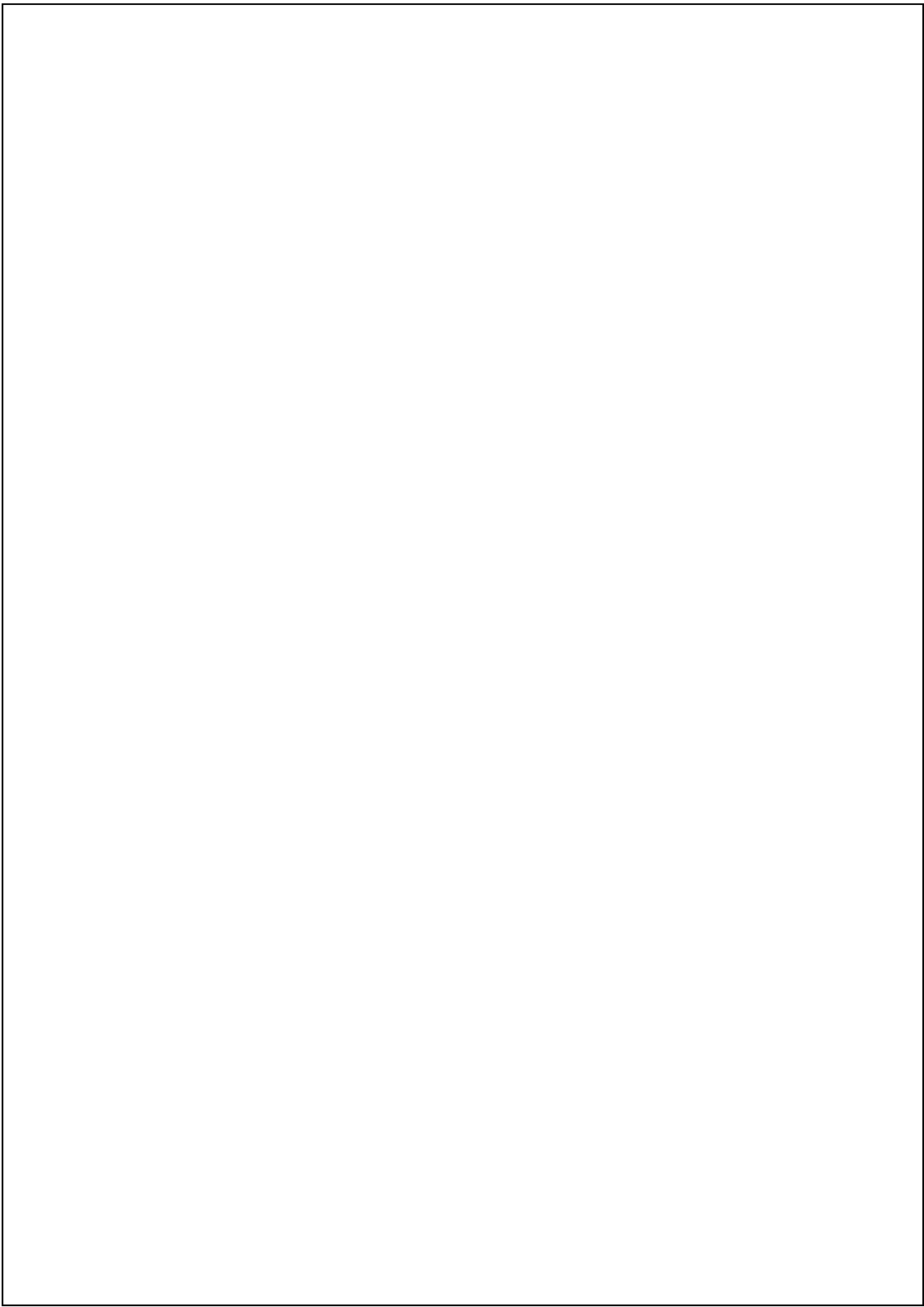
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