

## **Risk on the Radar**

Exploring How and Why Consumer Behaviour Is Changing in Response to Sweden's  
Deteriorating Security Situation

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### **Abstract:**

Consumer behaviour during crisis conditions has been widely studied, with established insights into behavioural drivers, risk perception, and past crisis responses. However, acknowledging that each distinct crisis exhibits vastly different effects on consumers, little is known about how consumers respond to the multifaceted threats that a deteriorating security situation today poses. Therefore, this study focuses on a new type of historically unique crisis characterized by prolonged, abstract, and ambiguous threats that affect consumers' lives. By investigating the historically peaceful context of Sweden, this study addresses how and why consumer behaviour is changing in response to the country's deteriorating security situation. An exploratory qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with Swedish consumers to gain an understanding of what behavioural patterns can be attributed to the security situation and the underlying motivations that drive them. The findings reveal that the ambiguous nature of the threats causes a wide range of consumer responses, from subtle shifts in preferences and priorities to more concrete purchasing responses, such as anxiety-driven consumption and home preparedness. The behaviours are driven by the portrayal of risk through social and informational channels, and the interpretation of the risk, which are dominantly shaped by emotional processes and experiences from previous crises. The study expands the theoretical understanding of how and why consumers respond to crises and has important implications for managers and policymakers to navigate a new and complex environment.

**Keywords:** consumer behaviour, security situation, crisis, risk behaviour

|                |                                      |
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## List of Definitions

**Consumer Behaviour:** The study of how individuals and groups satisfy their needs and wants by choosing, purchasing, using, and disposing of goods, ideas, and services (Kotler & Keller, 2009).

**Crisis:** An unstable situation in which a decisive change is impending with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome (Hazaa et al., 2021).

**Preparedness:** The knowledge and capacities developed by governments, response and recovery organizations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current disasters (UNDRR, 2017).

**Risk:** The product of the probability and consequences of a potentially harmful event (Battistelli & Galantino, 2019).

**Sweden's deteriorating security situation:** The increasing threats to national security due to the potential expansion of Russian warfare beyond Ukraine, rising tensions in the Baltic Sea, the widespread societal impact of hybrid warfare, and the increasing overall instability in the geopolitical landscape (Försvarsmakten, 2025; MSB, 2025).

**Threat:** Attributable to negative intentionality and ill-intentioned actors deliberately producing harm to others (Battistelli & Galantino, 2019).

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

*“Sweden is not at war. But neither is it at peace.”*  
— *Ulf Kristersson, Prime Minister of Sweden (2025)*

On the 24th of February 2022, Russia initiated its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, starting the largest military attack Europe has seen since the Second World War (Kaufman et al., 2022). The invasion and ongoing warfare have shaken the global security situation, particularly for the European neighbours that are perceived to be in the crossfire as Russia’s potential “next targets” (Jones & Anglesey, 2025; Reyes, 2025). Simultaneously, numerous European countries endure continuous “hybrid attacks” from foreign powers (European External Action Service, 2025). These include cyber attacks, sabotage, and disinformation campaigns, with the ambition to disrupt critical societal systems, gain access to sensitive information, and influence decision-making (Försvarsmakten, 2025). In the first months of 2025, the situation has continued to escalate as President Trump’s return to the White House has shaken the alliance between Europe and the U.S. The U.S. rhetoric toward the EU countries, economic threats of various tariffs and trade policies, and its criticism and demands towards Ukraine in the ongoing war have sparked questions about whether European NATO members can expect U.S. aid in the case of a foreign invasion (Gardner, 2025; Michaels et al., 2025). The recent developments have further destabilized the global geopolitical landscape and deepened the uncertainty of the situation.

As the situation escalates, fear is growing among European citizens (Hajek et al., 2023; Groupe d’études Geopolitique, 2025). Throughout various situations and crises in the past, the fear and uncertainty experienced by individuals have significantly affected the way they consume (e.g. Clerides et al., 2015; Loxton et al., 2020; Somer & Ruvio, 2014; Wachinger et al., 2013). Therefore, understanding consumer behaviour is not only essential for managers navigating an increasingly complex environment, but also for policymakers seeking to anticipate and mitigate extreme or undesirable societal responses.

One European country that has been significantly impacted by the deteriorating security situation is Sweden. The situation poses a dramatic change to Swedish citizens as the nation has had peace for over 200 years (Informationsverige.se, 2023). The escalations have resulted in the restoration of the Swedish total defence, which can be described as a whole-of-society approach involving the collaboration of the armed forces, government ministries, civic organizations, the private sector, and the general public (Ericson et al., 2023). Total defence was a central part of Sweden's military strategy already during the Cold War, but this time, an even greater emphasis is being put on individuals' responsibility to contribute to national security (Ljungkvist, 2024). Given the ambiguous nature of hybrid attacks and disinformation campaigns, the individual citizen bears a greater responsibility in defending against such attacks today, as opposed to the Cold War, where responding to propaganda and false information was a governmental task (Ljungkvist, 2024).

While the emphasis on individual responsibility and "togetherness" fosters unity, it also heightens fear and anxiety among Swedish citizens (Ericson et al., 2023; Ljungkvist, 2024). By the end of 2023, war and conflict had become the top concerns for Swedish consumers, with 93% being very or somewhat worried about the situation (EY, 2023). In addition, the tone of government decision-makers has become more dramatic as the situation has escalated. In January 2024, the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces, Micael Bydén, stated that all Swedes must prepare themselves for war, leaving 38% of the population more worried about war coming to Sweden (TV4, 2024). Given the evident impact the deteriorating security situation has on individuals, it is important to understand how and why consumer behaviour has shifted in response.

## 1.2 Problem Discussion

Although significant attention has been put into how consumer behaviour is affected by various crises (e.g. Clerides et al., 2015; Loxton et al., 2020; Somer & Ruvio, 2014; Wachinger et al., 2013), each distinct crisis exhibits vastly different effects on consumers. Hence, it is not plausible to assume that new crises will share the same characteristics as previous ones. This study focuses on a new type of historically unique crisis with a multitude of abstract and ambiguous threats that affect consumers' lives. The situation is characterized by a risk of an escalation of Russia's war beyond Ukraine, persistent hybrid attacks from

foreign powers, and geopolitical instability that threatens the world order and the dependency on NATO as an alliance. The role of the individual is also different from similar situations in the past, such as the Cold War or World War II, as citizens must be constantly aware and prepare themselves for threats such as military advancements, cyber attacks, disinformation campaigns when they are scrolling their phones, or any other threat that can not yet be imagined. The ambiguous nature of the situation makes the threats ever-present and difficult to understand, spreading fear and impacting the lives of consumers in a historically unique way. Therefore, it is important to study how this particular situation impacts consumer behaviour.

### 1.3 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of how and why consumer behaviour is affected by a deteriorating security situation characterized by a multitude of ambiguous and abstract threats. More specifically, it aims to shed light on what consumer behavioural patterns can be exhibited in such a situation and the underlying mechanisms that drive those behaviours. This is done by studying the Swedish context, where individuals are expected to be highly impacted by the situation, as it is continuously faced with such threats and significantly emphasizes the responsibility of the individual through the total defence, sharply contrasting its long history of peace. With the aforementioned research purpose in mind, this study aims to answer the following research question:

*How and why is consumer behaviour changing in response to the deteriorating security situation in Sweden?*

### 1.4 Expected Contributions

The expected contribution of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how and why consumer behaviour changes during crises by examining a novel type of situation marked by ambiguous and abstract threats. Practically, the study seeks to inform both policymakers and managers. Given the heterogeneous and potentially extreme and irrational individual responses during crises (e.g., Pennings & Grossman, 2008; Slovic et al., 2004; Loewenstein et al., 2001), insights into current and anticipated consumer behaviours can help national government politicians, governmental

agencies, and regulatory agencies anticipate and mitigate undesirable responses. For managers, understanding these behavioural patterns can support strategic decisions and provide early warnings of shifts in consumer sentiment.

## 1.5 Delimitations

The term “security situation” might include the threat of several criminal behaviours, like terrorism and gang violence. Although many aspects of a security situation are intertwined, this study limits the scope by focusing on: *the increasing threats to national security due to the potential expansion of Russian warfare beyond Ukraine, rising tensions in the Baltic Sea, the widespread societal impact of hybrid warfare, and the increasing overall instability in the geopolitical landscape*. The delimitation has been based on the overlapping definitions of the deteriorating security situation used by the Swedish Armed Forces (2025) and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB, 2025).

## 2. Literature and Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Literature Review

This section provides an understanding of previous research on consumer behaviour during crises by first unpacking the non-unified fields of research feeding into it. It begins by outlining the dominant approaches to studying consumer behaviour, followed by a review of how threats and the risks associated with them affect consumer behaviour. Finally, findings from previous research on consumer behaviour during specific crises are presented to highlight which consumer behaviours have been exhibited in the past.

#### 2.1.1 Consumer Behaviour, Threats, and Risk

Consumer behaviour is defined as how individuals and groups satisfy their needs and wants through buying and disposing of goods, services, ideas or experiences (Kotler & Keller, 2009). The decision process of consumer behaviour has been argued to happen in five stages, from problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and lastly, to post-purchase behaviour (Kotler & Keller, 2009). However, as Englis and Solomon (1997) argue, a full understanding of consumer behaviour also requires attention to what consumers choose not to consume.

Scholars have examined various dimensions of consumer behaviour. Two major pillars of consumer research, the economic (e.g. Becker, 1965; Samuelson, 1948; Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944) and psychological (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Schwartz, 2005) perspectives have shaped much of the historical understanding of consumer behaviour. These approaches rest on the assumptions that consumers are either highly constrained by rationality and utility maximization, or cognitive information processing (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Arnould & Thompson, 2007; Mehta et al., 2020). Consumer culture theory (CCT) became recognized as the third major pillar of consumer research (Arnould & Thompson, 2007) and arose in opposition to these more structured approaches to consumer behaviour, as it rather emphasizes how culture and relations between society and individuals are crucial to understanding consumer behaviours (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011).

It has been well-established that situations or crises that involve threats can have a significant impact on consumer behaviour. Campbell et al. (2020) describe how threat-inducing events can be perceived as disruptions to daily life, which compel individuals to adapt their consumption habits to new circumstances. Li et al. (2021) discuss how such events can exhibit both constructive and positive consumer behaviour, such as an increased willingness to donate (Cai & Wyer, 2015), and irrational and negative behaviour, such as higher alcohol consumption (Vlahov et al., 2002). Acknowledging that there is a relationship between consumption and the self, Han et al. (2015) describe how threats to the self, like a threat to one's mortality, can cause a wide range of consequences for consumer behaviour. They highlight how consumers may respond to threats either by approaching them, leading to problem-focused consumption aimed at managing the situation, or by avoiding them, which tends to result in more emotionally driven coping behaviours (Han et al., 2015). Ultimately, it is individuals' attitudes and perceptions of the risk associated with a given threat that shape behavioural responses (Pennings & Grossman, 2008), positioning risk as the key driver to translate threats into consumer action.

The influence of risk on the behaviour of both consumers and individuals has been given extensive attention in previous literature. Bauer (1960) was among the first to formulate the concept of risk in consumer behaviour. He emphasized how consumer behaviour is motivated by subjective risk, as opposed to "real world" (objective) risk, since the consumer has limited information, a semi-reliable memory and a reduced number of trials to consider and hence can not assess (objective) risk accurately (Bauer, 1960). While Bauer focused on subjective risk in the consumer context, Kahneman and Tversky (1979) fundamentally reshaped the broader understanding of decision-making under risk through prospect theory. By challenging the assumption of rationality, they showed that people systematically deviate from rational decisions and are more sensitive to losses than to equivalent gains. Slovic (1987) further developed the field by suggesting that not only the decision-making process, but also individuals' perceptions of risk, are heavily influenced by emotions and psychological biases, rather than relying on statistics and expert judgements. Kasperson et al. (1988) added to this understanding by emphasizing how risk is not only a construct of the individual, as it is substantially shaped by surrounding social and cultural forces as well. Building on this progression, Loewenstein et al. (2001) advanced the understanding of risk behaviour by introducing the risk-as-feelings hypothesis, demonstrating how emotional reactions, in

tandem with cognitive evaluations, also play a fundamental part in shaping behaviour under risk.

