An investigation from the perspective of employees as to whether Penney's should introduce the concept of online selling or not.

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Abstract

Purpose - The rise of e-commerce across the globe is among the key new trends that are influencing the retail sector, consumers, and the economy over the past few years. Existing literature focuses on the implementation of e-commerce technologies in a broader sense across industry segments, while there is limited research available that focus on the adoption of e-commerce innovations for a specific company within a particular industry. This paper has been conducted with the intention and aim to fulfil such literature gaps and to investigate from the perspective of employees whether Penney's should introduce the concept of online selling to their operations or not.

Methodology - The research method performed for the collection of data was qualitative research through the use of both semi-structured interviews and e-mails. An inductive approach was used in order to gain new insights and different perspectives from the employee's point of view, this allowed any conclusions that were drawn from the dataset to be achieved through the collection and analysis of data retrieved.

Findings - This paper found six emerging themes that have an influence on the perspective of Penney's employee's as to whether the company should introduce online shopping. These included: The perceived advantages of introducing e-commerce, impulse buying, the instore experience, click and collect, competition, and the effects of Covid-19 on shopping.

Research limitations – Due to the limited number of employee's that partook in this study, the results cannot be taken as representative to that of the perception of all Penney's employees. While also due to the use of convenient sampling, the sample may be considered to be limited on the bases of geographical demographics.

Outcomes – The study has found that whilst the benefits of e-commerce can be advantageous for some companies, it is not always the most appropriate method of conducting business operations for all. As a result of this study's findings, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that employees at Penney's believe that the company should not introduce e-commerce as a method of online selling.

Keywords: E-Commerce, Penney's, Retail, Covid-19, Click and Collect, Impulse buying.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief introduction to e-commerce, the subject area of this research paper and to also set out the aim of the study as well as the layout of the paper.

1.1 Research Background

As a result of fast technological advancements and the introduction of emerging innovations, the retail industry has and still is undergoing major modifications (Woods et al, 2021). The growth of electronic commerce (also known as e-commerce from this point of the study onwards) over the past few years, as well as the Internet growth of the 1990s, have altered and transformed how retailers engage with their consumers in recent years. It is rapidly becoming a standard form of conducting business, particularly throughout the retail industry (Lewis and Cockrill, 2002). Perhaps one of the most significant shifts amongst the retail industry has been the move from conventional shopping methods to electronic purchasing via the introduction and usage of e-commerce platforms by retailers. Despite the fact that e-commerce is not a new concept, it is an advancement of existing business processes to avail usage of new internet-based technology (CCH, 2001: cited in Gide & Wu, 2007).

With e-commerce, growing exponentially, and projected to become one of the most leading contributors to the performance and growth of retailers in today's highly competitive marketplace, it should be acknowledged that the success of such retailers can be driven and influenced by that of digital and social commerce. E-commerce provides several chances for companies to thrive and become even more profitable, as well as to make the shopping experience for customers easier. Consumers can buy online at any time and from any location due to the rise of the Internet, which also allows them to compare prices and seek information on features of various products within seconds. According to Byrnes (2007), 69 percent of shoppers search for information about products via the use of the internet prior to going to the shop to buy their desired product, 39 percent evaluate a product's characteristics and pricing across numerous retailers online prior making a purchase, and 61 percent would like to be able to search for product information using barcode labels and look up pricing from different businesses in order to obtain the best product for the best value for money.

In recent times, the retail industry has been attempting to fulfil the ever-changing needs of customers while also being affected by ongoing technology advancements. This position is changing and advancing all the time. It is clear that e-commerce is gaining significant market position in Europe, particularly throughout the mist of the global pandemic of covid-19. Keeping in mind the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic upon the retail industry, the overall revenue of e-commerce in Europe was forecasted to generate 717 billion euros in 2020, as per the statistics available from the European Commission (OECD, 2020).

Regardless of how important physical retail outlets have become throughout time, e-commerce has seen a significant increase in the selling of fashion commodities online.

Statistics from Clement (2020) link to this statement revealing that throughout January 2019 and June 2020, retail e-commerce channels saw an unparalleled worldwide traffic surge, exceeding that of the Christmas period traffic highs. In June 2020, online retail stores received nearly 22 billion visitors worldwide, increasing above 16.07 billion from January 2019. This again shows that there has been a drastic surge in the number of consumers calling upon e-commerce as a resolution to the restrictions that Covid-19 has imposed globally.

Taking the aforementioned benefits, statistics, and projections into consideration the question that still lies on people's mind is why have Penney's yet to make the transition and merge e-commerce into their business operations? Given the inception of e-commerce, and providing that the topic's relevance has grown year in and year out, e-commerce has been deemed to be a prospective instrument for achieving company aims of faster growth and revenue as previously mentioned above. Simultaneously, there are also some uncertainties and drawbacks to replacing the traditional method of retailing or incorporating e-commerce aspects to company operations and this seems to be one area where Penney's, the subject of this investigation, is particularly scrutinized. Although consumers have pleaded for Penney's to go online especially throughout the lockdowns and government restrictions of Covid-19, there has yet to be any plans for the company to do so.

The rejections to the consumers desire for Penney's to introduce online selling have reportedly been shut down due to the aspect of cost. Unfortunately, it appears that the reasoning behind why numerous customers adore shopping with Penney's also turns out to be the same cause as to why Penney's believe that introducing online selling will not work. As Penney's generates revenue on volume rather than margin, with the associated logistical expenses attached to introducing online e-commerce to the company, they fear that if introduced, once the novelty of it wears off, that such operations may result in decline as consumers will realize that the shipping fees that would be associated to online shopping at Penney's would be more than the worth of most of the items purchased (Reddan, 2021).

1.2 Research Aim

While it can be suggested that the rapidly growing phenomenon of e-commerce has more or less taken control over most of what is now known as 'the digital age' in order to bring about change to business operations with the desire to attain performance and profitability. It has drawn the attention of numerous academics, prompting many scholars to focus their study efforts on the notion of e-commerce, while once again the investigator of this scholarly study was no exception.

With this being the case, and most of the existing literature focusing on the implementation of e-commerce technologies in a broader sense across industry segments such as retail, there are limited research papers available that focus on the adoption of e-commerce innovations for a specific one company within a particular industry. On account of this, the current study is driven by the shortcomings of previous literature and seeks to fill these gaps by using Penney's as the chosen company in order to investigate from the perspective of employees whether they should introduce the concept of online selling or not. To do so the following sub questions have been addressed within this study: (1) Can Penney's benefit from online selling? (2) Would the introduction of an online store have an influence on competitiveness

of Penney's? (3) What effect will the recent change in customer trends to online shopping have on Penney's?

1.3 Layout of The Dissertation

The following chapters of this study are laid out as followed. The literature review and theoretical underpinning for this study is included in chapter two. Chapter three will state the research question. The methodology used and acknowledgments of limitations/weaknesses of the study is described in chapter four. The findings and outcomes of the analysis are presented in chapter five. Chapter six examines and discusses these findings in the context of previous research. While chapter seven brings the study to a close by highlighting the significance of the collected data and recommending future research suggestions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter introduces previous literature on the topic of E-commerce to the current study. With more and more retailers adapting to concepts of e-commerce and digitalising aspects of their business operations the topic of E-commerce can be considered to be relevant. Although the literature of e-commerce covers a wide variety of topics, this study will concentrate on six main themes that appear across the literature examined including: Brick-and-mortar stores, a general overview of E-commerce, the Impact of Covid-19 on e-commerce, omni-channel retailing, the advantages, and disadvantages of adapting e-commerce as part of an integrated omni-channel and an overview of Penney's the company of study. Despite the fact that the literature discusses these principles in a number of situations in this chapter, it should be noted that the study will further concentrate on their applicability to whether or not Penney's should introduce such concepts of e-commerce from an employee's perspective.

2.1 Brick-and-Mortar Stores

Traditionally shopping was limited to only in-store purchases whereby shoppers had no other choice than to interact face-to-face with employees of brick-and-mortar stores in order to purchase a product. Conventionally, the retailer has served as the final consumer's source of information and purchase interaction.

According to a report conducted by KPMG (2017) 23% of consumers say they prefer to visit a physical retail store because they enjoy the experience of shopping, while it was also reported that 56% of consumers prefer to shop in physical stores rather than online for the purpose of being able to try on, feel and see the items in person before making a decision on the purchase. Although physical stores are still prosperous, they are not deemed to be as essential as they may have been in previous times, especially with the introduction of e-commerce. Businesses are now evolving and adapting to the changes within retail environments to provide both physical and digital services to their consumers (Corporate Finance Institute, 2021). However, with the introduction of new entrants, such as vendors and digital outlets that are rapidly entering the retailing environment and challenging the retailing process, it is ultimately leading to the demise of traditional retailing (Reinartz et al, 2019).