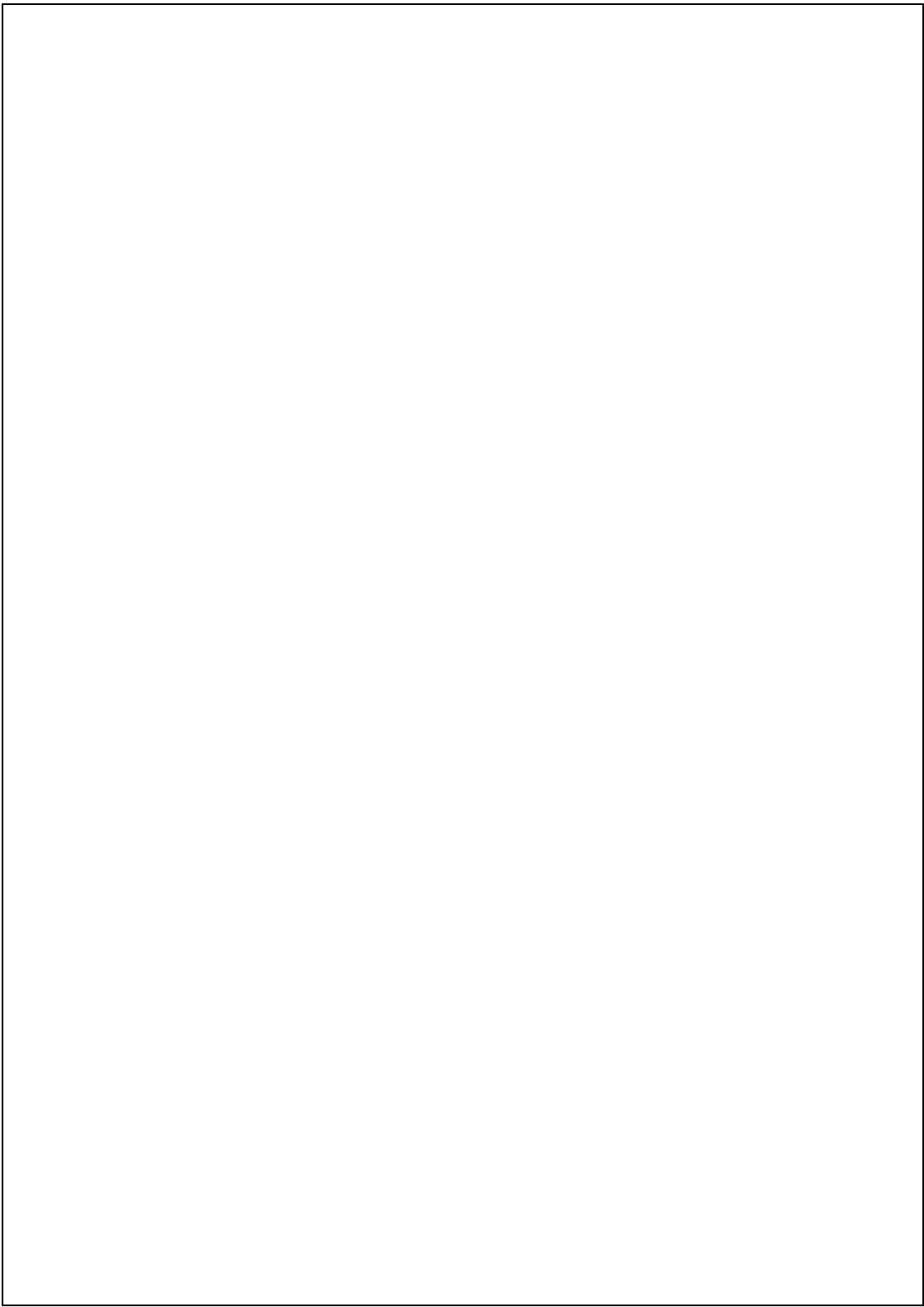
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