### 2.1.2 Consumer Behaviour During Past Crises

This section presents the literature on consumer behavioural shifts during various types of crises, including war, political conflict, global health emergencies, and natural disasters, that share relevant similarities with Sweden's deteriorating security situation. By outlining the different types of crises that have served as research contexts, this review provides a foundation for understanding how consumers can respond in times of crisis. The review has been structured around specific behavioural patterns that emerge across these crises, as they often exhibit recurring themes.

#### *Home preparedness*

Proper household emergency preparedness has been identified as one of the most effective ways to mitigate the effects of a disaster (Keim, 2008). In addition to reducing potential damage, preparing can give people a sense of safety and control. Olsson and Rinne (2023) studied how the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine engaged household preparation to give people a sense of agency and control over the situation, granting hope in an otherwise hopeless situation.

Previous literature offers contrasting views on which factors affect the likelihood of having a household emergency plan. Rivera (2020) studied how the likelihood of developing a household emergency plan in the U.S. context increases with greater efficacy in preparedness activities, prior exposure to disasters, and access to preparedness information. Relatedly, a substantial part of the field suggests that individuals with lower risk perception are less likely to heed warnings and take preparedness measures than those with higher risk perception (Hung et al., 2007; Ruin et al., 2007). Wachinger et al. (2013), however, introduced the risk perception paradox, arguing that individuals with high risk perception may still choose not to prepare. This can occur when they accept the risk as the benefits of the current situation outweigh dealing with the risk, feel a lack of personal agency and transfer responsibility to others, or lack the necessary resources to take action (Wachinger et al., 2013).

### *Panic buying*

Panic buying is commonly recognized as a consumer behaviour where individuals purchase unusually large quantities or a wide variety of products in anticipation of, during, or after a disaster or perceived disaster, or in expectation of significant price increases or shortages (Yoon et al., 2018; Yuen et al., 2020). The literature employs various terms with similar meanings, including hoarding (Roos et al., 2025), stockpiling (Ahmadi et al., 2022), and buffering (Dickins & Schalz, 2020).

Yuen et al. (2020) studied the initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and established four factors that might cause consumers to engage in panic buying: (1) individuals' perception of the threat and scarcity, (2) fear of the unknown, (3) coping behaviour, and (4) social psychological behaviours. It is thus argued that panic buying can mitigate the perceived risk of the situation, regulate individuals' fear and negative emotions around the uncertainty of the crisis, and restore a sense of control. Social psychological behaviours can drive panic buying further, either as individuals follow the actions of others, or through a higher level of social distrust, which causes individualistic behaviour by buying more than one's share and not leaving enough for others (Yuen et al., 2020). Loxton et al. (2020) studied how consumer behaviour during the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic was consistent with previous crises, arguing that hoarding perceivably important goods is common at the first sign of a disaster. The authors argue that a higher consumption of regularly used products in the initial stages of a crisis, such as cleaning products during the COVID-19 pandemic, can be seen as reasonable. However, as the crisis develops and fear and anxiety grow, individuals start acting on their feelings and, in turn, engage in more irrational consumption (Loxton et al., 2020).

### *National sentiment*

It has been widely established that consumers' attitudes toward a specific country, both positive and negative, can impact how they perceive brands from that particular country. As consumption is one way to express one's identity and values (Belk, 1988), people can support or oppose a nation's identity by increasing or decreasing their consumption of products and services representing that nationality (Pandya et al., 2024). Some may experience animosity, resisting the consumption of goods from a specific nation or culture (Klein et al., 1998),

while others may feel affinity by developing a sense of sympathy, which leads them to favour the nation or culture's goods (Oberecker et al., 2008).

Plenty of research has studied how international conflict can affect consumers' propensity to consume domestic and foreign goods, as consumers exhibit the attitudes mentioned above. One particularly researched conflict is the Iraq War, which exhibited various effects on consumer behaviour. Pandya et al. (2024) studied how the sales of American-sounding brands in the U.S. increased in counties that suffered more casualties in the war, due to a heightened sense of national identity, and decreased in counties that had a higher coverage of the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal, due to a decreased sense of national identity. Clerides et al. (2015) found that anti-American sentiment caused by the Iraq War decreased the sales of American soft drinks in several Arab countries following a series of boycotts. Other studies have examined how France's opposition to the war in Iraq affected the sales of French products in the U.S., highlighting how animosity can cause changes in consumer behaviour not only from direct conflict, but from political disagreements as well. Chavis and Leslie (2009) studied how sales of French wine significantly decreased in the U.S. as a result of a nationwide boycott, and Pandya and Venkatesan (2016) studied how French-sounding brands, mistakenly perceived by consumers as French imports, declined in market share as a result of the dispute.

More recently, the literature has examined how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created animosity and affinity toward Russia and Ukraine, respectively, and how it in turn impacts consumption patterns in foreign countries. Akhtar et al. (2024) studied European consumers' attitudes toward Russian brands after the invasion of Ukraine and found that there was a strong negative influence of consumer animosity on the attitude toward Russian brands, in turn leading to widespread boycotts. On the other hand, Kochkina et al. (2023) studied how European consumers have developed a more positive view of Ukraine, finding that German consumers, in particular, have expressed their support for the country by demonstrating a strong willingness to purchase Ukrainian pharmaceutical products.

#### *Consumption of essential and non-essential goods*

The literature on the consumption of essential and non-essential goods during crises is multifaceted and offers contrasting results. Several studies have found that the COVID-19

pandemic, similar to previous crises, forced consumers to reevaluate their priorities to fulfil more essential needs (Loxton et al., 2020; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). In terms of luxury consumption, Syed and Haq (2021) found that the uncertainty the pandemic brought with it caused consumers to refrain from shopping for luxury products the way they used to. Kim et al. (2022) further studied how the pandemic also heightened public expectations for reduced spending on unnecessary products, emphasizing the public's active role in shaping these consumption patterns.

Contrastingly, it has been established that crises can, in some cases, cause higher consumption of non-essential goods as well. When faced with fear and anxiety, individuals experiencing negative emotions may use consumption as a strategy to gain positive reinforcement (Tice et al., 2001). Kemp and Kopp (2011) introduced the concept of emotional regulation consumption, which defines how individuals consume a good or service for the purposes of alleviating, repairing, or managing an emotion in the short term. The specific consumption patterns vary between individuals and contexts, depending on what evokes positive emotions. Somer and Ruvio (2014) studied how Israelis under constant rocket fire cope with their emotions and found that mildly materialistic consumers utilize social support to a greater extent, while more materialistic consumers cope with the situation by acquiring new objects. Kemp et al. (2021) studied the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and found that people consume products, mainly food in particular, to mitigate feelings of fear and anxiety. The pandemic also shifted what aspects of the consumption of non-essential goods were considered most important. Kumar (2023) found that the human suffering seen during the pandemic caused luxury consumers to place greater emphasis on intimacy and social connectedness to generate happiness, emotional bonds, and support from the products they consumed.

### *Travel*

Another aspect of consumption that has been found to be affected during crises is the willingness to travel. During a crisis, it has been established that uncertainty in individuals' risk attitudes and perceptions can increase the likelihood of undesirable behavioural shifts and can be manifested as a heightened reluctance to travel (Pennings & Grossman, 2008). Mill and Morrison (2006) discuss how risk influences travellers' destination choices as they assess both positive and negative factors when considering a location's perceived ability to

fulfil their felt needs. They argue that individuals with more travel experience will feel safer when travelling, and many choose to regularly return to the same destination as it is perceived as a place of safety and comfort (Mill & Morrison, 2006). Another way travellers seek security in times of uncertainty is by opting for destinations closer to home, as illustrated by Jęczyński et al. (2023), who found that Polish tourists favoured nearby locations to mitigate fears caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having visited a destination before may also reduce the perceived risk of going there again, as suggested by Ingram et al. (2013), who studied how previous visitors to Thailand were less affected by its political instability in the early 2010s and sustained a more favourable view of the country than those who had not visited before. Travellers may also take a stance when deciding on their destinations and choose to boycott nations or regions they disagree with. Ahn et al. (2022) showed how Korean consumers boycotted travel to Japan in response to its restrictions on exports of components vital to Korea's technology industry, illustrating how decisions made by national leaders can affect the image of the entire country and, in turn, its tourism industry.

## 2.2 Research Gap

The review of the non-unified body of literature within consumer behaviour during crises shows several mature research areas. Extensive research has already investigated the fundamental drivers of consumer behaviour (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Arnould et al., 2005; Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944), risk factors influencing behaviour (e.g. Bauer, 1960; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Slovic, 1987), and how consumer behaviour has been impacted in past crises (e.g. Ingram et al., 2013; Loxton et al., 2020; Somer & Ruvio, 2014). As the effects on consumer behaviour for each crisis are highly contextually dependent, one can not expect a unified understanding of how consumer behaviour changes during crises to be universally applicable. Therefore, there remains a question as to how and why consumer behaviour is changing in response to the novel and multifaceted crisis that the deteriorating security situation poses. Due to the recent escalations and the novelty of the situation, there are limited studies on how consumer behaviour changes when faced with a crisis characterized by such threats and their ambiguous, ever-present nature. Therefore, the literature on consumer behaviour during crises is limited in explaining how and why such a

crisis may impact consumer behaviour. This reveals a gap in existing research, namely a lack of understanding of how and why consumer behaviour is impacted when facing an ambiguous, multifaceted and complex risk setting of this nature. Given the extensive impact this crisis already has on individuals, this study seeks to address this research gap to deepen the understanding of how consumer behaviour is changing in such a context.

## 2.3 Theoretical Context

This study does not test a specific theoretical framework, as it aims to avoid preconceived notions about the behaviours that may arise from this particular crisis. Rather, this section presents the study's theoretical context that serves as a foundation to the explorative approach to how and why the risk associated with such a crisis affects behaviour, and to help explain the underlying mechanisms behind the study's results. The rationale behind the theoretical context has been inspired by Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) positioning of CCT.

CCT consists of several theoretical approaches, but the shared orientation is the exploration of the relationship between consumer action, cultural meanings and the marketplace (Arnould et al., 2005). This is done by examining heterogeneous manifestations and multiple meanings of consumer cultures, which refer to a system of commercially produced symbols and objects through which groups use to make sense of their environments, and guide their lives and experiences. These are shaped, transformed and sustained by the socioeconomic and marketplace system in which they reside, through historical forces, cultural narratives, and ideologies (Arnould et al., 2005).

Askegaard and Linnet (2011) developed the CCT field by emphasizing the importance of bringing consumers in a consumer culture alive as "real people" that constantly navigate their social universe. This is done by examining both the individual consumer and the wider context and elements of forces that shape their lives, which may be less explicitly experienced by the consumer. As opposed to giving primacy to the overly individualistic focus on consumption and observed lived experiences of consumers, they expand the analytical lens to the "context of context", which is not necessarily directly part of an individual's consumer experience. Given the complex and ambiguous context this study addresses, the actions and motivations of consumers may not be immediately visible or easily

interpreted. Therefore, to uncover a consumer's "lifeworld" (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011), there is a need to situate a consumer's motivations and consumption in a world beyond that of the subjective experiences of the consumer. As such, one has to investigate the relations between individuals and society, through both the rich, detailed accounts of real-life experiences and the structuring influences of the consumer's systems (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011) to properly unpack the study's research question.

