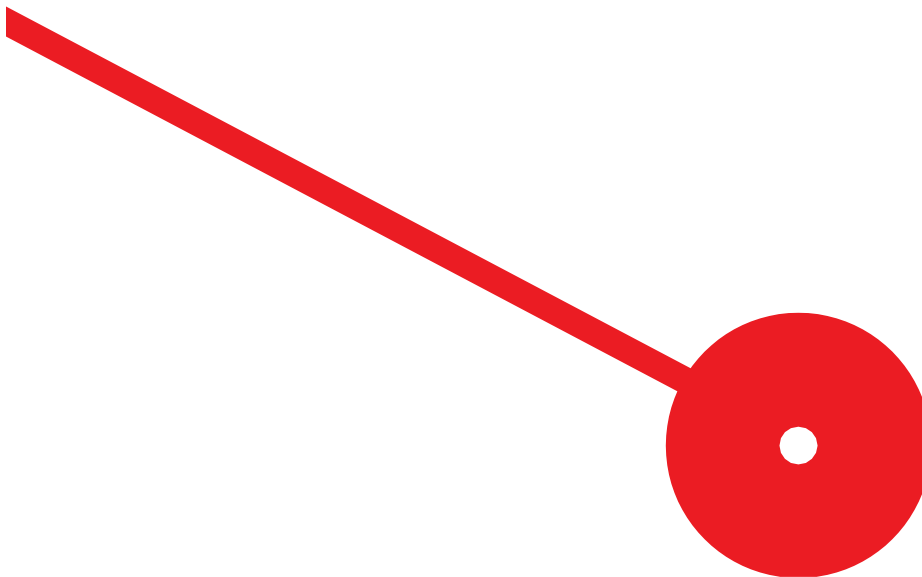




# The Impact of Covid-19 and Accelerated Growth of e-commerce: The Insignia Case

Maria Carolina Selles Vieira Ferraz

10/2022



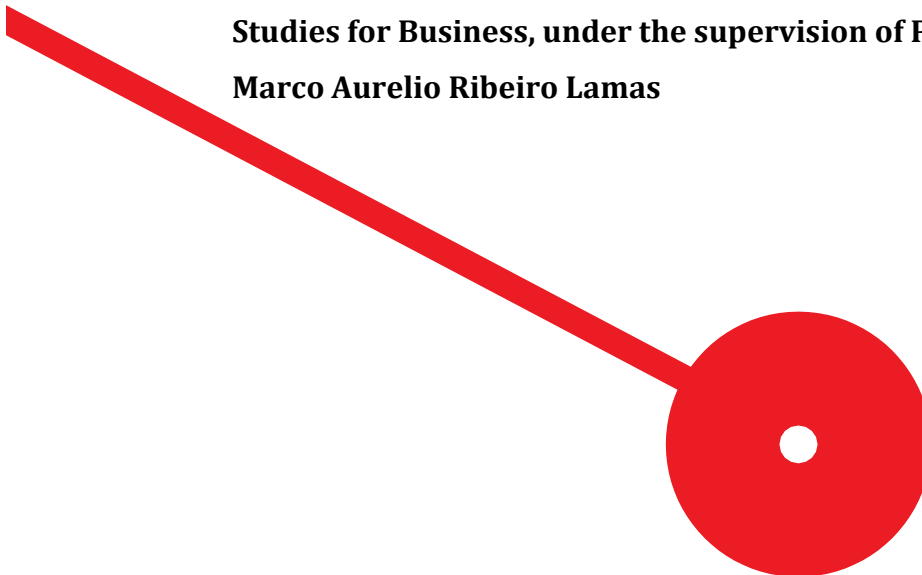


# The Impact of Covid-19 and Accelerated Growth of e-commerce: The Insignia Case

Maria Carolina Selles Vieira Ferraz

## Internship Report

**presented to the Porto Accounting and Business School in  
order to obtain the Master of Art degree in Intercultural  
Studies for Business, under the supervision of Professor  
Marco Aurelio Ribeiro Lamas**



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## **Abstract**

2020 was an atypical year. It was marked by a world pandemic caused by the infectious disease called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that radically changed people's lives. Therefore, the present Internship Report is intended to carry out a case study of how the new consumer behavior and e-commerce trends caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic had a direct impact on Insignia Note!'s business, a company which I had the opportunity to work as an intern for three months. The report focuses on describing the company, the role and experiences developed during this period in the third chapter.

In this report, there is a contextualization of the pandemic period, regarding the severe impact in the economic outlooks in almost all industries and sectors worldwide, as well as its consequences. This work aims at understanding how lockdown and restrictions measures have changed consumer behavior and created a digital acceleration around the world, which is bringing both new opportunities and new challenges to bear.

In addition to the tasks realized during the mentioned internship, a study case was also presented showing how Note! turn the problems brought by the pandemic into a real opportunity to grow by creating its own online business. Then, the report makes a link between the knowledge acquired during the Master's course in Intercultural Studies for Business and the internship.

**Key words:** Covid-19 pandemic, Insignia Note!, Consumer behavior, Digital acceleration, E-commerce

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## **CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION**

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## **1. Introduction**

The present internship report has as its objective the description of the activities and the tasks carried out during the experience at Note!, an Insignia that belongs to Sonae MC. Since the internship was carried out in a pandemic moment, the report also aims to contextualize this period, its impact around the world, especially in the European Union economy and its affect mainly on e-commerce. To better accomplish this aim, a case study will be presented about the Insignia Note!, a retail chain with more than 80 stores through Portugal, which had only physical stores before the beginning of the pandemic, more precisely until April 2020.

The second Chapter will present updated data from COVID-19, restrictions measures, the impact on the global economy, the sector more affected and will formulate a theoretical foundation about e-commerce and consumer behavior before and after the pandemic period.

The organization culture and structure of the whole company will be explored in the third chapter, focusing on Note!. It will be explained its mission, value proposition and the products and services it offers, as well as the description of this period and my function as an intern, based on my personal experience.

The fourth Chapter will be dedicated to the study case, reporting the directly consequences that the lockdown and restrictions measures brought to the company and its challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Note! had to find a way to become digital in a short period of time. Then, the creation of its own digital platform and the uptake of online commerce will be analyzed and linked to the theoretical data about the new e-commerce trends and consumer behavior in the second chapter. By the end of the report, a chapter will be dedicated to the connection between the Master's degree course and the internship realized at Note!.



## **CHAPTER II – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Interculturalism**

The term culture is defined as the behaviors, beliefs and knowledge of a particular social group, including language, religions, local music, arts, law, among countless other aspects acquired by a human as a member of society (Kroeber, 2002). The main categories to distinguish a culture are: general characteristics, food and attire, housing conditions and technology, economy and transport, local community and government, social care, religion, science, sex and life cycle (Matsumoto & Juang, 2007).