Covid-19 has resulted to an increase in e-commerce and rapid digitalisation in the face of declining business activity. Within the mist of the global Covid-19 pandemic companies have been forced to transform their businesses to online operations as a means to accommodate for the government restrictions and closures of physical retail stores. With stores having to close, businesses have had no other option but to digitalise their operations or to put them to a halt. Many businesses and customers progressively "went digital" as such restrictions and closures of physical stores had become the new normal. The introduction of digitalisation has seen sales and purchases of products through the internet boost e-commerce worldwide retail sales to from 14% in 2019 to over 17% in 2020 (UNCTAD, 2021).

2.2 E-Commerce

E-Commerce has been a subject of interest for researchers for a long time, which is not surprising given that e-Commerce operations serve as a basis for the new wave of online business transactions (Zoroja et al, 2020). E-commerce also known as electronic commerce is

a new conception characterising the mechanism of purchasing, trading, or transferring goods, services, and data through means of electronic communications networks such as the internet. In other words, it refers to the sales, distribution, and delivery of products and services online. E-commerce is a term which has been used in relation to the online sale of tangible goods, nevertheless, it may also refer to any type of commercial exchange that is made accessible through the internet. It is important to note that there is no definitive definition of e-commerce (Mann, 2000), but instead there is a variation of definitions. Khan (2016) defines e-commerce as "*the buying and selling of goods and services on the Internet. Other than buying and selling, many people use Internet as a source of information to compare prices or look at the latest products on offer before making a purchase online or at a traditional store*", while Sharma (2019) states that "*E-Commerce also known as electronic commerce or internet commerce, refers to the buying and selling of goods and services using the internet, and the transfer of money and data to execute these transactions*".

Depending on the form of partnership that exists amongst the two sides of the trade, E-commerce can be classified into the following five categories as set out by Gabriel and Loredana (2020): Firstly, there is Business-to-Consumer (B2C) e-commerce, this is a model in which companies offer products and services directly to their consumers. Business-to-Business (B2B) e-commerce is another model in which companies conduct operations with their partners through digital communications. Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C) e-commerce allows consumers to sell and purchase products from one another via an online marketplace. Business-to-Government (B2G) e-commerce is whereby businesses can sometimes provide products and services to government entities in exchange for a payment. Lastly, Process-to-Business (P2B) e-commerce is whereby companies can retain and utilize data to distinguish and assess clients, vendors, and staff; however, this information may also be shared with consumers, distributors, staff members, and business partners in a highly controlled manner that must be in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

For the purpose of this study the concept of e-commerce is understood to be that of business-to consumer (B2C), involving a commerce transaction between a company in this case Penney's and an end customer. The term B2C was once used to identify any mechanism of selling goods directly to shoppers including in-store shopping, however it has now evolved to become more commonly used to define transactions among both online shoppers and retailers whereby consumers buy products from businesses via online transactions. This use of B2C e-commerce was defined by Grandon and Pearson (2004) as "*the process of buying and selling products or services using electronic data transmission via the Internet and the www*". In B2C e-commerce, Person-to-Computer (P2C) contact is seen to be the standard way for online businesses to operate as there is no physical contact with the retailer whilst shopping online. The transaction is conducted with an individual browsing or searching through an online store, adding wanted items to their virtual basket, and ending with consumers exchanging their payment and billing details to confirm the purchase of the goods. P2C is the most cost-effective method of expanding the consumer base since the whole world can be targeted for the same price via the same website (Kumar & Vijayalakshmi, 2016). Nowadays the internet can be regarded as an enormous marketplace making it possible for businesses to gain access to the population of the world that have a connection to the world wide web (WWW) (Bairagi, 2011).

With the constant advancement in technology, it has given businesses new opportunities to achieve a significant advantage over competitors through organizational efficiency and/or strategic positioning (Phan & Vogel, 2010). After some reluctance, several brick-and-mortar retailers, particularly large retailers, have made significant investments in technology, establishing digital subsidiaries in addition to their physical locations (Pozzi, 2013). Sharma and Sheth (2004) have anticipated that customers would be likely to adapt to the brick-to-click shopping trend, meaning that customers would shop online from companies who also have a physical/brick-and-mortar locations. This is considered on the basis of consumers feeling a sense of ease if they can visit the store prior to an online purchase to physically see the item or knowing that if there is a problem the product that they order online that they can return the product back to a physical store. Within a few years of extensive commercial use the internet has profoundly transformed the retail environment due to the fact that online retailers' buyers and sales figures have grown at unprecedent rates (Enders & Jelassi, 2000).

2.3 The Impact of Covid-19 On E-Commerce

In recent months, there has been a positive trend of online sales figures as they have continued to grow but have drastically escalated with the main factor of such growth continuing to be 2020's global pandemic 'COVID-19'. The pandemic has had a significant impact on the growth rates of e-commerce as more people have become reliant on shopping online following the forced closure of traditional retail stores due to government restrictions that have been put in place as a means to stop the spread of COVID-19. According to Ecommerce Europe (2021), the pandemic has intensified the digital transformation of companies throughout Europe as e-commerce has proven to be a means of survival for many physical outlets that were forced to facilitate the utilization and adaptation of e-commerce in order to accommodate the rising consumer demands whilst stores were closed. It is expected that such adaptions will continue to contribute towards continued expansion for companies operating with the e-commerce industry.

A recent survey conducted by the central statistics office (2020) reported that since the pandemic more consumers were opting for online shopping. In 2020, nearly seven out of ten (69%) of online shoppers had bought products and/or services online which in comparison was up by 6% from 2019. The report also observed that while the number of people making digital transactions has grown, the frequency of them have also increased. With over 21% of consumers who bought something online had done so ten times more in the previous three months when compared to 2019, there was a 7% growth, with clothing and footwear being the favoured buy up to 63% of online consumers have purchased some.

2.4 Omni-Channel Retailing

For companies looking to please consumers who progressively want more, omni-channel retailing is the direction to go (Rigby, 2011). With the emergence of modern industry trends, both e-retailers and brick-and-mortar outlets have been confronted with new complexities of meeting consumers demands. To begin, consumers expect retailers to adapt an Omni-channel model into their business operations, in involves both e-retailers having a physical presence on the high street and brick-and-mortar retailers to expand their presence into online

retailing (Singh, 2019). According to a study conducted by Ernst & Young LLP (2000: cited by Dennis et al, 2002) it was proposed that instead of competing with the Internet, traditional stores should integrate it into their retail strategy. The term omni-channel approach refers to a retailer's approach of using both online and traditional platforms to entail offering consumers with several options from which they can purchase goods or gather data about their purchases (Chopra, 2016).

Once a consumer chooses how they are going to shop whether it be online or in-store the process of the knowledge quest begins, however it is no longer conducted solely in a brick-and-mortar store as it would have been previously. Consumers now have the option to either begin the transaction online, through the use of a mobile phone or computer, obtain the necessary information online, visit the physical store for specific details such as how the product looks and feels in person. From that the consumer can the opt into completing the transaction instore or return to their computer or device and complete the transaction online (Pérez, 2019). In the contemporary world where there are multiple channels available for businesses to interact with consumers it is key that the businesses integrate an omni-channel strategy to enable consumers to interact with the brand online with the aim to ultimately attract them to the retail outlet.

Stock availability is a significant factor which affects consumers purchasing decisions, a report conducted by KIBO (2018) stated that 77% of consumers claim that knowing the number of products available through certain channel options (online or instore) affects their buying choices, which was up 13% to 64% from the year before. Furthermore, 68% of shoppers are much less willing to buy from a location that does not show in-stock product availability, while 78% of shoppers search online for in-store product availability prior to visiting a physical store. Traditional brick-and-mortar retailers can perform well not only by exploiting the strength of the internet, but also by integrating their offline and online realms to supply consumers with a unified channel experience that businesses who operate solely on/offline cannot achieve (Opadjieva et al, 2017).

It must be noted that regardless of the channel of choice the consumer should get the same experience and knowledge regarding the product. The interactions between the consumer and the brand should be seamless and consistent throughout all channels. Moreover, it should be noted that shoppers are likely to use one of the companies' alternative channels only if it is considered to be a convenient replacement for other channels or a "fallback" for a collapsed channel. Considering the possibility of inevitable accessibility disruptions, companies may be encouraged to prioritize both channel flexibility and channel versatility as a form of retaining business (Bendoly et al, 2005). One example of such, is the aforementioned global pandemic of COVID-19 which has forced non-essential brick-and-mortar stores to close. Therefore, only businesses who have already established omni-channel operations or choose to aggressively introduce e-commerce into their channel strategy have been able to continue to sell to consumers. Traditional retailers are bound to be pushed aside unless they implement a completely modern perception that enables them to combine diverse networks into a unified integrated omni-channel interface (Rigby, 2011).

