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FINNISH CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ONLINE SHOPPING FROM CHINA

Examining the Facebook discussions of active online shoppers

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and motivations for the study

In general, buying products and services online has become more and more common in Finland. Internet retail accounted for 11 % of sales value in retailing in 2016 – in 2012, the share was only 8 %, and the channel is expected to continue its growth and to reach 15 % of overall sales value by 2021 (Euromonitor International 2017). The number of people (aged 16-74) that had bought or ordered something online during the last three months in 2014 was one and a half times more than in 2009. Among the most bought products or services were accommodation, travel tickets, clothing and shoes. (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT): Väestön tieto- ja viestintätekniiikan käyttö 2014, Verkkokauppa.)

In 2016, according to Statistics Finland (Tilastokeskus), 44 percent of Finns had bought something online during the past three months and 62 percent during the past year. The statistics of the most relevant age groups are presented in the following table.

Table 1 Finnish online shopping statistics in 2016 (Statistics Finland: Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT): Väestön tieto- ja viestintätekniiikan käyttö 2016)

Age group	Amount of consumers that had made online purchases during the past three months	Amount of consumers that had made online purchases during the past year
16–24 years	51 %	80 %
25–34 years	68 %	90 %
35–44 years	70 %	88 %

Cross-border e-commerce has become increasingly popular among consumers across the world for various reasons, such as wider variety or lower prices (Cho and Lee 2017, 11). Furthermore, compared to for example the other Nordic countries, Finnish consumers make more purchases from online shops that are located abroad: each month in 2016, approximately 46 % of Finns bought something from a foreign online shop. In comparison, only 29 % of Swedish consumers made purchases from foreign online shops each month. (PostNord 2017.)

Especially the importance of China as a country from which the Finnish consumers make purchases has grown substantially, and the increased amounts in orders from Chinese online shops have frequently caught the interest of the media. For example, according to the leading newspaper Helsingin Sanomat (5.9.2017), Finnish consumers order already 15 million parcels from China a year – which is a lot considering that there are approximately 5 million people in Finland. Judging from that there are consumers

who have never ordered from China, there must also be people who are really heavy users of the Chinese online shops. According to the Finnish Post, the amount of Chinese parcels delivered exceeded one million each month in 2017 (Posti Group press release 3.1.2018). Furthermore, according to a cross-border e-commerce survey by International Post Corporation (IPC), even 37 % of Finnish consumers' latest cross-border online purchases came from China in 2017, whereas a year earlier the share of China was only 21 %. In all, 52 % of the surveyed Finnish consumers had made purchases from Asian online shops.

The sales volume of the Chinese online shops is huge and continues to grow rapidly (Clemons, Wilson, Matt, Hess, Ren, Jin and Koh 2016, 1123). For example in 2016, the Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba's Single's Day campaign, which is the world's biggest online promotional campaign, "brought the entire Chinese electronic commerce industry an astonishing record volume of transactions worth 120.7 billion RMB and 1.04 billion transactions" (Xu, Li, Peng, Hsia, Huang and Wu 2017, 245). In 2017, Singles' Day once again exceeded the expectations and previous records with sales worth 168 billion RMB (21.7 billion euros) (Kauppalehti 12.11.2017).

This study focuses on Finnish consumers who buy online directly from China, especially those who make purchases in the Chinese online shops regularly. The phenomenon is very current, as ordering products from Chinese online shops has increased substantially during the last few years, and the topic has also been discussed in the Finnish media frequently (e.g. Helsingin Sanomat 5.9.2017), but has not been widely researched.

From the viewpoint of domestic shops and other companies, the main problem with consumers ordering directly from China is unfair competition, for example that consumers do not need to pay value-added tax when they order from outside the EU if the value of the parcel is less than 22 euros. In addition, the Finnish Post has stated that handling the Chinese parcels is unprofitable for them as the terminal due paid by China is not enough with respect to the costs caused by the shipments. For the consumer, on the other hand, the downside of this inexpensive, easy shopping is for example that one cannot be sure about the quality, ethicality or safety of the product. (Helsingin Sanomat 5.9.2017.)

As the growing amount in orders suggest, the importance of Chinese online shops is unquestionable, and domestic companies are facing challenges due to the new competitive conditions. What is not known, however, is what essentially drives Finnish consumers to order from China. Therefore the present study aims to investigate consumers who are active users of Chinese online shops in order to understand their attitudes and behavior to contribute to the academic discussion about the phenomenon, whilst also helping domestic companies, both online shops and brick-and-mortar retailers, in recognizing how they could enhance their competitiveness.

1.2 Research questions and structure of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes Finnish consumers have towards online shopping from China. In this case, attitude is understood similarly than in the Oxford dictionary of US English, which defines attitude as “a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behavior” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/attitude>). Moreover, the focus of the study is especially on the opinions and behavior of those consumers that order actively from Chinese online shops and have joined a social media group that focuses on the topic. In this study, “active online shoppers” refers to consumers who make online purchases regularly.

The study delves into the consumers’ attitudes through the following sub-questions:

- What motivates Finnish consumers to make online purchases from China?
- How does herd behavior demonstrate in online shopping?
- How do Finnish consumers perceive the ethical issues related to online shopping from China?

Motives for online shopping are studied in order to understand the reasons due to which consumers make purchases in an overseas online shop rather than in a traditional shop or a domestic online shop. Besides that the consumers’ motives are various and range from utilitarian to hedonic, each consumer does not necessarily have a sole motive for online shopping. Rather than one solitary motive, it is likely that many consumers have a combination of motives that drive them to make online purchases from China.

Herd behavior is included in the study as one of the sub-questions, because it can be argued that when the consumers decide to join the social media group, they already have a certain, often positive or at least curious, attitude towards online shopping from abroad. Moreover, belonging to the group may intensify the alignment of these existing thoughts and attitudes (i.e. herding): for instance, group members share information about discounts and certain products and encourage each other to purchase more, and opinions that differ from the public opinion of the group are rapidly papered over. It is thus likely that there is a relationship between herding and consumers’ attitude towards the phenomenon as they might strengthen each other.

In addition, ethical issues are crucial in determining the consumers’ attitudes to the phenomenon. For example, transporting a large amount of individual packages from the other side of the world inevitably causes environmental impacts, the buyer cannot always be sure about the safety of the products, and counterfeit products are prevalent, which implies that how consumers perceive these ethical issues influence their attitudes towards online shopping from China.

As already mentioned, ordering products directly from Chinese online shops has become increasingly popular among Finnish consumers, because of which it is crucial to

understand what motivates the consumers to engage in the trend, as well as what is the role of herding and ethical issues in consumer online buying behavior. This study will analyze Finnish consumers' online discussions collected from a Facebook group where consumers interested in foreign online shops gather together to share their experiences and advice. The group was chosen as the context of the study because the aim is to examine particularly active online shoppers, and it can be argued that the consumers belonging to the Facebook group meet the criteria as they have deliberately joined the group and take part in the discussions.

The study is organized as follows. Firstly, the theoretical background presents the concepts and previous research related to the topic. These are divided into the following subchapters: electronic commerce in general, buying decision process, online impulse buying, herd behavior, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and discussion about various ethical issues related to online shopping from China. After the theoretical background, the methodology part presents the context in which the research data was collected, the chosen research method (content analysis), as well as the initial themes used in the data analysis and the trustworthiness of the research. After this, the following chapter analyzes the data and aims at answering the research questions. The study ends with conclusions.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction to electronic commerce

Buying products and services online is nowadays part of many consumers' everyday life. According to Statistics Finland, in 2016, 44 percent of Finns had bought something online during the past three months and 62 percent during the past year (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT): Väestön tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käyttö 2016). The following subchapters will focus on briefly explaining why consumers shop online rather than in traditional stores, the choice between domestic and foreign online shops, the development of e-commerce in China and mobile shopping.

2.1.1 *Motives for online shopping*

The motives for buying the product online rather than in a traditional shop are various, depending on whether the consumer is a hedonic or a utilitarian shopper (Sorce, Perotti and Widrick 2005, 123). Hedonic shoppers, who shop for pleasure, usually search for “a product specific online shopping experience”, whereas the utilitarian shoppers' four typical reasons for online buying are “convenience, informativeness, selection, and the ability to control the shopping experience” (Sorce et al. 2005, 123).

Sarkar (2011, 64) states that consumers who have highly hedonic values tend to avoid online shopping, because they favor direct communication with the salespeople, which implies that companies doing e-commerce should increase the entertainment value of the website to attract these customers. Similarly, Dennis, Morgan, Wright and Jayawardhena (2010, 151) state that male consumers have been dominating traditional e-commerce, as female consumers find the social aspect of shopping more important and would prefer social e-shopping that combines electronic commerce with social networks. On the other hand, utilitarian consumers perceive more benefits in shopping online, such as saving time and costs and overall convenience, but they also perceive more risks in online shopping, which indicates that companies should also focus on the security of their online shop (Sarkar 2011, 64).

Bobalca (2015, 246) identified the following advantages of online shopping: 1) accessibility (time, space); 2) convenience (delivery convenience, evaluation convenience, access convenience, transaction convenience, search convenience); 3) product diversity; 4) cost savings (time, money); and 5) interactivity (access to other buyers' opinions, online assistance). According to Bobalca (2015, 241), the most important reasons for shopping online are also related to the above-mentioned

advantages, and include “space accessibility, access convenience, evaluation convenience, delivery convenience, time saving and money saving”.

On the other hand, there are also some disadvantages related to online shopping compared to traditional shopping. Bobalca (2015, 249) identified the following downsides: 1) delivery costs (time, money); 2) transaction risk; 3) delivery risk (delay, returning the order); 4) product risk (product with other characteristics, no testing possibility, quality risk, product damage); and 5) lack of personal communication. Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg (2010, 78), on the other hand, presented the benefits and limitations of e-commerce from the viewpoint of consumers in the following way:

Table 2 Benefits and limitations of e-commerce for consumer (Solomon et al. 2010)

Benefits:	Limitations:
Shop 24 hours a day	Lack of security
Less travelling	Fraud
Can receive relevant information in seconds from any location	Can't touch items
More choice of products	Exact colors may not reproduce on computer monitors
More products available to less-developed countries	Expensive to order and then return
Greater price information	Potential breakdown of human relationships
Lower prices so that less affluent can purchase	
Participate in virtual auctions	
Fast delivery	
Electronic communities	

Besides, according to Euromonitor International (2017), there are three main reasons why Finnish consumers make purchases online. The first reason is that online shopping is viewed as being good value for money, as there are frequently discounts available and many retailers tend to invest in online marketing campaigns. Another reason for the growth of e-commerce in Finland is its convenience, namely the possibility to get the purchases delivered quickly and at a reasonable cost. In addition, availability and variety of products and brands not otherwise available in Finland has an effect on the growing popularity of online shopping. (Euromonitor International 2017)

2.1.2 Choosing between domestic and foreign online shops

In e-commerce, consumers are able to decide whether they want to buy from shops that are situated in their own country or somewhere else in the world. Cross-border e-commerce has succeeded well in recent years, as consumers from across the world have become interested in purchasing directly from overseas (Cho & Lee 2017, 11). This means that the global B2C market size has expanded greatly, as consumers are able to make purchases from online shops located in other countries, tempted by factors such as wider choice or lower prices (Cho & Lee 2017, 13).

Cho and Lee studied the causal relationships between the use of overseas direct purchases in different countries (accessibility to or awareness of major global B2C websites), customs efficiency, logistics connectivity, regulation quality and globalization, with the degree of globalization in a specific country as moderator, in addition to population, income, tariff, and degree of ICT accessibility as control variables, aiming at identifying the determinants of overseas direct purchases (ODP) (Cho & Lee 2017, 16). They found that connectivity that relies on air transport might decrease overseas direct purchases, since consumers who order from overseas online shops may be more sensitive to cost than time, and that overseas direct purchases can be increased in those countries that are more globalized. (Cho & Lee 2017, 17.)

Furthermore, according to a survey by PostNord (2017), during an average month, 49 % of Finnish consumers (aged 18-79) shopped online. All in all, the Finns spent 3.2 billion euros on buying products online in 2016. What is distinctive compared to other Nordic countries is that Finns tend to buy from overseas online shops more often than the others: even 46 % of Finnish consumers did purchases on foreign online shops each month. Most common countries from which the Finns order online include Germany, China, Great Britain, Sweden, as well as the United States. Three most popular product groups that Nordic consumers tend to buy online from abroad include clothes and shoes, consumer electronics and media. (PostNord 2017.)

In Finland, it can be stated that the field of online retailing is competitive and fragmented, with both domestic and foreign players. The leader in the channel is a domestic company, Verkkokauppa.com that focuses on consumer electronics but has extended its offerings to other categories as well, whose value share in 2016 was 9 %. In the second place, with a value share of 3 % is the German fashion retailer Zalando, followed by the online shop of the domestic department store Stockmann with a value share of 2 %. (Euromonitor International 2017.)

It can be argued that there is some charm of novelty connected to cross-border e-commerce as it has facilitated buying considerably lower-priced products from abroad. Moreover, cross-border e-commerce and particularly the Chinese online shops have been featured a lot in the media and in public discussions, which likely have made more and

more consumers aware of the phenomenon, and thus increased the interest to try ordering from the online shops in question.

The emergence and growth of the Chinese e-commerce industry has occurred relatively recently. Electronic commerce started to reach China in the beginning of the 21st century, and despite the fact that e-commerce took off more slowly in China than in some Western countries, its impact in China has been more substantial (Erisman 2015, 212). The first big player of the Chinese e-commerce industry was Alibaba Group, and according to Erisman (2015, 5) “the founding of Alibaba was really the birth of e-commerce in China”.

Nowadays, Asia Pacific is the world’s most dynamic region regarding e-commerce, and by 2019, the region is expected to reach a share of 20.4 % electronic retail in total retail (Moagar-Poladian, Dumitrescu and Tanase 2017, 177). In 2017, 14.6 % of overall retail sales in the Asia Pacific region were e-commerce, whereas the worldwide share of e-commerce was 10.2 % of total retail sales (eMarketer). Furthermore, of all the countries, the share of retail e-commerce (e-tail) in total retail sales is the highest in China. When examining the sales value of the biggest e-retailers, there are four Chinese companies in the world’s top 50, with combined sales value of 27 billion dollars. (Moagar-Poladian et al. 2017, 177.)

2.1.3 Mobile shopping

According to Fuentes and Svingstedt (2017, 142), mobile phones have transformed shopping, and Erisman (2015, 203) argues that mobile shopping is a major movement that is reshaping electronic commerce in China. For example, Alibaba has achieved to build a leading position in mobile commerce, even though it began the shift to mobile more slowly than its competitors. (Erisman 2015, 203.) During Singles’ Day 2017, approximately 90 % of transactions were made in the mobile channel (Kauppalehti 12.11.2017). This implies that the concept of mobile shopping is relevant for this study. According to a survey by PostNord (2017), one in four Nordic consumers who have shopped online have also used their mobile phones to make purchases, however, Finnish consumers shop less on their phones than consumers in the other Nordic countries. Besides, according to a survey on cross-border e-commerce by International Post Corporation (IPC), 17 % of Finnish consumers prefer mobile phone as a means of shopping.

Mobile shopping consists of various types of activities, which means that mobile shopping does not necessarily need to include purchasing anything, thus for example browsing through products while waiting for a bus can be counted as mobile shopping.

According to Fuentes and Svingstedt (2017, 140-142), mobile shopping can be divided into six types of activities:

- mobile window shopping (browsing)
- finding inspiration and staying updated (idea shopping)
- researching purchases and finding products
- reading product reviews and comparing prices
- mobile phones and stores: localizing, socializing and bargain hunting
- mobile payment, transferring funds, and managing expenses.

Mobile shopping consists of following elements: technology (smartphone, ICT infrastructure), competence (technical & shopping competence), and meaning (leisure, social, functional). The combination of these three elements is needed in order that mobile shopping is both possible and desirable to the consumer. (Fuentes & Svingstedt 2017, 142-144.)

According to Fuentes and Svingstedt (2017, 144-145), mobile shopping is not completely unproblematic from the viewpoint of consumers: the consumers interviewed reported becoming stressed and anxious because of the continuous shopping possibilities on their phones. Many also mentioned being worried that they buy more than they actually need, because smartphones have made impulse buying so easy.