Building on this logic, three risk behavioural perspectives together map out this theoretical context. In isolation, these perspectives offer relevant insights into different aspects of behavioural response to crises, but lack the necessary breadth to gain a broad understanding of what drives consumer behaviour during crises. As the perspectives highlight different aspects of a multifaceted risk environment, the combination of the three is deemed suitable to capture the studied context's complex risk setting and reflect what is beyond individuals' observed lived experiences, and thereby contribute to the understanding of the "context of context". Moreover, as all three of the perspectives regard an individual, as opposed to a consumer, they help describe the underlying mechanisms of "real people" (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011), beyond the isolated lens of the consumer. Taking a broader view of the consumer is argued to be suitable to this specific context of the studied phenomenon, as it might trigger behaviours beyond those of the traditional consumer.

The social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988) and the logic behind the behavioural outcome space (Pennings & Grossman, 2008) help uncover the relations between individuals and society, and how the communication between individuals, society and social groups contributes to explaining individual responses and behaviour when facing a crisis. The two perspectives in tandem contribute to understanding the context of context that the individual is facing, by including different angles to understanding the role of communication during a crisis. However, while the two perspectives capture the external communication about a risk, they do not account for the individual's current and historical "internal" affective context, which is driven by a history of conditioning and past experiences with crises. Therefore, the risk-as-feelings hypothesis (Loewenstein et al., 2001) complements the understanding of the "context of context" for an individual facing a crisis. The prevalence of emotional somatic markers influences the vividness and imagination of the consequences of this crisis, and will therefore also likely affect the amplification or attenuation of certain behaviours, and the

effectiveness of risk communication. Moreover, acknowledging the individual's emotional responses might explain why some individuals act contrary to what the other perspectives would predict in some, or all, aspects of their consumption. To conclude, the three theoretical perspectives can be perceived to together allow for an understanding of individuals' broader context of context. The remainder of this section will review the three perspectives in more detail.

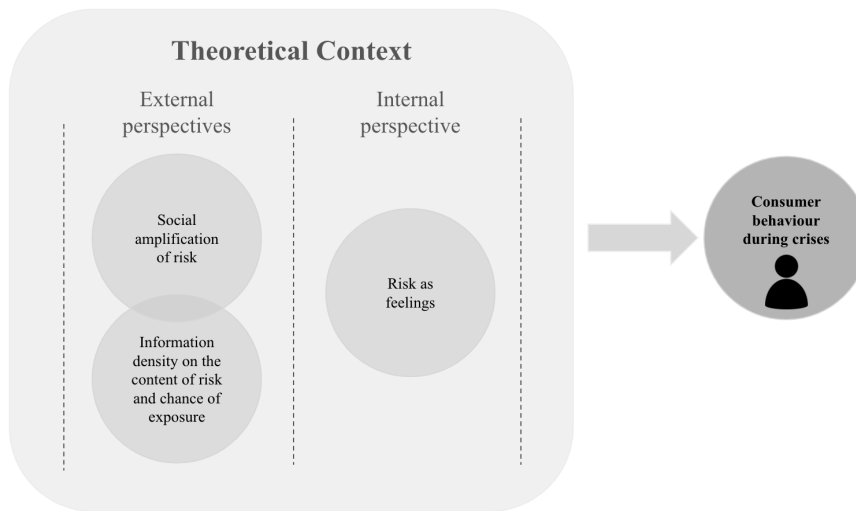


Figure 1 - The theoretical context of the study

### *Social amplification of risk*

Kasperson et al. (1988) describe the “social amplification of risk” as how psychological, social, and cultural processes interact with risk events, ultimately determining whether risk perception and related behaviours are heightened or attenuated. Individuals socially experience risk, either by direct personal experience or indirectly through receiving information about the risk. This risk event information dominantly flows through two major networks, namely the media or through informal personal networks like social groups of friends, neighbours or co-workers. The individual, or the “receiver” of the information, decodes the informational message, which is largely shaped by the symbols within the message that were emitted by the source. These symbols might have distinct meanings for different social and cultural groups and play a powerful role in shaping the decoding process and triggering the receiver's attention and associations. For instance, if a message references a widely appreciated social value or is emitted from a prestigious communication source, the receiver's perceived credibility of otherwise weak evidence can increase. The individual

response to the information is guided by both heuristics and values to simplify the complexity of the risk and the severity of the signal value the risk elicits. Moreover, alignment with the interpretations of one's social group and possible stigmatization from negative imagery associated with undesirable social groups or individuals, further guides this response. Social amplification of risk, through this interaction between risk events and social processes, highlights how risk is meaningful only in relation to how people perceive the world and its relationships, and therefore poses an essential perspective for understanding behaviour in crisis contexts (Kasperson et al., 1988).

### *The behavioural outcome space*

Pennings and Grossman (2008) explain how communication about a risk affects risk attitudes and risk perception that in turn drive behaviour during crises or disasters. They extend the logic of Kasperson et al. (1988) by emphasizing the role of information density and communication effectiveness about a risk. These are core drivers for how the risks are characterized, and therefore also for the subsequent individual behaviour during crises.

During a crisis, there are both individual risk behaviours of citizens and the cumulative effect of all individual behaviours. This cumulative effect is called the “behavioural outcome space” (BOS), which is the aggregate behaviour policymakers are faced with. Information density about the risk content and the interpretation of the likelihood of exposure to that content are directly related to risk attitude and risk perception. Different sources of risk information, communication about the risk and different presentations of the risk probabilities all alter the public characterization of the risk. As a crisis has a high level of uncertainty, both risk attitude and risk perception become uncertain variables. This uncertainty leads to a wider BOS with higher variances of risk attitudes and perceptions, which in turn causes heterogeneous behaviours and increases the probabilities of extreme and undesirable behaviour. On an individual level, this can manifest through behaviours such as a reluctance to travel or stockpiling medication, and as collective behaviour causing reactions such as price spikes, stock market crashes or medication shortages. Yet, as behaviours of citizens in times of crises are heterogeneous, some individuals will not be affected at all. Therefore, to understand and be able to handle a crisis and the associated behaviours, one has to understand the effect risk communication has on characterizations of risk perception and risk attitudes during a crisis. To narrow the BOS, decision-makers need to turn an *uncertain* situation into a

*risk* situation by increasing information density about both the crisis and the chance of exposure to it (Pennings & Grossman, 2008).

### *Risk as feelings*

Loewenstein et al. (2001) introduced the risk-as-feelings hypothesis, arguing that behaviour during risk and uncertainty is shaped not only by cognition but also by emotions. The hypothesis highlights how affect and feelings play a vital role in shaping behaviour and emphasizes the interplay between emotional reactions and cognitive evaluations in guiding reasoning and decision-making. Emotions can guide reactions at their first occurrence, but they also influence future behavioural responses through conditioning and memory, where emotions serve as somatic markers. Moreover, in some risk situations, the same scenario can generate an emotional reaction that diverges from, and potentially overrides, the cognitive evaluation of the risk. This is especially prevalent in high anxiety situations, where emotional reactions often are the dominating influence on behaviour. The risk-as-feelings perspective highlights an additional crucial factor in understanding behaviour during crises, as affect not only serves as an important input in decision-making and behaviour, but may be essential, and potentially mediate cognitive evaluations of risk and the resulting behaviour (Loewenstein et al., 2001).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Methodological Fit

Adequate research methodology that ensures internal consistency and fit among the elements of this research project is necessary, both in order to answer the research question accurately and to ensure high quality of research (Saunders et al., 2012; Bell et al., 2022). These factors will now be considered.

#### 3.1.1 Research Assumptions and Philosophy

As this study aims to uncover and understand changes in consumer behaviour on the individual unit of analysis in a unique and novel setting, the authors employ an interpretivist perspective. The social constructionist ontology underpins this perspective, where subjective human action and meaning-making constitute reality rather than one externally existing objective truth (Bell et al., 2022; Saunders et al., 2012). The notion of “objective” risk influencing consumer behaviour is contested by scholars (Bauer, 1960; Mitchell, 1999; Stone & Winter, 1985), which makes the constructionist assumptions underpinning this study critical to yield effective explanations of the study’s revealed dynamics. As this study investigates a complex interplay between contextual risk factors and individual behaviours, the interpretivist perspective is appropriate as it embraces the existence of multiple interpretations and narratives. This allows for rich insights into the unit of analysis while still considering its interplay with the social world and the cultural and societal factors underpinning it (Saunders et al., 2012).

#### 3.1.2 Research Design

Given the adopted interpretivist epistemological position, a qualitative research method has been used as it is appropriate when studying the social reality and shifting property of an individual’s creation (Bell et al., 2022; Saunders et al., 2012). This study does not aim to test existing theory, but rather to gain a deep understanding of human behaviour and motivations by exploring a previously unexamined, novel and complex context, which supports the use of a qualitative and exploratory approach (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Concretely, the study was designed as a qualitative cross-sectional study with explorative semi-structured

interviews as the main data collection method. The interview setting is well fitted with the study's abductive approach, as this allows for direct observation and exploration of the interviewees' personal experiences of the deteriorating security situation, to ground the studied phenomenon in reality (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). Contrary to the qualitative method, a quantitative approach would ignore its complexity and interrelated contextual factors, disregard changes to early stages of the consumer decision process that have not yet been materialized, and one could not attribute behavioural shifts with confidence to the deteriorating security situation.

### 3.1.3 Approach to Theory

This study adopts an abductive approach, meaning that rather than setting all preconceived knowledge aside, the study has continuously iterated between empirical evidence and the literature to generate plausible explanations to the initially "unexplained" puzzle (Bell et al., 2022; Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This approach is appropriate to the study's explorative purpose, as it is suitable to explore a phenomenon and challenge pre-understandings (Bell et al., 2022; Saunders et al., 2012). Concretely, the study aims to generate knowledge about a context that is new to the literature, but acknowledges that there is knowledge to be drawn from similar situations in the past. This was evident, for example, when research on past crises informed the interview guide, while still allowing interviews to take their entirely own course and explore topics beyond what was known from previous research.

## 3.2 Data Collection

### 3.2.1 Interview Sample

Following the logic of purposive sampling, interviewees were selected based on criteria that allowed the research question to be answered (Bell et al., 2022). As individuals actively shape their life paths by making decisions, their consumer behaviour develops and adapts over time in response to life events (Moschis, 2007; Suttharattanagul et al., 2022). Therefore, two criteria were set to ensure the sample provided both relevant findings and variation of voices. First, interviewees were spread across three different life cycles, as they appropriately reflect consumer needs and spending patterns (Bauer & Auer-Srnka, 2012; Baines et al.,

2022; Wells & Gubar, 1966) and, therefore, are proposed to contribute to different angles of the studied phenomenon. Second, the scope for the interviewees was set to be of legal and working age (18-65) to facilitate the process of contrasting the results across different life stages.

After reaching out to a small group of relevant people, these people were in turn asked to propose potentially relevant candidates to be interviewed next, in accordance with the snowball sampling method (Bell et al., 2022). Specifically, the interviewees were asked to recommend one potential candidate per life cycle bracket to ensure an even spread across groups. This was done to include individuals who reflect the general characteristics of the population (Bell et al., 2022). Respondents were recruited until theoretical saturation was reached. After interview 19, the new data no longer provided insights or revealed new aspects of a developing theory or theoretical categories, but two additional interviews were held to ensure saturation (Bell et al., 2022). The full list of interviewees can be found in Appendix 2.

### 3.2.2 Interview Design

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing for flexibility while still being guided by overall themes in the interview guide (Bell et al., 2022). As the semi-structured approach allows for in-depth exploration of the interviewee's motivations, emotions and characteristics (Bell et al., 2022), it was deemed appropriate for this study as it aims to develop a deep understanding of the studied phenomenon. An interview guide (Appendix 3) served as a guiding tool of curiosity and to spark initial conversation, while still being attentive and open-minded to explore new interesting venues. In accordance with the outlined abductive approach, the studied phenomenon is perceived as related, and similar, to other observations already experienced and explained in other situations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Therefore, the interview guide was designed with inspiration from past behaviours that emerged in previous crises (see section 2.1.2), while keeping in mind that these might be shown to be irrelevant in this context.