In the case where a business has applied an omni-channel approach previous literature found that a conducted reported revealed 64% of customers use the Internet as their pre-purchase source, but only 13% of those same customers use the Internet to complete their purchase

(Verhoef et al, 2007: Cited in Fornari et al, 2016). Avery et al (2013) suggests that omni-channel development would not only boosts sales volume but will also enable a business to create greater brand loyalty over time while also reducing the amount of channel cannibalization that can exist in a multi-channel setting (cited in: Ye et al, 2018).

2.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Adapting E-Commerce as Part of An Integrated Omni-Channel

For those businesses that choose to introduce e-commerce as part of an integrated omni-channel some of the advantages for both the producers and consumers and are not limited to but can include Brick-and-mortar retailers taking advantage of the strengths of both retail outlets and online presence by operating via both means. By operating online enables consumers to browse and search for items on the Internet at their leisure, at any time and from any location. While still having the presence of a retail outlet, it gives consumers the option to choose whether they wish for the goods purchased to be delivered to a chosen location or collect them in store via a click-and-collect service (Enders & Jelassi, 2000).

A physical store presence also makes it easier for customers to return ordered goods to the store, rather than having to post their package back to where it had come from. This could occur if the product does not meet their needs, whether it does not work as intended or because the consumer has changed their minds. It is also easier to create credibility in the digital environment especially for retailers who already have a broad network of stores and are a known brand, as consumers are already knowledgeable about the product quality and customer service that is provided, they would be more willing to purchase from their online store expecting the same (Enders & Jelassi, 2000).

As the opening of physical stores is costly, retailers who opt to introduce online selling can take their business anywhere in the world at less of a cost through the utilization of the internet. Therefore, the introduction of e-commerce can be beneficial for businesses as it allows them to operate without the need to establish as many physical stores that would be necessary if the business did not operate online, because online retail websites are really not limited by physical storage they can also provide consumers with a larger variety of goods. By expanding into the e-commerce industry also enables retailers to have the ability to significantly grow their sales and target audience by selling and delivering products to consumers in countries where physical stores are not present (Bhalekar et al, 2014, Kushwah & Singh, 2019).

The introduction of a website to businesses allows for consumers to shop and purchase items 24 hours a day without the need for physical communication at an in-store location. (Khan, 2016) Furthermore, the versatility of purchase timing has been of benefit to businesses operating online as it allows for transactions to occur at any time of the day not just within regular business hours (Kabugumila et al, 2016) which can lead to increased revenues from sales.

Despite this, it is also though that given the potential advantages of the evolving retail environments to include e-commerce, omni-channel strategies show that integrations as such are not exactly a perfect solution for all retail organisations (Ye et al, 2018). Some of the

notable difficulties that producers and consumers encounter when conducting business interactions through online means are as follows: In developed countries, financial institutions and banks are reluctant to actively promote e-commerce. Whilst retailers on the other hand, require the intervention of financial institutions to expand the scope and attractiveness of e-commerce and to aid in the prevention of fraud and losses incurred related to credit card evasion (Khan, 2016) which leads us to the next drawback of e-commerce that businesses face. The most prominent issue in regard to e-commerce websites is that there is a lack of cyber protection. In the case that the businesses online stability, performance and certain system architectures are lacking it can provide a pathway for websites to become compromised and fraudulent activity to occur (Khan, 2016). The fear of financial and personal information being misused is a huge drawback in e-commerce (Bhalekar et al, 2014). According to Mann (2000), fraud activities connected with the use of credit cards restrict the optimal use of e-commerce as in some countries such as Taiwan, people are hesitant to use credit cards for online purchases due to the personal liability that can result from falling victim of fraudulent activities.

The significant advantage of Internet shopping over conventional methods of buying goods is that those who choose to shop online can make their selections without being interrupted, which allows them to devote longer durations of time contemplating their purchases (Tišlerová, 2015). Although this is an advantage for consumers, on the business side of it this can be deemed to be a disadvantage. Giving consumers longer time to contemplate the purchase may lead to lower sales conversions as they will have more time to think rather than to buy items impulsively whilst in-store. A report conducted by FirstInsight (2019) supported this statement by reporting that 54% of online consumers spend more than 50$ when shopping online compared to 71% who spend more than that when shopping in-store.

2.6 Penney's: An Overview the Company

Penney's was established by Arthur Ryan in 1969, with the first store opening on Mary Street in Dublin. Since then, the company has over 380 stores globally including stores across Ireland, Europe and America, employing approximately 70,000 members of staff (Primark, 2021). However, it must be noted that for operations outside of Ireland Penney's is also known as Primark due to a patent on the original name by J. C. Penney, an American store, who held the exclusive license to use the trademarked name throughout the district when Penney's wished to set up in the UK. (Primark, 2021) Primark has become one of Europe's leading fashion chain stores, providing a diverse range of products in women, men's, kids, and home apparel as well as personal care product lines, and gift items. (ABF, 2020) The value proposition is very simple to comprehend: it involves constant change, with trendy items available to the consumer at a comparatively low cost via cost management. The low-cost strategy is pervasive throughout the company and firmly ingrained in the culture of Penney's. It is achieved by focusing their efforts on reducing costs throughout their operations including keeping their advertising solely inhouse via marketing through the use of social media, their website and shop displays. However, Penney's are yet still one of the few retailers who have chosen not to move there operations online but rather exclusively selling instore instead (ABF, 2020).

Chapter 3: Research question

3.1 The research question

The purpose of this paper is to investigate from the perspective of employees as to whether Penney's should introduce the concept of online selling or not. The study is perceived as relevant based on the aforementioned research of pervious literature that points out the rapid increase in e-commerce and digitalisation in the face of declining business activity due to Covid-19.

In order to do investigate the main research question the following sub-questions have been addressed within the research study to gain a greater understanding of the employee's perspectives on whether or not Penney's should introduce online selling.

1. Can Penney's benefit from online selling?

2. Would the introduction of an online store have an influence on competitiveness of Penney's?

3. What effect will the recent change in customer trends to online shopping have on Penney's?

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter introduces and justifies the choice of methodology used within this study. In detail it describes the methodological approach that was used to carry out the study and why it was chosen, as well as the methods that were utilized for data gathering. The chapter also outlines information on the study's participants such as the selection criteria, who the participants are and why they have been selected to partake in the study. Finally, any ethical considerations that emerged during the procedure of the study are addressed.

4.1 Introduction
As per Saunders and Thornhill (2015: Cited in McDermott 2020), research is an activity performed by an individual or individuals with the specific purpose of discovering explanations to the unknown in a methodical manner, therefore improving their topic expertise. The discovery, interpretation, and progression of methodologies and techniques for the progress of human understanding are the major goals of relevant academic research.

4.2 Research Approach
The degree to which a study involves hypothesis testing or theory development poses a significant dilemma about the study's structure. The reasoning of one's study can sometimes be represented by one or in some cases two distinct alternatives to the rationale through the use of deductive or inductive reasoning (Saunders et al, 2019).

A deductive approach to research begins with hypothesis and theories prior to actually collecting or analysing evidence. As a result, qualitative analysis emphasizes on developing theories, whereas quantitative analysis emphasizes on evaluating hypotheses. Often qualitative studies, in contrast are not backed up by quantitative analysis (Hair et al, 2020).

However, an inductive approach to research, on the other hand, is a method of logic that entails finding similarities in a data collection in order to draw conclusions and construct hypotheses. Researchers who apply an inductive methodology are seeking to establish their hypothesis or logical structure from the evidence that they gather (Hair et al, 2020). Although inductive research is designed to encourage interpretations to arise from data whilst you gather it in order to define correlations and interactions and construct a hypothesis, it should not preclude one from using current theory to articulate your research objective or even to recognize ideas that you want to investigate during the study phase (Saunders et al, 2020).

For the purpose of this study, the use of an inductive approach was considered to be the best reasoning as the researcher did not have a clear idea as to what themes were going to be identified throughout the conduction of the research but rather found such themes within

the analysis and coding of the data. The main goal of an inductive approach is to encourage research conclusions to arise from primary data's recurring, prevalent, or important themes despite the limitations inflicted by standardized methodologies (Thomas, 2006).

In order to bring such themes to life thematic analysis was employed for the purpose of carrying out this investigation. This necessitated the transcribing of interview tapes, as well as subsequent coding phases for both the e-mails and interviews. The researcher began the analysis by reading and re-reading transcripts in order to become familiar with the data collected and to further determine possible themes. Therefore, the purpose of the use of an inductive approach within this study was not for the researcher to establish or reject a certain concept or theory, but rather, to gain new insights and different perspectives from the employee's point of view as to whether Penney's should introduce the concept of selling online or not.