Therefore, interculturalism is about the interaction between cultures, favoring their coexistence and integration, supported by respect for diversity and mutual enrichment. The expression also defines a movement that seeks respect for other cultures, overcoming the failures of cultural relativism by defending equality (Sarment, 2014). Then, in a globalized world, the intercultural studies became extremely relevant to promote dialogue between cultures, understand the complexity and richness of relationships among different cultures (both on an individual and community level) and to collaborate in the search for answers to global social, economic, political and ecological problems.

According to Nowakowski (2005), cultural differences can become a barrier in business communication and influence business relations, negotiations, international management, marketing communication strategies, decisions concerned with the brand or consumer behaviors, since cross cultural contact is one of the aspects of globalization (Adamczyk, 2017). It is possible to exemplify this contact as meeting among individuals from different cultures that have different traditions and hierarchies of value and the relationship between the sellers and consumers, negotiators, superiors, subordinates and coworkers. Hence, some of the challenges included in this communication are: time (in terms of punctuality and length of time devoted to talks), language, currency, political system and the governing law in a particular country, choosing the place for negotiations, choosing negotiators, differing ideology. cultural differences, different mentality (Kendlik, 2009, p.12).

For that reason, the acquisition and improvement of occupational and intercultural competences by the workforce are crucial in the world of international business for gaining competitive advantage on the global market (Nowakowski, 2005). To build healthy global business relationships is necessary the ability to learn about other cultures and proper

training to help a person to adjust once he or she is in another culture, which reaffirms the importance of intercultural studies (Washington et al. 2012).

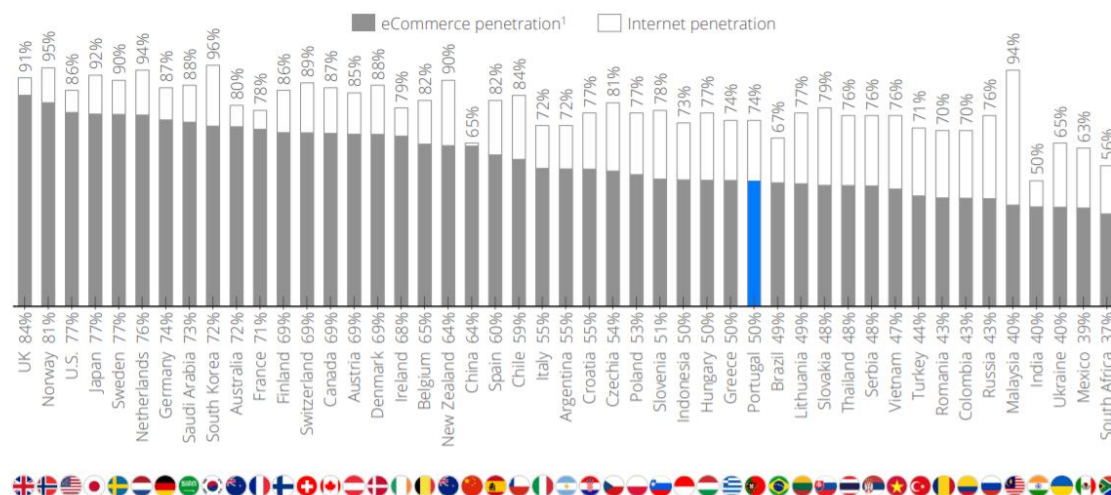
## **2.2 Consumer behavior**

Prior to defining the consumer behavior, it is necessary to define the idea of “consumer” and “behavior”, Kumar et al. (2016) defined consumer as a person who can buy or purchase goods and services offered for sale, in order to satisfy personal or family needs and wants and the definition of “behavior” is anything that an organism does involving action and response to stimulation. By these definitions everyone is supposedly a consumer and in need of satisfying their desires to acquire something new that is affordable and in their disposition.

The concept of consumer behavior is the group of actions in which the consumers show in order to obtain a good or service in a specific place and time (Moon et al., 2015), following this definition we can see that different cultures and societies do not show the same consumer behavior and different periods of time have different kinds of goods and services available so in the end the biggest impacts are from external influences.

From that point, consumer behavior is a concept that cannot be described easily seeing that some cultures prohibit some foods such as cow meat in Hindu or alcohol in Islamic culture, on the other hand the Western societies have a more materialistic point of view and encourages recreational consumption of goods. However, even inside the same culture or the same region there are different social classes and purchasing power, leading to an even bigger and wider way of influence over customer behavior (Hashem, 2020).

To better understand the consumer behavior in Portugal, E-commerce DB Country Reports published in December 2020 some data about Portuguese shoppers: Until 2020, there were 5 million e-commerce users in the country, which means that 50% of the population shops online (Fig. 1). Besides, 34% of those online shoppers have a high household income and 75% research on the internet before purchase. Their main interests are clothing, food & drinks, and consumer electronics.

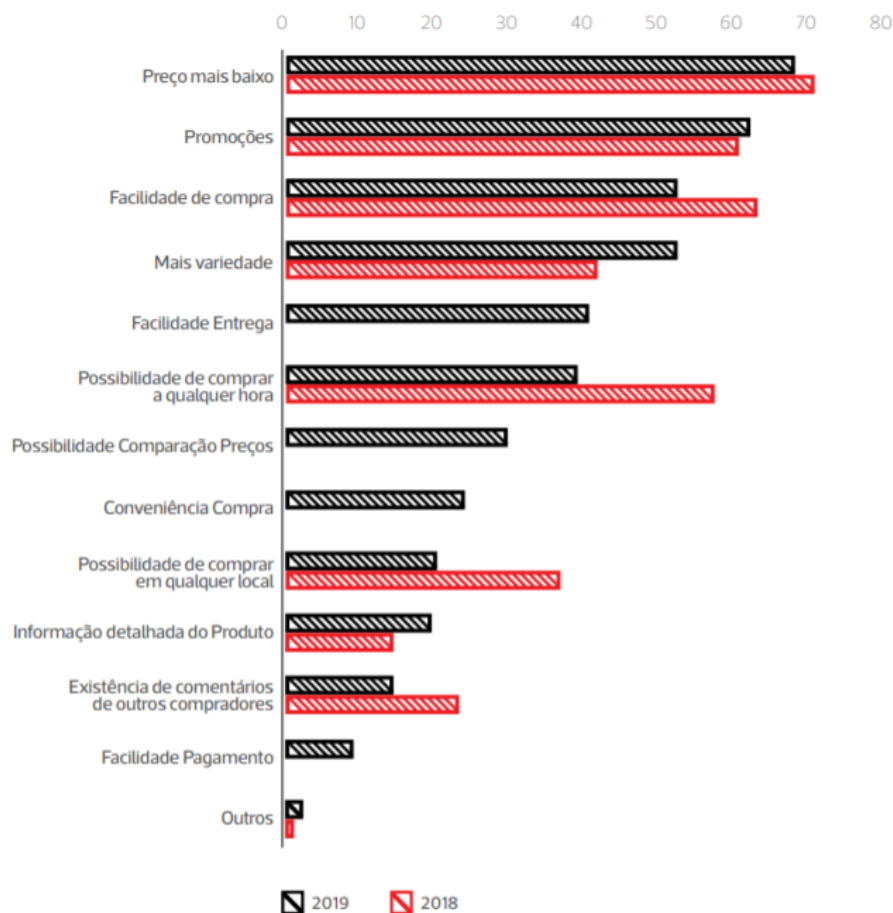


**Figure 1. E-commerce and internet penetration rate in 2020**

Source: Statista Market Outlooks (2020).