The interview guide's questions were carefully designed to be open-ended rather than leading to ensure that the interviewees shared their true, natural, reflections (Bell et al., 2022). Introducing, follow-up and probing questions were mixed to ensure deep exploration of the interview subjects, with the possibility to spend more time on the areas revealed as most

interesting (Bell et al., 2022). Questions were deliberately framed in less technical terms, both for them to be understood by all interviewees and to mitigate the risk of the authors feeding their own agendas and categories into the interview (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). As the studied phenomenon exists in a rapidly changing context, and the context is pivotal for interpreting the questions, interviews were conducted in a 3-week period, starting March 3rd. The time span was considered the shortest possible to ensure answers were related to a unified macro environment while allowing time to process the gathered material. Two pilot interviews were held before conducting the interviews to test the structure of the interview setup and the logic of the interview guide, making sure questions were well understood and to be able to make adjustments if necessary (Bell et al., 2022). Following this, some questions were clarified, and follow-up prompts were added where necessary.

### 3.2.3 Interview Process

Given that the study's subject can potentially be considered private, emotionally disturbing, and sensitive, looking over the process around the interviews is crucial. Before each interview, the interviewees were informed about what they could expect, including that their data would be kept confidential and that they were recruited on the general basis of representing a "regular" consumer. Having individual, rather than group, conversations was necessary to ensure participants felt safe to potentially share psychological patterns connected to fear and stigmatized behaviour without the influence or judgement of other people (Bell et al., 2022). Interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes, and took place online on Microsoft Teams as it opened up the opportunity to have conversations with geographically dispersed participants. Online interviewing can be considered subpar to face-to-face interviews, as important non-verbal and visual cues can be missed (Bell et al., 2022). Therefore, video conferencing was key to ensuring rich interview data, as this format allows for observing these cues beyond the verbal (Bell et al., 2022). This format places greater demands on the safe handling of data, and therefore, permission to record the interviews was requested. Conducting the interviews online and in the subject's mother tongue ensured a familiar setting for the interviewee to share freely without fear of being overheard or not being able to put thoughts into words (Bell et al., 2022).

To lay the grounds for data analysis, the automatic transcribing feature on Microsoft Teams was complemented by one author manually transcribing what was said. This allowed the

transcriber to take notes of non-verbal cues, pauses, and other observations that capture elements of talk that are interactionally relevant (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The other author had full attention on the interviewee, making sure they were responsive to what they were both saying and doing, and being attentive to indications of potential unease (Bell et al., 2022). This enabled flexibility in the interview and allowed explorative directions, as the interviewer was attentive to new interesting directions of the conversation. After concluding each interview, the authors separately noted experiences and feelings about the interview to gather enough detail to check against faulty memory and mitigate the tendency to retrospectively modify the experience (Bell et al., 2022; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis method used in this study was inspired by the thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006), complemented by the thematic techniques introduced by Ryan and Bernard (2003). Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze and report patterns in the data, and was deemed suitable for the study as it can provide rich and thick descriptions of large amounts of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A clear and systematic approach to identifying themes is illustrated in Figure 2 and was used to reduce the risk of “paralysing the researchers” because of the limitless analytical possibilities (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

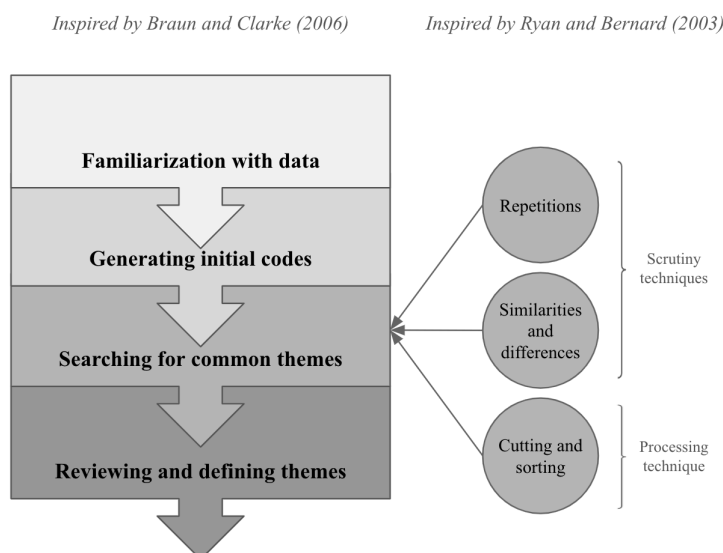


Figure 2 - Approach to thematic analysis

The first analytical step involved immersion into the data, mainly through transcribing interviews to written form, to ensure in-depth familiarity with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done continuously as interviews unfolded. Then, features of interest were identified to generate initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which the authors did separately to not infringe on each other's judgement. To then identify themes, two scrutiny techniques and one processing technique introduced by Ryan and Bernard (2003) were deemed appropriate for the study as they are considered most suited to rich, complex narratives and data. The scrutiny techniques involved looking for repetitions by identifying topics that occur and reoccur, and finding similarities and differences, by conducting systematic comparisons across the data units. The "cutting and sorting" processing technique was subsequently used by arranging common patterns to arrive at the themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). After the initial set of themes was identified, these were continuously checked and reiterated to ensure their robustness (Braun & Clarke, 2006). See Appendix 4 for an illustrative example of this process.

### 3.4 Quality of Research

Given the study's interpretivist perspective, the quality of research will be established according to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four quality criteria of trustworthiness, as they argue for different, equally valid, interpretations of the same phenomena (Bell et al., 2022). As qualitative researchers should ensure that their quality criteria align with their philosophical assumptions (Johnson et al., 2006), this deliberate choice further contributes to a fit among the study's research elements, which in itself is a way to ensure the quality of research (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

#### 3.4.1 Credibility

The credibility of the findings refers to how well the researcher's representation aligns with the respondents' perspectives (Nowell et al., 2017). The authors employed respondent validation to improve credibility, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This was carried out by providing participants with an extract of the interview transcript and notes to verify its content to ensure the authors obtained a correct perspective of the participants' experiences (Bell et al., 2022). Further, as the thematic analysis entails some sort of theme identification based on the investigator's judgement, a clear outlining of the used techniques is presented in

section 3.3, which is argued to increase the identified themes' validity (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Additionally, the authors individually identified themes and compared them to ensure agreement, which enhanced intercoder reliability and hence also the likelihood of ending up with valid themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

### 3.4.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the study's findings (Nowell et al., 2017). However, instead of making claims that the findings apply in other contexts, qualitative studies are encouraged to produce thick descriptions. As the authors provide such extensive, thick descriptions throughout the study, they can then be compared "case-to-case" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3) and evaluated to determine the appropriateness of transferring the findings to a different social context (Nowell et al., 2017; Bell et al., 2022).

### 3.4.3 Dependability

Dependable research has a logical, traceable, and clearly documented research process (Nowell et al., 2017). To demonstrate the study's dependability, the authors have continuously provided an "audit trail" with evidence and rationale of theoretical and methodological choices made throughout the study (Nowell et al., 2017). The rigorous note-taking process (section 3.2.3) during and after the interviews also contributes to the study's dependability and mitigates the risk of retrospective modification of experiences (Nowell et al., 2017; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

### 3.4.4 Confirmability

Confirmability involves demonstrating that interpretations and findings are grounded in the data and clearly explaining how these interpretations were formed (Nowell et al., 2017). This has partly been accomplished by establishing credibility, transferability, and dependability of the study (Nowell et al., 2017). Although confirmability can also be established by demonstrating that the conclusions have not been excessively influenced by the author's values (Bell et al., 2022), the constructionist ontology of this study acknowledges that there is no value-free research. Hence, in accordance with the interpretivist perspective, the study's axiological foundations are that the authors are subjective and their interpretations are key to contribution (Saunders et al., 2012). However, the authors have exercised reflexivity in their

values (Saunders et al., 2012) to increase the confirmability of the study and to ensure they look beyond familiar perspectives that make them “interpret new insights with old lenses” (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021, p. 692). This was partly achieved by putting significant emphasis on disconfirming cases to prevent selective interpretation and by continuously challenging preconceived notions held by the researchers.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study made several deliberate choices to mitigate potential ethical issues and risks (Bell et al., 2022). Given the study’s potential to address sensitive topics, a key priority during the interviews was to avoid harming the interviewees (Bell et al., 2022) by maintaining attentiveness to identify and respond to any signs of discomfort. Furthermore, interviewees were informed in advance about the interview’s focus, allowing them to decline participation if they felt uneasy about the subject. Informing participants beforehand enabled the authors to receive explicit consent on participation (Bell et al., 2022), and consent to record the interview was obtained in the introduction of the session. Furthermore, the study ensured participant privacy by anonymizing names and making sure no information in the study could be traced to a specific individual (Bell et al., 2022). Lastly, the study exercised secure data management and GDPR compliance by only using university-approved tools and deleting the recordings of participants after completing the study.

## 4. Results and Analysis

To answer the study's research question, this chapter will outline how and why consumer behaviour is changing in response to the deteriorating security situation in Sweden. Six main themes have been identified based on the study's empirical results. Each theme begins with a presentation of specific consumer behaviours observed during the interviews, followed by an analysis of their underlying drivers by drawing on the study's theoretical context. The chapter ends with a synthesis of the study's findings.

### 4.1 (Not) Preparing the Home

During the interviews, it became evident that the extent to which the interviewees had prepared their homes because of the deteriorating security situation differed greatly between the participants. Approximately half of the interviewees had prepared to some extent, while the other half had not prepared at all. The rationale behind preparing or not preparing, however, also saw great disparity.

Some of those who had not prepared their homes assessed the risk as too low to take any action on. The low perception of the risk associated with the situation, therefore, made it unnecessary for them to spend any time, money, or space on preparing their home. This was particularly common among the younger age group, who were more constrained in terms of monetary means and leftover space in their homes.

*"I haven't stocked up on canned food or planned to hide in the laundry room shivering. I'm not worried that I, in my apartment, will be targeted by a drone attack or something like that. It's just not something I think about. The risk is too low for it to be worth my time."* (Interviewee 9)

Another reason why some consumers had not prepared their homes lies in the emotional investment the consumption would entail. These consumers assessed the risk associated with the situation to be high yet refrained from preparing at all. They explained that taking the step to buy goods that would be needed if the situation continues to escalate would be too emotionally straining, as they would have to simulate how they actually could be affected.

*“Preparing the home is just too emotionally heavy. Dealing with it feels unbearable, it’s like hammering nails into my own back. I went through this every day during COVID and it was exhausting. It made me feel awful. And in the end, nothing really happened. That experience made me realize that the benefit of preparing was not worth the psychological pain it caused me, so I don’t do it even though MSB recommends it.” (Interviewee 17)*

Some of the interviewees who had not prepared their homes yet maintained a high risk perception attributed their reluctance to a form of “paralysis”. As there are too many risks and uncertainties to understand and process, they argue that it feels impossible to prepare for everything and, instead, do nothing. Most of the interviewees discussing this paralysis also emphasized a hopelessness around the situation, arguing that their preparedness activities would not matter if anything serious happened.

*“I haven’t done anything to prepare my home, I just don’t know what to do. I feel vulnerable, like I can’t influence my situation. What good is a can of sausages if there’s gunfire in the streets? MSB has its guidelines, but I don’t think they would help anyway. It’s hard to grasp what war would actually mean, it feels so far from my own reality. It’s frightening and uncertain. You feel helpless. I don’t have a plan at all. The anxiety has paralyzed me when it comes to preparing. When you don’t know what to do, you end up doing nothing.” (Interviewee 11)*

The interviewees who had prepared their homes also offered vastly varying rationales as to why. Some assessed the risk associated with the security situation to be high and viewed preparing their home as a rational response. As they acknowledge that there is a possibility that they could be affected, preparing provides a sense of control and readiness for unforeseen events.