The ground for choosing the use of an inductive strategy was that it has taken into account the situation where exploratory research was present, this is often most ideal for smaller samples that provide qualitative data such as that included in this study. Therefore, any conclusions that were drawn from the dataset was achieved through the collection and analysis of data retrieved and was done so through the use of inductive research. This is because the researcher started the study with unknown generalizations or early correlations, no predictions as to whether Penney's should go online or not could be established from the outset, and even the researcher was unsure of the quality and form of the study results until the analysis was complete.

4.3 Research Method

Quantitative analysis is associated with observational research which describes, analyses, and uses numerical data in a structured manner (Zikmund and Babin, 2016). It is widely acknowledged that qualitative approaches are perhaps the most effective for inductive and explorative analysis because they can contribute to hypothesis development and justifications (Ghauri et al, 2020). It usually favours significantly bigger studies that involve a large number of participants and obtains a substantial data set. The reason for this is because the higher the numbers that are included within the study, generally the better universally applicable and accurate the outcomes are expected to be (Denscombe, 2014).

Qualitative data is described as linguistic, verbal, or textual data which is not distinguished by numerical data; the emphasis is on narratives, conceptual representations, realistic descriptors, meanings, and other expressive representations (Zikmund and Babin, 2016). Thus, qualitative studies rely on analysing concepts as opposed to frequencies (Saunder et al, 2007). Qualitative analysis usually involves a small number of participants or activities. All of this represents a desire for in-depth research, whereby the collection of data from real-life situations and the accompanying deep explanation of such, would only be available in small groups (Denscombe, 2014). Qualitative analysis is especially useful where previous knowledge of the phenomena undergoing investigation is restricted, meaning that qualitative studies are generally explorative and agile since the questions regarding the research are always flexible (Ghauri et al, 2020).

Because the purpose of this study is to investigate from the perspective of employees whether Penney's should introduce the concept of online selling or not a qualitative approach was deemed as the most appropriate choice of approach. The reasoning behind the use of a qualitative approach is that it enables for deeper complexity and context to be gained around the research question by focusing on the participants point of view, attitudes, and feelings towards the topic under investigation. As the researcher did not have any generalizations or predictions on the outcome of the data set it was best thought that the use of quantitative analysis was to be rejected as the study's objective was to gain insights from the employee's perspective. The use of quantitative analysis was deemed to be unsuitable as the requirement of numerical findings would disregard the employee's perception on the matter investigated as answers to the questions asked would be limited, meaning that contextual information may have very well been excluded.

4.4 Phenomenology

The phenomenological research is intended to describe how an individual's behaviour is shaped by interactions with the physical world, things, others, or events. Experiences are described, reflected on, and interpreted through phenomenological investigation (Zikmund & Babin, 2016). Phenomenology covers topics relating to people's perceptions or meanings; people's attitudes and beliefs; people's feelings and emotions (Denscombe, 2014).Therefore, it can be said that the use of phenomenology is most acceptable for this study as the aim of it is to not only investigate from the perception of Penney's employees whether the company should introduce online shopping or not, but to also gain an insight of their attitudes and beliefs towards online shopping in general while also investigating whether the employees who have participated believe that such an introduction for Penney's would benefit the company or not.

4.5 Methods of Data Collection

In attempt to collect meaningful and effective data this study will involve the use of conducting both semi-structured interviews and email interviews.

4.5.1 Interviews

If the interviewer is starting the inquiry with a particular goal in mind instead of a vague idea of trying to do analysis on a subject, the interviews would most likely be semi-structured in order to discuss the more concrete problems. Whenever the analyst has a good understanding of how the information will be analysed, greater order is probable to be enforced (Bell et al, 2019). For this reason, one of the methods of data collection chosen for this study is semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews is a primary data source which allow the researcher to cover a range of different topics by using specific questions in order to gain first-hand information as well as a greater understanding of the area under investigation (Kumar, 2011).Nonetheless, the researcher can also be more flexible in terms of the interview structure as well as, perhaps more importantly, to allow the participant to formulate greater insights and thoughts and to also talk more broadly about the problems posed through the use of open-ended questions. By doing so, the participant will be encouraged to elaborate on their points of concern regarding the topic up for discussion (Denscombe, 2014).

Generally, semi-structured interviews would run between thirty and sixty minutes long (Fox, 2009). Although conducting interviews is an effective method of gathering complex and detailed information, it can also entail some weaknesses as in some cases it can be both financially costly and time intensive means of data collection. However, due to covid-19 the interviews conducted for this study will take place virtually through zoom thus, eliminating the aspect of financial cost however, it still entails a cost of both the researcher and participant's time. There is also a concern around the conduction of interviews as such given that each interview is distinct, the consistency of the answers and engagement received from each participant can differ greatly (Kumar, 2011).

4.5.2 Email

Due to time constraints and limited access to personnel, there has been limitations on securing interviews with employees within higher ranking positions at Penney's head office. However, it has been formally agreed that virtual interviews through the use of e-mail can be used as a second method of data collection as it can be deemed as an appropriate alternative to this drawback. Qualitative data processing techniques have evolved progressively in the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Researchers started to use technology-based tools for data collection including emailing, messaging, and chat rooms (Creswell, 2007). Virtual interviewing may also be conducted without requiring the interviewer and the interviewee to be present in real-time or make physical contact. A simple email exchange may serve as the basis for a virtual interview with a series of detailed and structured answers requiring follow-up responses from participants (Denscombe, 2014).

Online interviews are growing increasingly popular despite the fact that they tend to be cutting-edge. Electronic mail interviews are currently being used by several academics to augment traditional research methodologies (Nehls, 2013). In this regard, the online world and the usage of email have contributed to a reduction in the relevance of timeframes that are usually considered as acceptable for carrying out a certain task such as interviewing (Tsatou, 2009 cited in: James, 2015). The use of email as an alternative to interviews has enabled a mean to gain insights and obtain data from participants who may not have been able to take part in the study if there was only a reliance on interviews for various reasons.

The use of email allows participants to take part in the study at a time that suits themselves within the agreed response timeframe of four days for this particular study. It may also lead to more though out answers as the participants will be answering the questions at a pace that suits them and possibly in a more relaxed environment than that of the pressured answer and question interviews. The use of emails can also strengthen and support the data captured in interviews conducted with other participants. Likewise, to the interviews the questions that were asked in the emails were also open-ended to allow the researcher to collect qualitative data from the respondents.

4.5.3 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in May 2021 prior to commencing the study with the participants involved. The questions for the interviews and emails were drawn up and asked to two individuals, one via interview and one via email, both of whom were not taking part in the actual research study. The goal of the pilot study was to determine the adequacy of the questions, to ensure they were understandable and that they were able to offer the researcher with some initial prototypes on the research's potential. Furthermore, it aided the researcher in gaining expertise in performing semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the pilot study benefited the researcher in learning interviewing techniques and conversational flow (Majid et al, 2017). The pilot study found that the use of the open-ended questions that were asked were deemed to be appropriate as using questions like this has stopped the researcher from steering respondents to answering the questions in a way that they think the researcher wants them to rather than getting the respondents to open up and answer the questions in their own ways. Following the pilot study, it was also suggested that while conducting interviews that a list of prompt questions may also be needed to be lined up. By doing so would allow the interviewer to get the interviewee to talk more if one does not fully answer a question asked. In asking prompt questions it was also noted that likewise to the actual interview questions these prompt questions must also be open-ended so that they again do not lead the participant to answering dishonestly.

4.6 Selection of Target Population

4.6.1 Sampling Method

According to Denscombe (2014), there are two sample selection methods that could be considered when conducting a research study: Probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

Probability sampling is a random selection of the population which are selected to participate, each participant in the population must have an equal and dependent probability of being included in the study (Kumar, 2011). The philosophy underlying its application is seen to be the simplest method to provide a relevant selection and to guarantee that the researcher has no say about who is involved. This type of sampling fits well with quantitative studies that involve a greater number of subjects and whereby the survey ought to be dependent on a totally random sampling from the population under study (Denscombe, 2014).

Therefore, as this is a qualitative study the use of non-probability sampling will be used. Non-probability sampling are instances whereby the likelihood of a participant being chosen is uncertain, resulting in study sample bias (Acharya et al, 2013). This method of sampling offers a variety of complementary sample selection methods, the most of which contain some individual judgment (Saunders et al, 2019). To the contrary, the population of non-probability sampling may not be adequately conceptualised because of the bias in how they are chosen (Frey, 2018).