The consumer profile has been changing progressively over the last few years. Nowadays, according to the CTT E-commerce Report (2019), 51% of the Portuguese online shoppers are characterized by the predominance of the female gender, 66% with active ages from 25 to 44 years, followed by the youngest people, from 16-24 (23%). Most live in urban areas, such as Lisbon and Porto.

In Portugal, about 60% of Portuguese consumers spend on average 1 to 5 hours a day with Internet access and for online shopping, 43% of those use a computer, while 33% prefer mobile devices. 79% of them continue to prefer to buy on branded platforms than on marketplaces. Although, due to the diversity of products the marketplaces have been offering, they are gaining more space lately. The CTT E-commerce Report (2019) also states that the online shoppers are buying more and more often with a lower average value per purchase, reflecting a greater level of trust from the several stakeholders of the Marketplace. The greater maturity of the online market has been manifested in the growing practice of promotions and campaigns made by the companies, since these are the biggest motivation for the Portuguese consumer to buy online. Followed by the facility, in comparison with the in-person purchase process (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. Reasons to buy online**  
Source: CTT E-commerce Report (2019).

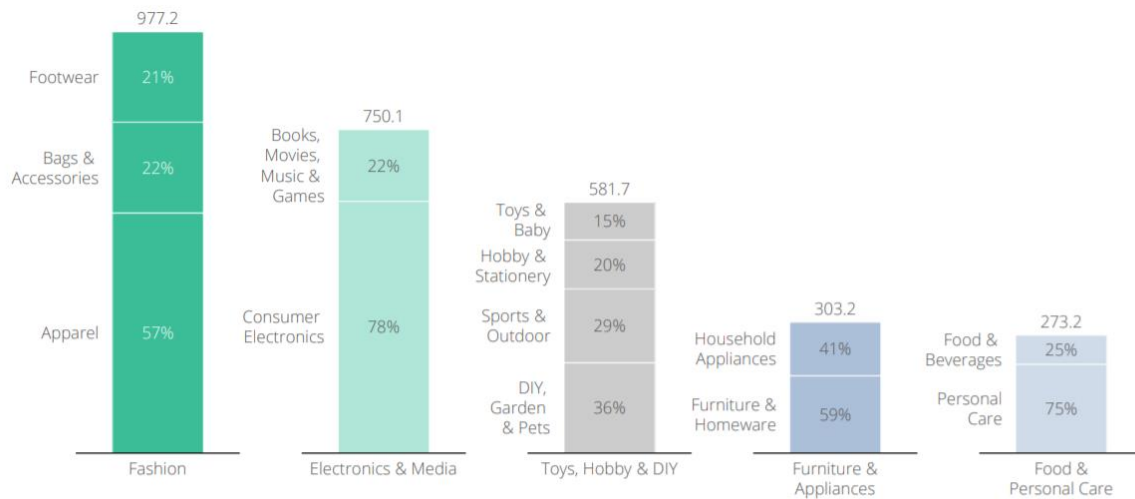
At the top of these consumers' preferences are, according to the ranking prepared by the European Ecommerce Report 2019, the Chinese e-commerce site AliExpress, followed by eBay, Amazon, FNAC, Worten, Continente, La Redoute and, finally, Wook. As can be seen, a good part of the favorite websites of the Portuguese population are foreigners, which confirms that Portugal is the second country in Europe with the highest rate of purchases on international websites, with 85% of consumers more interested in buying from a foreign retailer.

### 2.3 E-commerce

Albertin (1999) defined electronic commerce as the realization of the entire chain of business processes in an electronic environment, through the intense application of communication and information technologies. Kalakota and Whinston (1997) consider that e-commerce can be defined as the commercialization of products and services using computers. The same understanding is shared by Bloch, Pigneur and Segev (1996), who

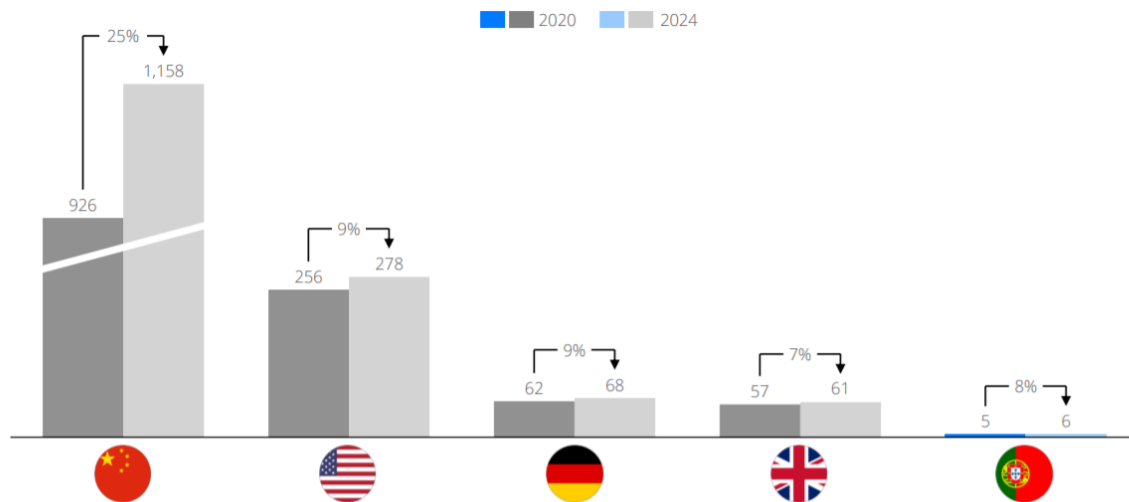
defined e-commerce as the support for any type of business transaction using electronic devices, that nowadays are the computers, smartphones, tablets and other smart devices. E-commerce technology allows business transactions to cross cultural, regional and national boundaries much more conveniently and economically than traditional commerce.

Although shopping online is easy, not everyone has access to the internet, not even in the first world countries does the entire population have access to the internet making this the biggest problem to developing e-commerce. But even with this issue e-commerce does not stop growing and trying to reach every level of social classes. As an example, in Portugal the e-commerce grew 17% in 2018, according CTT E-commerce Report (2019), and over 3 billion dollars net sales were made in 2019, mainly due to the fashion category, as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. E-commerce revenues in Portugal in million US\$ in 2019**  
 Source: Statista Market Outlooks (2020).