*“I have essentials in the basement: water, canned food, a first aid kit, a camping stove, and things like that. On a rational level, I recognize that the security situation is worse than before, so I’d rather be safe than sorry.” (Interviewee 3)*

Others who had prepared had done so despite perceiving the risk the security situation poses as low. In these cases, some of the interviewees attributed their decision to prepare to a devotion to duty to follow the recommendations of the Swedish authorities. Despite classifying the risk of being affected as low, they purchased the items recommended in the “In case of crisis or war” pamphlet that was sent home to all Swedes. Interviewees with children commonly discussed how this affected their decision, as they felt they could not disregard the authorities’ recommendations when they held responsibility over others.

*“I’ve bought a huge amount of prepping supplies: freeze-dried food, canned goods lasting until 2035, a crank radio, and a solar charger to name a few. I feel a sense of duty. Now they say we should be able to manage for a week, so I want to be prepared for two. I have kids, and that makes me feel more responsible for others.”* (Interviewee 13)

Another group of interviewees stated that a primary motivation for preparing their homes was the influence of those around them, rather than perceiving the risk as high themselves. As friends or family members began prepping, discussions around it became more common, gradually making it feel like something they should engage in.

*“A lot of the prepping stuff I have bought is because I saw others buying it. I bought canned and freeze-dried foods because my friends did so, but today I see no point in having them. If a crisis comes, we’ll just eat what we have in the pantry anyways.”* (Interviewee 7)

The vast discrepancy in Swedish consumers’ preparedness activities is a clear example of the heterogeneous behaviours that are prevalent in a wide BOS (Pennings & Grossman, 2008). It is apparent that the ambiguous threats and high degree of uncertainty associated with Sweden’s deteriorating security situation, paired with low information density on the content of the risk and the chance of exposure to it, causes a wide BOS with a variety of behaviours. Although MSB has provided a specific list of items all citizens should prepare their homes with, risk attitudes and perceptions seem to vary too much to align consumers around what to do. The underlying mechanisms that drive preparedness activities significantly differ between individuals. Four different types of consumers have been identified, as depicted in Figure 3,

based on their perception of the risk associated with Sweden's deteriorating security situation, as well as the extent to which they have prepared their homes.

|                           |      |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Extent of prepping</b> | High | Duty to follow the recommendations of the authorities<br><br>Influenced by others | Response based on the cognitive evaluation of the risk<br><br>Response based on fear and anxiety from the risk |
|                           | Low  | Risk is perceived as too low to be worth spending any time or resources           | Too emotionally involved in consumption<br><br>Prepping paralysis                                              |
|                           |      | Low                                                                               | High                                                                                                           |
|                           |      | <b>Risk perception</b>                                                            |                                                                                                                |

Figure 3 - Consumer motivations behind (not) preparing their homes

The consumers who perceived the risk to be low and chose not to prepare their homes simply made the cognitively based evaluation that it was not worth their time or resources. A potential explanation for why this behaviour was particularly prevalent in the younger age group, apart from their resource constraints, can be found through the lens of the risk-as-feelings hypothesis (Loewenstein et al., 2001). Since the consumers in the younger age group have never experienced any political conflict of this scale before, it may be the case that they, generally, do not take the threat as seriously as the other age groups. In other words, they lack somatic markers from previous crises that could otherwise evoke an emotional response and guide behaviour, which may explain why their emotional reaction to the current situation is too weak to induce action.

The consumers who perceived the risk to be high and chose to prepare their homes involved both cognitive evaluations and emotional reactions (Loewenstein et al., 2001). Some interviewees' consumption of goods to prepare their home was primarily driven by a "rational" reasoning that they wanted to be prepared for a potential risk, but did not experience any particular emotional investment in the process. Others were more emotionally involved, assessing the risk to be high, feeling anxious and scared about it, and preparing their home as a response.

The behaviours of the consumers who perceived the risk to be low but still chose to prepare their homes can be explained by the social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988). It is likely that individuals in the interviews interact with and are influenced by their informal personal networks of other individuals who have also prepared their homes. Thus, these people provide reference points of validation about how this risk is perceived, what is rational, and the correct associated behaviour. For them, the common interpretation of the risky context in their social group is the anchor for social alignment. Another possible explanation from the social amplification of risk perspective (Kasperson et al., 1988) is that individuals interact and process information from the media and experts, and adhere to the authorities' recommendations, even when they do not personally perceive the risk as high. In other words, the message is interpreted as credible, likely because institutions such as the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) communicate recommendations that reflect the individual's wider set of social and cultural norms.

The consumers who perceived the risk to be high but still chose not to prepare their homes held emotions as a central part of their decision-making process (Loewenstein et al., 2001). Interestingly, all consumers within this group discussed how they generally have a high degree of emotional involvement in their consumption, meaning that their emotions typically are important drivers for what they consume and that they are, in turn, emotionally affected by what they consume. This helps explain why it might become too emotionally heavy to prepare for a crisis for these consumers, despite holding a high risk perception, compared to those who can distance their emotions from their consumption. The emotional investment required to prepare the home also helps to understand the "prepping paralysis" explained by some interviewees. As Loewenstein et al. (2001) outline, the divergence between the cognitive evaluation of the risk and the emotional reaction to it leaves these interviewees in a state of intrapersonal conflict. Given the ambiguous threats Sweden's deteriorating security situation poses, it would be tremendously emotionally straining for highly emotionally involved consumers to properly make sense of the different threats, understand what could potentially happen, and take action to prepare for such a situation. Realizing the psychological effort the process would entail, consumers instead surrender themselves to a feeling of meaninglessness of their preparedness activities and do nothing, creating the prepping paralysis.

## 4.2 Consuming to Reduce Anxiety

Some of the interviewees described how they engaged in consumption to reduce anxiety around the situation, or to somehow feel safe. The consumption patterns vastly differed between the interviewees, but a few common themes were identified. Some explained how they naturally consume certain types of foods when they are stressed or anxious to mitigate the negative feelings caused by the deteriorating security situation.

*“I buy food, exactly what I crave, sometimes oddly specific things like canned ravioli. It’s a mix of nostalgia, indulgence, and a sense of ‘enjoy it while you can.’ If everything else feels terrible, at least this meal doesn’t have to.”* (Interviewee 18)

Others described how personal interests and hobbies were a natural place to “escape” when worried about the security situation. Activities such as playing computer games, exercising, and spending time in nature were frequently mentioned as ways to shift focus and clear the mind after consuming unsettling news. Many of the interviewees also specifically mentioned cultural activities, such as going to a play, museum, or cinema, as a way to immerse themselves in another world when this one feels threatened.

*“You find each other in uncertain times, it’s a reminder of what truly matters. Culture plays a big role - movies, art exhibitions, and more. Gaming also feels safe and comforting. Both art and games let you escape into another world when this one feels uncertain.”* (Interviewee 8)

*“I’ve gotten more into music, gaming, painting, even taking courses like pottery or dance. I’ve also engaged more in culture; the art being created now feels richer because there are stronger emotions in society. More music, more exhibitions, more interesting works, it all feels more meaningful.”* (Interviewee 4)

Another common theme was the desire to regain a sense of control over what could still be influenced. For some, this meant purchasing additional insurance or stocking up on spare parts for their car in case of unexpected events. For others, it was about cultivating a sense of

security and comfort at home, emphasizing that as the world grows more uncertain, investing in a safe and stable home environment becomes more important.

*“It’s in the little things, like gardening. Flowers and things like that feel more important now. I think I buy more fresh flowers, just to have beautiful things in everyday life. Home is safe, so I want to make it feel nice and comforting.”*

(Interviewee 5)

In many cases, the consumption patterns shown by the interviewees were primarily driven by emotions, rather than cognitive evaluation, as suggested by the risk-as-feelings hypothesis (Loewenstein et al., 2001). Since this is a situation characterized by feelings of anxiety, it is unsurprising that emotions are a primary driver in behaviour (Loewenstein et al., 2001). This is particularly evident among the interviewees who consume items such as foods that they love when they feel worried about the security situation, which is purely driven by a desire to feel better rather than a cognitive response around how to practically handle the situation. Others, who wanted to regain a sense of control over the situation by consuming items like additional insurance or spare parts for the car, exhibited how emotional reactions and cognitive evaluations worked together to guide decision-making. Although the items consumed can be perceived as rational responses to the situation, the evaluations have been influenced by the consumers’ emotions, highlighting how cognitive evaluation and emotions work in tandem to affect behaviour, as suggested by the risk-as-feelings hypothesis (Loewenstein et al., 2001).

The tendency to cope with negative emotions by escaping reality can also be seen through the lens of the social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988). As the roots of social amplification of risk lie in the social experience of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988), consumers appear to try to mitigate the effects of social amplification, and the negative emotions they might entail, by shaping their lives to avoid unpleasant experiences of risk. The interviewees, as recipients of information during crises, appear to manage this by shutting out certain influences and increasing their engagement with informal personal networks and social groups that engage the individual in activities, such as playing computer games or participating in cultural events, which help distract them from the security situation.

### 4.3 Changing National Sentiment

Many of the interviewees emphasized a higher propensity to buy Swedish goods as they believe it has become more important to be self-sufficient as a nation when the world grows more uncertain. Some argued that consuming locally produced goods was a way to support and strengthen the nation, while others attributed the shifting preference to a reluctance to support other nations.

*“We prefer to buy Swedish products to support local and domestic production. This has accelerated as a result of the security situation, as there is a growing sense of protectionism. We want to keep things under control because there’s a lack of trust in the rest of the world.”* (Interviewee 16)

In most interviews, animosity towards the U.S. was prevalent upon discussing sentiment towards other countries in relation to the security situation. The negative sentiment towards the country was mainly attributable to the new Trump administration, a hostility towards Europe, and how the war in Ukraine is being managed.

*“Since the presidential transition, my view of the U.S. has collapsed. I used to see the U.S. as a country I admired, but that view has fallen apart. This is largely due to its leadership, like Musk and Trump, but also the public’s support for them. Seeing people stand by these figures has only reinforced my negative perception.”* (Interviewee 8)

Not all, but a majority of the consumers with an animosity toward the U.S. also highlighted a decreasing propensity to consume American goods. Many discuss instances in which they have actively refrained from consuming American goods and opted for goods from other countries instead, but it mainly concerns purchases where there is a convenient alternative with similar standards and price. However, when the American alternative is perceived as superior in terms of quality or price, it is still frequently preferred.

*“I’ve stopped buying Coca-Cola and now choose Swedish alternatives, but if something American offers unique features I can’t find elsewhere, like social media or a Ralph Lauren handbag, I still buy it.” (Interviewee 11)*

In addition to the increased propensity to buy Swedish goods and lower interest in American goods, many stated that they were consuming more European goods as their European identity has grown stronger when the support from the U.S. is being questioned. In that sense, European consumption was considered a counterweight to the products consumers stopped buying from the U.S., as there is a wider range of options to serve as an alternative.

*“I still feel just as Swedish as before, but I’ve grown a stronger sense of being European as well. [...] If I have to choose between a Swedish and a Spanish cucumber, and the Spanish one is cheaper, I’ll go with that.” (Interviewee 21)*

The shift toward stronger European and Swedish identity and consumption, as well as the lower propensity to consume American goods, seem to have been guided by both cognitive evaluations and emotional reactions, as suggested by the risk-as-feelings hypothesis (Loewenstein et al., 2001). Consumers go through a cognitive evaluation of the situation by acknowledging the need to consume Swedish and European goods to become more self-sufficient, but also experience strong negative emotions toward the U.S. and what its actions might entail for oneself. This drives the reluctance to consume American goods and shifts the consumption towards Swedish and European alternatives.

An important factor to consider, which is not explicitly prevalent in the interviews, is the contextual effect of the social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988) that, in turn, feeds into both the cognitive and affective interpretations of the risk. Dominant societal figures through various media sources clearly portrayed the U.S. and its recent political development as a contributor to the heightened risk of Sweden’s deteriorating security situation. When doing a brief media analysis on Sweden’s four largest daily newspapers (see Appendix 5), 82 articles mentioning the boycott of American goods have already been published in the first four months of 2025 (Retriever, 2025). Adding to that, the Prime Minister of Sweden himself has exclaimed how the U.S. administration has created significant insecurity for Sweden (Jones & Costantini, 2025). As individuals learn about the risk through their social context

and rely on heuristics and values to simplify its complexity, aligning with the group values associated with European and Swedish identities helps establish how one should respond (Kasperson et al., 1988). This social alignment is evident in the empirical data, where the negative imagery associated with the U.S. leads to a stigmatized environment. Consequently, avoidance emerges as the only socially acceptable response.