4.6.2 Sampling Technique

It is also important to note that there are various types of non-probability sampling techniques that researchers may choose to use including: Snowballing, quota, and convenience sampling.

For this study, the type of non-probability sampling technique that has been chosen is convenience sampling. This is whereby individuals are selected only because they are "convenient" sources of information for researchers (Frey, 2018). The selection of the sample in this case is not based on expert judgement, but instead, the fundamental criterion for the selection is the simplicity with which a sample may be obtained. The expense of identifying elements of the population, the geographical location of the samples and acquiring interview information from the selected components all factor into the convenience of acquiring the sample. Hence why convenience samples are ideal for exploratory studies as such as they are inexpensive and do not require a record of all demographic characteristics. Nonetheless, when conducting research using a convenience sample, it is important to note that interpreting conclusions or generalizing beyond the sample size is not a good idea, considering that the random selection of participants might induce inconsistency and bias which cannot be detected or managed given that the participants are chosen according to a convenience sampling approach (Freya, 2018: Zikmund & Babin, 2016: Acharya et al,2013).

Within this study as the sample was based on convenience the researcher has had to be cautious to not give her own interpretations on what the participants were discussing within their answers, nor could she have any influence on the employee's perceptions. As aforementioned, one way of overcoming this was done by using open-ended questions through the collection of data as a means for participants to give their own thoughts and perceptions on the matter of Penney's introducing e-commerce. It must also be noted that the study cannot be taken as representative to that of the perception of all Penney's employees as the sample size consists of eight respondents, it cannot be concluded that their answers would be the same or equivalent to that of any other employee of the company.

4.6.3 Chosen sample

For the purpose of the study eight participants including six females and two males between the ages of twenty to thirty were selected to be interviewed all of which were current employees at Penney's as per perspective and have worked at the company for more than one year within various job roles including sales assistants, managers, buyers and communications. The chosen participants were also geographically located in Dublin as it was convenient for the researcher to find employees who were willing to participate from her own place of work including both employees that still do and have previously worked alongside the researcher in a particular Penney's store in Dublin. However, it must be noted that those employees who have left the particular store still do work for Penney's and are still located in Dublin. To preserve secrecy and give the employee's the confidence to pass judgement on the research question as to whether Penney's should or should not go online the identity of participants has been obscured. The participants were selected as it is believed that due to their knowledge of the company and their experience working in-store, the respondents will be capable of supplying the data needed to carry out this study. The purpose of the study is also to gain insights from an employee's perspective hence the reasoning behind choosing current employees. Furthermore, it may be claimed that the respondents are most characteristic, good representation, or have characteristics that are common of the population.

Although several qualitative research specialists ignore addressing the question of "how many" interviews are adequate, there seems to be some variation in what is indicated as a minimal. A significant amount of literature, research papers, and publications make recommendations and propose that five to fifty participants can be deemed as acceptable (Dworkin, 2012). A sample size of eight participants from have been chosen to take part in this study in order to get a cross mix of opinions across various job roles within the organisation. Eight participants were chosen to take part in this study as such a number can be considered to be sufficient enough to produce a reasonable level of data that is capable of answering the research objectives proposed.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

It must be acknowledged that this study must adhere to a set of ethical standards that are necessary to preserve the degree of honesty, dependability, and credibility. For this study the main ethical standards are to ensure that the anonymity and confidentiality of those participating as well as the security of the data obtained. In attempt to do so, the researcher must abide by the Data Protection Act 2018 to ensure that the data obtained is used only for the specified purpose as outlined to participants and that any data obtained is stored safely. Furthermore, it is important to note that all participants partook in this study willingly and were permitted to withdraw from the research at any time with no negative repercussions.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings

The outcomes of the analysis are presented in this chapter, with special emphasis on six reoccurring topics or themes amongst participants. Having analysed the data that had emerged from the e-mails and interviews conducted it was evident that six themes had come into existence. The themes that had emerged and will be further explored in this section are: The perceived advantages of introducing e-commerce, impulse buying, the instore experience, click and collect, competition, and the effects of Covid-19 on shopping.

5.1 The Advantages of Penney's Introducing E-commerce

Having analysed the data it was evident that there were a number of factors that participants have thought to be advantageous for Penney's if the company were to introduce online shopping. Firstly, one factor that emerged among the data collected is that of attracting potential new customer segments and reaching a further target audience it was noted that Penney's *"growth strategy is focused on further penetration in both new and existing markets",* one participant had also made special reference to attracting potential new customers especially from area's that do not have a Penney's within close proximity of consumers place of residence; *"With not all stores having the same products instore... online would be an easier way for customers to get the chance to see and buy a full variety of stock, making it also a better way for Penney's to sell more".* Participants also deemed the introduction of online selling or e-commerce to be a more convenient method of shopping in comparison to instore as consumers can shop at the comfort of their homes, browse for only items that they want, see stock sizes and levels immediately as well avoiding having to queue to get instore and at pay points with one respondent adding, *"As online shopping is becoming more reliable some people are seeing instore shopping as being redundant. You see less people shopping instore nowadays where there is an option to shop online because it is less of a hassle, there are no crowds of people, and there are instant stock updates rather than going instore to find that the size you want is not available".*

Another advantage for Penney's if they were to set up online operations would be an additional stream of income via sales from those that choose to use online shopping as their preferred method. For Penney's there is the possibility of introducing an online selling platform as part of an integrated channels distribution. This means that they could use the power of their social media accounts to attract customers to their website through the use of quick link tags which enables customers to be brought straight to the product tagged rather than having to browse for the item on the website or instore. *"With more than 22 million highly engaged followers across the Primark social channels, digital plays an important role in our business, showcasing our latest ranges, building engagement and driving customers into stores".* While other comments made included *"If Penney's were to go online there is a higher chance that with the integration of social media items that are trending on social media would sell quicker online than instore...because it is more convenient to shop at the tip of your finger rather than having to go searching for the product instore". "Online also gives you the chance to see what is new in stock with a click rather than having to browse".*

5.2 Impulse Buying

Amongst the data collected one of the main disadvantages to Penney's introducing online shopping that was mentioned by all the participants involved was the possible drawback to their impulse buying strategy. Penney's currently have a strategy in place whereby they use a stock placing technique that puts 'pick up' products varying from facewipes and face masks to underwear and batteries at key points throughout the store such as the cash desks and locations where customers are likely to purchase the items without ever having the intentions of doing so. The impulsive buying strategy could be a factor which may be affected if Penney's were to introduce online selling as when consumers shop online the idea behind it is they can search for whatever it is they want or need without the hassle of browsing through the whole store for the item. Therefore, it can be said that unlike instore impulsive buys or pickups are not a common feature whilst shopping online. It is likely that the consumer will tend to only buy what they intend on searching for online with little to no consideration for any impulsive buys whereas on the other hand consumers are more likely to browse whilst instore for the simple reason being you are already instore, so it is no burden to do so. It is also likely that whilst instore that consumers will manage to see other items that they will want to purchase rather than just what they came in to buy. This may be because they have not been unconsciously probed into buying unnecessary and unneeded products. Throughout the interviews conducted for the study participants have noted that whilst serving customers instore that they *"regularly hear customers say they only came in for one item, yet they have bought much more than they intended"*. Another participant also stated, *"You go into Penney's for one thing and manage to come out after spending more than you expected and don't understand how, it is a store that you spend time just picking up unneeded products and I think if they were to move online, they would lose this aspect ultimately leading to a fall in buys".* While another added, *"you never or at least rarely leave Penney's with just what you came in for".*

With the lack of impulse buying being a downfall to the introduction of e-commerce, it can also lead Penney's in a downwards spiral in terms of sales and revenue for the company. If Penney's were to introduce e-commerce as a method of selling, there is a possibility that the stores would see less footfall as a result of consumers switching to online methods rather than instore shopping which may also affect the revenues from impulsive or pick up buys. One participant noted that *"At the moment there is an increase in price per basket per customer, as consumers are buying more items per one shop rather than doing multiple smaller purchases. This means that customers may spend between €100-200 in one shop and may not return for up to two weeks".*

5.3 The Instore Experience

When asked if Penney's should introduce the concept of online selling or not, the respondents tended to be under the opinion that the company should refrain from doing so because they believe that the company strive on their instore experience. One participant also referred to the instore experience as Penney's unique selling point stating, *"it is what sets Penney's apart from the competition and is an attribute that contributes to sales",* whilst other comments were also made such as, *"why change it if it is working already?"* and *"If the strategy that is currently in place is not broken then don't try to fix it".* The instore experience at Penney's was also deemed to lead to more sales as the customer pays for the experience of being able to touch try and feel the product on prior to making the purchase decision, one noted that

"Online shopping does not give you the same feeling as instore, although you may see things that you consider buying, you are not encouraged to because you cannot physically see the product whereas when instore you have the ability to physically see, feel and try the item". Such results from the data obtained builds evidence onto the existing literature that is available such as that following research conducted by KPMI in 2017 which stated that 56% of consumers prefer to shop in physical stores with the reasoning behind the figures being on par with some of the reasoning found within this research paper. Penney's strive to ensure that the instore experience is unique for its customers; *"The in-store design and experience are also part of Primark's attraction to customers, we strive to create an innovative store environment that inspires our customers and engages them in the fun and fashion of Primark".*

The experience that the Penney's stores offer to customers is what makes them want to shop instore time and time again especially elderly customers who pop instore routinely and those customers who make a day trip of travelling from other parts of the country to bigger cities such as Dublin to do retail shopping, *"because some Penney's are bigger than others with more stock options than those in smaller counties".* One participant suggested that *"customers value the social aspects of instore shopping",* with another adding *"people still enjoy the instore experience of going in and trying things on, pre covid you would see groups of younger people trying things on, taking pictures and making fun out of their instore visit, whereas online this aspect would be missed".* So, if Penney's were to introduce online shopping the social aspect of the instore experience could be lost as consumers would not have to visit as they could shop online instead.