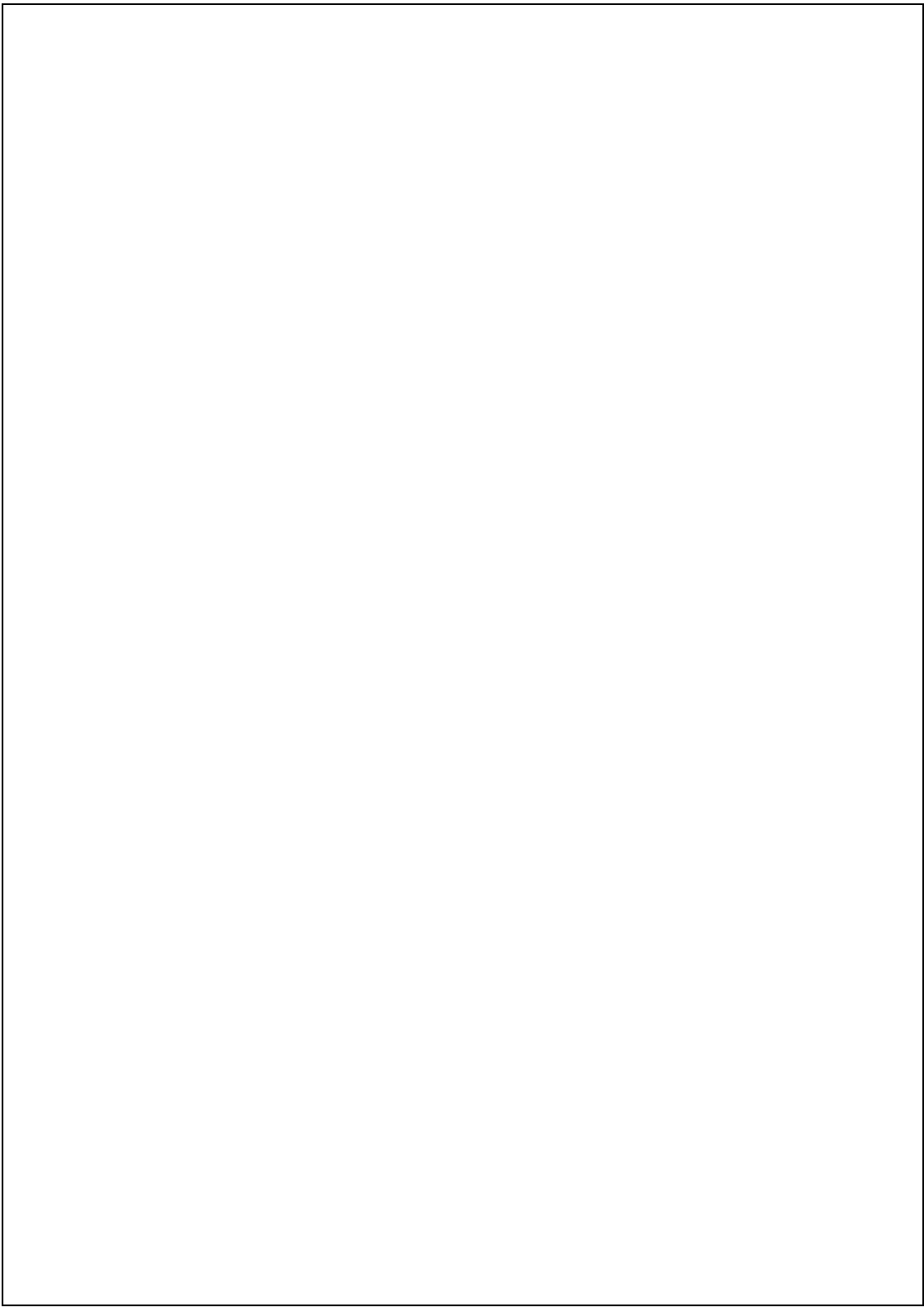
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FINAL GRADE