Besides, Kim, Kim, Choi and Trivedi (2017, 60) note that consumers who have shopping apps on their smartphones are usually those who are more experienced in both online shopping and as smartphone users, and are also likely to download a larger amount of non-shopping applications, even though they might use other apps less frequently, which could be caused by that obtaining new apps becomes easier by time, but when the consumer has more applications on the phone, he or she spends less time using one application. When it comes to the purchasing stage, only the browsing patterns of shopping applications and digital experience are found to determine mobile purchases on the shopping applications, whereas browsing applications that are not related to shopping does not affect mobile shopping. Consumers who have more shopping applications and who use them frequently also buy on more shopping applications. (Kim et al. 2017, 65-66)

Furthermore, Yang, Li and Liao (2016, 245) studied the how active coping with the unfamiliarity or inconvenience caused by shopping on mobile phone influences the consumers' intention to continue using the mobile shopping channel. They argue that solely how content a consumer is with the shopping process is connected positively to the consumer's continued use intention of the mobile channel, even when there are no discounts or other promotional incentives. Since the satisfaction with the buying process enhances perceived ease of use of mobile shopping, the consumer is prone to make mobile purchases also in the future. This finding unveils an indirect connection between continued use intention and active coping. They state that active coping attempts do not

directly influence use intentions, and neither indirectly through being content with the task outcome, which again emphasizes that mobile shopping experience itself, rather than what the consumer purchased, has a more crucial influence on forthcoming use of the mobile shopping channel. (Yang et al. 2016, 263.)

2.2 Consumer online buying behavior

This subchapter discusses several concepts related to consumer behavior in an online context that are relevant to the study. The subchapter begins with presenting the consumer's buying process, both the traditional five-stage model and a three stage-model of web-based consumer behavior, as well as discussing some important aspects of post-purchase behavior. Thereafter, the focus is on online impulse buying, herd behavior in an online context, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

The consumer's buying process is traditionally divided into five different stages that are problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen 2012, 271), as shown in the following figure.

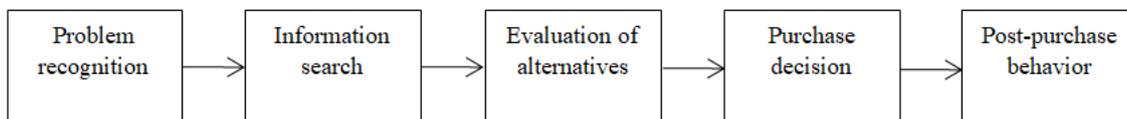


Figure 1 Consumer's buying process (Kotler et al. 2012)

However, when buying a product, consumers do not necessarily go through each one of the five stages every time, especially when it comes to purchasing regular everyday products (Kotler et al. 2012, 270-271). Some purchases can be done without any advance planning. Impulse buying (synonymous with unplanned buying) can be defined as "any purchase which a shopper makes but has not planned in advance" (Stern 1962, 59). Impulse buying, especially in an online context, will be discussed in more detail in the following subchapter (2.2.1).

In an online context, Guo and Barnes (2011, 304) have proposed a three-stage model of web-based consumer behavior and buying decision that simplifies the above-mentioned five-stage model, except the last stage (behavior after the actual purchase). This model is presented in the following figure.

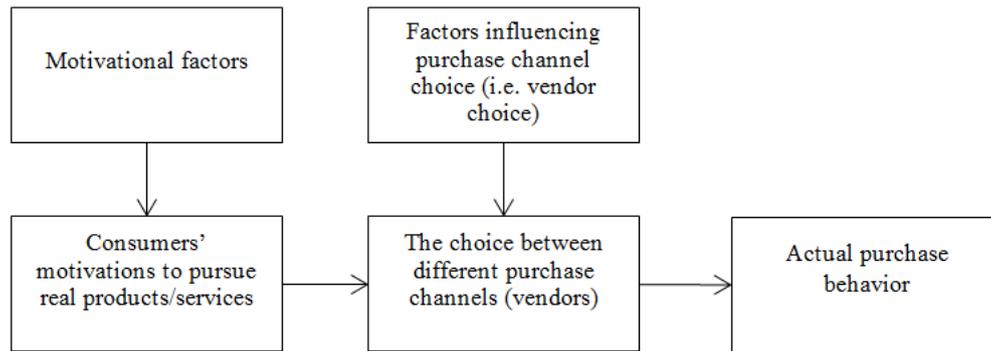


Figure 2 Online consumer behavior and buying decision (Guo and Barnes 2011)

In the first stage, the focus is on how the consumer perceives that a certain product or service could help in filling the discrepancy between actual and desired states. In the second stage, on the other hand, the consumer makes the choice between different vendors. At this point, the consumer needs to search for information on for example performance, and evaluate the alternatives based on criteria such as price and delivery times. (Guo & Barnes 2011, 303-304.)

This three-stage model was applied in a study by Qiu, Lin and Li (2015, 428-429), who aimed at building a framework to predict consumer behavior in e-commerce context. They developed an explanatory framework called COREL, which consists of a two-stage process. In the first stage, associations between products are examined and applied to predict the consumer's motivations and to build a selection of product candidates. In the second stage, on the other hand, the focus is on learning the consumer's preferences considering product features to determine which products from the selection collected in the first stage will most likely be purchased. (Qiu et al. 2015, 451.)

Furthermore, an important aspect in consumer behavior in an online context is related to the post-purchase stage of the buying process: consumers' returning behavior. The importance of return policies in the competition between online retailers has increased, and as a consequence, many of them offer free returns, which in turn lowers the perceived uncertainty in online shopping and thus increases return rates and unnecessary ordering (Saarijärvi, Sutinen and Harris 2017, 284). Saarijärvi et al. (2017, 293-294) found multiple forms of returning behavior, in other words reasons behind the decision to return the product bought online, which can be divided into 10 categories (such as disconfirmation driven, money shortage driven and benefit maximization driven returning behavior). Furthermore, returning behavior varies based on whether the returning of products is planned or unplanned, and in which phase of the buying process the decision to return the product is made.

In addition, purchasing behavior differs across countries and cultures. For example when it comes to post-purchase behavior, there are differences in complaining behavior, such as whether returns or exchanges are accepted and under what circumstances

(Usunier & Lee 2013, 112), and these differences can be found between China and Finland as well.

Complaining behavior manifests itself in multiple forms, including negative word of mouth, asking for returns and exchanges, sabotage, exit, and posting experience online, and Blodgett, Hill and Bakir (2006, 103) argue that differences in complaining behavior are due to competitive forces rather than cultural differences that studies usually have suggested. On the other hand, De Mooij and Hofstede (2011, 189) state that consumers from collectivistic countries, such as China, are less likely to complain and are more loyal because of harmony needs. However, even though they do not complain to the company, they still discuss their negative experiences with their in-group (De Mooij & Hofstede 2011, 189).

According to Blodgett et al. (2006, 109), in China it is not common to return items that the consumer is not satisfied with, or at least the consumer should have a good reason for the return, such as that the product does not work. On the other hand, in Finland consumers are used to that most shops, although not obliged to do so, offer their customers a possibility to return or exchange the item for a limited time at least if the item is unused, if the buyer changes his or her mind about the purchase for some reason. In distance selling, such as e-commerce, the consumer in fact has a right to cancel the order without a specific reason for a period of 14 days after receiving the product that is fixed by the Finnish law (Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority).

2.2.1 *Online impulse buying*

As mentioned in the previous subchapter (2.2), impulse buying (synonymous with unplanned buying) can be defined as “any purchase which a shopper makes but has not planned in advance” (Stern 1962, 59). Stern (1962, 59-60) identified four types of impulse purchases, which include planned, pure, reminder and suggestion impulse buying. Impulse buying takes place when a consumer encounters an unexpected urge that the consumer is unable to resist, and a great deal of impulse buying happens during seasonal sales (Solomon et al. 2010, 83).

According to Piron (1991, 512) impulse purchasing consists of three key features: it is unplanned, it results from an exposure to a stimulus, and the decision is made “on-the-spot”. In addition, it can be further divided into experiential and non-experiential impulse purchases. Experiential impulse purchases include emotional or cognitive reactions (such as guilt or excitement over impulsively buying an expensive clothing item), whereas non-experiential purchases, for example when impulsively buying vegetables, are not accompanied by such emotions. (Piron 1991, 512.)

Cobb and Hoyer (1986, 406) state that three consumer groups can be identified in terms of how much they plan the buying decisions in advance: planners, partial planners and impulse purchasers. Planners know the exact product and brand they will purchase before they enter the store, whereas partial planners do know beforehand that they need certain products, but make the decision between brands in-store and thus spend more time on searching and comparing prices, and are likely to be influenced by in-store information. Impulse purchasers, on the other hand, do not plan their purchases in advance, and advertisements have more influence on these consumers than point-of-purchase displays, as they do only a little in-store information processing compared to partial planners. (Cobb & Hoyer 1986, 406-407.)

A consumer's overall perceived shopping value consists of two elements: hedonic and utilitarian value. Utilitarian value refers to "functional aspects of the shopping context", whereas hedonic value comes from "fun and playfulness of the shopping". (Sarkar 2011, 58.) In an online context, Ozen and Engizek (2014, 78) found that hedonic value drives consumers' impulse buying tendencies. Impulse buying tendency is higher for those consumers who view online shopping as a means of relaxation and as an adventure. Furthermore, these consumers cannot resist the temptation when they encounter discounts. (Ozen & Engizek 2014, 88.)

According to Ozen and Engizek (2014, 88), the correlation between online impulse buying tendency and three dimensions of hedonic shopping behavior – adventure, relaxation and value – is positive, whereas the correlation between online impulse buying tendency and the fourth dimension, social shopping, is negative. This implies that consumers with a social personality tend to keep away from buying online impulsively, whereas those who view buying online as an adventure or a way to reduce stress and are bargain hunters are more likely to purchase impulsively. Furthermore, they state that which hedonic shopping dimension is dominant may influence the amount of online impulse buying a consumer does. (Ozen & Engizek 2014, 88.)

In addition, Park, Kim, Funches and Foxx (2012, 1588) state that in the case of apparel purchases, web browsing influences impulse buying from both hedonic and utilitarian viewpoints. Wide variety of products and selection is likely to result in browsing for utilitarian purposes and thus decreases the likelihood of doing impulse purchases. On the other hand, price is critical in encouraging hedonic browsing and consumers are inclined to buy impulsively because of price and offers during promotional campaigns. Furthermore, sensory attributes in the online shop influence directly the online impulse buying behavior in the case of clothing. (Park et al. 2012, 1588.) Xu and Huang (2014, 1299), on the other hand, studied the effects of two sales promotion techniques, namely bonus packs and price discounts, on online impulse buying, and found that as far as hedonic products, price discounts lead to greater impulse buying intention, whereas in the

case of utilitarian products, bonus packs are more likely to result in making impulse purchases.

Chan, Cheung and Lee (2017, 207) state that studies on online impulse buying most often apply a S-O-R framework as theoretical foundation, perhaps as it has been traditionally used in consumer behavior research. In addition, the majority of online impulse buying research highlights the role of environmental cues. The S-O-R framework consists of three main elements: 1) stimulus, the trigger that stimulates consumers; 2) organism, the internal evaluation of consumers; and 3) response, the result of consumers' reaction toward the stimulus and organism. (Chan et al. 2017, 207.)

Floh and Madlberger's (2013, 435) study is one of those that focus on the effect of atmospheric cues in online impulse buying behavior by applying S-O-R model. In the model, they use online store design and navigation as stimuli; enjoyment, impulsiveness and browsing as mediating organisms; and impulse-buying behavior and expenditure as responses. Floh and Madlberger (2013, 434) argue that the role of enjoyment is crucial in online impulse purchase, although its impact is only indirect.

Consumers who make purchases impulsively get satisfaction from the act of buying itself as well as from being in possession of the product, which implies that online stores should present relevant marketing stimuli, such as online price promotions and offers that are available for a limited time only, to target these consumers (Floh & Madlberger 2013, 434). In addition, another way to increase the likelihood of impulse purchases is providing information that draws consumers' attention and makes them curious, such as excellent product images, concise descriptions and other consumers' evaluations (Floh & Madlberger 2013, 434).

Furthermore, Liu, Li and Hu (2013, 834) found in a study of online group shopping that when a consumer thinks that a website is easy to use and has a wide variety of attractive offerings, the consumer views the website as visually appealing, which in turn leads to more pleasure in acquiring products or services from that website, more positive assessment concerning unplanned buying, and are thus likely to feel more intensely urged to purchase impulsively. Additionally, those consumers that are impulsive are more prone to assessing unplanned purchasing in a positive way, which consecutively urges them to engage in online impulse buying. (Liu et al. 2014, 834.)

Verhagen and van Dolen studied the effect that online store beliefs have on online impulse buying, and state that emotions are pivotal when it comes to impulse purchases in an online context, as they appear to work as a mediator between online store beliefs and impulse buying in an online context. Of the studied beliefs, it was found that enjoyment, merchandise attractiveness, and online store communication were significantly related to online impulse buying, whereas ease of use of the website was not. Because of these results, merchandise attractiveness was described as a performance factor, as it loaded on both positive and negative affect, enjoyment and communication

seemed to be excitement factors as they influenced only the positive affect, whereas ease of use was classified as basic factor and not taking part in forming emotions. (Verhagen & van Dolen 2011, 325.)

2.2.2 Herd behavior in online shopping

This subchapter discusses another phenomenon that is closely linked to online consumer behavior: herding. According to Raafat, Chater and Frith (2009, 420), herd behavior can be broadly defined as “a form of convergent social behavior that can be broadly defined as the alignment of the thoughts or behaviors of individuals in a group (herd) through local interaction and without centralized coordination”.

Based on multiple prior studies on herding, Raafat et al. (2009, 420) present a framework to describe the different approaches to the phenomenon, in order to understand why group members' behavior or thoughts become aligned through local interactions. Prior research on herding can be divided into two main types: pattern-based explanations and transmission-based explanations of herd behavior, which can also be viewed as a global vs. local distinction. However, Raafat et al. (2009, 420) argue that is crucial to determine both the mechanism of transmission of a certain thought from one person to another and the patterns of interaction between individuals, in order to understand herd behavior and to be able to move between these two levels of the framework.

According to Raafat et al. (2009, 422), in pattern-based explanations, herd behavior is seen in reference to interaction patterns, and individuals are viewed as “units with certain simple, well-defined properties and modes of interaction” that cause herding. Pattern-based approaches usually count on “physical laws, distances and velocities rather than the emotional states of the herd” (Raafat et al. 2009, 422). One example of pattern-based model is social network analysis, in which nodes (i.e. people) are connected to each other by ties (Raafat et al. 2009, 422).

On the other hand, transmission-based explanations aim at defining information transfer mechanisms that lead to herding by focusing on the role of cognitive and affective factors, especially the concept of mentalizing (Raafat et al. 2009, 423). Mentalizing refers to the human competence to read the mental states of other people, often done automatically and without thinking, which makes it possible to predict and explain their actions (Frith & Frith 2006, 531). Herding is a social tendency, and people frequently converge by imitating the opinions or behavior of the bigger group where they belong to (Raafat et al. 2009, 423).

Transmission-based approaches to herding can be further divided into mentalizing and non-mentalizing approaches. Emotional contagion is the most researched example of non-mentalizing models. (Raafat et al. 2009, 424.) It includes an involuntary transmission

of emotion without being aware of where the feeling originally came from (Wispé 1991, 76), such as automatically becoming excited in a crowd or audience where others are excited as well (Raafat et al. 2009, 424). Furthermore, it may be expanded to the wider concept of social contagion, which can be defined as people's tendency to mimic each other's expressions, movements and so on, which leads to behavioral convergence (Hatfield 1991, according to Raafat et al. 2009, 424).

One example of a situation in which online herd behavior occurs is during an online discount campaign, in other words online shopping carnival (OSC) such as Black Friday or Alibaba's Singles' Day, during which it is possible to witness "the power of online herd behavior exhibited by a frenzy of consumers purchasing, sharing and interacting with each other" (Xu et al. 2017, 245). The endless amount of information in online shopping environments may result in information overload during the discount campaign. As there is a large amount of the online stores, all having their own offers, consumers face information asymmetry, which might make them uncertain about whether they should take part in the OSC or not. (Xu et al. 2017, 247.) Moreover, information acquired from other people can be split into informational influence and normative (or social) influence (Deutsch & Gerard 1955, 629).