5.4 Click and Collect.

Although participants were not directly asked about the topic of click and collect it was a common theme that occurred throughout the data collected. Click and collect was considered to be a convenient method of shopping with the likelihood of the cost of such operations not being as pricey for Penney's in comparison to the introduction and commitment to a fully adapted online selling platform. One participant noted that click and collect would be convenient as *"it could save consumers time"* in a sense that *"you would be able to check size availability and collect the product rather than having to go instore to find that the size you are looking for is not available".* While another suggested that *"trends have changed, people do not feel the need to shop instore anymore because there are easier more convenient ways to shop such as click and collect".* By introducing click and collect Penney's would still be attracting customers to the physical store which in turn could still lead these online collectors to convert to instore purchasers as they may see products they want whilst instore collecting their online orders. It was also proposed that by offering the option of click and collect to consumers would still *"brings footfall through the door which means that there is still the potential for these customers to buy products while instore".* Although overall the idea of click and collect was beneficial there were still some drawbacks to introducing such operations to Penney's distribution channel and logistics.

Throughout the dataset the management of a click and collect feature was discussed indirectly, participants believe that the management of such a service could be an issue for the day-to-day running's of stores, some considered that *"instore stock would have to be constantly managed to ensure that there was sufficient levels of stock to support both instore and click and collect shopping, if more deliveries were needed to do so this would include more management for the operations".* While another considered where the stock would come

from and how it would be managed; *"for this to work there would have to be separate stock ordering and storage dedicated to click and collect as shopfloor stock levels are not always accurate or available due to theft and damage".* The issue in relation to such operations can be considered to be that of stock and sales loss. If Penney's were to include separate stock orderings to meet the needs of a click and collect option for consumers problems may arise if they were to over order or double up on stock, by doing so could have the potential to result in a loss for the company if particular stock that is ordered does not sell as well as forecasted to.

In relation to Penney's introducing online shopping or the concept of click and collect to their operations timing was also a concern for participants some believe that Penney's would have to put a lot of time into making the idea a reality with one participant adding *"from a buyer's point of view it would not be compatible with the current operations as buyers for each department are always two seasons ahead of instore fashion collections".* Therefore, if Penney's were to move there operations online there would have to be an advanced notice to buyers in order to be able to incorporate the stores stock with that of online. Extra stock would also have to be purchased for online to match that of what collections have already been ordered for instore sales. Again, this could cause a delay to bringing the collections to the sales floor especially if double the stock is being ordered it would take a longer time to produce in factories; *"A disadvantage would be not being able to produce enough stock for both instore and online… if they could there is a possibility it may take the time of production longer meaning the clothes would not get to the floor until a later date than would have been expected".*

5.5 Competition

During the research for this study participants were asked if they thought that temporary closures of physical retail stores due to covid-19 has had an impact on Penney's competition, an analysis amongst the answers of participant's indicated that such closures have had a negative effect on the competition of Penney's. Participants have disclosed that the closures of physical retail stores have had a negative effect on Penney's because as a results of Government restrictions consumers have turned to online shopping as a means to overcome the closures. One suggested that *"online retailers have grown during Covid closures, and they are now bigger competition to Penney's than they would have been pre-covid"*.

However, as Penney's has been one of the few retailers who have choose not to introduce e-commerce to their operations during this time it had put their sales and revenues to a halt in comparison to those competitors who opted for the introduction of an e-commerce platform; *"It has affected sales as people have been able to shop from competitors who have the option of online, whereas Penney's income was at a freeze", "closures have not had as much of an impact on competitors as much as it has on Penney's because most of the competition do operate online and/or offer a click and collect service".* During the restricted closures much of Penney's competition were at an advantage given that they were still able to sell to consumers via online options such as home delivery and click and collect which lead to consumers having no choice but to shop via such methods. One participant made reference saying, *"Competitors such as Dunnes were able to sell to consumers during lockdown which seen customers attract to such stores that they may not have shopped at prior to covid".*

When asked if the closures had an impact on Penney's competition pricing was also a factor that had been acknowledged by participants. It was noted that consumers during the mist of the pandemic had been pushed towards adapting to online shopping where there are a wide variety of online stores that can offer the similar quality of products at similar pricing to that of Penney's, with one participant implying that the *"Competition also has similar if not levelled pricing in comparison to Penney's, so customers may choose to shop online because the pricing isn't a major difference."* Likewise, another said *"online retailers such as Shein has replaced Penney's cheap clothing offerings during Covid and there is a possibility that consumers may choose to keep buying from there rather than shopping with Penney's instore".*

5.6 The Effects of Covid-19 On Shopping

The sixth theme that had developed throughout the collection of data was the effects of covid-19 on shopping. This theme was a constant occurrence in a sense that the theme was not only brought up when asked a particular question but rather it was brought to light within multiple answers to the questions asked; For example, one participant when asked do you think Penney's should go online suggested that Penney's should do so *"especially with the year that's in it due to covid".* In general participants believed that covid-19 has had an effect on customer's shopping behaviours, likewise to the recent survey conducted by the central statistics office (2020) that has been previously mentioned within the literature review participants have also noted that since the pandemic there are more consumers that have been opting for online as a shopping method. One participant stated that *"there are more people shopping online, you can notice it instore that shops in an overall sense are not as busy as they would have previously been prior to covid".* Some of the reasoning behind the switch to online shopping that were suggested amongst the data collected was that consumers are *"moving to shopping online as a precaution to their health".*

Another effect of covid-19 behind the change in customers shopping behaviours were that of government restrictions which have had a major influence on the way in which people could shop throughout the mist of the pandemic. Consumers have had limited options to instore shopping following such restrictions which has resulted in more consumers becoming reliant on online shopping due to forced closures of traditional retail stores as a way to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Some participants have also agreed with this and have suggested that *"instore shopping has changed due to covid since stores were forced closed people have adjusted to online shopping".*

However, while covid-19 had forced Penney's to close for near to five months with no means of generating revenues, once the reopening was announced customers began to create a hype and sense of excitement around the notion of being able to shop instore again, *"People were still queuing to get instore although they had appointments and time slots booked prior to the reopening".* The hype that grew for customers wanting to shop with Penney's instore was created on the basis that Penney's had been one of the most popular brands that had not jumped into creating an online selling platform for customer throughout lockdown. The lack of being able to shop at Penney's had ultimately made customers want for the brand become a need in their mindset, this was evident through the *"much bigger social media presence than any other brand",* with Penney's new stock and news upon reopening trending across major platforms including TikTok, Facebook and Instagram. This hype also seen sales figures go beyond what Penney's had been taking in prior to Covid with one participant

stating, *"it seen sales go above what would have been made on an average shopping week prior to covid… the suspense of Penney's closures definitely had a positive impact on its reopening".*

Whilst conducting research for this study participants that were part of Penney's buying and communications team had touched on the subject of talks around Penney's considering selling through third parties such as ASOS during lockdown as a means to overcome the store closures and as another method of selling products rather than building their own selling platform. However, the idea of this was short-lived with one stating that *"in terms of trading online… we look at alternative business models…but have no immediate plans"*. Although it would have been a convenient move to buy stock and sell it on onto third parties, the logistics behind the operations would be major as well the cost and time it would take to establish whilst this was being done the stores would be allowed to trade again in the meantime. One participant noted that *"the volumes of stock and amount of work that would be needed to set it up would cost a huge amount of time, money and labour. Penney's would need to have their own depo's, shipping, and transportation in place for such operations".*

5.7 Limitations of The Research
These findings, likewise, to that of other research papers, must be regarded with discretion, and a variety of limitations in regard to this particular study should be taken into consideration.