Besides, the number of e-commerce users is expected to grow by 8% to 6 million users in Portugal by 2024 (Fig. 4). With this in mind, the companies started to develop and improve their websites to improve the consumer experience. In addition, new technologies for payment online were created and increasing the sales by making it faster and easier to complete the purchase with Multibank or MB Way in Portugal, in the end sending the receipts to emails immediately. It appears that the most mature business areas in terms of e-commerce are the fashion segment (clothing and footwear), hotels and travel and the consumer electronics segment (mobile phones, gadgets, etc.). On the other hand, the consumption categories that are lagging the most are health and the automobile sector (REDUNIQ, 2021).



**Figure 4. Number of e-commerce users in selected countries in millions (user development)**  
 Source: Statista Digital Market Outlook (2020)

## 2.4 The Coronavirus (COVID-19)

COVID-19 is caused by SARS-CoV-2, a betacoronavirus. The coronavirus strain was first identified in December 2019 in China, in the city of Wuhan, in Hubei province. The initial cases of COVID-19 were associated with a market in Wuhan (Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market). The market closed on January 1, 2020, but the disease has progressed, triggering a worldwide epidemic or pandemic. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency and on March 11, the WHO declared it a global pandemic.

The symptoms of the disease are variable that may include fever, fever, cough, fatigue, breathing difficulties, and loss of smell and taste and the biggest problem of this virus is that, contrary to what most people thought at the beginning, that it was just a mild flu, COVID 19 is a serious disease, which can be fatal. Some people do not develop symptoms, others have mild symptoms, however a significant number of people develop various fatal complications including organ failure, septic shock, pulmonary oedema, severe pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) which causes serious damage, especially to the lungs and heart (Chen et al., 2020). The virus is transmitted from human-to-human through respiratory fomites, when a patient is symptomatic or during the asymptomatic period of COVID-19 (Sohrabi et al., 2020).

In March 2020, 90.870 cases of COVID-19 were confirmed and many governments decided to introduce lockdown, in an effort to curb exponential rates of infections and avoid

overcrowding in hospitals, since at the moment there was not any effective antiviral treatment or vaccine available.

Over the summer, in the northern hemisphere, the cases decreased a bit. However, as the fall started and the weather turned cold again, some countries, mainly in Europe and North America, were experiencing a second wave and along with that came another lockdown in most of the countries and the countries that avoided lockdowns only implemented restrictions to daily life, mitigating agglomerations and the spread of the disease.

According to the WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, the global death toll has reached 4.927.723 and the number of confirmed global cases is 242.348.657. The United States alone is responsible for most of the cases and deaths with a total of 46.264.596 cases and 755.721 deaths, being followed by India and Brazil.

Within less than 12 months of COVID-19 pandemic began the research and development of vaccines, in December 2020 the first doses of vaccines were being administered in China and USA. Even after a mass vaccination across the world some countries are still experiencing effects of a third wave of infections and implementing some restrictions but not as extreme as it was on the first two waves. On the other hand, countries in Europe are beginning the deconfinement plans step-by-step and getting closer to how it was before COVID-19.

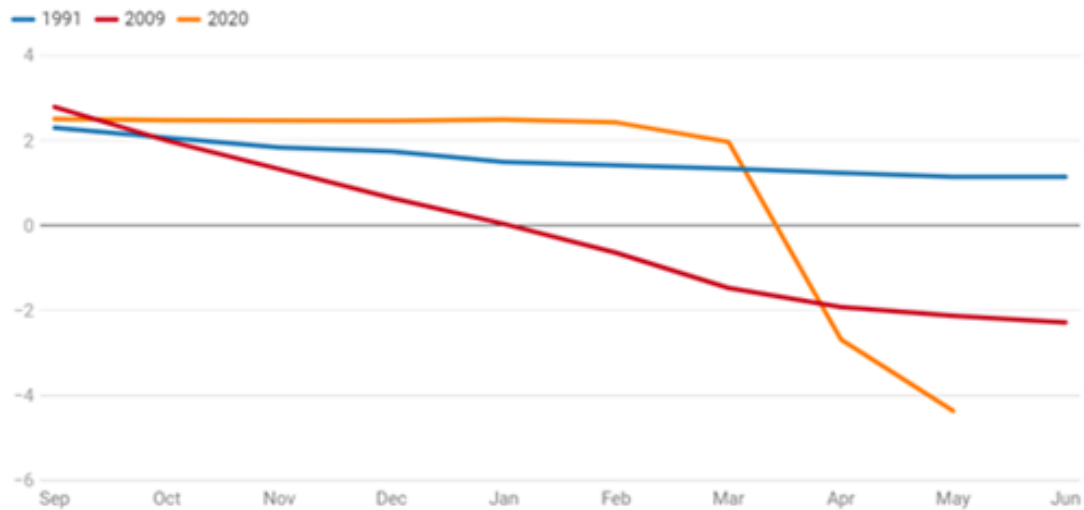
## **2.5 Impact of Covid 19 in the global economy**

Infectious disease outbreaks can easily cross borders to threaten economic and regional stability and since China, the country where the pandemic has arisen, is integral to nearly every sector of the global economy, the consequences were not small. China is the world's largest manufacturer and importer of crude oil and what happened there had a great impact all around the world, disrupting the economies and social order, as well as causing death and illness (Qiu et al., 2017).

Restrictions on movement and other interventions to protect public health and avoid the virus spread have reduced economic activity in most sectors and most countries, affecting production, distribution and consumption, with greater impact in countries that were less well prepared to deal with crises. Billions of people around the world were asked to stay at home and subsequently, businesses have been susceptible to transition into virtual



workplaces or laying off employees. As a result, the economy damage in 2020 represented the largest global economic shock in decades (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5. Consensus forecasts of global GDP (percent)**  
Source: Consensus Economics, World Bank (2020).

