

Executive Summary

In the Aftermath of the Pandemic: A Jobs-to-be-done Perspective on Stationary Retailing

By *Alexandra Rese* and *Daniela Wolfschmidt*

The pandemic has changed life in many ways and has had a particular effect on the stationary retail sector and city centers (e.g., mandatory masks, lockdowns, access controls). Non-system-relevant stores were forced to close temporarily leading to their demise in many cases and the desolation of city centers throughout Germany and other countries. For years now, brick-and-mortar retail has been under pressure due to advancing digitalization and stiff competition from online retail, leaving retailers to face the uncertain future of physical stores. The pandemic has further accelerated the structural shift in retail to online channels.

This paper employs the jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) theory to investigate how the pandemic has changed, for the long term, customer behavior when visiting the city center and which “jobs to be done” (abbreviated: jobs) customers now pursue during their visits. The JTBD theory enables a new view on markets, customers, and their needs, making customer experience more predictable. It directly addresses customers’ real goals and related jobs. The idea underlying the theory is that customers pursue various jobs, which explains why they use certain offers. By taking a process-oriented perspective and analyzing how customers try to solve their personal and social needs, this framework offers a holistic view of customer needs. We address the following research questions: *(1) How has consumer behavior changed due to the pandemic and which changes might be permanent in the long term? (2) Which goals do customers pursue when visiting the city center post-pandemic? (3) Which differences do exist regarding demographics (gender, age)?*

Using a literature review, we identified several direct pandemic-induced changes in customer behavior. To test the long-term nature of these behavioral changes and to explore the JTBD framework, we conducted a qualitative empirical study involving 18 German respondents of different gender and age profiles. Overall, we came up with five long-term behavior changes. We confirmed three long-term behavior changes identified in previous studies: a trend to-

wards online shopping; changing values (health and safety in focus); shopping at local suppliers due to a new awareness of sustainability. We found two additional long-term behavior changes: an awareness of sustainability and the decline in shopping frequency with customers visiting brick-and-mortar stores in the city center less often than before the pandemic.

With regard to the JTBD framework, we identified a total of 16 jobs, seven functional, six emotional, and three social jobs. While the functional jobs are equally important for both genders, the emotional and social jobs are more relevant for women when visiting the city center. The differences in the customer groups can be employed to improve the city center by highlighting the benefits of product inspection and immediate availability and the hedonically valuable shopping experience. The results of this study indicate the connection between utilitarian motives and the fulfillment of functional jobs, between hedonic value and the fulfillment of emotional jobs and between social value and the fulfillment of social jobs. The only job that directly corresponds to a long-term behavioral change is supporting local businesses. Since promoting localness is one of the functional jobs when visiting the city center it should be the focus of promotional initiatives.