One major drawback to this study is the sample size, as it consists of only eight participants the study cannot be taken as representative to that of the perception of all Penney's employees. If this topic was to be further studied one suggestion would be to include a larger sample size for such data to be considered more representable. As participants that took part in the study were all from Dublin due to convenient sampling, the sample may be considered to be limited on the bases of geographical demographics.

Another limitation was due to Penney's company policy regarding employee's disclosing future possibilities for the company, this had limited the job roles that were included within the study to only those of participants that were willing to give their opinions on the matter of whether Penney's should introduce the concept of online selling or not.

As the researcher was the main component in the collection and interpretation of data, and she was also in charge of the data evaluation. According to Patton (2002) the participants' own viewpoints might influence their replies to the questions asked in both the interviews and e-mails. This means that if the study was to be conducted again, other researchers may reach to different conclusions from the data obtained due to their diverse experiences and depending on the questions that they may ask when conducting their primary research.

Lastly, one such challenge was the interference of the Covid-19 global pandemic. As the pandemic restrictions made it hard for the researcher to meet participants in person, it influenced the decision for the use of virtual interviews and e-mails to be the choice of data collection methods rather than in-person interviews. This circumstance has had a direct effect on the approach used for the investigation as the original plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews.

Chapter 6: The Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate from the perspective of employees whether Penney's should introduce the concept of online selling or not. This chapter contains a discussion on the primary data and major findings that were found in order to address and answer the research question using also three sub-questions: (1) Can Penney's benefit from online selling? (2) Would the introduction of an online store have an influence on competitiveness of Penney's? (3) What effect will the recent change in customer trends to online shopping have on Penney's? The purpose of the chapter is again to examine if the primary data answered the questions stated above and to also draw comparisons on if and how the research conducted is similar to that of previous studies and literature. The theory behind the employee's perspective as to whether Penney's should introduce online selling or not is comprised of six themes: (1) The perceived advantages of introducing e-commerce, (2) impulse buying, (3) the instore experience, (4) click and collect, (5) competition, and (6) the effects of Covid-19 on shopping with each theme being described in detail in the following sections.

6.1 The Perceived Advantages of Introducing E-commerce

The study found in relation to this theme that the employee's questioned believed that there were three main advantages to Penney's introducing the concept of online selling including the potential to attract potential new customer segments and reaching a further target audience, the aspect of convenience and that the introduction would be an additional stream of income for Penney's. Following these finding the results answer the question and prove the claim that Penney's can benefit from online selling. With literature by Bhatnagar et al. (2000) claiming the idea that consumers consider convenience in purchasing as a component that generates positive buying behaviour as it allows them to have access to a buying online platform twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Throughout the analysis of the interviews conducted for this study, the findings also aligned with Bhatnagar et al (2000), as participants also deemed online platforms for shopping to be convenient; *"as customers can shop at any time of the from any location".* A study by KPMG (2017), also agreed with this as it found that 58% of consumers that shopped online rather than instore did so because of convenience and the ability to shop 24/7.

By giving consumers the convenience to shop when they want and the opportunity to order products that are not available instore could be considered to be factors that can have a positive impact on online sales, a study by the National Retail Federation (2020), found that 83% of consumers believe that purchasing convenience is far more essential now than it was five years ago. With the internet making it possible to purchase products from anywhere around the world can suggest that it furthers the aspect of convenience for consumers. Given that the majority of online shops provide distribution to a variety of countries, consumers are not merely constrained to the items supplied by physical stores within their geographical location. This can provide much more flexibility and convenience for internet buyers to obtain difficult-to-find goods or products or those that are not available instore; with one participant adding that *"online shopping would allow you to order products that are not available instore".*

The use of E-commerce can be advantageous for businesses including Penney's as it can enable increasing sales turnover, expanding the number of consumers from within and outside the company's physical locations which also enables them to broaden the company's commercial presence. Businesses that operate online have the ability to use e-commerce to accelerate growth and revenues (Soegoto et al 2018). Because of such literature there is a possibility that may imply that if Penney's were to introduce online shopping to their operations that they could appeal to and attract more customers in various locations compared to the number of customers that they currently cater for. By attracting and enabling a wider audience to become customers through an online platform can help to improve sales and revenues for Penney's.

6.2 Impulse Buying

In regard to the theme of impulse buying although participants were not directly asked about the topic, it was a theme that had occurred throughout the findings. Employees seemed to think that if Penney's were to introduce online shopping that the levels of sales in regard to impulse buying would decline immensely. These findings have answered the proposed research questions as it can be considered that if Penney's were to begin trading online that the lack of impulse buying would potentially have a negative impact on sales, as the consumer is expected to spend less online than he/she potentially would instore meaning that the sales and revenues for Penney's would also be in decline if such operations were to be introduced. This finding is also in line with the study conducted by FirstInsight (2019), where according to their findings 54% of online shoppers spend more than $50 online as opposed to 71% who spend more than that whilst shopping instore. Thus, by using these statistics, if Penny's were to expand their operations to online could mean that they could potentially be at a 17% loss each time a customer was to shop online as opposed to shopping instore where they are more likely to impulsively buy.

It can also be suggested from the findings that if Penney's were to set up online operations and if customers trends were to change in a sense that the majority of consumers were to use online as their preferred method of shopping it could mean that the footfall within stores could also be reduced. This could potentially mean that if there were to be less footfall through the stores, that there may also be a decrease in sales and revenues for the Penney's in particular, as there is a possibility that less footfall could lead to a reduction in the sales of impulsive buys and pick up products that make up most of their sales. One participant suggested that *"if customers were to use online shopping that they would not shop as often or spend as much as they would when compared to shopping instore"*, which again links to the research of FirstInsight (2019).

If this was to be the case, similarly to other retailers around the country at the moment, Penney's may have to close the doors of some of their physical stores. Discussion around this topic also helps to answer the question of whether the introduction of an online store would have an influence on competitiveness of Penney's. It could be said that if Penney's were to establish an online store and close some of their physical stores, that there would be a possibility that the competitiveness amongst both the business and its rivals would become

stronger, especially considering that at the moment other high street retailers have had to make a transition to digitalise their operations as a means to overcome the decline in revenues and sales instore due to government restrictions and covid-19. One respondent implied that *"with online retailers growing during store closures they are now bigger competition to Penney's now than they would have been pre-covid".* However, it has also been proposed that even though the presence of traditional businesses may decline, it may not indicate that consumers would buy less, but rather that their purchasing habits will alter. Traditional retailing may continue to have a presence, but it should still be acknowledged that the retail industry may have to adapt and evolve in this altering dynamic environment (Hunt, 2018).

6.3 The Instore Experience

When questioned if Penney's should implement the idea of selling online or not, the majority of participants believed the firm should not do so because they feel the company ought to continue to keep emphasis on bettering their in-store experience. Conversely, a study by KPMG (2017) as aforementioned backs this belief as it revealed that 23% of consumers say they prefer to visit a physical retail store because they enjoy the experience of shopping and that that 56% of consumers prefer to shop in physical stores rather than online for the purpose of being able to try on, feel and see the items in person before making a decision on the purchase. Such literature aligns with the findings of this study as participants also agreed that the experience of being able to use senses while shopping can improve the overall experience, with one participant adding that "*Online shopping does not give you the same feeling as instore, although you may see things that you consider buying, you are not encouraged to because you cannot physically see the product whereas when instore you have the ability to physically see, feel and try the item".*

As Penney's currently do not operate online it can be suggested that the instore experience is a main focus for them, if they want to attract customers to physical stores, they need to provide an environment and atmosphere instore that will appeal to customers. Based on a report by International Council of Shopping Centres (2018), 75% of generation Z shoppers claim that shopping at a retail establishment provides a better experience compared to buying online, with over half believing that it is vital for a merchant to maintain a retail outlet located near, even if they 're making online purchases. With Penney's have ongoing investments to improve the customers shopping experience for example, throughout many of the more modern stores across their portfolio they have introduced free Wi-Fi, seating areas, and coffee shops to the stores can mean that by doing so they are potentially attracting customers to the store without having to make any changes to how the business operates. As one participant noted that *"if the strategy in place is not broken then do not fix it",* it can be said that rather than Penney's adapting to other shopping methods they continuously work on improving what is already working for them.