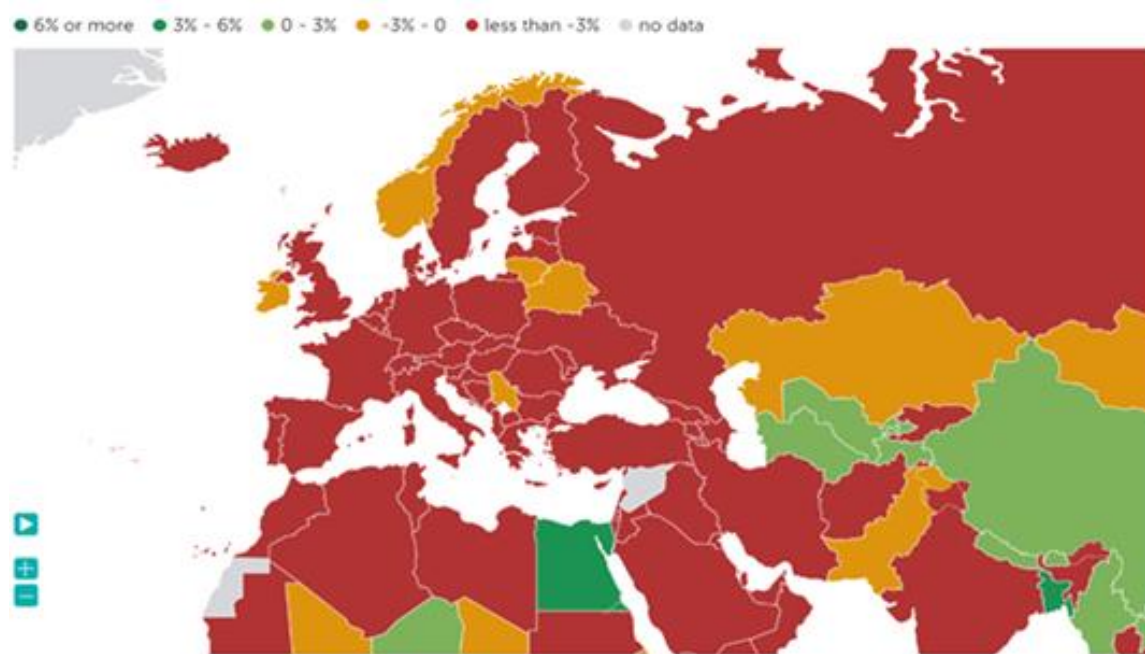
Despite all the efforts of governments to contain the downturn with fiscal and monetary policy support, the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) suffered a contraction of 5%, as shown in Figure 6, and the prospects for the long term are that the pandemic may leave lasting scars through lower investment, an erosion of human capital through lost work and schooling, and fragmentation of global trade and supply linkages.



**Figure 6. Real GDP growth (Annual percent change)**  
Source: World Economic Outlook (October 2020).

### 2.5.1 Impact of Covid 19 in European Union

The world pandemic caused a great global impact, and the euro area is no exception. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the fall in eurozone GDP in October 2020 reached -7,2% (Fig. 7 and Annex n.1), while in 2019, the GDP growth was 1.6% in this area (Annex n. 2).



**Figure 7. Real GDP growth in 2020 in Europe.**  
Source: International Monetary Fund (2020).

It has affected both supply and demand. Changes in the key production inputs of capital and labor and their productivity reflects supply conditions in the economy and the measures imposed by governments to contain the spread of the virus are a unique example of severe temporary supply-side restrictions (Bodnár et al., 2020). Therefore, economies and public finances are under considerable strain with all levels of government focused on mitigating the damage, especially during lockdown to support local business and communities and help them recover as strongly as possible.

The pandemic has induced a triple-pronged economic shock in European Union (EU), according to the economist Louis Boisset (2020): a supply shock, due to the closing of industrial and less workers going to their workplace; a demand shock, due to the drop of consumption as a result of lockdown and contingency measures, as for example, the closing

of stores and shopping malls; the existence of many uncertainties, as the duration of the restriction measures in European countries and when the population is going to get the vaccine and the effectiveness of government support.

### **2.5.2 Sectors more affected by Covid-19 in the European Union**

As stated above, Covid-19 and the lockdown had a great impact in all sectors of the economy, however some sectors were drastically affected while other sectors were only slightly affected. The sectors most affected have suffered mostly a negative impact due to lockdown but we have been able to observe a positive impact in some industries that sustain the economy of these sectors. The sectors more affected in the EU were the service and industry sector.

The secondary, or industry sector encompasses all human activities that transform raw materials into products. The industry sector includes manufacturing, construction or utilities (providing goods like electricity, chemicals, gas, etc). Some examples of the industry sector are small workshops, mills producing textiles, factories producing steel, chemicals, plastic, oil refinery.

The textile industry is an industry with a very extensive activity and with various sectors implemented within with bets on creativity, technical knowledge such as casual clothing or for automotive cabin supplies, to succeed in the international market this industry needs to be always innovating in technologies, materials and business models. For a long time, the textile and clothing industry (ITV) was considered one of the largest and most important in the sectors in the international brand, still, with the emergence of the pandemic of COVID-19, this was one of the most affected sectors, according to the 5th survey released by the International Textile Manufacturers Federation (ITMF) in 2020.

Another industry affected was the chemical industry, as it is a vital part of Europe's economy, since Europe is the second largest chemicals producer in the world (Annex n. 3) providing employment to over 1.2 million people. This industry supplies almost all sectors of the economy so it has a big role to sustain the economy's sectors. Even though it has a positive impact on the EU economy, this gradual loss of the industry to regions of Asia has been accelerated by the pandemic, according to a report released in 2022 by the European Chemical Industry Council (Cefic).

The tertiary, or services, sector encompasses all kinds of intangible goods, such as

consulting and advice, transport, or tourism. If a country generates its GDP mostly via services, this is often through industries like tourism (including accommodation and hospitality), financial services, or telecommunications. The service sector is one of the main sectors in most EU countries so a negative impact can severely damage Europe's economy. Two important industries in this sector were negatively affected: The transport industry and the tourism industry, with many economists fearing their recovery, which may take years (Sönnichsen, 2020).

With the lockdown, borders were closed and flights were cancelled. Consequently, the entire airline industry globally was negatively affected by the pandemic. A study published by E. Mazareanu, in October 2020, showed that the number of scheduled flights worldwide decreased by 46.4% in comparison with October 2019. The airline capacity in Europe, in the beginning of the restriction measures and lockdown in March, was down by almost 88% (Annex n. 4). In Italy, for example, the number of passenger flights declined 98%. The transport industry was affected all year long, since after a slight recovery in the summer, the second wave came along with travel restrictions again and the European passenger traffic declined over 90%.

Since people could not cross borders, travel or leave their houses, this situation also greatly affected the tourism sector both in hotels that were without receiving guests as in restaurants, travel, and cruise agencies and many others. Revenue swelled by 50% for hotels and restaurants, 70% for travel agencies and 90% for cruises and airlines. Many cities in Europe depend on tourism in the region, with Europe being one of the most chosen destinations in the world to travel, a very complicated situation for cities that depend exclusively on this sector. With the drop in tourism and travel restrictions have caused so many problems for businesses and travelers trying to return home and unable, companies and hotels that have the record of decreased bookings and the high number of refund requests. However, e-commerce came to balance the fall in revenues in this sector, maintaining some positive activity in the economy and reducing its fall.

The quaternary or knowledge sector includes industries providing information services, such as computing, information and communication technologies, education, training, education, development of technology, and research, IT and development. This sector is very important for the development of science and technology that will lead to a better economy. Inside this sector, there is the Information and communication technologies (ICT) that was one of the less affected industries by the pandemic (Annex n. 5). On the other

hand, this crisis did cause serious damage. The major impact was on hardware business, including devices, software and service business, while collaborative applications, cloud service and technologies such as security have relatively smaller impacts. ICT is one of the most promising industries for the recovery of the economy, still some difficulties and challenges are expected due to pressure on infrastructure networks, decreased consumer income and less availability of components (Oberoi & Singh, n.d.).