Informational incentive refers to "the extent to which an individual accepts information from incentivized promotional messages and consumer reviews", and it can thus be divided into promotional information and review information (Xu et al. 2017, 247). Social influence, on the other hand, is defined as "the extent to which people perceive that others in reference groups have participated in OSC activities" and is divided into endorsement influence and peer imitation (Xu et al. 2017, 248).

Xu et al. (2017) created a model to illustrate the relationship between informational incentives and social influence and consumer behavior during the OSC; in other words, how the two types of information result in consumers imitating each other and conducting herd behavior during an online shopping carnival (Xu et al. 2017, 247). According to Xu et al. (2017, 252), OSC consumer behavior is defined by the combination of three prominent features of the carnival theory: participation, interaction and pleasure, in addition to the importance of informational incentives from reliable sources and social influence, especially the behavior of others in the consumer's reference group, as the essential preconditions for consumer behavior during the OSC.

Furthermore, Langley, Hovee, Ortt, Pals and van der Vecht (2014, 16) studied herd behavior in an online context, and by using a pattern-based framework that has three dimensions (the speed of contagion, the number of individuals and the uniformity of direction), defined eight different herd behavior patterns, ranging from small, obscure batches to large-scale, unified crowds. These patterns include: Slow meandering, Fast meandering, Slow converging, Fast converging, Cold Brownian, Hot Brownian, Marching, and Stamping (Langley et al. 2014, 20).

Langley et al. (2014, 18) argue that herding in an online context differs from traditional herding because of the distinctive attributes of the online setting, which include social bandwidth, interactivity and surveillance. All the eight herding patterns were identified in online data collected from Twitter; Slow meandering (gradual increase of a certain topic with diversified opinions discussed by few people) being the most common pattern. On the other hand, some of the patterns occur only rarely, particularly those in which converging behavior escalates fast through population (e.g. Stampeding, which means that a dominant opinion communicated by multiple people spreads rapidly). However, these exceptional events are the most important to be identified from the viewpoint of managers, as they are most likely the ones that the company needs to react to. (Langley et al. 2014, 21-23.)

Moreover, Chen (2008, 1977) argues that online herd behavior takes place when consumers utilize evaluations written by other consumers to prove product quality online. Examining different studies that focus on buying books online, Chen (2008, 1989) found that star ratings and sales volume have an influence on consumers' product choices. In addition, other consumers' opinions have a greater influence than an expert's opinion, and a recommender system affects the product choice more than the website owner's recommendations. Consumers are using online herd cues to get information about products, as well as calling for recommendations on what others think is the best option they should choose. (Chen 2008, 1989.) These product evaluations and recommendations that can be found on e-commerce websites are one example of electronic word of mouth, which is discussed in more detail in the following subchapter.

2.2.3 *Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)*

According to a classic definition, word of mouth can be defined as "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service" (Arndt, 1967, 3).

Reviews of products and services that consumers publish online are one form of electronic word of mouth, which is also called eWOM (Zhang, Craciun and Shin 2010, 1336). Product reviews can be found on both third-party websites and retail websites (Shen, Li and De Moss 2012, 19). Another type of eWOM are blogs and video blogs (also called vlogs). Word of mouth is important, because studies have shown that it is more powerful than paid messages (Nyilasy 2006, 169, 178).

Whereas traditional word of mouth is usually limited to the consumers' local social network, the effects of electronic word of mouth can reach a lot further geographically, as consumers from all around the globe can access other consumers' reviews online and participate in it. Another important difference between traditional and electronic word of

mouth is that the sellers can initiate consumers to write reviews on their websites, but they cannot affect traditional word of mouth in the same way. (Chen & Xie 2008, 479.)

There are two sides in word of mouth: input (which is the receiver) and output (the communicator), and usually studies deal with either one of them. This is even though they are not independent from each other, as they form the same verbal exchange (Nyilasy 2006, 167). Nyilasy (2006, 167) also points out that both receiver and communicator can be the one who starts the communication, so it does not necessarily have to start with a receiver asking for information.

According to Buttle (1998, 245), word of mouth can happen either before or after the purchase. Input word of mouth refers to a consumer who uses word of mouth as an information source before making a buying decision. Output word of mouth, on the other hand, occurs after the purchase has been done. In the two-step flow theory, the information flows first to the “opinion leaders”, who are influential individuals in their networks, and who, through word of mouth, distribute that information to their peers (Buttle 1998, 248).

Use and effects of eWOM

According to traditional word of mouth research, consumers search for input word of mouth especially when the buying decision they are making contains risks (Nyilasy 2006, 178). Consumers search for information online for multiple reasons. According to Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003, 51), main reasons for reading product reviews include saving time in decision-making and making better purchase decisions. Especially those who do not have a lot of experience about the product tend to use online reviews a significant source of information (Chen & Xie 2008, 488). On the other hand, Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006, 1), identified the following eight reasons because of which consumers look for others’ opinions online:

- to reduce their risk
- because others do it
- to secure lower prices
- to get information easily
- by accident (unplanned)
- because it is cool
- because they are stimulated by off-line inputs such as TV
- to get pre-purchase information (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006, 1).

According to Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006, 1), other consumers’ product evaluations are more important than advertising. They point out that as people and their reasons to use electronic word of mouth are different, if the managers want to influence their customers’ online behavior, for example making more of them to engage in writing

electronic word of mouth, they should find out what are their customers' motivations (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006, 12).

According to Bosman, Boshoff and van Rooyen (2013, 39-41), the electronic word of mouth factors that affect review credibility are platform, text length, stars and time, meaning means that these factors are more relevant for the 'found helpful' degree. On the other hand, Racherla and Friske (2012, 555-556), who studied the perceived usefulness of consumer reviews, noticed that socio-demographic information, for example name and picture, did not have a significant effect, whereas expertise and reputation of the reviewer had a high impact on the usefulness perceptions. In addition, both Zhang et al. (2010) and Bosman et al. (2013) highlight the importance of showing also negative star ratings on the website, as they increase the credibility of the source.

Online consumer reviews can include both written and quantitative reviews. When it comes to quantitative reviews, Shen et al. (2012, 19) found that extreme reviews (1 or 5 stars) have a bigger impact on perceived quality than median evaluations, and that negative ratings' impact was bigger than positive reviews' impact (1 vs. 5 and 2 vs 4 stars). Hung and Li (2007, 493) found that electronic word of mouth has different effects on informed and uninformed consumers. They argue that it can cause "variety-seeking and excessive buying" to an uninformed consumer, whereas to an informed consumer electronic word of mouth "facilitates selective buying tailored to the consumer's specific needs" (Hung & Li 2007, 493).

In addition, the effects of eWOM can differ depending on the gender of the consumer. Fan and Miao (2012, 178) found that "gender differences affect perceived eWOM credibility, use and acceptance of eWOM, and purchasing decisions", and that the manners in which men and women develop trust from online reviews are different. Women tend to be more emotional in the buying process than men and use the Internet for social support. In addition, women are more likely to use credible eWOM as help when making buying decisions than men, and expertise and rapport affect significantly the electronic word of mouth credibility for women. eWOM acceptance affects buying intention significantly for both men and women, but the effect is smaller for women, and this might be because women may perceive more risk in online shopping, which might make them more cautious to make purchasing decisions than men. (Fan & Miao 2012, 178.)

2.3 Ethical and unethical consumption

2.3.1 *Consumer ethics*

Devinney, Auger and Eckhardt (2010, 4-9) argue that the notion of “ethical consumer” is a myth and instead of ethical consumerism, we should focus on social consumerism and the concept of consumer social responsibility. Consumer social responsibility can be broadly defined as “the conscious and deliberate choice to make certain consumption choices based on personal and moral beliefs” (Devinney et al. 2010, 9). There are two main components in this concept: social and consumerism. Social refers to the latent effect of non-traditional and social components of the firm and their products, whereas consumerism entails that consumers’ preferences are somewhat subject to the growing impact of social factors. (Devinney et al. 2010, 9.)

According to Devinney et al. (2010, 10), consumer social responsibility appears in three ways. The first one is expressed activity towards certain causes, for instance donations or participating in protests or boycotts. The second, and most common, approach is defined as opinions expressed in surveys and in other market research (“stated social preferences”), and based on surveys, consumers are increasingly interested in ethical issues concerning products and companies. The third way in which consumer social responsibility shows up is expressed activity as regards to buying behavior. In reality, the levels of ethical products sold are considerably lower than what the interest that consumers show towards them in surveys would imply. (Devinney et al. 2010, 10.)

There are many factors that may influence consumers’ ethical judgments. According to Vitell and Muncy (1992, 596), these factors include questions such as is the seller or buyer at fault, is there direct damage to the vendor, is the action seen as unlawful, does the consumer have a negative attitude toward business, and does he or she think that unethical equals illegal. Consumers tend to consider passive unethical behavior as more acceptable than active unethical behavior, in other words that it is more tolerable when the seller is being harmed when it happens as a result of the seller’s own mistake or fault. In the same way, direct harm to the seller is seen as less acceptable as indirect harm. (Vitell & Muncy 1992, 596.)

Studies have shown that consumers’ values and attitudes towards ethical consumption do not necessarily translate into actual behavior, which is referred to as the attitude-behavior gap (Gregory-Smith, Smith and Winklhofer 2013, 1205). Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2014, 2759) discovered four interrelated factors that have an effect on the intention-behavior gap. These include “prioritization of ethical concerns into primary or secondary, formation of plans or habits, willingness to commit and sacrifice, and shopping behavior modes” (Carrington et al. 2014, 2765).

On the other hand, Chatzidakis, Hibbert and Smith (2006, 695) argue that a cognitive process called neutralization can aid consumers to overcome the attitude-behavior gap, as it facilitates coping with the guilt or dissonance caused by actual behavior not being in line with the consumer's ethical beliefs or attitudes. Neutralization is defined as "justifications that soften or eliminate the impact that norm-violating behavior might have upon self-concept and social relationships" (Chatzidakis et al. 2007, 693). To reduce the dissonance, consumers use different neutralization techniques, which include denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemning the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties (Sykes and Matza 1957, according to Chatzidakis et al. 2007, 694).

Gregory-Smith et al. (2013, 1212) studied the role of emotions on consumer choice in the case of ethical consumption and based on research data, developed taxonomy of guilt, where the intensity of guilt varies depending on context and agent of evaluation. According to their findings, the most intense guilt is "often induced by the self and driven by specific concerns for the welfare of humans or animals", and that "self-evaluation (i.e. based on one's standards and norms) determines a stronger and longer-lasting level of guilt than evaluations of others" (Gregory-Smith et al. 2013, 1212).

In addition, Gregory-Smith et al. (2013, 1213-1214) identify specific strategies that consumers use to manage the emotions of guilt and regret.

Techniques for managing regret include for example:

- Ignorance
- Justifications
- Promises for improved future behavior.

Techniques for managing guilt can be classified as:

- Outcome/expediency oriented actions (in the case of purchases with notable gains, underlining the need to collect "some sort of returns, whether financial, emotional, or social")
- Introspection (used by consumers who are "inclined towards reflecting on their emotional state in order to achieve emotional balance")
- Diminishing net impacts (by focusing more on the least harmful aspects of the choice)
- Use of positive emotions (hedonic feelings, or positive emotions in general concerning the imagined positive outcomes to ignore guilt). (Gregory-Smith et al. 2013, 1213-1214.)

According to Gregory-Smith et al. (2013, 1213), guilt and regret are "the most salient negative emotions that accompany dissonant behavior". As it is possible that some consumers experience regret and guilt when making online purchases from China, it can be argued that they might also employ the above-mentioned strategies to manage these emotions.

2.3.2 *Ethics in online shopping*

According to Román (2007, 131), consumers' concerns about the ethical questions related to online shopping started to increase at the same time when e-commerce became more common. Román developed a scale to measure consumers' perceptions concerning online retailers' ethics (CPEOR), which is defined as "consumers' perceptions about the integrity and responsibility of the company (behind the website) in its attempt to deal with consumers in a secure, confidential, fair and honest manner that ultimately protects consumers' interests" (Román 2007, 134).

CPEOR consists of four dimensions: security, privacy, non-deception and fulfillment/reliability (Román 2007, 142). In this classification, Román highlights the difference between privacy and security dimensions: security focuses on the safety of the website's payment methods, whereas privacy concerns the consumers' personal information.

Lu, Chang and Yu (2013) used the CPEOR scale combined with individualism and collectivism typology, where individualism and collectivism were divided into horizontal and vertical types, to study Taiwanese consumers' perceptions of e-retailers ethics. According to their study, consumers' cultural value has partial effect on their attitudes concerning e-retailers. In addition, they state that CPEOR is an important element in e-loyalty intention, meaning that when it increases, also repurchase behaviors should increase (Lu et al. 2013, 59).

Concerning vertical individualism, Lu et al. (2013, 59) found that it affects solely the non-deception dimension of CPEOR. When it comes to consumers with horizontal individualism, they are likely to "retain satisfying perceptions of seller security, privacy, and fulfillment" when the e-retailers keep their promises. In the case of horizontal and vertical collectivists, these consumers view "e-retailers as part of their familiar in-groups and place the benefits of the in-groups ahead of their own goals, thus displaying higher CPEOR for tolerance of retailers' mistakes".

As it can be seen, studies on ethical issues related to electronic commerce often focus on security and privacy features of the e-commerce website itself, but there are also some issues that are more related to the products sold in the online shops. Some of these, namely counterfeit products, product safety and environmental impacts, are discussed in the following subchapters.

2.3.3 *Counterfeit products*

Chinese e-commerce companies, for example Alibaba, have been blamed for having counterfeit products listed on their e-commerce platforms. According to Erisman (2015,

117, 141), Alibaba has a similar policy as eBay, meaning that if they are notified by a brand owner about counterfeit products on their website, these listings are investigated and taken down. The company is thus satisfying the legal standards, but on the other hand, Erisman (2015, 117) points that “operating in China meant there were simply more counterfeiters to contend with and so it was all too easy to find fake products listed by small merchants”. Even though counterfeiting is a worldwide issue, it prospers especially in developing countries due to corruption and weaker legal infrastructures (Green and Smith 2002, 89).

According to the Finnish media, whether or not it is worthwhile to order counterfeit branded products is a never-ending discussion in social media groups, where consumers discuss their experiences in making purchases from Chinese online shops. However, according to the law, it is illegal to buy counterfeit products. (Helsingin Sanomat 5.9.2017.)

According to Davidson, Nepomuceno and Laroche (2017, 13), purchasing counterfeit goods presents an ethical dilemma, since it profits the buyer as well as the illegal seller whereas the legal owner of the brand suffers and less taxes are paid all through the supply chain. For the brand owner, the monetary losses in terms of lost sales are not the only negative impact of counterfeiting, since counterfeiting may also lead to erosion of the value of and confidence to the brand, reducing the status value that consumers associate to owning the branded products (Green and Smith 2002, 90).

Counterfeiting can be divided into deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeiting: in deceptive counterfeiting, people are deceived into believing that they are about to purchase a genuine product. On the other hand, non-deceptive counterfeiting is in question when the circumstances such as price, quality and location clearly indicate that the product is a fake and consequently the consumer is knowingly acquiring a counterfeit (Viot, Le Roux and Krémer 2014, 4). For instance, if a branded product is sold online at a fraction of its real price, it should be clear to the consumer that the product cannot be authentic.

Davidson et al. (2017, 13) studied the relationship between intention to buy counterfeit products and materialism, which is a significant driver of consumption. Because of mediating effect of risk of embarrassment, materialism negatively predicts the intention to purchase counterfeit products. However, this applies only when the counterfeit product can be easily recognized as fake. If the product is perceived as being similar with the authentic brand product, materialism leads to positive buying intentions instead. In addition, when the product is not visible to others, materialism does not have an effect on buying intentions. (Davidson et al. 2017, 12.)

Viot et al. (2014, 22) identified the various determinants of attitude towards buying counterfeits. Their results indicate that societal economic factors do not have an effect on attitude, while individual factors, especially motivations but also deterrents, affect the

consumer's attitude towards purchasing counterfeits. Individual motivations influence attitude towards buying counterfeit products positively, whereas individual deterrents affect it negatively. However, both of these factors affect the buying intention only indirectly, as attitude towards buying counterfeits functions as a mediating variable. (Viot et al. 2014, 22.)