53/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

Theoretical background

Just sufficient use of relevant sources.

Lack of focus on research question. Greater use of up to date sources needed

The relevance of the research question/theoretical background

Research question is made explicit, and an attempt to embed it in the existing literature is made, however it is not very clear what issue is being addressed (or its importance is not clearly stated).

Methodology

Methodology is not fully consistent with the research question, and numerous doubts arise regarding how the question will be addressed by the selected methodology. The presented understanding of the methodological issues is mostly inadequate. The discussion of limitations and ethical issues is either too brief or incomplete

Structure/clarity of expression

Some points unclear. Most words correctly spelt.

Referencing

Adequate but some omissions

Comment 1

A fair intro of issues relevant to the investigation

Comment 2

You should have at least one research objective linked to your selected organisation/brand

PAGE 5

Comment 3

Make use of more current sources

PAGE 6

Comment 4

Some very dated sources

Comment 5

Consider reviewing consumer buying behaviour model(s) too

Comment 6

More current sources should be used

PAGE 7

Comment 7

These might be too much! Are you planning to test all of these? How?

PAGE 8

Comment 8

17 years ago!

Comment 9

Why, in particular, may your study be important for your chosen orgn/brand?

Comment 10

Some of these could have been included within 'theoretical background'

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

Comment 11

Very general details were provided. More specific details would have added value: who would be the population of interest, sample size, sampling technique, since the plan is to use questionnaire, number of questions, type, administration of the questionnaire, pilot run etc

THEORY (20%)   55 / 100

Theoretical background

90-100 (100)	Impressive in scope and executed in highly creative manner. Excellent and critical grasp of theory
80-89 (85)	Selective and clearly focussed elaboration of the academic issues underpinning the research. Critiques the relevance of the material drawn from extensive reading.
70-79 (75)	Selective and clearly focussed elaboration of the academic issues underpinning the research. Evidence of extensive reading around the topic.
60-69 (65)	A substantial elaboration of academic material underpinning the research question. Good use of academic sources.
50-59 (55)	**Just sufficient use of relevant sources. Lack of focus on research question.**
40-49 (45)	Limited academic support for the research question. Some irrelevant material. Over-use of general internet sources.
30-39 (35)	Use of only one or two sources.
20-29 (25)	No sources were used to back the argument.
0-19 (0)	No theoretical background and no argument are present.

RELEVANCE (40%)   55 / 100

The relevance of the research question (to society and to your discipline) and how it links with the theoretical background.

90-100 (100)	Entirely original research question precisely addressing a new and highly relevant territory of research.
80-89 (85)	Excellent and original research question very clearly embedded in the existing literature and addressing a well defined issue of high importance.
70-79 (75)	Clear and original research question embedded in the existing literature and addressing a well defined issue.
60-69 (65)	Relatively clear research question, to some extent embedded in the existing literature and addressing a well defined issue. There is room for improvement, however.
50-59 (55)	**Research question is made explicit, and an attempt to embed it in the existing literature is made, however it is not very clear what issue is being addressed (or its importance is not clearly stated).**
40-49 (45)	Research question is not well embedded in the existing literature and does not address any important issue in any clear way.
30-39 (35)	Research question is very unclear and it is disconnected from the literature.
20-29 (25)	The attempt at expressing the research question is entirely unsuccessful and no connection with the literature is made or attempted.
0-19 (0)	There is no research question.

METHODOLOGY (25%)   45 / 100

90-100 (100)	Impressive grasp of methodological issues, a flawless research plan.
80-89 (85)	Methodology is very consistent with the research question and the presented understanding of the methodological issues (such as research paradigms, alignment between methodology and methods chosen for the research) is excellent. Very clear and concise discussion of limitations and ethical issues is present.
70-79 (75)	Methodology is consistent with the research question and the presented understanding of the methodological issues (such as research paradigms, alignment between methodology and methods chosen for the research) is very good. Clear and concise discussion of limitations and ethical issues is present.
60-69 (65)	Methodology is generally consistent with the research question, however certain aspects of the link between them could have been better explained. The presented understanding of the methodological issues is appropriate. Discussion of the limitations and ethical issues is present.
50-59 (55)	Methodology is somewhat consistent with the research question, however there remain question marks regarding how certain aspects of the question will be addressed by the selected methodology. The presented understanding of the methodological issues is mostly adequate, however with multiple areas for improvement. Some attempt at discussing limitations and ethical issues.
40-49 (45)	**Methodology is not fully consistent with the research question, and numerous doubts arise regarding how the question will be addressed by the selected methodology. The presented understanding of the methodological issues is mostly inadequate. The discussion of limitations and ethical issues is either too brief or incomplete.**
30-39 (35)	Methodology is not consistent with the research question, thus it is doubtful that the question will be addressed by the selected methodology. The presented understanding of the methodological issues is mostly inadequate. No attempt to discuss limitations and ethical issues.
20-29 (25)	The methodological section is entirely confused and unclear.
0-19 (0)	No discussion of methodology

STRUCTURE (15%)   55 / 100

Structure and clarity of expression. Referencing and bibliography

90-100 (100)	Impressive and consistent clarity of expression, flawless academic style.
80-89 (85)	Excellent. Almost flawless.
70-79 (75)	Fluent, clear. Correct use of terminology and English. Careful proofreading. Correctly cited and listed.
60-69 (65)	Mostly clear. Very few grammatical or spelling errors. Minor flaws and omissions.
50-59 (55)	**Some points unclear. Most words correctly spelt. Adequate but some omissions.**
40-49 (45)	Many points unclear. Some misuse of words and grammatical errors. Careless proof reading. Poor and incomplete.

30-39 (35)	Difficult to understand. Spelling grammar and general use of English needs urgent attention. None.
20-29 (25)	Extremely difficult to understand, mostly unclear, no referencing.
0-19 (0)	Entirely unclear, or missing. No referencing.