Although measures of confinement and social distance have had a negative impact on most industries, for ICT it has had a positive impact. With the government and companies promoting telework and avoiding gatherings of people for social reasons, there has been a significant increase in the use of internet, video calls, increasing the use of online communication platforms and apps. This change of behavior in consumers benefits digital media and Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), cybersecurity and data security. The increased use of online content like downloads, gaming, video conferencing and remote access to corporate networks will consequently increase cloud services. With this new trend of behavior, consumers will start to be more demanding and want better services, thereat the needs and demand in ICT are increasing. Consequently, the improvement of the industry and its development are a necessity which will lead to the growth of the industry. In order for it to happen, E-commerce and ICT need to evolve together.

## **2.6 Consumer behavior post-pandemic**

As news of COVID-19 spread and as it was officially declared a pandemic by the WHO, the population responded by stocking up. They bought out medical supplies like hand sanitizer and masks and household essentials like toilet paper and bread. Humans respond to crises in different ways. When faced with an uncertain, risky situation over which we have no control, we tend to try whatever we can to feel like we have some control, since the situation was accompanied by a lot of uncertainty and contradictory information. Also, seeing other people buying up the shelves and then seeing a scarcity of necessary products validates the decision to stock up because no one wanted to be left behind without any resources. This situation is defined as panic buying. Adding this behavior with the fear of people leaving their homes, many consumers started to opt for ordering their groceries online. Hence, many supermarkets have adjusted their services to meet demand. It is also a safe solution, since the risk of virus exposition via the package itself is very low.

According to a study by personal finance startup Credit Karma in September 2021 in

the United Kingdom, about 70% of the British consumers said that buying online and on mobile phones have become their favorite shopping methods, in comparison to less than half prior to the coronavirus pandemic. The study found how digital spending and banking habits have changed since COVID-19 restrictions began. However, online shopping is not the only method shoppers have been implementing over the last 18 months. Thanks to many branches closing during lockdown, usage of online and mobile banking has been also accelerating. As a result, just 8% of consumers prefer to enter into a physical branch than using online services now, down from 19% before the pandemic began. There was also a change in the way to do charity. People could not leave their homes, but at the same time, a great part of the population was in need. Then, the desire to help was combined with the facilities brought by e-commerce that resulted in a new trend where non-profit organizations have been embracing the digital power for selling donations and reaching a larger audience of shoppers. A report by the Internet Retailing indicates that UK charities sell 185% more items online in six months to August 2021 compared to the same period a year before. Many of these sales were conducted via marketplace sites like eBay, analysis suggests, as non-profit organizations turned to online channels in an attempt to plug an estimated £10 billion total loss in funding that came with the pandemic (Skeldon, 2021).

Forbes Magazine in March 2020 released the results of a survey on the impact of Coronavirus on purchase decisions and behavior which found that overall, all generations are worried about Coronavirus, but Millennials are changing their shopping behavior more dramatically than any other generation. The results also unearthed some interesting differences between how men and women are responding to the crisis, with more men overall reporting a greater impact on spending decisions. Most men claimed that the pandemic had affected how much they are spending on services and experiences and what products they are purchasing. Also, more men are shopping more frequently online and avoiding in-store environments than women, according to this study.

Despite all differences among generations or genders, according to a study made by Tao et al. in March 2022 (p. 1), “the pandemic has had a profound psychological and behavioral impact on people around the world” and it is a fact that the consumer behavior has undergone a change post-pandemic that will remain. There was an increase of 10% of online shopping for groceries by Europeans living in urban areas and according to a study from PwC, over 80% of European consumers who started buying groceries online during the pandemic are planning to continue to do so (Fig. 8). This means that, although social

distancing restrictions have been eased, there is no turning back for shoppers who have gone digital.

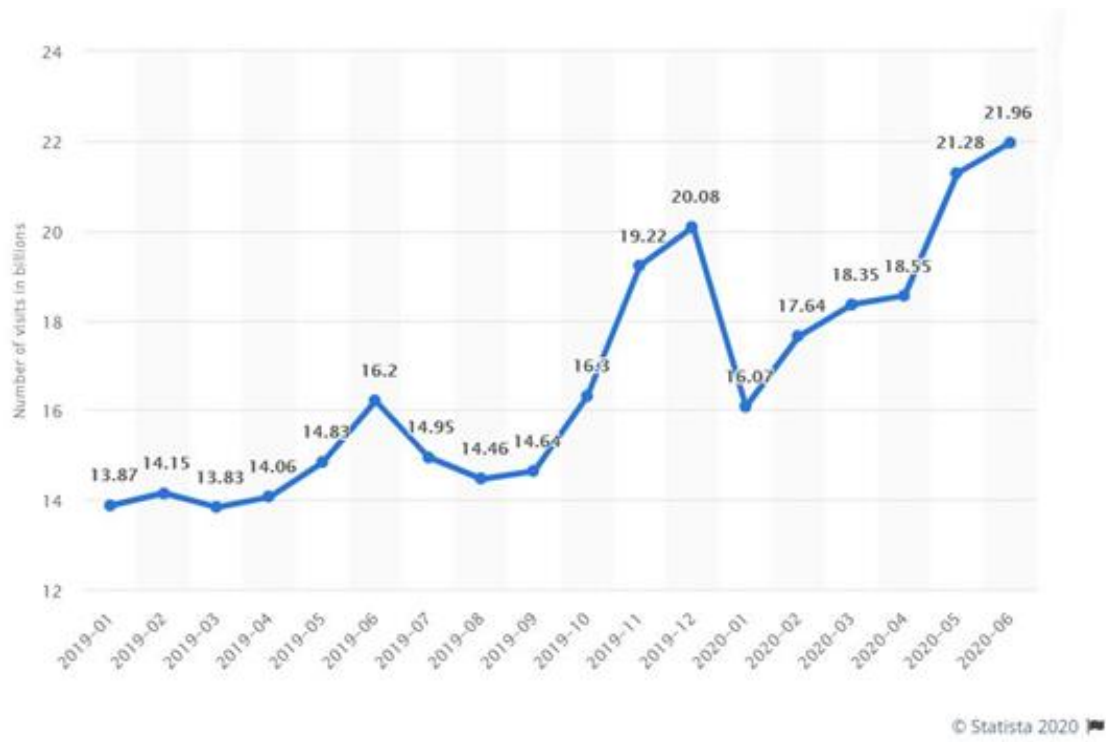


Figure 8. The impact of Covid-19 on consumer trends in Europe  
Source: Ecommerce News (2020).

## 2.7 How Covid 19 has accelerated e-commerce trends

From consumer behavior to demand prediction to retention, the events of the last year have altered or sped up almost every facet of online retail. Ecommerce is one of the industries with a positive impact due to a change in consumer trends and new behaviors that benefit this industry. In order to protect themselves from the pandemic and due to all restrictions of confinement and social distance, consumers relied on e-commerce platforms for the purchase of household staples and other essential and home products, leading to an increase in demand for contactless delivery services from active and new users on ecommerce platforms (Adibfar et al. 2022).