2.3.4 Product safety

Another issue in online shopping from abroad concerns the safety of the actual product itself. According to the Finnish Safety and Chemicals Agency (Tukes), the products purchased on foreign online shops do not necessarily fulfil all the safety requirements of local (in this case Finnish or EU) authorities. In addition, when a consumer orders a product from outside the EU, he or she becomes comparable with the importer, and if the product causes damage or the consumer sells it forward, he or she is responsible for the product similarly as the importer would be responsible. Especially in the case of cosmetics, the consumer should keep in mind that the product does not necessarily fulfil legal requirements and could for instance contain ingredients that cause allergy, and that the list of ingredients is not always visible in the online shop. (Tukes) Especially counterfeits of expensive luxury makeup products include a serious health risk, as they might contain dangerous chemicals that may even cause long-term health hazards, in addition to their production being linked to organized crime (Me Naiset 19.5.2015).

According to Ching Biu Tse (1999, 911), even though perceived product safety can be viewed as an underlying dimension of perceived product quality, there are so many components in quality that it is important to distinguish product safety from product quality in general. In other words, a product can satisfy the consumer's needs and yet it can be of a low standard in terms of safety. (Ching Biu Tse 1999, 911.) There are multiple product-related aspects that have an effect on consumers' impressions on product safety, including price, branding, store name, country of origin, promotion channels, source credibility, nature of product testing authority, and guarantee. The study focused on computer monitors' perceived product safety and interestingly, it was found that Chinese being in charge of either manufacturing or assembly of the product lowers the consumers' product safety perceptions strikingly, and products that are both manufactured and assembled in China scored the lowest of all. Furthermore, the lowering effect of country of origin is stronger in the case of products manufactured in China than those solely assembled there. (Ching Biu Tse 1999, 918-920.)

According to Clemons et al. (2016, 1123) China is the biggest e-commerce marketplace in the world, and in addition, faces the most rapid growth as well. Chinese e-commerce differs from e-commerce in other regions as a result of the issues the Chinese

consumers face daily in their shopping: for example, the quality of products might not be satisfactory and the amount of counterfeit products seems endless (Clemons et al. 2016, 1123). China is considered to have the highest frequency of product fraud and tampering of any main economy, and there have been multiple, more widespread product quality scares than elsewhere, such as selling dangerous or defective products, that have increased concerns among Chinese consumers and led to lower levels of trust. (Clemons et al. 2016, 1120, 1123.)

However, online shopping is well-established among the Chinese, and the best online merchants in China are seen similarly as the best online merchants in other regions. This indicates the importance of establishing a reputation of good quality in an early phase when doing e-commerce in the Chinese markets. In addition, plausible third-party assurances are highly valued in China. (Clemons et al. 2016, 1144.) AliExpress, among others, offers this type of buyer protection guarantee to its customers, for example promising a refund if the ordered item is not received or if it is not as described by the seller (Buyer Protection Guarantees. AliExpress Help Center).

2.3.5 *Environmental impacts*

In addition, there are some environmental implications that are linked to the fast-growing e-commerce industry, that result from manufacturing, packaging, transporting and possibly returning the ordered goods. Even though the environmental impacts are present in domestic e-commerce as well, they become emphasized in cross-border e-commerce, especially when the buyer and seller are located far away from each other, such as in the case of Finnish consumers and Chinese online shops. According to Fan, Xu, Dong and Wei (2017, 174), as China's e-commerce industry has faced rapid growth, also the need for packaging materials in its express delivery industry has increased simultaneously, which has environmental impacts. As the distances in express delivery and demand for materials needed for packaging the orders increase, this will have an effect on China's environmental emissions indirectly (Fan et al. 2017, 175).

In addition, the Chinese recycling rate is low, which increases the production of materials even more. Environmental pollution will thus worsen greatly as a result of the disparate standards within the industry producing the packages and the varying quality levels. Also traffic safety in China is threatened as delivery times and distances expand. To decrease the environmental damage, improvements are needed in using packaging materials more efficiently, such as developing a standard production model, promoting new technologies and using greener materials. (Fan et al. 2017, 175-176.)

On the other hand, there are also studies which argue that e-commerce has also positive environmental impacts. For instance, Smidfelt Rosqvist and Winslott Hiselius (2016,

168) argue that on national level, increased online shopping has sustainability potential in the form of more sustainable travel habits of those consumers who make online purchases regularly. According to them, increased online shopping on national level has potential to partially reduce the requirement to own a car to transport the purchased goods home (Smidfelt Rosqvist & Winslott Hiselius 2016, 168).

When it comes to cross-border e-commerce, such as ordering products directly from China, it can be argued that another transport-related environmental issue is product returns. For example, if a consumer has ordered clothes that turn out to be of wrong size, what does he or she do with them? Returning the product to China might cost the consumer more than the original price of the product, in addition to the environmental impact of shipping the item back to the other side of the world, but also the disposal of the unsuitable product has an effect on the environment, especially if not recycled.

Because of their characteristics, clothes are a product group in which returns are more common compared to other types of products, as some consumers may order many sizes and colors at the same time and then return those ones that are not suitable, causing high return rates that lead to transport-related CO₂ emissions (Wiese, Toporowski & Zielke 2012, 476). However, it is possible that this pattern of ordering multiple items and returning those that do not fit might not be as common in the case where the online store is situated in the other side of the world because returning the items can be perceived as difficult and costly. Even 64 % of Finns have not considered the environmental impacts caused by the large amount of returned packages in e-commerce, and some consumers even believe that returning unneeded items is beneficial for the environment, whereas in reality particularly cheaper clothes that are returned might end up being burned (Helsingin Sanomat 27.12.2017).

2.4 Synthesis of the theory section

The theory section began with an introduction to electronic commerce, firstly presenting some motives because of which consumers decide to buy a product online rather than in a traditional shop. Common motives for online shopping include for example wider product variety, saving time and money, and convenience. Online stores are open around the clock, thus the consumer is able to make purchases whenever and wherever and get them delivered. Moreover, the motives for online shopping depend on whether the consumer is utilitarian or hedonic. In addition, it can be argued that the consumer's attitude is connected to the motives, as consumers who are motivated to make online purchases regularly tend to have a rather positive attitude towards online shopping.

When a consumer has decided to purchase a product online, the choice is made between the online shops that offer the product. The development of e-commerce has

facilitated making purchases from abroad, which means that the consumer is able to choose whether to order the product from a domestic or a foreign online shop. Basically, the choice concerns which attributes are the most highly valued for the consumer, for instance whether price or delivery speed is more important. Chinese online shops are often able to offer considerably lower prices compared to their Finnish competitors, which means that a consumer who highly values saving money might opt for a Chinese online shop, whereas a consumer to whom it is more important to get the item as soon as possible might be more likely to use a domestic online shop which is able to offer faster delivery for the product.

As this study focuses specifically on online shopping from China, the development of e-commerce in China was also presented briefly. Even though the introduction of e-commerce was quite slow in China, its importance in the global e-commerce market at present is unquestionable. On the other hand, mobile shopping was discussed because its importance has grown significantly in recent years and also the Chinese online stores that are in the core of this study have introduced their own mobile shopping applications. Mobile shopping includes other activities than the mere act of purchasing, such as browsing, reading product reviews and looking for inspiration. For some consumers, the use of mobile shopping applications is above all a way to spend time, and as a result of the browsing they might end up buying something – often impulsively.

Consumer's buying decision process was discussed as well, even though consumers do not necessarily go through each stage of the process each time when they make a purchase, particularly in the case of regular everyday products or impulse purchases. In an online context, impulse buying is common especially to hedonic consumers, who shop for pleasure, in addition to common features of the Chinese online stores (low price and discounts) being likely to encourage consumers to make impulse purchases. Some relevant cultural differences in for example post-purchase behavior were discussed as well. For example, it is not common for Chinese consumers to complain to the seller, whereas Finnish consumers are used to complaining and returning the product if they are not happy with their purchase, which might cause some cross-cultural issues between the buyer and the seller.

Both herd behavior and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) are relevant concepts to the study because the research data is collected in a certain social media group targeted at consumers that are interested in online shopping from China. The context of the study as well as the data collection and analysis process is described thoroughly in the following chapter. The discussions in the social media group are a form of eWOM, and the group itself can be viewed as being a herd. In the herd, alignment of thoughts and behavior may occur as a result of the use of eWOM, for example when a large amount of group members simultaneously decides to purchase a certain product in consequence of a peer

recommendation from the group, or in a situation where group members moderate opinions that differ from the public opinion of the group.

On the other hand, the last chapter of the theory section discussed the ethical issues related to online shopping from China, as one of the sub-questions of the study addresses the consumers’ perception of these issues. All the ethical issues that were included in the theory section are relevant to the topic: for instance, counterfeit products and product defects are relatively common in the Chinese market, and with the increasing order amounts and long delivery distances, environmental impacts are inevitable. In addition, previous studies have shown that the consumer’s ethical attitudes and values do not automatically translate into actual behavior, which is referred to as the attitude-behavior gap. In the case of Chinese online shops, the attitude-behavior gap could occur for example in a situation where a consumer thinks that purchasing domestic goods would be a more ethical choice, but nonetheless decides to order similar products from China in order to save money.

To conclude, the theoretical background of the study is illustrated in the following figure.

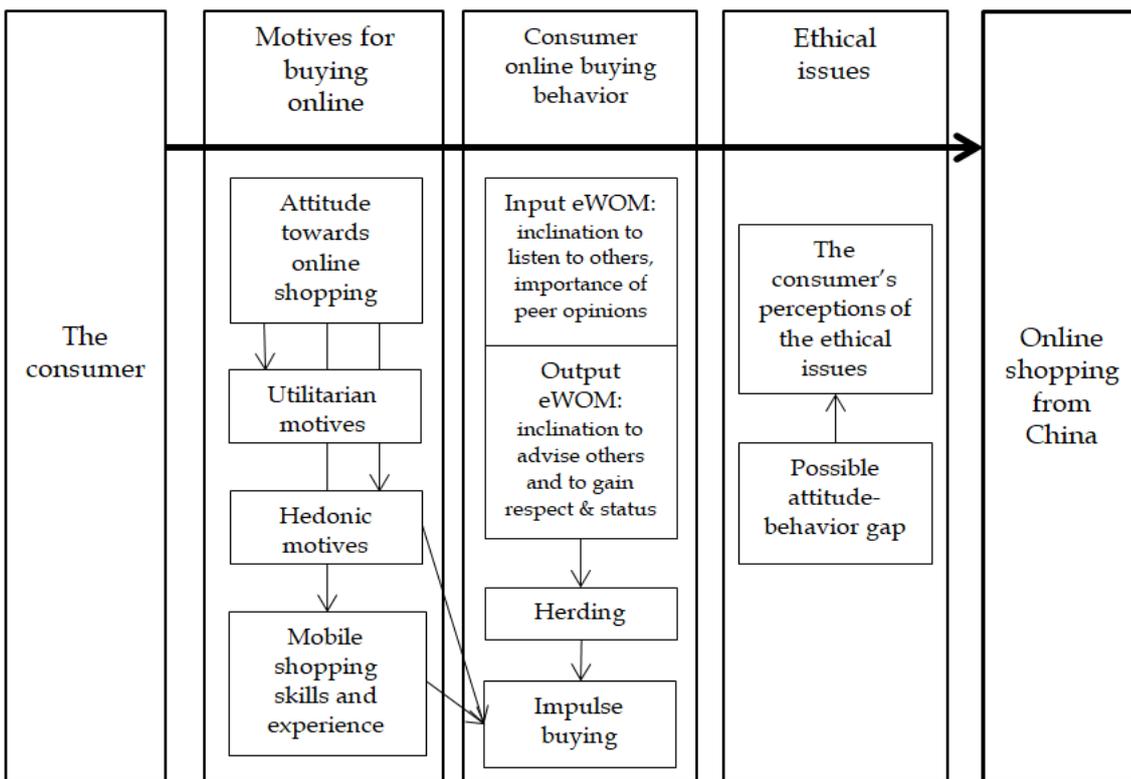


Figure 3 Theoretical background of the study

The figure aims to demonstrate how the concepts discussed in the theoretical background are connected to each other, as well as how these concepts influence a consumer’s attitude towards the phenomenon (online shopping from China). The model

begins with the consumer, and ends to online shopping from China, and the concepts that influence the consumer's attitude are placed in between, which is illustrated with the bold arrow. The model is divided into three main parts: motives for online shopping, consumer online buying behavior, and ethical issues. In the model, the concept of attitude is included in the first part (motives) as it can be argued that attitude and motives are closely connected to each other. For example, if the consumer has a negative attitude towards Chinese online shops or online shopping in general, it is likely that the consumer is not very motivated to make purchases or even browse in these online shops in the first place. In addition, attitude is included in the third part (ethical issues) in the form of the possible attitude-behavior gap; as it is known that the consumers' ethical opinions do not always translate into behavior. Each concept is placed below the theme that it is mostly linked to. Moreover, the connections between the concepts are illustrated with smaller arrows.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study employs a qualitative research method, namely content analysis, which is presented in subchapter 3.3. A qualitative research method is chosen for this study, because qualitative research is suitable when the research question focuses on understanding a new phenomenon or discovering the experiences or behavior (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2010, 105), which applies to this study. Qualitative research is described as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell 2009, 4). Qualitative research often includes arising questions and procedures, the research data used is often compiled at the participant’s environment, the data is analyzed inductively starting from details and building up to more general points, and the researcher interprets the meaning of the research material (Creswell 2009, 4).

3.1 Context of the study

The context of this study is ordering from Chinese online shops. Focusing on one single Chinese online shop and excluding the others from the study would not be feasible, as the data used in the study consists of social media discussions in which the participants do not necessarily disclose which specific online shop they order from.

Nevertheless, this subchapter concentrates on providing an overview of Alibaba, as the company was the first big player in Chinese e-commerce and its founding can be viewed as the birth of e-commerce in the country (Erisman 2015, 5). Founded in 2000, Alibaba focused first on the business-to-business markets, with the idea of building an online platform where buyers and sellers could connect. When the company started its operations, less than 1 % of the Chinese population used the Internet, and even fewer could even think about buying something online. 15 years later, Alibaba had 300 million customers, approximately 80 % of Chinese e-commerce transactions were completed on the platform, and more than half of the parcels transported in China are from deals that were made on Alibaba’s websites. (Erisman 2015, 3.)

Nowadays, Alibaba Group is an e-commerce conglomerate connecting buyers and sellers allowing them to purchase a variety of products and services (Erisman 2015, 189-190). Erisman (2015, 190) describes today’s Alibaba as an ecosystem, which consists mainly of three elements: wholesale marketplaces, retail marketplaces, and support systems that are generated by participants in the ecosystem. More and more, Alibaba’s marketplaces and support services provide the base for China’s modern economy. (Erisman 2015, 190.)

Of Alibaba's businesses, average Finnish consumers who engage in online shopping are likely to be most familiar with Alibaba's global retail marketplace called AliExpress. Founded in 2010, AliExpress was "Alibaba's first attempt to connect Chinese sellers directly with consumers in international markets", featuring a wide range of products from Chinese manufacturers and distributors available to consumers at wholesale prices (Erisman 2015, 197). On the other hand, Alibaba.com (or Alibaba International) is the largest global wholesale marketplace connecting importers and exporters in different countries. Even though the main customers of this platform are not end consumers, Erisman (2015, 192) argues that "nearly everyone in the world has likely used a product sourced on Alibaba.com", and also the sellers on this platform come from all around the world, not only from China.

Moreover, an example that illustrates well the volume of the Chinese e-commerce industry is Alibaba's Singles' Day (also known as Double 11 Day) which is a "shopping holiday" (Erisman 2015, 3) or "online shopping carnival" (Xu et al. 2017, 245) that Alibaba started in 2009 and that has faced constant growth in sales volumes since its debut. Nowadays, it is the world's biggest and most successful online promotion campaign, held each year on November 11th (Xu et al 2017, 245). During the event in 2014, more than \$9.3 billion worth of transactions were made on Alibaba's consumer websites during that one day, which is more than all the US Black Friday and Cyber Monday online sales counted together (Erisman 2015, 3). In 2016, a new record was made: 1.4 billion transactions during Single's Day and record volume of transactions worth 120.07 billion RMB (Xu et al. 2017, 245). The following year, Alibaba was once again able to exceed the previous records with sales worth 168 billion RMB (21.7 billion euros) (Kauppalehti 12.11.2017).