Conversely, social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988) helps explain the increased preference for domestic products. The sudden delegitimization of the U.S. as a trusted partner in the deteriorating security situation restructures the dominant cultural context and social reality in which the interviewees are embedded. This is a clear example of how Kasperson et al. (1988) explain that the social structures of risk experiences are shown in community, societal and economic responses. As interviewees redefine their social values and affiliation, the act of purchasing domestic products functions as an action to address the risk and as a symbolic cue for reinforcing these new socially accepted boundaries.

#### 4.4 Shifting Travel Preferences

Although some described an unchanged willingness to travel as they felt safe abroad, a number of different shifts in travel preferences were prevalent in the interviews. Many stated that they would not want to travel near the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, as they felt safer keeping their distance from active conflict zones. Some also described how they were less inclined to embark on long-haul trips outside of Europe, preferring to stay closer to home for a greater sense of security.

*“I would not want to travel anywhere close to Ukraine right now. I have become more restrictive in where I could see myself travel.”* (Interviewee 3)

*“I’m not as eager to travel far anymore, it just feels more unpredictable. Before, people talked about going to Tulum, but now that would seem crazy. It just feels more uncertain, especially with how impulsive Trump is. You never know what he might do. I’d never take that risk with kids. But I’d still travel within Europe.”*  
(Interviewee 15)

Some further stated that they experienced a reluctance to travel anywhere as things feel safer close to home. Others, who also voiced safety as a primary concern for travel, opt for destinations which are perceived to be safer because they are familiar or more predictable.

*“It doesn’t feel right to be abroad if something were to happen. We can’t be in Italy and just go back if things escalate. I might not even travel to Finland. In that sense, the world feels smaller.”* (Interviewee 13)

*“I don’t feel as excited to try new things, like travelling or exploring, because that requires a sense of security. In uncertain times, I naturally seek comfort. I would rather travel to familiar places where I know what to expect, destinations friends have already visited, or countries with a similar culture which feel safer because there is a reassurance in people that are like me.”* (Interviewee 11)

The presence of U.S. animosity was prevalent in terms of travel preferences as well, as many of the respondents claimed they would not want to travel to the U.S. today, largely due to two reasons. Most argued that they did not want to support the current administration, and some stated that it felt unsafe and harder to predict what could happen on such a trip. Some also experienced strong emotions towards peers who travelled to the U.S., as contributing to its economy was unthinkable to them.

*“There are so many places in the U.S. I would love to visit, but I just don’t want to go there right now. When I saw a journalist post on LinkedIn about how excited he was to travel to a big conference in Kansas, I had such a strong reaction. I would never want to go there in the current situation. I feel very certain about that.”* (Interviewee 8)

The generally heterogeneous attitudes towards travel among the interviews fit well into how Pennings and Grossman (2008) describe the wide BOS. The heterogeneous behaviours that are exhibited as a result become clear in the case of travel, as some consumers react drastically by entirely refraining from leaving the country, while others have not been affected at all.

The common pattern throughout these behaviours is the perception of safety as they all, in one way or another, serve to decrease the uncertainty associated with travel. However, the threshold for what is perceived as safe seems to be highly individualistic. In line with the risk-as-feelings hypothesis (Loewenstein et al., 2001), it is evident that emotion plays a crucial role in travel consumption in light of the deteriorating security situation. Decisions are made based on what level of perceived risk consumers are willing to take on, mitigating feelings of fear and anxiety by opting for alternatives that are perceived to be safer. Cognitive evaluation certainly plays a part in deciding destinations that are reasonable to travel to, but the emotions involved form the basis of what level of risk can be tolerated and where consumers feel safe.

One can observe the same patterns of social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988) in the travel-related U.S. animosity and the behaviours outlined in section 4.3. Through the dominant negative portrayal of the U.S. and its suggested contribution to the heightened risk associated with Sweden's deteriorating security situation, destinations closer in proximity are preferred above the stigmatized U.S. destination. The empirical data shows strong emotional reactions towards peers still travelling to the U.S., indicating a broad sentiment of animosity and social stigmatization.

## 4.5 Absence of Panic Buying

Throughout the interviews, many contrasted the security situation to the COVID-19 pandemic and discussed how they panic-bought toilet paper then, but could not give any similar examples related to the security situation. Some argued that the pandemic posed a more immediate and uncertain threat as it was the first global disease of this generation, while the security situation has gradually deteriorated, causing the pandemic to lead to more drastic actions driven by fear.

*“The first global crisis I experienced was COVID-19, and back then, I reacted more irrationally and bought all kinds of stuff out of fear. This time, we’re overwhelmed with bad news every day, and it’s just too much to take in to cause as emotionally driven actions. Nothing stands out the same way anymore.”*

(Interviewee 17)

Some also highlighted that “irrational” and disproportionate emotional behaviours during the pandemic have caused less drastic measures during the deteriorating security situation. As many were afraid and consumed accordingly during the pandemic, but most were only mildly affected by the disease, emotional consumption is looked back upon as something irrational and unnecessary, decreasing the propensity to let panic and fear affect consumption today.

*“During Covid I kept thinking, ‘I really don’t want to die’. But now after it all, I see that things did not turn out so bad. The world didn’t end. Then we have some sort of receipt that this too shall pass. I think that affects my attitude towards the current security situation and makes me less prone to act now compared to the pandemic.” (Interviewee 17)*

The empirical data highlights the ambiguous nature of the risk context, characterized by the intertwinement of multiple threats, none of which distinctly stand out. In other words, by viewing it from Pennings and Grossman’s (2008) perspective of a wide BOS, interviewees perceive information density on the content of the risk and the chance of exposure to it to be low. According to Pennings and Grossman (2008), this could lead to heterogeneous, extreme and undesirable behaviours, including panic buying. However, this is not what is reflected in the empirical data, as none of the interviewees engage in such behaviour.

Adding the perspective of social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988) nuances the understanding further. During previous crises, such as the pandemic, triggers of panic buying were characterized by multiple high-signal events that heightened the perceived seriousness of and public concern over the underlying risk. These signals, such as the dramatic reports on the first COVID-19-related deaths and the virus’ global spread, serve as risk amplifiers, heightening the public perception of the threat (Kasperson et al., 1988). But, even though there have been numerous recent statements and developments portrayed in the media, only six articles mentioning panic buying or hoarding have been published in Sweden’s four largest daily newspapers during the first four months of 2025 (Retriever, 2025). This suggests that the events building the portrayal of the deteriorating security situation have not been perceived as being high-signal events with powerful symbols that trigger this specific action. This might be the case as the security situation has seen a gradual deterioration over many years, which has successively moved the baseline for what is perceived as such a high-signal

event, in contrast to the pandemic, where the crisis unfolded very quickly and caused panic among consumers.

The risk-as-feelings hypothesis (Loewenstein et al., 2001) and the temporal proximity between the current crisis and COVID-19 add another perspective to this (non) behaviour. The pandemic was a clear example of what Loewenstein et al. (2001) call a public panic, characterized by an explosion of public concern through extensive media attention which is fueled by the interplay between anxiety, fear and subjective probabilities. Such emotional responses not only guide behaviour at the first occurrence, but they also affect future behaviour through conditioning and memory (Loewenstein et al., 2001). Hence, as the pandemic and Sweden's deteriorating security situation have both implied threats to one's sense of safety, the emotional responses from consumers during the pandemic affect behaviours in the current security situation. The drastic panic buying activities present during the pandemic, which turned out to be largely excessive, seem to have affected the threshold to engage in such behaviours during this crisis. As consumers realize that their behaviour during the pandemic was much in vain, they appear less likely to engage in such consumption today. It also seems as though some consumers may be emotionally depleted by their panic buying activities during the pandemic, making them less prone to let their emotions trigger behaviours driven by panic in this particular situation, as they understand the emotional burden it would entail. Understanding the somatic markers consumers bear with them from the pandemic helps explain the reported absence of panic buying during Sweden's deteriorating security situation.

## 4.6 Emerging Thought Patterns and Priorities

In several ways, interviewees highlighted how they have seen a shift in how they think about their consumption without it materializing in their actual consumption. Many highlighted how the uncertainty associated with the security situation forces them to think through larger purchases more thoroughly. While some have actively postponed or avoided major purchases and investments, many explained that while the uncertainty makes them think twice, it ultimately does not change their buying behaviour. They reason that life cannot simply be put on hold due to fear and uncertainty.

*“I’ve reflected on bigger purchases; should I really be doing this right now? But in the end, I come to the conclusion that life must go on. If a world war were to break out, I’d still have to live my life. Whether I rent an apartment or have more loans doesn’t really matter. I’m just more aware and think things through.”*

(Interviewee 5)

Others reflect on what they believe to be most valuable to them when they feel less safe. Many mention that relationships with friends and family have grown increasingly important, particularly among the interviewees with children, as they reflect more about what the deteriorating security situation might entail for their family rather than for themselves. Although many state that they reason around it, few claim to have spent more time with their families or friends because of the security situation.

*“I definitely value my relationships more today. When you think about what could happen, you start to focus less on yourself, especially as you get older and have children. My own perspective doesn’t feel as important anymore; instead, I think about how I can support my children and grandchildren. Relationships become incredibly important. But I don’t think I’ve actually spent more time with them because of the security situation.”* (Interviewee 10)

In terms of the attitude toward consuming non-essential goods, the interviewees offered a diverse range of responses. While most did not report any significant change in their propensity to consume items they could live without, some shifts in both directions were observed. A few argued that the current security situation has driven them to seize the moment and consume while they still can, whereas others explained how indulging in expensive, non-essential items feels inappropriate when others are suffering.

*“Before, I just kept big sums in the bank, but now I feel like ‘you only live once.’ So, I’m willing to spend more on what feels important to me. It’s like I feel more mortal now.”* (Interviewee 3)

*“It feels a bit ridiculous to buy something like a nice sweater when people are dying right next door in a neighbouring country. It makes me think, maybe I should be buying a tent instead? It definitely affects how I think about my purchases.”* (Interviewee 4)

It is apparent that there is substantial variation in how consumers reason around their thought patterns and priorities. As discussed in previous themes, this is likely connected to the wide BOS (Pennings & Grossman, 2008). In this case, it seems as though consumers let their feelings guide their decision-making when it is difficult to determine how to reason around the situation, in line with the risk-as-feelings hypothesis (Loewenstein et al., 2001). As a result, consumers exhibit a wide range of interpretations, as different emotions drive varying reactions. It may also be the case, as discussed with regard to preparedness activities, that refraining from taking action safeguards oneself from acknowledging the severity of the situation. It is possible to think about what feels important and what is right or wrong, but allowing the security situation to alter the way life is perceived might imply having to deal with stronger feelings of fear and uncertainty that are too straining to bear. In that sense, it is evident that emotions (or avoidance of them) guide decision-making (Loewenstein et al., 2001).

Another reason why these thoughts have, in many cases, not materialized into a particular behaviour is likely because it to some extent requires a reevaluation of what is important to oneself, which involves the challenging effort of situating the self in a new lifeworld. Given the complex and rapidly evolving risk context, the sociocultural context through which individuals understand risk (Kasperson et al., 1988) is also undergoing change. The uncertainty surrounding appropriate behavioural responses in this changing environment may be attributed to the fact that the sociocultural norms and values themselves are in a state of transition, making it difficult for individuals to discern what actions are considered socially acceptable or appropriate. Such reevaluations go deeper than a minor change in consumption patterns, which arguably takes a longer time to process and turn into action.