The use of Ecommerce platforms increased significantly between January 2019 and June 2020. Retail websites generated almost 22 billion visits in June 2020, up from 16.07 billion global visits in January 2020 (J. Clement, 2020) (Fig. 9).



**Figure 9. COVID-19 impact on global retail e-commerce site traffic 2019-2020**  
 Source: Statista (2020).

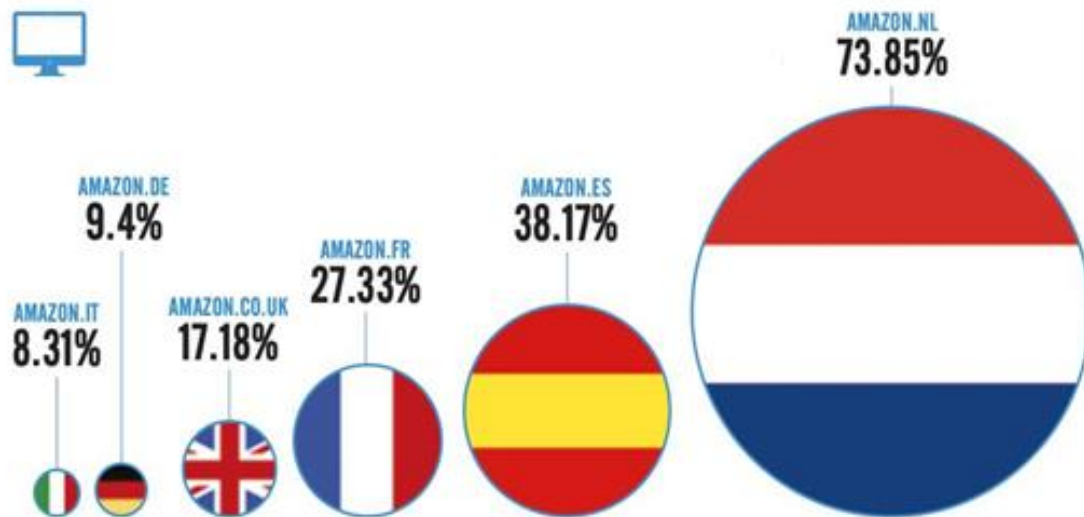
According to an analysis made by GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company, 9 out of the top 10 global ecommerce companies saw double-digit revenue growth in 2020, according to Figure 10. Amazon, Alibaba, Wayfair, Coupang, and Pinduoduo are the companies that stood out. Pinduoduo came close to triple-digit year-on-year revenue growth at 97.6%, raising its total 2020 sales to \$8.6 billion, while South Korea’s top marketplace Coupang saw a 90.8% growth, ranking it 7th overall for 2020 revenue at \$12 billion. Amazon topped the list at a reported revenue of \$386.1 billion, although its growth was far lower at 37.6%, as the company is already a consolidated digital platform and for that reason and to a surge in sales during the pandemic.



Rank	Company Name	HQ	Revenue (US\$bn) 2020	Revenue Growth (YoY) (%)	Net Profit (US\$bn) 2020	Net Profit Growth (YoY) (%)
1	Amazon	United States	386.1	37.6%	21.3	84.1%
2	JD	China	108.1	29.4%	7.2	305.9%
3	Alibaba	China	104.0	40.9%	21.8	0.8%
4	Vipshop Holdings	China	14.8	9.6%	0.9	47.2%
5	Wayfair	United States	14.1	55.0%	0.2	118.8%
6	Rakuten	Japan	13.7	18.1%	-1.1	-267.2%
7	Coupang	South Korea	12.0	90.8%	-0.5	32.0%
8	eBay	United States	10.3	18.9%	5.7	217.3%
9	Zalando	Germany	9.1	25.4%	0.3	130.9%
10	Pinduoduo	China	8.6	97.6%	-1.0	-3.2%

**Figure 10. Top 10 Ecommerce Companies by Revenue in 2020**  
Source: GlobalData (2020).

Amazon is an American multinational technology company which focuses on Ecommerce, cloud computing, digital streaming and artificial intelligence. It is one of the most competitive Ecommerce platforms on the market and it presents competitive prices and strategies outlined market by market, with delivery and price advantages. The company is an excellent example of a successful Ecommerce platform that increased its consumers in the EU during the pandemic, since unlike major world economies such as the United States and China, the EU has been slower to join Ecommerce platforms. Nonetheless, 2020 has accelerated this trend and increased the transition from offline to online. Per month, Amazon sites on the European market have almost 300 million unique visits. During 2020 traffic to the company website increased in all European markets and between March and August there was an increase of 73% in the Netherlands, 38% in Spain, 27% in France, 17% in the United Kingdom, 9% in Germany and 8% in Italy (Fig. 11). In the UK, Amazon is now on course to become the largest retailer by 2025, overtaking the biggest ones such as Shell, McColls, BP and Wilko, as was reported by the Charged Retail.



**Figure 11. Increase in Amazon's traffic between March and August 2020.**  
Source: Joanna Perry (2020).

This increase in demand for products through Amazon reflects the new behaviors of consumer confinement as the best-selling categories on Amazon were Consumer Electronics, Toys & Games, Health & Beauty, and Home & Kitchen, all products for home. Not only there was an increase in consumer interest on Amazon, but also brands looking for the platform to sell their products. This interest from local brands is greater in digitally less mature markets. The forecast for Amazon's participation in Europe is for growth in the coming years and pandemic and its containment measures have accelerated the process not only for Amazon but for various Ecommerce platforms making online shopping a new trend on the rise. Many traditional and offline businesses were forced by this new trend to shift resources to Ecommerce. This shift from offline businesses to e-commerce platforms also provides a response to the increased demand for online stores.