3.2 Data collection

The data used in this study consists of Finnish consumers' online discussions on ordering products directly from China on social media platforms, namely Facebook. These discussions are collected from a Facebook group where consumers interested in ordering from Chinese and other overseas online shops gather together to share their experiences and advice about the topic. The group currently has more than 115 000 members (January 2018), and it was chosen for the study because it is known as the largest and most active Finnish social media group that concentrates on foreign online shops. The participants were not aware that a research was following the discussion, which means that all the discussions used as data in this study are authentic because the presence of the researcher did not have an effect on the participants' behavior. However, on account of research ethics, all the discussions were anonymized prior to the analysis, in order that it was not

possible to identify individual participants from the data. Moreover, it must be noted that the focus of the study was not on the participants themselves, but on the content of the discussion regarding the research topic.

The analyzed discussions were chosen in two different phases: the first took place from late October until mid-November 2017, which is a peak time in e-commerce as many consumers are ordering Christmas presents and there are well-known discount campaigns, and the second batch of discussions occurred in January 2018, which was chosen as it represents a more ordinary month for the sake of comparison. The Facebook group is very active and new discussions are started continuously, but some of them only get a few responses. Because of this reason, the researcher looked for discussions from the group using keywords such as “counterfeit”, “fake”, “cosmetics” and “return” to find discussions that are relevant to the topic of this study. In addition to the themes that they handled, the discussions studied were mainly chosen based on their length, and all the material was anonymized: the screenshots of the discussions were printed out and each participant numbered.

The data used in the study consists of 15 threads from the before-mentioned Facebook group. In total, there were 596 people who took part in these discussions. Some of them participated only by writing one comment to one of the threads, but on the other hand, there were also multiple people who were active in more than one of the threads and posted more than 10 comments. The most active participants commented more than 20 times during the discussions included in the data. The chosen discussions vary in length, but in total, when screenshots of all the discussions were printed out (two screenshots per page) to conduct the analysis, there was 132 sheets worth of data.

3.3 Research method and data analysis process

The method used in this study is content analysis of online discussions on social media, namely Facebook. Content analysis can be defined as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”, and a technique which offers new insights and deepens the understanding of a certain phenomenon (Krippendorff 2004, 18). There are three kinds of definitions of the method: those that view content as “inherent in a text”, those that see it as “property of the source of a text, and those that take it to “emerge in the process of a researcher analyzing a text relative to a particular context” (Krippendorff 2004, 19). Furthermore, it can be stated that content analysis is a research method that studies “artifacts of social communication” (Berg 2004, 267) and aims at examining communicative material systematically (Mayring 2004, 266).

In qualitative content analysis, generally four types of procedure can be discerned. These include summarizing content analysis, inductive category formation, explicating content analysis, and structuring content analysis. The first procedure, summarizing content analysis aims to reduce the material so that the most important contents are conserved, but in a shorter, more manageable form. It is suitable in a study where the interest is only on the content level of the material. (Mayring 2004, 268-269.)

Inductive category formation, on the other hand, uses the procedures of summarizing content analysis to develop categories from a material. In the beginning, general definitions of categories, selection criteria and the level of abstraction are formed, followed by gradual category formation from the material and possibly forming new categories, revising categories after processing approximately 10-50 % of the material, final processing and analysis of the material. For example, the inductively found categories can be summarized into a few umbrella categories and then continue with further studying their influence on something. (Mayring 2004, 268.)

Explicating content analysis can be defined as the opposite of summarizing content analysis, as it aims to systematically collect additional material. This additional, explanatory material goes beyond the text itself as it offers information on the context, such as information about the people communicating and the subject itself, as well as socio-cultural background and target group. (Mayring 2004, 268-269.)

The fourth procedure, structuring content analysis, aims to filter out specific aspects of the material and to do a cross-section of it using strict ordering criteria that have been decided in advance, or assessing the material according to specific criteria. It includes typologizing and scaling procedures that are content-focused and formal, and that depend on the type of structuring dimensions which have been formed likewise to a theory, and accordingly, these are separated into individual categories. The main objective is to develop precise definitions, fundamental examples and coding rules resulting in a coding guide that makes precise structuring possible. (Mayring 2004, 269.)

Data analysis process

This study aims to examine Finnish consumers' attitudes towards online shopping from China, and to achieve this purpose, the analysis is divided into three sections based on the sub-questions: consumers' motives for online shopping, herd behavior in the online shopping context and the consumers' perceptions of ethical issues related to the phenomenon.

According to Berg (2004, 267-268), when conducting objective content analysis of messages conveyed in the research data, it is important to formally establish explicit rules that are called criteria of selection before starting to analyze the data. This criteria needs to be exhaustive enough to explain each variation of message content and it has to be applied rigorously and logically during the analysis so that using the same messages and

criteria, another researcher would get the same analysis results. The categories developed should during the formulating of the criteria need to reflect every significant aspect of the messages. (Berg 2004, 267-268.) The criteria of selection for each sub-question of the present study are briefly presented in the following paragraphs.

For studying the motives (the first sub-question of the study), initial themes to analyze the data were developed based on former studies presented in the theoretical background part of the study, on themes such as online shopping, mobile shopping, electronic word of mouth, hedonic and utilitarian motives for shopping, consumer behavior during a promotion campaign, and online impulsive buying, as well as the articles about the topic in the media (e.g. Helsingin Sanomat 5.9.2017).

The initial categories of motives for online shopping from China are listed below. The data was analyzed using these initial categories, but the categories were also revised during the processing of the material.

- Because it is cheap (e.g. Cho and Lee 2017, 13; Park et al. 2012, 1588)
 - low prices and good offers encourage consumers to engage in hedonic browsing and doing impulse purchases, for example during a discount campaign (Park et al. 2012, 1588) – perhaps consumers might perceive that in the case of cheaper products, they do not have to think about the buying decision that much or consider whether the product is really needed (compared to more expensive purchases)
- Because it gives them pleasure (e.g. Sorce et al. 2005, 123)
 - especially in the case of hedonic buyers, who may consider online shopping as an adventure and a way to relax (Ozen and Engizek 2014, 88; Liu et al. 834)
- They do it impulsively, without planning in advance (online impulse buying) (e.g. Ozen and Engizek 2014, 88; Park et al. 2012, 1588)
- It is a way to spend time when bored or waiting for something, browsing through products online and then ending up ordering something, especially in the case of mobile shopping (e.g. Fuentes and Svigstedt 2017, 144)
- Because other people (for example in social media) recommend ordering a certain product (eWOM) (e.g. Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006, 1; Chen and Xie 2008, 488; Hung and Li 2007, 493; Fan and Miao 2012, 178)
 - excessive buying: especially in the case of novices, when there is a constant flow of information about cheap products, they might end up ordering more than they initially thought (Hung and Li 2007, 493)
- Because of the wider variety and the possibility to find products that are not available in Finland (e.g. Cho and Lee 2017, 13)

On the other hand, the second sub-question aims to find examples of herd behavior in an online context from the studied material. In order to analyze herd behavior in this

context, all messages and comments that can be viewed as herd behavior, in other words the alignment of thoughts or behavior of people within a group that takes place without centralized coordination and through interactions (Raafat et al. 2009, 420), were marked in the data and analyzed in order to find out in what kind of situations herding can be found and how it manifests itself.

In addition, this study aims to find out whether consumers discuss ethical issues related to ordering from China on social media (third sub-question). The aim is to examine which ethical issues are visible in the consumers' discussions, and in what kind of manner the consumers treat these issues. The initial categories for studying the ethical issues were developed around the different ethical issues that are connected to the phenomenon discussed in chapter 2.3. These include:

- purchasing counterfeit products
- environmental impacts related to the production, transportation and returning of the products
- product safety issues
- online store safety issues.

In order to analyze the data, all the material used in this study was first printed out and each person taking part in the discussions was numbered in order to anonymize the material. Next, the material was processed by the researcher, marking from the discussions the above-mentioned themes to highlight the comments that are related to the sub-questions of the study in order to find answers to the research questions. The results of the analysis are discussed in chapter 4. As conversations in the group are carried in Finnish, any direct citations used in the study were translated by the researcher.

3.4 Trustworthiness

This subchapter will focus on the trustworthiness of the study and its results, by using Mäkelä's (1990) criteria. These criteria were chosen because the concepts of validity and reliability are better suited to quantitative research, meaning that in the case of qualitative research, it is better to apply another perspective to assess the trustworthiness of the study. In addition, the chosen criteria are suitable in a study that analyzes clearly defined data, which applies to this study. (Mäkelä 1990, 47.) According to Mäkelä (1990, 47-48), qualitative analysis can be assessed based on the following criteria: the significance of the data, the sufficiency of the data, the comprehensiveness of the analysis, and the extent to which the analysis can be evaluated and repeated.

When it comes to the significance of the data, it can be argued that the data used in this study is significant, because the focus of this study is especially on consumers who order from China regularly, and the data consists of discussions between consumers who

can be assumed to be greatly interested in the topic, as they have joined and actively participate in the social media group and the majority of them seem to have quite a lot of experience in overseas online shopping. In addition, it can be argued that the data is sufficient enough, because it consists of 15 discussions and the majority of the discussions are quite long: when printed out, there was in total 132 sheets worth of data, and the material, especially the themes that were discussed and the arguments of the participants, began to saturate.

The comprehensiveness of the analysis means that the findings are not based on random samplings (Mäkelä 1990, 53). In this study, the data was chosen based on the length of the discussions, the discussions handled different topics, the amount of participants in the discussions was relatively large and the messages were analyzed thoroughly, so it can be argued that the analysis was comprehensive. On the other hand, the extent to which the analysis can be evaluated and repeated refers to how well the reader is able to follow the researcher's reasoning and conclusions and that the coding rules are presented so unambiguously that if another researcher used the same criteria, they would get the same results. The categories according to which the data is handled and analyzed were presented in the previous subchapter (3.3), and the researcher aimed to do it as thoroughly as possible.

4 RESULTS

The data used in the analysis consists of 15 threads from a Facebook group that deal with different subjects related to online shopping from China. The data collection process was presented in chapter 3.2, whereas the chosen research method and the analysis process were described in chapter 3.3.

In accordance with the purpose of the research, this chapter aims to investigate the attitudes Finnish consumers have towards online shopping from China, as well as answering the sub-questions: *What motivates Finnish consumers to make online purchases from China?*, *How does herd behavior demonstrate in online shopping?*, and *How do Finnish consumers perceive the ethical issues related to online shopping from China?* The structure of this chapter will follow these questions, discussing first the sub-questions and then providing a summary of the main findings.

4.1 Motives for online shopping from China

The first sub-question addresses the motives Finnish consumers have for ordering products from Chinese online shops. Analyzing the consumers' online discussions, it is possible to find multiple explanations why consumers buy online and particularly from a shop located abroad, but on the other hand, also some reasons why some consumers have decided not to order from the Chinese shops either at all or avoiding ordering certain product groups, such as cosmetics.

4.1.1 *Lower prices and wider variety as drivers for cross-border online shopping*

As expected, it can be stated based on the data that cheap prices are an important motive for online shopping from China. Some consumers even argue that the products available in Chinese shops are the same than in Finland but at lower prices. For example:

“Exactly the same clothes (as in H&M), the price is just a lot cheaper” [4].

According to Park et al. (2012, 1588), price is a critical factor in encouraging hedonic browsing, which also can lead to impulse buying when the consumer encounters a good offer. In the social media discussions, repeated comments of online shopping from China being “so cheap” highlight the importance of low prices as an important motive. Interestingly, throughout the discussions in the social media group, it can be noticed that there are consumers who argue that they only purchase products they actually need,

whereas others quite openly state that they know that they do not need every product they buy. Even though there is no need for all the products they order, they continue the habit, apparently because the items on the Chinese platforms are inexpensive, and online shopping and constantly receiving parcels gives them pleasure.

In addition, it can be argued based on the data that in most of the cases, people seem to be prepared for a disappointment when ordering inexpensive items – if nothing else is wrong with the order, at least the parcels can be lost during the long shipment from China to Finland. For instance, someone argues that they rarely complain even when buying something worth a few euros from a Finnish shop, whereas another participant mentions having complained when a dress bought from a Chinese online shop that costed 12 euros turned out to be full of holes, but adds that she probably would not have bothered to complain if the price was lower. Moreover, one reason behind buying a certain product from China is also herd behavior: following the actions of peers (other group members) and buying the same product they seem to be buying. Forms of herd behavior in the context of online shopping are discussed in more detail in subchapter 4.2.

Furthermore, wider product variety can also be seen as a motive for online shopping from China. For instance, one participant argues that buying cheap counterfeits from China leads to domestic retailers going into liquidation, and he consoles himself with the fact that at least the products he orders from China are not available in Finnish stores. This is an example of an attitude-behavior gap (Gregory-Smith et al. 2013, 1205), as it seems that the consumer feels that buying inexpensive products from China is morally wrong, but his ethical judgements do not translate into actual behavior. Moreover, this way of thinking could also refer to guilt management techniques, namely diminishing net impacts by focusing more on the least harmful aspects of the choice (Gregory-Smith et al. 2013, 1213-1214).

Another example where product variety seems to be the motive for online shopping from China can be found from a thread that focuses on ordering bedsheets from China. For instance, one participant argues that she orders them from China because the patterns are so beautiful, while another consumer states:

“Those patterns are not always available in Finland, especially with a zipper. The material is nice to the touch and the price is not bad either, the same level as in Finland“ [467].

Furthermore, especially the price-quality ratio of the products seems to impact the consumers’ buying intentions:

“It is not possible to find that cheap double comforters elsewhere. And they have been really good! Should order more again” [461].

On the other hand, in another thread, in response to a comment in which another consumer questions what others do with all the “junk” they order, a consumer states that he orders mostly baking-related products that are really expensive in Finland and appreciates especially the quantity:

“For example, one large silicon mold can cost 40 euros here, by ordering you get more and different molds with the same amount of money. Then you have more choice when the inspiration hits” [479].

In addition, more utilitarian motives for ordering from Chinese online shops can be found from the data as well, such as living far away from shops, which is common in a sparsely populated country like Finland. For instance, one participant argues that ordering from online shops makes life a lot easier for those who do not live in population centers. Positive experiences based on previous orders could also lead to making new orders in the future. Satisfaction with the purchasing process has been found to encourage the continued use of the channel at least in the case of mobile shopping (Yang et al. 2016, 263), so this finding is also in line with previous research.

On the other hand, it can be argued that also negative previous experiences influence buying behavior in the future: one participant writes that she has stopped ordering children’s clothes from China, as she perceives that the ones she has ordered before have been of bad quality. However, she adds that she still orders clothes for herself, which means that she has only stopped buying one product group because of the negative prior experiences and continues ordering other things.

Furthermore, among the research data there is a long discussion in which the initiator inquires other consumers’ reasons for online shopping from China, which is of particular interest for this study, because in the comment section, more than a hundred participants talk about their motives for online shopping. Based on this discussion, it can be stated that the motives the consumers most commonly disclose seem to be quite utilitarian: 74 people argue that price is an important motive because of which they have decided to buy from China, whereas 38 people refer to wider selection, 12 to the availability of certain products (e.g. equipment they need for their hobbies) and seven people mention convenience-related motives, such as saving time, home delivery or living far away from shops, although hedonic motives (e.g. suspense factor, impulse buying and pleasure) appear in many comments as well. In addition, many participants mention more than only one motive, the most common combination being price and product variety. For example, the following consumer seems to be motivated by the combination of convenience, price and variety:

*“I live in a small village and we have no shops here and from there you can get for example cheap decorative items which are perhaps what I mostly order from there. And there are also such products that are not even available in Finland *smiling emoji*” [515].*

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the motives the consumers share on social media are not necessarily their only motives for online shopping, as it might be easier to give the same reasons as an excuse like the majority of previous commenters – for example, at least eight people specifically mention that they order products they actually need, perhaps to defend themselves and to show that they do not engage in any questionable behavior by ordering useless knick-knacks. Furthermore, it is notable that the motives that were mentioned the most often are also in line with the benefits of e-commerce for the consumer listed by Solomon et al. (2010, 78).

4.1.2 Spending time and searching for pleasure through online shopping – often excessively

Furthermore, indications of both shopping for pleasure and excessive buying can be found in the material. Browsing in the online stores is, for some consumers, a pleasant way to spend time or even a hobby. An example of this behavior can be seen from the following comment:

“Shopping is sort of an addiction when it becomes a hobby. That’s what I have thought in my case. You end up looking at products etc. online when there are no other nice things to do. You should replace that time spent on shopping with some other hobby/hobbies” [246].