## 4.7 Concluding Synthesis

To synthesize the study's findings and answer how and why consumer behaviour changes in response to the deteriorating security situation in Sweden, the identified consumer behaviours and the underlying mechanisms that drive them are mapped out in Figure 4. As has been revealed and explained in detail throughout this chapter, three underlying mechanisms help explain these responses, each influencing different behaviours to varying degrees.

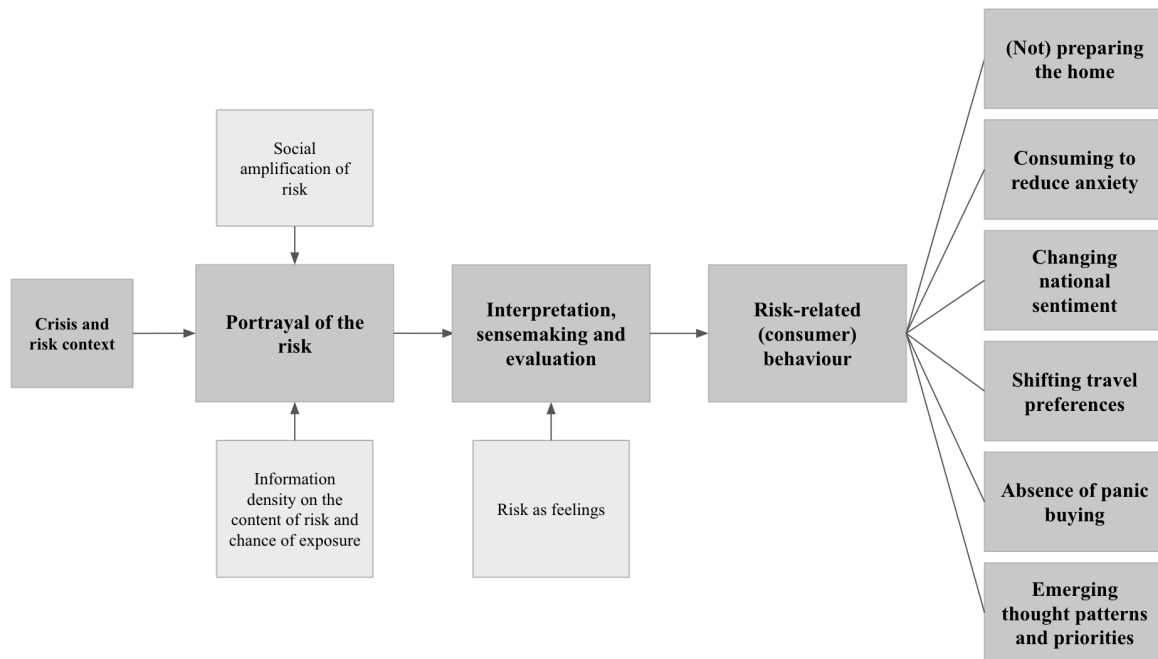


Figure 4 - Mapping out how and why consumer behaviour changes during a deteriorating security situation

First, the risk associated with the situation is portrayed. This is partly guided by the social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al., 1988), where individuals form an understanding of the events and risks through their social experience of risk. It is evident that behaviours are guided by a validation of social and cultural norms and groups, and conversely by avoiding stigmatized behaviours. The portrayal is also guided by the level of communication effectiveness and information density about both the crisis content and the chance of exposure to it (Pennings & Grossman, 2008). This study has identified great variances in both risk attitudes and perceptions, and highly heterogeneous responses within many of the identified behaviours, in line with what is projected in a situation with a wide BOS.

As the consumer has a portrayal of the risk, they make sense of, interpret and evaluate what it entails. The findings show how emotional reactions and cognitive evaluations work together (Loewenstein et al., 2001) to form the decision of how to behave as a response to the risk, as suggested by the risk-as-feelings hypothesis. In many instances, emotions are shown to dominate interpretations of the risk, where somatic markers from past crises guide individuals in this situation as well.

Finally, behavioural outcomes are produced, which include the consumer behavioural patterns identified in this study. It should be noted that these consumer behaviours do not solely capture purchases directly observable in the marketplace. For instance, *absence of panic buying* and *emerging thought patterns and priorities* rather involve non-consumption and a reasoning around one's individual needs, while *changing national sentiment* and *shifting travel preferences* largely concern how consumers evaluate their alternatives. Although these have evolved into purchasing behaviour for some consumers, *consuming to reduce anxiety* and *(not) preparing the home* exhibit the clearest examples of behavioural shifts that have translated into concrete purchasing actions.

To conclude, integrating the three distinct perspectives of behavioural responses during risk sheds light on different aspects of the studied risk context's multifaceted risk. Thus, it allows for an understanding of both lived consumer experiences, motivations and choices while also being context-attentive by situating these experiences in a wider perspective. By doing so, this study has been able to answer the research question of *how and why consumer behaviour is changing in response to the deteriorating security situation in Sweden*.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

### 5.1 Relating Results to Past Literature

The findings of this study exhibit both similarities and differences from previous findings on how consumer behaviour has changed during past crises. One pattern for which the results present similar tendencies as in previous literature is travel. Although this study's findings are contextually specific, the reluctance to travel, negative attitude towards travelling to countries consumers experience animosity towards, and the propensity to stay close to home and to destinations that feel familiar, go in line with previous findings (Ahn et al., 2022; Jęczmyk et al., 2023; Mill & Morrison, 2006). Similarly, the tendency to consume to reduce anxiety has been seen in various crises in the past (e.g. Kemp et al., 2021; Somer & Ruvio, 2014). As such, the findings around the consumption to reduce anxiety do not deviate from previous literature, but rather highlight which specific behavioural patterns, such as consuming particular foods, escaping reality through engaging activities, and decorating the home, are exhibited in this particular context. The reasoning around priorities and the consumption of non-essential goods finds support for both contrasting stances in previous research. The consumers who reassessed their consumption priorities and focused on fulfilling more essential needs go in line with the findings from, for example, Loxton et al. (2020) and Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020), while the consumers who emphasized a higher propensity to consume goods they wanted but did not necessarily need go in line with the findings from Tice et al. (2001) and Somer and Ruvio (2014).

The findings on national sentiment present similar patterns as during previous conflicts, but shed further light on when, and when it might not, affect consumption. Although previous literature has suggested that national animosity towards a country can affect the consumption of goods from that country (e.g. Clerides et al., 2015; Pandya & Venkatesan, 2016), most such major studies have been quantitative and lacked the nuance of how consumers reason around their choices. This study has added the perspectives of when consumers experiencing animosity towards a country choose to consume such goods anyway, when they refrain from it, and what goods are perceived as the most suitable alternatives, which adds to the understanding of national sentiment and consumer behaviour.

The findings on home preparedness partly align with previous literature but shed light on new phenomena. To some extent, the findings align with those of Hung et al. (2007) and Ruin et al. (2007), who suggest that individuals with lower risk perception are less likely to take preparedness measures than those with higher risk perception. Yet, the risk perception paradox (Wachinger et al., 2013) is highly prevalent in the results as well. Although the drivers of the paradox identified by Wachinger et al. (2013) were present in this context, new explanations for the phenomenon have been identified. Both the prepping paralysis and the emotional burden prepping entails, discussed in section 4.1, add to the understanding of why consumers might choose not to prepare their homes despite carrying a high risk perception.

The findings on panic buying activities somewhat deviate from previous literature. Neither of the factors that cause consumers to engage in panic buying, presented by Yuen et al. (2020) seemed to cause any such behaviours, even though many consumers carried a high risk perception and coped with the situation through other forms of consumption. Hence, the four factors Yuen et al. (2020) present may not be applicable in a context where the situation grows gradually worse over time, as is the case with Sweden's deteriorating security situation. It also seems as though the factors that drive panic buying have been affected by the post-pandemic effects discussed in section 4.5, both by the somatic markers consumers bear with them and by an emotional fatigue caused by panic buying activities during the pandemic. Hence, it is plausible that the propensity to consume in panic looks different today compared to during the pandemic, where a significant share of the panic buying literature is situated. The four factors Yuen et al. (2020) present may still hold, but the findings of this study suggest that there is a higher threshold for these factors to trigger panic buying activities in a post-pandemic context.

## 5.2 Theoretical Contributions

By answering the research question of how and why consumer behaviour is changing in response to the deteriorating security situation in Sweden, this study offers several theoretical contributions. First, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the literature on consumer behaviour during crises by introducing a new type of crisis characterized by a multitude of ambiguous and abstract threats. By taking an exploratory approach to build an understanding of how consumer behaviour is changing when facing such a situation in the Swedish context,

the study expands the existing knowledge of consumer behaviour during crises. Moreover, the study has provided a new combined lens for explaining why consumer behaviour changes during this type of crisis by integrating three distinct perspectives of risk behaviour. In unison, they have revealed new insights about the underlying mechanisms that drive the “real person” and their consumer behaviour during crises. Providing this new lens for understanding the consumer also expands the literature on consumer behaviour during crises.

Lastly, the study extends previous literature on specific consumer behaviours during crises, as outlined in section 5.1. For certain behaviours, such as travel and the consumption of non-essential goods, the previous findings from past crises have been reaffirmed in this particular context. For other behaviours, such as home preparedness and panic buying, the study adds to the existing knowledge by providing new insights into the phenomena.

### 5.3 Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several important practical implications. First, they offer valuable insights for managers, as they can inform strategic decisions regarding product development, communication strategies, and marketing approaches that align with consumers’ shifting needs, emotions, and priorities. Also, as elaborated upon in section 4.7, insights into potential future materialized behaviours can serve as early indicators of shifting consumer sentiment. For example, the current reevaluation of alternatives between American and local products may develop into lasting changes in purchasing behaviour or gradually return to previous patterns, depending on how the crisis unfolds. Moreover, the identified behaviours reveal emerging consumer vulnerabilities important for regulatory agencies, like the Swedish consumer agency, to attend to. The study indicates that some consumers experience confusion and emotional strain, which can be taken advantage of in pursuit of market objectives. This highlights the need for protective measures that protect consumers from unethical marketing practices that may exploit these vulnerabilities.

Second, the findings are important for policymakers, both politicians and governmental agencies (e.g., MSB), responsible for shaping the security agenda and managing the risk communication during crises. The revealed heterogeneous responses highlight that many individuals (citizens) are uncertain about both the content and likelihood of risk, indicating a

wide behavioural outcome space (BOS) that policymakers are faced with. Therefore, there is a need to turn this *uncertain* situation into a *risk* situation by revising their communication strategies and increasing information density on the crisis to narrow the BOS, mitigate future unwanted behaviour and achieve the greatest societal benefit (Pennings & Grossman, 2008).

This revised communication should explicitly account for public fears (Loewenstein et al., 2001) and the social amplification of risk by incorporating appropriate symbols that guide the citizens' decoding processes and trigger their attention (Kasperson et al., 1988).

## 5.4 Limitations of the Study

There are limitations of the study that are important to address. First, although the study is not intended to produce results that are directly transferable to other contexts with a strictly representative sample, it is important to acknowledge that the findings are based on the experiences of the individuals in this study's specific sample. Also, the use of snowball sampling is a non-random method, which further means that the sample is not representative of the broader population (Bell et al., 2022). However, the current situation in Sweden may serve as a specific example of a broader societal phenomenon that gives insights into consumer behaviour during crises that are valuable in other contexts as well.

Another limitation is the sensitive nature of the study, as interviewees were asked to reflect on and report behaviours and experiences that may involve emotional distress, social stigma, and potentially norm-deviating actions. Hence, interviewees may have consciously or unconsciously withheld or distorted information due to feelings of shame or discomfort, or they may not have been fully aware of certain behaviours at the time of the interview. Also, traditional psychological barriers may be particularly prevalent in the interviews, such as the attitude and behavioural gap, capturing divergence between people's attitude towards a behaviour, and how they actually behave (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006), and that people can lie or twist the truth to preserve a consistent self image (Cialdini, 2007). Even though the interview setup, questions, and careful attention paid by the interviewers were supposed to create a comfortable and natural setting, the Hawthorne effect (Bell et al., 2022) of knowing that you are being studied could still have been present and caused interviewees to act differently than they normally would.