6.4 Click and Collect

Although respondents were not questioned about the subject of click and collect, it was a common theme across the data that was collected for this study. Click and collect was thought to be a convenient form of trade, with the expense of such operational activities likely to be less expensive for Penney's than the launch and investment to a fully integrated online selling platform. One respondent speculated that *"it would be almost impossible to maintain up to the two hundred new lines that come in daily, and for a lot of our products the profit margins*

would not offset the cost of setting up and maintain online shopping". Nonetheless, such findings built new insights to that of the literature review which suggests to the researcher that click and collect brings advantages to both customers and to Penney's without having to fully integrate to online selling commitments. Respondents concluded that it would be a convenient method of shopping for consumers, whilst also still being beneficial to the company in terms of bringing footfall through the doors of physical stores (PWC, 2019). In terms of answering the research questions the introduction of click and collect as a method of online selling for Penney's can be considered to be beneficial as previously mentioned it is convenient for consumers as it allows them to be flexible about shopping. For example, according to Victor et al (2018), the most common reason for consumers abandoning their online shopping orders is because there is no one at home to collect the delivery or they are too busy throughout the day to look around stores. By allowing customers to shop and collect products when it suits them not only benefits consumers, but also means that such operations can be beneficial for Penney's as giving consumers convenience and flexibility can lead to more sales and revenue for the company. If consumers are already in store, there is a chance that he or she will purchase other items that they see while walking through the store to collect the order. In consistence with this, a study by Bell&Howell (2017) found that when customers collect items instore, they generally make unplanned buys, resulting in greater sales for the company. They found that 69% of consumers who opted into using click and collect had bought additional goods when collecting their products in store.

6.5 Competition

In terms of competition, Penney's rivals throughout lockdowns have adapted to closures by introducing the option of click and collect to stores and some have even fully integrated to online sales and deliveries. These findings are also in agreement with that of E-commerce Europe (2021), as previously mentioned, who found the pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of businesses across Europe, as e-commerce has shown to be a lifeline for several physical retailers that were obliged to enable the use and adaption of e-commerce in order to satisfy growing customer needs while their stores were closed. However, as Penney's has not incorporated either click and collect or online shopping methods into their operations from the findings it can be considered that during lockdowns, the fact that they have not adapted may mean that they have lost out on sales compared to their rivals that have adapted. Looking at the revenue figures of Penney's for the year 2020, it was published that the company was down 24% to £5,895 million compared to £7,792 million in 2019 (ABF, 2020). Such figures propose that the closures have had a great impact on the company's financial state. However, in the long run it was considered that Penney's do not need to incorporate such operations because employees believe that the operations that are currently in place are working well enough, with one employee adding *"why change it if its already working".*

As previously mentioned in terms of the instore experience, Penney's is competing with both online only retailers and those of whom operate using digital and physical means. Therefore, it is important that Penney's go above and beyond when investing into their in-store experience as this is their only way of attracting and retaining customers. In some cases, companies such as Penney's who choose to concentrate on investing into the in-store experience will be capable of competing with, and even outperform, online competitors. In align with this, a report by Accenture (2021) noted that physical retail locations' future

viability depends on becoming a place where consumers would like to go, rather than have to go. It gives retailers the chance to connect with their consumers by engaging them in a company's experience.

6.6 The Effects of Covid-19 On Shopping

With Government restrictions causing businesses to temporarily close their doors, many of them choose to digitalise their operations in some way. If businesses such as Penney's were to move online as a consequence of Covid-19, one effect of such moves could include the drawbacks of customer returns. Throughout the collection of data one participant mentioned that there would be a possibility of *"much higher levels of returns as in most Penney's stores returns already account for between 4-8% of sales"*, it was also suggested that such figures *"would shoot up with the introduction of online shopping resulting in either high volumes for stores to process or expensive online returns which would not be worth it for Penney's".*

In light of such comments, further secondary research was carried out investigated into and from this it can be suggested that Covid has had a negative impact for businesses in regard to online shopping as it has seen a significant increase in the levels of returns for businesses with one analyst reporting that consumers return 15% to 40% of what they purchase online, opposed to 5% to 10% of what they purchase in-store the levels of return can often be substantial (Handley, 2020). Such figures back up the According to a survey conducted from the UK's online retail organisation, IMRG, 31% of retailers reported that monitoring online returns had a significant influence on profitability. To offset the expense of returns, 33% of respondents said they raised pricing (IrishExaminer, 2021). Such findings may suggest that online selling for Penney's may affect the company negatively.

If Penney's were to introduce online selling and to cover the level of online returns it is likely that they would also have to increase the price of products. By doing so would not align with Penney's motto of 'amazing fashion, amazing prices'. There may also be the possibility that customers may avoid shopping online at Penney's because they know that if they shop instore that the prices will be cheaper, or they may even switch to shopping at other stores that can offer similar products at lower costs. If this was the case, such possibility's go against the literature by Maxwell and Maxwell (2001) that implies that because the pricing of products and services is such a powerful motivator for customers, many online buyers anticipate internet shops to provide items and services at cheaper costs than physical retailers.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

This final chapter is provided to conclude this study. The aim is to incorporate both primary and secondary data sets in order to draw conclusions from the results and to make recommendations of ideas that could be adapted for potential future studies.

7.1 Conclusion

Although previous research into the introduction of e-commerce and online selling has shown to be beneficial for some retail companies, this study has concluded that whilst the benefits can be advantageous for some, it is not always the most appropriate method of conducting business operations for all. As a result of this study's findings, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that employees at Penney's believe that the company should not introduce e-commerce as a method of online selling. Although consumers have a desire for Penney's to introduce an online selling platform to their business operations, it is evident from the findings of this study that employees at lower staff levels agree with Penney's executives on the decision to reject such proposals.

As per stated throughout the study there are five main indicators which have had an influence on the conclusion for Penney's to keep their operations to traditional retail stores rather than introducing the concept of online selling. These indicators include: that the introduction of e-commerce would cause a lack of impulse buying amongst consumers as a result of a decline in footfall throughout stores, it may also cause a the loss of an instore experience for consumers, there is potentially a possibility for Penney's to incorporate click and collect to their operations as a way to bring e-commerce into the business operations without fully integrating online activities, the effects of how the competition of Penney's has adopted to the digital age, and how Covid-19 has affected the consumer trends of shopping.

The research has established that it would not be beneficial for Penney's to sell online as it would ultimately cost more money and time to incorporate such operations than it would be worth. As previously mentioned, by going online would also bring less footfall through the stores causing a decline in impulsive buying which makes up a great percentage of Penney's sales and revenues. It was also considered that if Penney's were to introduce online selling that their focus upon the instore experience would be lost within the mix. As Penney's have made such experiences part of their business culture if this was to be lost, they would ultimately loose part of the brands identity.

In terms of the competitiveness, it can be concluded that if Penney's were to introduce an online store that their competitors would probably be ahead of them. Whilst now the competition is strong within the retail industry, there is again the possibility that if Penney's were to go online the cost would again weigh out the worth of shopping online for consumers.

Whilst there have been changes to the consumer trends around shopping online it can be concluded that without the lockdowns of Covid-19 such trends would not have effected Penney's and did so only because government restrictions forced the stores to close. If such restrictions had not have been imposed the likelihood that Penney's would have still been generating large profits would have been high. This again links back to the idea of the instore

experience that is provided at Penney's. As the store gives customers constantly changing trends at low costs the experience of shopping at Penney's one day is never the same experience the next day, it entices customers to revisit the store regularly. Therefore, it can be concluded that the shopping trends of customers moving towards online shopping have not affected Penney's as of yet.

Having discussed in detail all of the indicators mentioned above and within chapters five and six, it has allowed the researcher to gain knowledge from an employee's perspective as to why Penney's has not yet adapted to the phenomenon of e-commerce. The data collected was done so using semi-structured interviews and emails. By doing so, this study has added to the body of expertise in the context of e-commerce by providing pertaining data on why Penney's, one company within the retail sector, is best not to incorporate e-commerce to their operations.

It may also be considered that the results of this study have supplied data on e-commerce and online purchasing within a European setting to academic scholars. Such information may stimulate public debate, which in turn might lead to additional research being conducted in future studies.

7.2 Recommendations

For further investigation into this subject of research the following suggestions should be considered:

If future researchers were to conduct a similar study, it would be suggested that when collecting the data that he/she would do so through the use of face-to-face interviews. This would allow the researcher to examine the body language of the participants to gain a greater understanding of their attitudes toward the topic at study.

In order to get a better understanding, knowledge and perception of the topic at study another suggestion would be to include a larger population to the study. By doing so can help to increase the validity of the research findings and allows the sample to be more representable than that of this study.

More research should be conducted utilizing a mixed methodology approach, whereby the study is conducted using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. By interviewing participants, the validity of the research will increase, and by utilizing surveys will further evaluate the hypotheses in order to eliminate any biases found amongst the quantitative findings.

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