On the other hand, one consumer states that she adds products to the shopping basket impulsively, but goes through the basket occasionally and removes unnecessary items since one shouldn’t let cheap prices to be the reason to buy junk. However, in another comment, the same person says that despite her previous comment, she still awaits some orders intended for her children, which could be viewed as an attitude-behavior gap. The latter comment could also refer to using positive emotions to manage the guilt from online shopping:

“I could cope without, but giving pleasure to others is lovely and I don’t consider that unnecessary because I don’t have a hundred parcels on the way” [18].

One example of shopping for pleasure as the motive for online shopping can be seen from the following comment:

“New purchases just make me smile, whether (the product is) old or new, counterfeit or authentic” [126].

As Hung and Li (2007, 493) argue, electronic word of mouth might cause excessive and variety-seeking buying to an uninformed consumer. Interestingly, the person who started a thread asking others’ experiences about buying children’s clothes from China (i.e. input word of mouth, Buttle (1998, 245)) commented on the same thread later on in a way that could refer to excessive buying resulting from the use of electronic word of mouth, i.e. the replies she got to her question in the group:

*“I just bought 9 pairs of pants... did I lose control? Well noo *laughing emoji*” [1].*

Another example of excessive buying can be found when one participant admits usually forgetting quickly what he has ordered and then the parcels just appear in his letter box daily. Moreover, it seems that the suspense factor related to online shopping from China may attract some adventure-seeking, hedonic consumers who according to Ozen and Engizek (2014, 88) are also prone to do impulse purchases. For example, one participant refers to this suspense factor saying that one can never know what is going to come when ordering products from China: it can be either really good or horrible and anything in between, which makes the online shopping exciting.

An interesting finding is a thread from January that begins with a participant asking whether the other members have considered taking a month off from ordering. The person asking the question also states that she has been thinking about taking a break from ordering for some months already, but has not yet succeeded in implementing the plan, because online ordering is so nice and one gets addicted to constantly receiving parcels. In the discussion, there appear to be multiple people who have either already taken a break or consider it. For instance, one participant writes that she feels like that her quota is about to exceed and she does not find anything interesting anymore. Furthermore, some participants state that after the initial enthusiasm phase when they first discovered the Chinese online shops, they have started to order only when they need something. For instance:

“It was like that for me maybe for the first year and a half, but nowadays certainly not every month. I stay away from unnecessary trash completely, mostly order clothes and decorative items. In the spring I probably start ordering

clothes for the summer and new cushions, in the fall some Christmas presents - - I just browsed a little and it's the same rags and rubbish that goes round year after year" [82].

In another discussion on the same topic, the person starting the conversation stated that she is “an addict” and shares a picture containing a pile of parcels that she had received during one day in January. According to the message, seeing her mailbox full of parcels from China functioned as an awakening to the reality and the consumer plans to stay out from AliExpress until the summer. In the comments, the consumer seems to explain herself by highlighting that most of the ordered items are clothes she bought for her child, which could also be viewed as a way for the consumer to manage guilt by diminishing net impacts or using positive emotions, by implying that a growing child needs new clothes.

Becoming addicted to browsing the online shops might also result from information system (IS) enjoyment. According to Turel and Serenko (2012, 521-522), IS enjoyment is traditionally viewed as beneficial since it drives high engagement with the information system, but on the other hand, they found that it can also lead to adverse outcomes, namely technology addiction: when using the system becomes a habit, some consumers may eventually become addicted to it as the level of habitual use grows. Key symptoms of technology addiction include conflict, withdrawal, relapse and reinstatement (inability to willingly cut down on the activity), and salience (Turel and Serenko 2012, 516). It can be argued that the discussions on not being able to quit the online shops and constantly making new orders could refer to the symptoms of technology addiction, especially reinstatement. Furthermore, constantly browsing might eventually lead to impulse buying when the consumer encounters an irresistible offer.

In another thread, the person starting the conversation states that he has tried to take a break from online ordering but has faced difficulties because he feels that he must order at least “something”, even if it is worth only 2 euros. One of the commenters shares a picture of an item, agreeing with the initiator saying:

“I know the feeling... a garlic peeler worth 48 cents, but I just have to order. At least something” [413].

The above-mentioned comment indicates that the consumer did not need the product in the first place, but somehow clings to constantly ordering more. Furthermore, some participants disclose very personal reasons as an excuse for excessive buying: one argues that for him, the worst phase in online ordering was when he was depressed:

“Back then, the only joy in life was that all the while I got some 2 euro products in the mail” [491].

Moreover, impulse buying is often connected to mobile shopping. As mobile shopping has developed, consumers have virtually endless shopping possibilities on their hands. This makes browsing a convenient way to spend time, and as a result the consumer may easily end up ordering something. Based on the analyzed discussions, it seems that many consumers that participate in the discussions in the social media group browse the online shops expressly on their mobile phones. For instance, when the participants share screenshots of the products they have ordered or plan to order, the screenshots are almost always taken from the mobile application of the online shop.

However, as Fuentes and Svingstedt (2017, 144-145) found, mobile shopping is not problem-free: it makes many consumers stressed, as well as causing worries of buying more than one actually needs as impulse buying is so easy on a smartphone. Similar themes could be found from the data as well. It can be argued that the discussions on taking a break from online shopping and those in which consumers discuss their addiction to the online shops reflect the negative emotions caused by impulse buying and mobile shopping.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that excessive buying and taking a break from online ordering seem to be more common themes in the group at the beginning of the year than in October and November. This could perhaps result from that during these months, it is common among the active users of the Chinese online shops to order Christmas presents – when ordering from China, the estimated delivery times are quite long, which means that products ordered in December are likely to arrive after the holidays. In addition, there are two important discount campaigns during November, namely Singles’ Day and Black Friday, which are considerable peak times for order amounts. January, on the other hand, is commonly a point when people make New Year’s resolutions and promise to change habits they are dissatisfied with – in this case excessive ordering of unneeded items could be viewed as being the bad habit, and as mentioned, many orders made during the big discount campaigns at the end of the year tend to arrive in January, which implies that the heavy users are likely to receive a lot of their orders at the time.

Furthermore, some participants have experienced other people making comments on their online ordering habits and especially the amounts of products they order from China, which again refers to excessive buying. In one thread, the person starting the conversation shares a picture of three large parcels and tells in the caption that the mailman had made an uneasy comment about her ordering from China. In the comments, another consumer reveals her experience of a similar situation:

“The mailman said to me yesterday in a husband-like way ”Take some time off from ordering now!” to which I replied: “But it is so cheap!”” [425].

Moreover, it can be noted that some consumers themselves seem to be embarrassed by the amounts they order: for example, one participant states that she would not order even half the amount she does now if she would have to collect each parcel from the post office and face the employees working there.

4.1.3 Motives for refraining from buying from China

In the discussions, there appear also comments from which it is possible to derive reasons why certain consumers have decided not to order from Chinese online shops at all, or have decided not to order certain types of products, even though they in general use these shops. For example, one participant states that she has never ordered from China and probably never will, because she claims to be very particular about what she buys and does not want clothes that are not exactly what they look in the advert, the size is wrong or the product smells bad, or that she would have to freeze the clothes before using them. In addition, an interesting observation is that the participant who tells that she has never ordered from the Chinese shops, similarly as those who try to bring up the ethical issues, quickly gets an angry response from another participant:

“Then what are you doing in this group?” [37].

The answer is that the consumer had considered ordering from China back when she joined the group and that even though she herself has never ordered from the shops in question, she does not judge those who do order.

Other reasons why some consumers state that they do not order from the Chinese shops (at all or not certain product groups) include for example: the need to test the material of the products before buying; feeling that one can get everything that is needed from Finland; the ease of buying and returning products when buying from Finnish shops; it is too complicated; not willing to buy “a pig in a poke”; worries about product safety (e.g. chemicals); and being afraid of ordering and then being scammed. Furthermore, some state that certain products are not worth ordering from China since the difference in price is not significant enough:

“I haven’t yet found cheap enough (bedsheets) that it would be worthwhile to order. Products within the same price range are available in Finland too.” [306].

An interesting finding related to this is that in a discussion about buying children's clothes from China, many participants mention that they have not dared to order clothes for their children, even though they order clothes for themselves from the Chinese shops, implying that they are worried about the chemicals these might contain and do not want their children to be predisposed to harmful substances. Furthermore, some mention that they always put the clothes to the freezer or wash them before using them, and at the other end of the spectrum, some participants state that they never wash anything, not even underwear, before using and nothing has happened to them, which shows that people seem to take up very different attitudes towards product safety issues.

4.2 Manifestations of herd behavior

The second sub-question, *How does herd behavior demonstrate in online shopping?*, addresses herding patterns that are visible in the consumers' discussions. As mentioned, herding refers to the alignment of thoughts or behavior within a group that takes place without centralized coordination and through interactions (Raafat et al. 2009, 420). In this case, the Facebook group where consumers share their experiences about overseas online shopping is viewed as being a herd, in which other participants' references and group pressure might lead to the individuals mimicking each other's opinions and behavior.

4.2.1 Using electronic word of mouth in support of buying decisions

It can be stated based on the studied material that consumers actively ask for each other's opinions and advice in the Facebook group (i.e. input electronic word of mouth). The topics range from how to spot whether the product they bought is a counterfeit or genuine, what kind of quality the electronics (such as camera equipment) from Chinese online shops are, and experiences on ordering children's clothes from China. In addition, when someone with prior experience about ordering the products in question appears in the discussion, they are usually asked further specified questions about their experiences and opinions on the products and ordering in general. It can be thus stated that many participants seem to be more comfortable buying a product that has already been tried and recommended by a peer, in this case another Finnish consumer that belongs to the same social media group, rather than ordering a pig in a poke. This is not surprising, as it is well-known that other consumers' reviews and opinions have stronger influence than advertising (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 1; (Nyilasy 2006, 169, 178)) or expert opinions (Chen 2008, 1989).

Some of the most common advice given in the social media group includes for example recommending to check the customer evaluations and product pictures the other consumers have uploaded on the online store, as well as reminding others to use the size charts provided by the seller when ordering clothes. Another common example of electronic word of mouth in the data can be defined as participants asking for references concerning reliable sellers or direct links to certain products that others have ordered and recommend, such as this example from one of the studied threads:

“Can someone recommend a good seller where you can get clothes for school-aged kids in AliExpress?” [35].

As it can be seen from the before-mentioned comment, some questioners know already very clearly in which online shop they wish to make the order and just want references for good sellers on that specific platform, but this is not always the case as there are also more general requests for references.

4.2.2 *Impulsive or excessive buying resulting from herding*

In the Facebook group, herd behavior can be seen for example in the case of products that become popular within group members: for instance, when a large number of people become interested in a certain product that other group members have ordered and post pictures of, recommending others to order the same product. For instance, in the data, herd behavior can be seen in a discussion about counterfeit backpacks. It seems that ordering counterfeits of a certain brand has become a trend among the group members, as one participant in the discussion is curious to know what it is that makes it so popular since photos of the backpack are posted in the group frequently. Among the replies, one participant comments having ordered the product because everyone else ordered it as well.

An interesting example of herd behavior in the case of products that become a trend within the group can be found in a thread where one consumer shares a video of a “home disco” created with party lights the consumer had ordered from China. The video soon gets a large amount of likes and comments from others admiring the lights and asking for a direct link to purchase the exact same product. Among the comments that were posted within 14 hours after the video was published in the group, at least 20 people state that they ordered the same lights inspired of the group member’s reference. For instance, one consumer writes:

*“Now I have to say that I really don’t know what I’m going to do with this but I just had to order it *laughing emoji x 2* - - at least I have fun now ordering it because I’m laughing out loud thinking what my man will say *laughing emoji*” [370].*

The following day, another participant replies to the before-mentioned comment:

*“I thought the same, but it’s on its way *laughing emoji x 3*” [371].*

As these comments appear rather soon after the video is posted, these consumers’ buying behavior can be considered as online impulse buying, which is especially common for hedonic buyers to whom online shopping is a way to spend time and relax (Ozen & Engizek 2014, 88). Ordering disco lights on the spur of the moment could be viewed as a typical example of online impulse buying: the consumers do not thoroughly consider whether they actually need the product, they just end up ordering it because it is inexpensive and looks fun, in addition to that a peer has already tested the product and it seems to be working fine. Furthermore, a participant states in the comments that this is not the first time the same item became popular among the social media users: some years earlier, someone had shared it in another group, causing a rush of people ordering the product similarly than this time.

Furthermore, in one of the threads where the participants discuss excessive buying and taking a break from ordering from the Chinese online shops after Christmas, a consumer states rather directly how the Facebook group (i.e. electronic word of mouth) acts as an important driver in his buying behavior:

“Browsing is probably the worst, with the pseudonym “and that’s where I got the idea from” ;) And in addition, this group feeds your “ideation” through the links (that people share)” [312].

On the other hand, in another thread that concerns taking a break from online ordering, at first several participants agree that they have experienced excessive ordering that got out of hand and are currently trying to cure of the habit. After these comments, another participant writes:

“I have not ordered anything yet, and I’d probably better leave it when reading these comments” [303].

Furthermore, some participants argue that it is quite common to get overly enthusiastic about ordering from the Chinese online shops as a novice, referring to a consumer who

does not have much experience in online shopping or has discovered the Chinese online shops only recently. Similarly, also Hung and Li (2007, 493) argue that excessive buying often occurs when novices face the constant flow of information in the form of electronic word of mouth, so the observation is in line with previous research. In this case, the information flow comes from the Facebook group where other group members share pictures of the purchases they have received. It can be argued that an experienced online shopper is more likely to be able to filter the products that he or she really needs from the information flow, whereas someone who is new to the world of the Chinese online shops and their almost unlimited supply might be more prone to get confused in the information flow and end up ordering almost everything nice-looking that a peer recommends.

4.2.3 Alignment of thoughts in the social media group

In the previous subchapters, herding could be seen in the alignment of behavior within the social media group, such as ordering the exact same products that other group members have bought and recommended. However, as mentioned earlier, another form of herding is the alignment of thoughts within the group, and examples of this can also be found in the discussions. One example of herding in the data concerns “moderating” opinions that differ from the public opinion of the group. For instance, when someone tries to take up the ethical issues related to ordering from China (such as unethical working conditions, environmental issues or issues related to ordering counterfeit products), they always seem to be quickly reminded by some other group members that the group is not the right place to criticize the phenomenon, and that they should not judge others’ actions. Some observations on the ethical issues will be discussed in more detail in the following subchapter 4.3.

Moreover, an example of alignment of thoughts within the group can be found in a discussion on Alibaba’s Singles’ Day campaign in November. The thread starts with a consumer asking whether others have noticed that the discount campaign is “pure cheating”, claiming that the sellers on the platform would have raised the prices of their products prior to the campaign, so that the discount price was not actually lower than the original price. Even though there appear to be some people in the discussion who argue that they have managed to buy something with a discount, it seems that the majority of participants in the thread follow others’ opinions and agree with the original poster, saying that they will not either participate in the campaign as they are not pleased with the discounts offered.

When it comes to assessing these examples in the light of the herding patterns defined by Langley et al. (2014, 20), it can be argued that the uniformity of direction seems to be high in both of the above-mentioned cases, as one dominant opinion recurs in the

comments. However, in comparison to the total number of people that belong to the group (more than 116 000 members), a rather small minority participates to each discussion, which implies that the discussions in question could be viewed as either slow converging or fast converging herding patterns, depending on whether the speed of contagion is perceived as gradual or rapid.

4.3 Perceptions of ethical issues

The third sub-question, *How do Finnish consumers perceive the ethical issues related to online shopping from China?* addresses the role of ethics in the social media discussions and how these issues are perceived by the consumers. Firstly, most of the ethical issues that were listed in chapter 3.3 can be found from the online discussions, at least to some extent. In addition, some other ethical issues are also mentioned, such as poor working conditions and child labor. For example, one participant writes in the discussion about ordering children's clothes from China:

“Clothes made by children for children, logical” [46].

On the other hand, this comment does not give rise to that much discussion, as the attention is quickly drawn to the fact that big multinational companies also sell products made with child labor, after which the ethical discussion about the issue falls through. Furthermore, in another discussion one consumer argues that she tends to order clothes for her children from China because they are cheaper and more unique than the clothes available in Finnish shops and continues:

“It does not interest me whether the person who makes the clothes is 10 or 60 years old” [554].