Lastly, the studied context is in nature complex, multifaceted and rapidly evolving. As the security situation has unfolded in real time and the interviews spanned three weeks, interviewees may have been exposed to slightly different conditions during their interviews. However, the fundamental risk context that forms the basis of this study remains the same throughout the data collection phase. As such, this limitation is not considered to have a significant impact on the credibility of the results.

## 5.5 Future Research

The findings of this study reveal several avenues for future research. First, it would be interesting to investigate the specific consumer behaviours that were identified more deeply. While this study aimed to provide a broad understanding of consumer behavioural changes, future research could generate more in-depth insights for each distinct aspect of consumption prevalent in the study by examining them in isolation. Second, a quantitative study on the topic could strengthen part of the findings of this study by measuring the statistical significance of the identified behaviours observable in the marketplace to enhance the understanding of their prevalence in the population. Third, a longitudinal study of the consumer behavioural effects of the deteriorating security situation would contribute valuable insights into when certain behaviours are exhibited and for how long they remain. Given how fast the security situation is changing, such research would be especially relevant for understanding how the behaviours identified in this study may shift over time.

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## 7. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Life stages

| Age Brackets | <b>Assumptions about the mean individual</b><br><i>Stages based on Wells and Gubar (1966)</i><br><i>Age brackets are based on the average age for having the first child in Sweden (SCB, 2024) and the average age for children to live with their parents (Eurostat, 2024)</i> |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 18-29        | Bachelors and newly married couples<br><i>No children</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 30-49        | The full nest 1 and 2<br><i>Married couples with children</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 50-65        | The full nest 3 and the empty nest<br><i>Older married couples with no children living with them</i>                                                                                                                                                                            |

## Appendix 2: Interview Sample

| Interviewee    | Gender | Age Bracket | Date       | Length |
|----------------|--------|-------------|------------|--------|
| Interviewee 1  | Male   | 18-29       | 2025-03-03 | 60 min |
| Interviewee 2  | Male   | 50-65       | 2025-03-05 | 60 min |
| Interviewee 3  | Female | 18-29       | 2025-03-06 | 60 min |
| Interviewee 4  | Female | 30-49       | 2025-03-06 | 50 min |
| Interviewee 5  | Female | 50-65       | 2025-03-11 | 55 min |
| Interviewee 6  | Male   | 18-29       | 2025-03-11 | 55 min |
| Interviewee 7  | Male   | 30-49       | 2025-03-11 | 50 min |
| Interviewee 8  | Female | 50-65       | 2025-03-11 | 60 min |
| Interviewee 9  | Male   | 18-29       | 2025-03-12 | 45 min |
| Interviewee 10 | Female | 50-65       | 2025-03-17 | 45 min |
| Interviewee 11 | Female | 18-29       | 2025-03-17 | 45 min |
| Interviewee 12 | Male   | 30-49       | 2025-03-17 | 55 min |
| Interviewee 13 | Female | 30-49       | 2025-03-18 | 45 min |
| Interviewee 14 | Female | 30-49       | 2025-03-18 | 50 min |
| Interviewee 15 | Female | 18-29       | 2025-03-18 | 40 min |
| Interviewee 16 | Male   | 50-65       | 2025-03-18 | 45 min |
| Interviewee 17 | Male   | 30-49       | 2025-03-19 | 50 min |
| Interviewee 18 | Female | 18-29       | 2025-03-19 | 50 min |
| Interviewee 19 | Male   | 30-49       | 2025-03-24 | 45 min |
| Interviewee 20 | Male   | 30-49       | 2025-03-24 | 50 min |
| Interviewee 21 | Female | 50-65       | 2025-03-24 | 45 min |

## Appendix 3: Interview Guide

### Introduction

*Explain the agenda, open up for questions regarding the setup and ask for consent to record the interview, and that all personal data will be deleted after the thesis process has been completed (in accordance with GDPR).*

### Background - Getting a sense of the person behind the consumption

*General consumer behaviour characteristics:*

- What aspects of your consumption do you think set you apart from others?
  - Do you think through your consumption or are you more spontaneous?
- Compared to others, how emotionally involved would you say that you are in your consumption?
- To what extent do you think your consumption reflects who you are? Why or why not?

*General attitude towards the security situation:*

- How have you experienced the deteriorating security situation in Sweden so far?
  - How do you feel when you think about it?
- How much news about the deteriorating security situation would you say you consume compared to your peers? More or less?
  - How do you react to receiving information about the security situation? How emotionally involved are you in Sweden's security situation?
- How has the deteriorating security situation changed how you view Sweden?
  - Has the deteriorating security situation affected your sense of national identity? If so, in what way?
  - Has your view of other countries changed in any way? Better or worse?

### Consumption during a security situation - General themes of discussion

- Would you say you have changed your consumption in light of the deteriorating security situation in Sweden?

*4 themes with consumer behaviours grounded in crisis literature.*

**1. Have you changed the type of products you buy, and if so how?**

- a. Prepping
  - i. How have you prepared your home in case a crisis occurs?
    - 1. What have you bought?
    - 2. When did you start preparing?
  - ii. How much of a plan would you say you have if something more dramatic were to happen?
- b. Hedonic purchases and shopping escapism
  - i. Is there any form of consumption that serves as a form of escape or stress relief for you?
    - 1. If yes: have you found yourself engaging in such consumption to cope with the security situation?
    - 2. If not: in what other ways do you cope with stress or fear?
- c. Essential goods and luxury
  - i. Has the security situation affected how you prioritize what is important to buy and what is not?
  - ii. To what extent has the security situation affected your willingness to buy expensive items you could live without?
- d. Familiar/nostalgic products
  - i. Is there anything you consume that makes you feel safe? To what extent do you consume such products today?
  - ii. Do you find yourself trying new products or services to the same extent that you always have?
- e. Social connectedness
  - i. Has the security situation affected your view on how much you value your friends and family?
- f. Travel
  - i. Has the deteriorating security situation affected your view of how you travel?

**2. How has your conception about brands changed, in relation to the security situation?**

- a. National affinity

- i. Have you changed the way you perceive Swedish brands?
  - ii. Have you changed the way you consume Swedish products and services compared to foreign ones?
- b. National animosity
  - i. Have you changed the way you perceive brands from any other country or region? Why?
  - ii. Have you changed the way you consume products and services from such countries or regions?
- c. Brand-specific perceptions
  - i. Are there any specific brands you have actively stopped consuming from for a period of time?
  - ii. Is there any specific brand you have developed a more positive perception of in relation to the deteriorating security situation?

**3. Have you experienced changes regarding how, and how much, you buy products?**

- a. Panic buying
  - i. Have you bought anything out of stress or fear that there will be a shortage of that particular item?
- b. Herd mentality
  - i. Apart from buying out of fear of shortage, have you bought anything because you noticed that other people were doing it?

**4. Have you altered your perception of the time horizon of your consumption?**

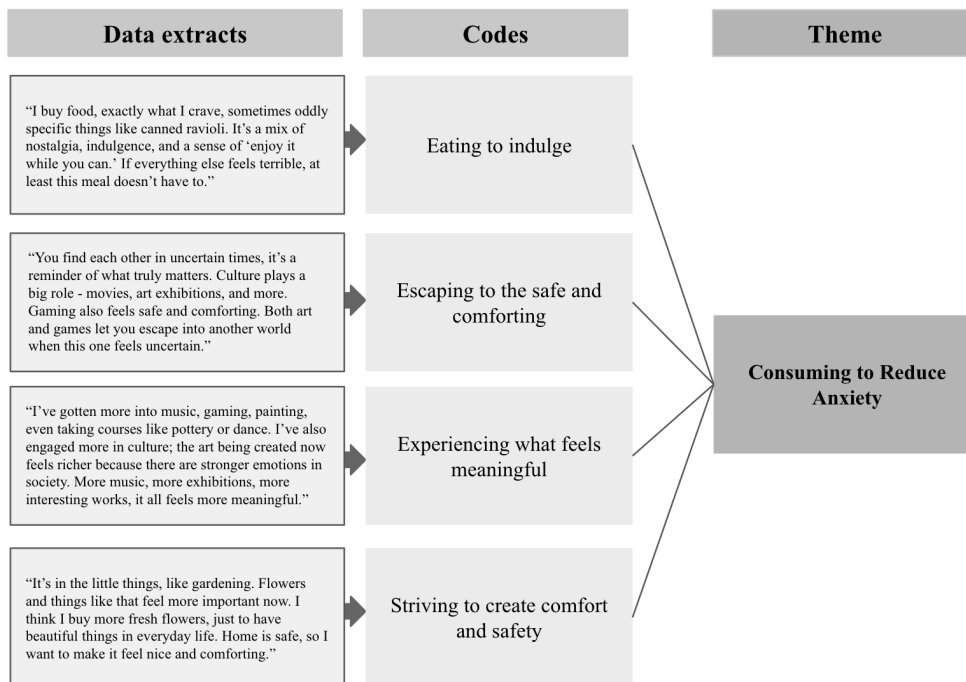
- a. Savings
  - i. Do you regularly save part of your income?
  - ii. Have you altered the amount you save?
  - iii. Have you changed the way you save in any way?
  - iv. Has the security situation altered your view of the financial risk in your environment?
- b. High involvement purchases
  - i. Have you changed the way you think about making substantial purchases?

- ii. Are there any purchases you have postponed or avoided due to uncertainty about the future?

**Concluding risk perception**

- How do *you* perceive the overall risk regarding the security situation?
- How do *you* perceive your individual risk regarding the security situation?

## Appendix 4: Extract of The Data Analysis Process



## Appendix 5: Brief Media Analysis

The brief media analysis was conducted through Retriever Editorial. The newspapers used for the data collection were Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, and Expressen. The search words were constructed to gain a comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon without including irrelevant articles in the sample. The search words for the two concerned behaviours were:

- **U.S. boycott:** (Bojkott OR bojkotta OR bojkottar) AND (USA, OR amerikanska, OR amerikansk, OR trump)
- **Panic buying:** panikköp OR panikköpa OR hamstra OR hamstrande OR hamstrandet

| Published articles | Jan 2025 | Feb 2025 | Mar 2025 | Apr 2025 | Total |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| U.S. boycott       | 4        | 18       | 44       | 16       | 82    |
| Panic buying       | 2        | 0        | 2        | 2        | 6     |

## Appendix 6: Usage of AI

In the process of writing this study, three AI tools have been used. First, the automatic transcription feature was used in MS Teams during the interview process. The transcription tool allowed one of the interviewees to focus on taking notes of what was considered the most relevant, instead of writing down every single word, and allowed the researchers to arrive at a finished transcript faster than if it had been done manually. It was evident that the tool in Swedish was not quite as effective as it was in English, so taking extensive notes of the key points and adjusting the transcript based on the recording of the interview was carefully done to avoid any mistakes made by the tool.

Second, GPT-4 has been used as a discussion partner and to refine writing. More specifically, it has been used to give suggestions on how to rephrase words or sentences for clarity, translation of quotes, and as a way to spark thought. The quality of the thesis has been improved by the tool as it has been able to give suggestions on how to improve structure and clarity in writing, as well as save time in finding the right words. It should be noted that it has not been used to write any complete sentences or for any analytical part of the research process. There is always a risk of LLMs such as GPT-4 to generate incorrect statements or responses, so the outputs were always cross-checked by the researchers to make sure that the suggestions were valid. It has been evident from the process that the tool still has its limitations, which is why it has not been used for purposes such as generating sources or analyzing the collected data.

Third, Grammarly has been used to improve the overall language of the study. The tool has provided suggestions on spelling and grammatical errors to ensure coherence and that a professional language was used throughout the study. Grammarly occasionally outputs incorrect suggestions, so the researchers' own judgment has always come first by double-checking before making any adjustments. It is apparent from the writing process that it is easy to miss simple grammatical errors, so using a tool to quickly display where such errors are proposedly present has helped ensure a professional language.

### *AI sources*

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