4.3.1 Debate on counterfeit products

As mentioned in the theoretical background, the presence of counterfeit products seems inevitable when it comes to Chinese online shops. It is thus not surprising that also in the research data, counterfeits are discussed frequently. Firstly, there is a relatively large amount of discussion on how to identify whether a certain product is counterfeit or authentic, where the participants share detailed pictures of their authentic and counterfeit products and the differences between them, leading to a consensus that some counterfeits are so precisely made that it is almost impossible to tell the difference. According to

Davidson (2017, 12), materialism is a strong driver of consumption and leads to positive buying intentions towards a counterfeit product when the counterfeit is perceived as being similar enough with the genuine product. The data indicates this as well, as some participants ask for direct links to sellers having counterfeits that were perceived as being good enough to be mistaken as authentic in the previous comments.

In addition, it seems that some people simply do not care whether the product they bought is “real” or not. In the discussion about how to spot a counterfeit from a genuine product, one participant replies:

“Does it matter?” [133].

The consumer continues with saying that she has used her Chinese counterfeit daily for over a year and is just happy about getting a nice and durable backpack for a small amount of money. In addition, another participant says that she wears her counterfeit bag with a clear conscience, because everything is overpriced in Finland. This again could perhaps be viewed as one kind of guilt management technique. Moreover, there is debate on whether counterfeiting can be compared to theft. During this debate, one person who is not against counterfeiting states that if he buys a counterfeit, he does not have the least intention to pay the original product in the first place. In addition, he refuses to understand why this behavior would harm the original manufacturer and adds that he has not had scruples about buying fake products.

On the other hand, not all participants agree on this. For example, one participant writes that in his opinion, people should only purchase either non-branded products or genuine brand products, because the brand owner has used a lot of money on designing the product and acquiring certificates, so it is not fair to them to buy a cheap counterfeit. Later on in the same thread, another participant argues that buying counterfeits means sustaining criminal activities, and that brand owners usually adhere to certain ethical principles, such as providing better working conditions.

However, this kind of comment seems to be easily papered over in the group. The firstly mentioned comment about the ethicality of purchasing counterfeits, for instance, quickly got a response which said that a Facebook group concentrated on Chinese online shops is not the right place to moralize low-cost production of counterfeits and exploitative business. Furthermore, often when someone tries to point out the ethical issues, they seem to be accused in a similar manner about stepping in (e.g. “then you’re in the wrong group!”), despite how friendly or judging the original message was.

4.3.2 *Post-purchase behavior and ethical issues*

Quite many ethical issues that are discussed in the group are connected to post-purchase behavior. One example of post-purchase ethical questions that can be found from the data concerns re-selling of counterfeits ordered from China as authentic products. For instance, one participant in the discussions is concerned whether it is safe to use the flea market groups on Facebook anymore since one cannot be sure about the authenticity of the purchased product. This refers to deceptive counterfeiting, which means deceiving the gullible buyer into believing that they are purchasing a genuine product (Viot et al. 2014, 4).

Another example of unethical behavior that is discussed and also criticized in the data is demanding money back from products that do not please the buyer; even though there is nothing “wrong” with the product (i.e. it is not broken or considerably different from the product description), and in some cases, even re-selling the product after claiming the money back. This topic seems to divide the group members. Some argue that it is a matter of principle:

“I want my products to be undamaged and of good quality when I buy something as new, whether it costs 1 or 500 €. And no... it is not about the price but a principle” [9].

On the other hand, others state that they have never asked for a refund when it comes to small purchases, not even if they did not receive the product. In addition, there are multiple comments on that if something costs only a few euros, the buyer should count upon that the quality of the product is not necessarily the best, using arguments such as “it is foolish to cry over one euro”. Some also seem to view not claiming small amounts of money back from the Chinese sellers as “charity”.

On the other hand, some participants argue that making reclamations about products that are not satisfying is important in the sense that if no one complained, the seller might be even less motivated to ensure the quality of the products they sell in the future. Complaining behavior is one of the consumer behavior domains where cultural differences can be seen: collectivists are less likely to voice complaints (De Mooij & Hofstede 2011, 189). China being a highly collectivist country and Finland being an individualist country implies that there are cultural differences in this area between the Chinese sellers and Finnish buyers. The Chinese sellers are perhaps not accustomed to customers complaining directly to them, because in China unsatisfied consumers are more likely to participate in negative word of mouth with people they are close with than complaining formally to the seller (De Mooij & Hofstede 2011, 189).

Another issue in post-purchase behavior concerns what happens with the products that the consumer is not happy with for some reason (for instance wrong size, color or other defects in the product). It is often mentioned in the social media discussions that there is no point in returning the product to the seller in China due to the high level of postage expenses: in many cases, returning the product would cost more than the price of the actual product is. When examining the discussions, it seems that it is quite common to give or sell the unsatisfying product to another consumer, especially when the product is usable, but of a wrong size. For example, a consumer shares a picture of a coat that she ordered for her dog with the following caption:

“Third time is the charm... now it fits even though it took over 2 months to arrive” [432].

The consumer tells later on in the comment section that she donated the two unsuitable coats she initially received to someone else. There seems to be even a flea market group specifically for this purpose on Facebook. However, it should be kept in mind that when re-selling the product, the consumer becomes comparable with the importer and is responsible for the consequences the product might cause.

Nevertheless, not everyone bothers to resell the unsuitable products: based on the social media discussions, it seems that some consumers rather throw the purchased item away, which can be argued to be the worst option when considering the environmental impacts especially in the bigger picture, or just put it in the closet, forget about it and proceed to order more products from China. Besides, especially products that have been broken during the transit or products that were “useless junk” in the first place are likely to be thrown in the trash – often after posting an amusing picture in social media with a caption such as “what I ordered vs what I got”. Based on the comments, some consumers seem to have bad conscience about having to throw unusable items away, whereas others do not seem to bother to weigh the consequences of their behavior.

Furthermore, one example of different outlooks on buying useless products that end up being thrown in the trash can be retrieved in a discussion concerning smartphones. The person starting the conversation shares a screenshot from an online store where a vendor claims to be selling a smartphone for the price of one euro, and inquires whether some group member has ordered the product to know if the offer is too good to be true. Among the comments, many people state that it is the consumer’s responsibility to check the product description thoroughly enough: in this case it seems that even though there is a smartphone in the product picture, the consumer would actually only get a phone holder for the lowest price and the actual phone is considerably more expensive.

Moreover, another consumer encourages the initiator to order the product “just for fun”, justifying her opinion by saying:

*“It is only a euro, it’s not the end of the world *laughing emoji* at least you get a good laugh if nothing else when the post arrives” [439].*

To this comment, another consumer replies:

“Where’s the fun in that you get unusable trash in the mail?” [440].

Interestingly, the former comment only has two “likes” from other group members whereas the latter comment has 20, which implies that more people agree with the consumer that views consciously ordering unusable items as questionable than the one who thinks it is acceptable to quite literally buy rubbish for the sake of short-term amusement.

4.3.3 Product safety and warning others of the safety risks

Furthermore, discussions about product safety can be found from the data, as well as some mentions about online store safety questions: for example, one participant admits that she has not dared to order from the online shops in question because she is worried about being scammed. When it comes to product safety, this issue is most commonly associated with makeup products and other cosmetics, such as counterfeit perfumes. Product safety seems to divide the public: some say that it is safer to stay away from the cosmetics when one cannot be sure about what the product contains and remind that the health hazards are not necessarily visible straight away but can develop over time, whereas others state that all the makeup they use is ordered from AliExpress and they have never had any issues with the products, such as allergic reactions.

On the other hand, it appears also that for some participants, the reason of not purchasing certain cosmetics from China is not product safety but more likely the fact that they have not been satisfied with the quality of the products they have tried. For instance, one participant writes that the counterfeit perfumes are horrible in her opinion – she argues that they do not smell like how they should and the scent does not last long. Furthermore, another participant states that she has not been pleased with the quality of the Chinese eyeshadows and that products in the same price range are available in Finland so it is not worth the wait to order them from China, but in another comment, the same participant tells that on the other hand, the lipsticks she has ordered from China have been of superb quality and she can recommend ordering them. In addition, the discussion about children’s clothes reveals that many consumers seem to be more careful about product

safety, such as the chemicals that the products may contain, when they are buying something for their children rather than for themselves.

It was mentioned previously (in chapter 4.3.1) that when ethical issues are brought up in the group, these comments are often papered over by saying that the group members should not judge each other's actions. However, this is not always the case as the following example indicates. In a thread where the person starting the discussion asks for others' recommendations for finding "the best cheap mascara" in a Chinese online shop, many participants rather recommend affordable mascaras that range from 3 to 5 euros available in certain Finnish stores, and others remind the questioner about the product safety issues, such as that there is no such authority in China that would supervise the contents or safety of the cosmetics. In addition, someone points out that in the case of Chinese cosmetics ordered online, one can never be sure if the next product and its contents would be exactly the same that the consumer previously ordered and that did not cause any issues.

Interestingly, when someone questions why people are giving advice that is different from what was asked, i.e. recommending products from Finnish shops when the questioner specifically asked about Chinese shops, multiple participants defend the respondents' behavior. For instance, some participants plead that not everyone is aware of the product safety issues so it is good that these issues are brought out in the group, and another participant argues that not necessarily everyone is aware of the more affordable options that are available in the local market. Furthermore, one of the participants in the thread states that because of many reasons, it is just caring for others and friendliness when one recommends products that are available in Finland: these products can be reached sooner than waiting for a product to arrive from China and that when buying the product from Finland, there is at least someone who is responsible for the contents of the product.

Moreover, when it comes to the environmental impacts of online shopping from China, these issues were interestingly not very often discussed in the data, even though it is evident that transporting a large amount of small items in individual packages from one side of the world to another causes damage to the environment. For instance, when one consumer tries to highlight the environmental issues by stating that he does not buy from Chinese shops because he prefers quality and does not want to pollute, another consumer quickly replies:

"You get the same quality but cheaper when you buy directly from the manufacturer than when buying from a Finnish shop. You pollute exactly in the same way when you buy from Finland, because the Finnish shops have bought the same products from the same manufacturers" [522].

4.4 Summary of the main findings

This subchapter aims to summarize the main findings to the sub-questions in order to discuss and understand the attitudes Finnish consumers have towards online shopping from China.

Firstly, it can be stated that not all the consumers in the group share the same attitudes towards the phenomenon. This can be seen for example in the comments about whether it is acceptable to order products that have a high probability of being useless. As discussed in subchapter 4.3.2, some consumers seem to think that it is fine to purchase these products for the sake of amusement, but on the other hand, many consumers seem to agree that consciously ordering unusable trash that will quickly end up being thrown away is questionable.

When it comes to the motives that the consumers have for online shopping from China, these vary as well. All of the motives initially listed in the research design chapter (3.3) can be found from the data, however some of them more often than others. Not surprisingly, utilitarian motives seem to be the most common reasons the consumers use when arguing why they prefer cross-border online shopping. The most important utilitarian motives the consumers have for online shopping from China include price, product variety and convenience. For example, the possibility to have unique items that are not available in Finnish shops seems to drive many consumers to order especially clothing or other such products from abroad. In addition, the consumers that buy from China because of lower prices often use arguments such as that it would be foolish not to buy from China if the same product is multiple times cheaper in a Chinese shop than in a Finnish shop.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that hedonic motives play an important role as well, as it seems to be common to search for pleasure through online shopping and make impulse purchases. For instance, many consumers seem to be driven by the suspense factor that is closely connected to ordering from Chinese online shops: not knowing if the product is as described, when it is going to arrive – or is it going to arrive at all. In this case, low prices and well-functioning buyer protection seem to motivate many consumers, as many consumers mention either that getting the money back from purchases that have defects or get lost in the mail, or that they do not mind losing a few euros if there is something wrong with the product as the product was so inexpensive in the first place, are important drivers for them.

In addition, impulse buying from the Chinese online shops is common among the consumers that participate in the discussions. The frequency of impulse purchases may result from the low prices and discounts that the Chinese online shops offer, as well as from mobile shopping, which facilitates impulse buying, becoming more prevalent. Particularly hedonic consumers view browsing as an enjoyable pastime, and are likely to

make online purchases impulsively. Moreover, it seems that especially consumers who are not experienced online shoppers might be prone to buying excessively. Besides, it can be argued that online shopping can become an addiction for some consumers. For instance, some discussions deal with the difficulties the consumers have in trying to take a break from ordering, as they have developed a compulsive need to constantly place new orders.

Nevertheless, it seems to vary whether the consumers have a guilty conscience about their online ordering or not. Some consumers mention that they do not care where the products they buy come from and in what kind of conditions they have been made as long as they are cheap, whereas others seem to ponder their online purchases more. For example, some participants argue that they only order products they actually need and would buy in any case. Rather than spending time wandering in traditional shops to find the product, they simply find online shopping more convenient and make the choice between different online shops based on price level or other conditions that matter to them.

Furthermore, different guilt management techniques are often used when the consumers explain why they buy from China, especially when the ethical issues are brought in the discussion. For instance, justifying online ordering from China by saying that the products are either overpriced or not available in domestic stores might refer to diminishing net impacts of the choice by focusing on the least harmful aspects, whereas justifying a large amount of orders by highlighting that the majority of the purchases are actually gifts to other people might refer to using positive emotions to manage guilt caused by online ordering.

Based on the research material, it can be argued that herd behavior is visible in the consumers' behavior and thoughts conveyed by their comments in the social media group. Many consumers use the group as a source of electronic word of mouth, either by asking for others advice concerning a certain product (i.e. input word of mouth) or by sharing information on products they have ordered and recommend others to purchase the same item (i.e. output word of mouth). Moreover, it can be argued that the consumers that belong to the social media group already have a certain attitude towards online shopping from China – it is likely that their attitude is quite positive or at least curious as they have deliberately decided to join the group and participate in the discussions. Thereby belonging to the group, where one is surrounded by like-minded consumers' comments and pictures containing successful purchases and positive experiences, is likely to reinforce that already existing attitude.

A representative example of herd behavior in the data is a discussion in which the initiator shares a video of disco lights that she ordered from China, and in the comment section, a large number of people write that they “had to order” the same product on the initiator's recommendation. In addition, the same discussion represents online impulse

buying, as the comments appear soon after the video is posted, which implies that the consumers made the decision to buy the recommended product impulsively. Some commentators state that they made the order for the fun of it and do not even know what they are going to do with the product, which also refers to shopping for pleasure and as a way to spend time.

Another interesting way in which herding can be seen is how the consumers “moderate” the discussions in the group: for instance, each time when someone tries to bring forward the ethical issues related to online shopping from China, it seems that other consumers quickly question why the person who disagrees with the others has joined the group, and highlight that the group is not the right place to discuss the ethical issues or to judge other consumers’ actions.

Even though the ethical issues related to online shopping from China are not widely debated due to the nature of the social media group, many of them are mentioned in the studied discussions. Two frequently discussed ethical issues include purchasing counterfeit products and product safety, especially concerning cosmetics. Both of them seem to divide opinions, but on the other hand, the public opinion seems to be that within the group, the participants should not judge each other’s actions, which is perhaps why the debate often comes to nothing.

When it comes to deliberately ordering counterfeits, some consumers seemingly do not care whether the product they buy is authentic or not, especially if the product looks similar enough to the branded item; some even ask for advice on finding the most genuine-looking counterfeits at the lowest price. On the other hand, there are also participants who appear to be opposed to counterfeiting, and some of them even try to explain to others why it is not acceptable, as some participants seem to refuse to understand the negative consequences that supporting counterfeits might have.

Another common theme in the ethical discussions is post-purchase behavior, such as conversations about what happens to unsuitable items, as returning them to China is often out of question due to high postage. Also in this case the attitudes seem to vary: some consumers consider that it is their right to claim the money back if the product does not fit, whereas others state that they do not bother to do so in the case of small purchases. Moreover, some give the unsuitable items away for free, while others tend to throw the failures away. Reselling the online orders at profit splits opinions, but especially in the case of counterfeits, the majority seems to regard it as questionable.

Furthermore, consumers’ attitudes towards the safety of Chinese products seem to vary. An interesting example is a discussion on ordering children’s clothes from China, in which many consumers state that even though they order products for themselves, they are still worried about ordering clothes for their children. On the other hand, some consumers argue that the products are the same regardless of their place of purchase, and thus safe to use, at least when washed or frozen first. However, precautions like washing

the item before use also seem to divide opinions, as some consumers argue that they never bother to do so and “nothing has happened”, which implies a carefree attitude towards overseas online shopping.

On the other hand, it can be argued that make up and cosmetics are product groups that even many active users of the Chinese online shops refuse to order from China. In the comments, this is justified by the fact that the list of ingredients does not necessarily hold true and the inexpensive make up might contain harmful substances. However, there also appear to be consumers that are not worried about the possible consequences that using the product could ultimately have.

To conclude, even within the group of active online shoppers, attitudes towards online shopping from China range from hesitant to overly enthusiastic, even addicted. For some, buying the product from where one can get it at the lowest price is purely rational, whereas others view online shopping and constantly receiving online orders in the mail as a source of enjoyment, even to the point when online ordering becomes compulsive and the consumer is not able to stop anymore. Nevertheless and not surprisingly, it can be said that the public opinion of the group to the phenomenon seems to be rather positive, but this impression may also be due to the nature of the social media group as a place where online shopping enthusiasts gather together and where differing opinions may be silenced. Some aspects of the phenomenon, such as consciously ordering useless gadgets “just for fun” that end up being abandoned, are deemed questionable by many participants, which implies that among the group, there are also consumers who take up more reserved attitude towards the phenomenon, even though they may find it useful in some situations.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter aims to present the conclusions of the study, divided into theoretical contributions and managerial implications. In addition, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

This study has several theoretical contributions. Firstly, various motives for online shopping were found, and the main motives, such as price and convenience, are in line with previous listings of the advantages of e-commerce to the consumer (c.f. Bobalca 2015, Solomon et al. 2010). Both utilitarian and hedonic motives were found to propel consumers to make online purchases from China. Moreover, in many cases it seems that utilitarian and hedonic motives are actually interconnected to each other. For example, low price is a representative example of a utilitarian motive, but as Park (2012) found, price is also critical in encouraging hedonic browsing. In the case of the Chinese online shops, this means that the low price level and additional discounts that the shops offer are likely to encourage the consumer to browse hedonically, which in turn might lead to making impulse purchases when the consumer encounters an irresistible offer.

Furthermore, it can be argued that from the viewpoint of the present study, the key stage in the consumer's buying decision process is the choice between different vendors (cf. Guo and Barnes 2011), since ultimately the fundamental factor in determining the vendor choice is which attributes the consumer values the most: for instance, whether delivery speed or price is perceived as more important. Shipping the product from the other side of the world may take a lot of time, but if the need is not urgent – or more like, if there is no actual need for the product but the purchase is made just for fun – ordering the low-priced Chinese option may seem tempting to the consumer.

Moreover, it was found that impulse buying has an important role in consumers' online purchases from China. Previous studies (c.f. Ozen and Engizek 2014) have linked hedonism with impulse buying, and the results of the present study support this connection, as it seems that considerably low prices and discounts facilitate making impulse purchases. Likewise, it was found that the suspense factor connected to online shopping from China (i.e. not knowing whether the product will be as described or when the order is going to arrive, or whether it is going to arrive at all) is an important motivator to many consumers. Perceived risk and the consumers' need to reduce it have traditionally been linked to e-commerce, but in the case of online shopping from China, it can be argued that as the prices are sufficiently low, consumers seem to be more willing to take

risks and less afraid of making losses, since the potential financial losses in the case that the product does not please the buyer are equally small.

Furthermore, Fuentes and Svingsted (2017) highlighted certain downsides of mobile shopping, and based on the results of the present study, negative aspects such as anxiety caused by the endless shopping possibilities, worrying about spending too much money or the impossibility to stop making online orders, are connected to online shopping from China as well. Based on the numerous social media discussions on attempts to take a break from online ordering without succeeding, it can be stated that for some consumers, constantly ordering from the Chinese online shops has become a compulsive habit, or even an addiction, that they are not able to quit.

When it comes to herd behavior in the context of online shopping from China, it was found that its role in online shopping from China is crucial, as it seems to have an impact on many aspects of the phenomenon, such as impulse buying and ethical opinions. Firstly, it was found that electronic word of mouth (eWOM), in this case especially fellow group members' opinions and advice, influences the consumers' buying decisions and thus leads to herding: for example, when group members share pictures of successful online purchases, other consumers often ask for a link to order the same well tried item, or state that they decided to order the same product, often impulsively. Based on the results, some products become so popular within the social media group that it might seem to a consumer that everyone in the group owns a certain product. As Hung and Li (2007) found, eWOM may lead to excessive buying especially in the case of consumers that are not experienced online shoppers, and also the present study found that many consumers seem to experience an initial enthusiasm phase when they come across the Chinese online shops and may thus end up ordering more than intended, encouraged by the constant information flow from the online shops and the social media group.

Furthermore, another example of herding in this context can be seen in situations where a group member tries to bring forward ethical questions or other opinions that differ from the public opinion of the group. In these cases, another group member seems to quickly remind that the group is not the right place to criticize other consumers' choices or even questioned why the person disagreeing with others had joined the group. That is to say that the opinions which differ from the public opinion of the group are "moderated" by other group members, which gives an impression that the group would have a unanimously positive attitude towards the phenomenon. Moreover, the atmosphere of the group seems to strengthen the existing attitudes the consumers have prior to joining the group, as within the group of like-minded people, it is perceived as acceptable to constantly order more products regardless of the impacts that such behavior might have.

Lastly, the consumers' perceptions of ethical issues related to online shopping from China were examined as well. Due to the nature of the group, it seemed that attempts to discuss the ethical issues often fell through, yet some interesting findings were made. Not

surprisingly, knowingly buying counterfeit products from China was discussed frequently throughout the data. As Davidson et al. (2017) found, materialism leads to positive buying intentions when a certain counterfeit product is perceived as being similar with the genuine branded product. This is likely to be the reason that explains the discussions in which consumers compare “real and fake” products in order to see if they are similar enough, or the numerous requests for advice to find the most genuine-looking Chinese counterfeit of a certain product.

A main finding related to the ethical issues was that many consumers seem to use different guilt management techniques (Gregory-Smith et al. 2013) in explaining their online orders. In particular two of the guilt management techniques, namely minimizing net impacts by giving greater attention to the least harmful aspects of the choice and the use of positive emotions, were identified in many occasions throughout the analyzed discussions.

Moreover, presence of an attitude-behavior gap (c.f. Chatzidakis et al. 2007; Gregory-Smith et al. 2013; Carrington et al. 2014) that often characterizes consumers’ ethical choices is clearly visible in online shopping from China as well. For instance, a consumer may say that a certain aspect of online shopping from China is questionable, but the doubtful attitude towards the phenomenon does not necessarily translate into actual behavior, as the same consumer may still make purchases from the Chinese online shops to a considerable extent, thus choosing his or her own self-interest rather than what would perhaps be ethically sustainable or socially acceptable.

5.2 Managerial implications

The managerial implications of the study are mostly directed to domestic companies, both online stores and brick-and-mortar retailers, which are affected by the current competitive situation in which more and more consumers opt for the Chinese online shops. The competition affects the Finnish retail industry, as the domestic companies are realistically not able to compete on price with their Chinese counterparts. Price is, however, one of the main motives due to which many consumers decide to order a certain item from China instead of buying it from a domestic retailer.

On the other hand, domestic retailers and online stores should focus on other attributes rather than price. For instance, when it comes to the product variety, high quality of the products should be considered to be important from the domestic retailers’ point of view: throughout the data, many consumers indicate that they are not willing to pay more for a certain product in a domestic shop if they perceive that they are able to get the exact same product for a lower price when buying it directly from China. Because of this, the

domestic shops should emphasize that they offer goods of high quality that are durable – and perhaps ethically sourced – and therefore cost more.

In the case of online shops in particular, it would be important to highlight attributes such as free and easy delivery and returns to reduce the perceived risk that is often connected to online shopping. It appears that when ordering inexpensive products from China, it is not unusual that the consumer is willing to take the risk that the product is not necessarily as expected, but in the case of more expensive products, the need to reduce the perceived risk in online shopping becomes emphasized.

Moreover, it can be stated that the role of herd behavior in online shopping from China is crucial. It is thus important for the retailers to keep in mind that many consumers want to buy from where others do too, and especially the exact product that others recommend. As eWOM has an impact on the buying decisions online, it is important that the online shops include product reviews from other consumers who have purchased the product. In addition, the online shop should function well and be easy to use: many consumers who enjoy browsing in the online shops as a pastime might make impulse purchases inspired by other consumers' recommendations or discount campaigns, but technical difficulties might potentially interrupt the impulse purchase – and allow the consumer more time to consider the need for the product, which can be viewed as negative from the seller's point of view.

Herding influences also the consumers' perceptions of the ethical issues related to online shopping from China. It can be argued if the consumers feel that it is socially acceptable to order even a large amount of products from China, which is the case in a social media group where online shopping enthusiasts gather together, they might engage in the trend more easily. From the viewpoint of the domestic companies, the problem seems to be that although most consumers are aware that buying from China is harmful to domestic companies, many of them still tend to choose their own self-interest, in other words that they get the product they want at the lowest possible price – and there is no easy answer to what could be done to change that.

5.3 Limitations

Firstly, it must be noted that as the study is focused on consumers that belong to a social media group dedicated to the topic of cross-border online shopping, these results do not cover the attitudes of all Finnish consumers, but mainly those that actively order from or are otherwise interested in the Chinese online shops as they have voluntarily joined the group and take part in the discussions. On this account, the attitudes of this group of consumers cannot be generalized to all Finnish consumers as such.

Furthermore, when it comes to the ethical issues related to online shopping from China (e.g. whether it is ethically right or wrong to purchase counterfeits, or the environmental impacts caused by online shopping), it must be noted that in the analyzed discussions, there were not that many consumers who would have disagreed with the public opinion of the group. Nevertheless, this does not mean that each consumer would be of like mind, because in other contexts (such as in other social media groups) there appear also more critical voices towards the phenomenon, but each group has its own rules and customs, which affects the contents and tone of the discussions.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

In December 2017, Council of the European Union agreed on new regulation concerning value-added tax on electronic commerce. Starting from January 2021, the exemption for consignments worth less than 22 euros from outside the EU will be removed. (Council of the European Union 7.12.2017.) That is to say that in a few years, small purchases from Chinese online shops will become subject to VAT. It would thus be interesting to study whether the additional charges caused by the new regulation will have an effect on consumer behavior in cross-border e-commerce, as this study has shown that many consumers order first and foremost these small items that have thus far been imported free of VAT.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, the limitation of this study was that its focus was solely on Finnish consumers and more precisely, only those Finnish consumers that are active online shoppers. Further research on other consumer groups and countries is thus required in order to develop a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon and its prevalence. In addition, due to the nature of the social media group from which the research data was collected, the ethical discussions in the group seemed to fall through quickly, which implies that the understanding of the ethical aspects of the phenomenon could have been more developed and well-rounded if the data were collected from different sources. Therefore, consumers' perceptions of the ethical issues related to online shopping from China should be studied more in-depth in the future, perhaps in the form of interviews with consumers, or even using quantitative research methods.

6 SUMMARY

Ordering from Chinese online shops has become increasingly popular among Finnish consumers: in 2017, the Finns ordered approximately 15 million parcels from China, and the phenomenon has been widely discussed in the media. However, consumers' increased interest in ordering from China has its downsides, such as the environmental impacts caused by the transportation of the increased amounts of orders and the new challenges in competitive conditions that domestic companies face. This study aims thus to understand the attitudes Finnish consumers have towards the phenomenon, focusing especially on those consumers that make purchases in the Chinese online shops regularly. The purpose of the study is divided into three sub-questions: the motives that the consumers have for online shopping from China, the role of herd behavior in online shopping, and the consumers' perceptions of the ethical issues related to the phenomenon.

The theoretical background of the study consists of several concepts that are closely connected to the topic. These include motives for online shopping, mobile shopping, buying decision process in online shopping, online impulse buying, herd behavior, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and the ethical issues. Moreover, a model demonstrating the connections between the concepts was created. The research method used in this study was a qualitative content analysis of 15 Facebook discussions of active online shoppers. The data was collected from October to November 2017 and January 2018 from a Facebook group in which Finnish consumers interested in overseas online shopping gather together.

The results of the study indicate that Finnish consumers have both utilitarian and hedonic motives for online shopping from China, price and convenience being among the most common motives. Besides, in consequence of the low price level, motives such as the suspense factor related to online shopping from China and the tendency to make impulse purchases also have an important role in online shopping from China. Moreover, it can be argued that online shopping from China might become a compulsive habit or even an addiction for certain consumers. The role of herd behavior in online shopping should not be underestimated either: the study found that electronic word of mouth (eWOM), especially other consumers' product recommendations in the social media group, influences the buying decisions and might also lead to impulse buying. Another way in which herd behavior is visible is how differing opinions are "moderated" by the members of the social media group. When it comes to the ethical issues related to online shopping from China, the study found that consumers use different guilt management techniques, especially the use of positive emotions and minimizing net impacts, in explaining their online orders. Moreover, it can be stated that an attitude-behavior gap that consumers' ethical choices are often characterized by, is noticeable in online

shopping from China, as the consumers' ethical attitudes towards the issues related to the phenomenon do not necessarily translate into actual behavior.

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APPENDIX 1 EXTRACT FROM THE DATA 1

[126]: Now it arrived! How do I know if it is genuine or not?? *picture of a backpack*

[127]: Link?

[128]: I guess they all come from the same factory

[129]: The real ones and real copies?

[98]: No

[130]: Made in Vietnam all of them

[131]: China and Vietnam.

[126]: *shares keywords to find the product in the online shop*

[68]: Price. And quality. Stiches.

[132]: Check the country of manufacture

[133]: Does it matter?

[133]: So I've been using my China-(brand of the backpack) daily for over a year and I'm just happy about getting a nice and durable backpack for about twenty euros.

[134]: Can cheap be genuine? Well no you're teasing yourself with a copy. I myself buy genuine products from Finland

[133]: How does this teasing manifest itself, that's a bit unclear?

[135]: Based on that, the person who paid for a genuine and expensive brand is a far better person and taxpayer. The person who bought a counterfeit that does the job probably teases oneself by carrying the fake around every day and at the same time constantly dreams about the genuine article and this illusion certainly gnaws the soul to pieces especially when you see someone who has the genuine backpack. Or something equally stupid.

[126]: At least I'm laughing when I'm walking with this backpack up *emoji*

[136]: Then you [134] are in the wrong group! In this group people buy inexpensive products and share experiences about them.

[129]: Why [134] then is in this group? Working in the customs or some other reason for stalking?

[137]: We got this as well and it doesn't differ from the genuine one in any way

[138]: Usually in the way that one is waterproof and the other one is not *emoji*
Of course there are different fake fabrics but some of them are completely different *emoji*

[137]: The other probably isn't but the other one is

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APPENDIX 2 EXTRACT FROM THE DATA 2

[345] The best purchase so far, they go in time with the music also *emojis* *video of party lights*

[346] Woow *emoji* I wonder if Ali sells those as well?

[345] Try the keyword “party light”, you’ll certainly find *emojis*

[346] Thanks for the advice!

[347] Look what I found on AliExpress *link*

[347] Different model Look what I found on AliExpress *link*

[348] Fine!!

[325] How much do these cost?

[345] My party lights costed 9e *emojis*

[349]: [345] what is the song that is playing?

[345]: (name of the song)

[349]: [345] when I go to that Wish site and buy that and it asks that which plug should I put that eu plug.

[345]: Yes, eu plug *emoji*

[349]: [345] does it go in time with any music, no matter what song you put.

[345]: Yes *emoji*

[350]: Link

[345]: *shares the link*

[351]: [352] ordered this!

[352]: Very nice!

[353]: Cool *emoji*

[345]: Yes! *emojis*

[353]: And the right music as well

[345]: Of course, the best! *emojis*

[353]: I'm getting some weird flashbacks from the 90's *laughing emoji*

[345]: Link to that?

[345]: *shares the link*

[355]: Had to order *laughing emoji*

[345]: Yeah! *emojis*

[356]: This one I have to order *emoji*

[357]: My order just left *laughing emoji* [345] did it take long to arrive?

[345]: I ordered in the beginning of December, I don't know if it was because of the peak period but it took almost a month before the parcel arrived *emoji*

[345]: But all my other parcels that I ordered in December were late so I don't think the delivery will take so long now *emoji*

[358]: Yes it is fine. I ordered this for my kid from Wish *video*

[358]: *shares a link*

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