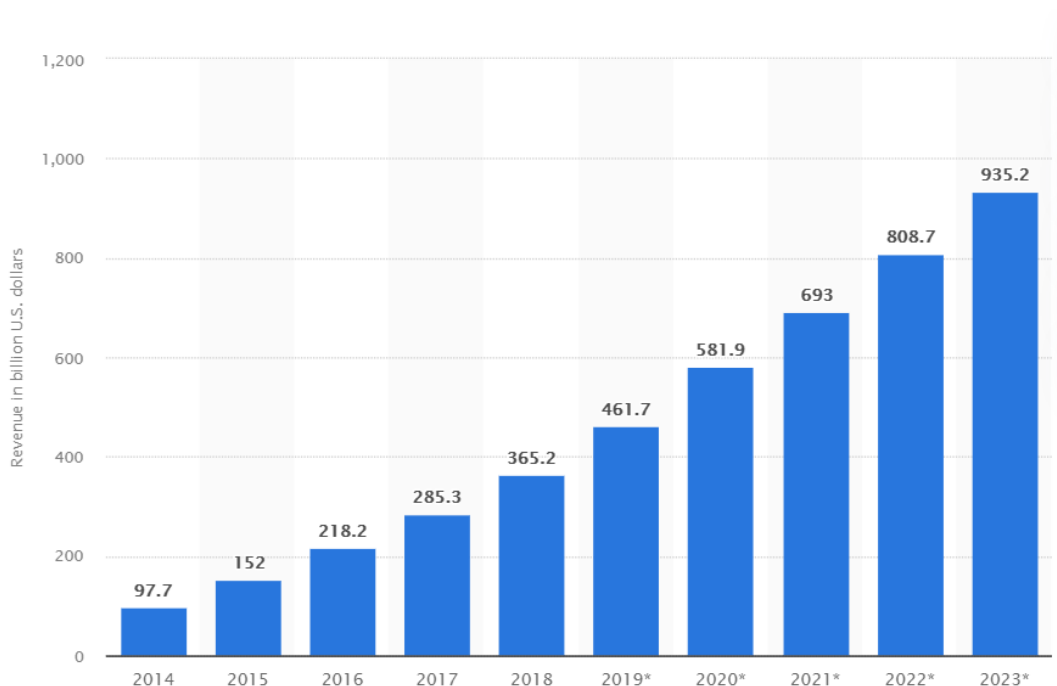
Despite the fact that Ecommerce has failed to help all sectors in the same way as it also depends on other commercial activities affected by the pandemic, such as distribution services and manufacturing activity due to travel and confinement restrictions, it has been asserting itself as an increasingly strong future trend and according to Lego Director for Ecommerce Strategy & Growth Kasper Thams, "Europe has a much more fragmented offline retail landscape, and many of the strong offline players are moving online."

The prospects for this sector are very optimistic and according to a new research report by NetImperative in 2021, brands selling online are making a range of investments

across new talent, digital marketing spend and delivery capabilities in expectation of a booming 12 months for e-commerce beginning August 2021.

### 2.7.1 Mobile APP

A great ally of this new trend is the use of apps. The new applications create an easy connection with the consumer. Mobile apps brought many changes into the marketplace including the way we book hotels, transfer money, order products and eat out. COVID-19 has rapidly accelerated the shift to digital commerce, with mobile apps taking center stage and the revenue through mobile apps are expected to rise to \$935 billion by 2023, according to Figure 12. In 2021, a massive wave of consumers across the globe downloaded ecommerce apps and made purchases through them. AppsFlyer’s State of Ecommerce App Marketing 2021 report reveals a 48% global surge in downloads of online shopping apps on mobile between January and July, rising 55% on Android devices and 32% on iOS. According to the study, consumer spending via apps is growing alongside these downloads, with data indicating a 55% increase in worldwide consumer spend on the format between March and July compared with the same period in 2020.



**Figure 12. Worldwide mobile app revenues in 2014 to 2023 (in billion U.S. dollars)**  
Source: Statista Research Department (2021).

A Study of a Business-to-Business Mobile App (Gill et al. 2017) verified that firms that had adopted mobile apps over 15 months increased the manufacturer's annual sales

revenues by 19.11%–22.79%, in comparison to a control group of firms that did not adopt. Besides, the implementation of the app resulted in positive return on engagement initiatives (RoEI). The simplicity of mobile applications provides excellent business benefits and can improve customer service. An own mobile app could boost the business for many reasons: would allow offline access, increase brand visibility, improve customer satisfaction ratings, enhance customer retention, provide personalization, build customer loyalty and generate more income (Kim & Kim, 2017).

## **CHAPTER III – THE INTERNSHIP AT SONAE MC**

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### 3. The Internship at Sonae MC

#### 3.1 The company

Sonae is a multinational business group based in Porto, Portugal. Founded by Afonso Pinto de Magalhães in 1959. It is present in 62 countries excluding wholesale in retail with over 42 thousand employees, focusing on learning and improvement throughout the years with a belief that this is the only way of overcoming the current and future challenges. The set of values and principles that guide the company's way of being in life and in business are the following:

1. Trust and Integrity
2. People at the center of our success
3. Ambition
4. Innovation
5. Corporate Responsibility
6. Frugality and Efficiency
7. Cooperation and Independence

According to the company's website, its mission is "To create long-term economic and social value, taking the benefits of progress and innovation to an ever-increasing number of people".

Sonae was founded on August 18, 1959 and stands for *Sociedade Nacional de Estratificados*. The company's history shows us how the company has diversified its business over the years through the acquisition of factories and the creation of companies in the most diverse areas, such as construction, restaurants, retail, telecommunications, medicine and hotel management. In 1983, Sonae entered the capital markets and in 1985 the first hypermarket in Portugal was opened in Matosinhos, called Continente. In the 90s, the company started to focus on specialized retail through several brands such as Modalfa, Maxmat, Max Office, Sport Zone, Worten. In this decade also, the company opened the Solinca Health Clubs. In 2013, the company started the telecommunications brand NOS and in 2016, it opened its first supermarket specializing in healthy food, Go Natural. In 2017, it launched Dr. Wells which is its first clinic specializing in dentistry and aesthetics.

In addition, over the years, the company has made a commitment to becoming increasingly sustainable through initiatives such as joining the Portuguese Plastics Pact and announcing its carbon neutrality in its operations by 2040, a decade ahead of the target set for the European Union (Sonae Sustainability Report, 2018).

Accordingly with their vision of business, they have a history of investments in innovations and sustainability having invested over 206 million euros in 2020 as shown in their annual report, some of these investments being for planting over 93 million trees across 73 hectares and also the biggest photovoltaic plant for self-consumption in Portugal.

Presently Sonae holds a portfolio of businesses in different business areas being their core business Sonae MC, which leader in the area of food retail owner of Continente (Modelo, Bom Dia and Ice), Meu Super, Bom Bocado, Book.it, Well's (drugstores) and Sonae SR that is in charge especially of sports, clothing and electronics related retail areas, owning the brands SportZone, Zippy, Worten, Worten Mobile, MO, Pets&Plants, Salsa, Dott, Note! and others.

In addition, they have different kinds of partnerships such as Sonae Sierra, international specialist in shopping centers and half of the shares owned by Sonae and Sonaecom with partnerships in different areas of telecommunications, media and software, for example the newspaper Publico, NOS, Biztech and WeDo Technologies. Also having different kinds of investments in tourism, energy, investment management and also real estate like Sonae Turismo and Sonae RP.

Those mostly updated results from March 2022, according to the company's report, showed us that Sonae is one of the biggest business groups in Portugal with a turnover of over 7 billion euros, an EBITDA of 268 million euros and a continuous operations net income of 331 million euros.

### **3.1.1 The Insignia Note!**

Note! is a store that brings together a comprehensive value proposition with books, stationery, gifts and other services to simplify the consumer's everyday life, including postal services in partnership with CTT, Jogos Santa Casa and a copy and printing service, with the possibility of requesting in advance online. It currently has over 80 stores across Portugal. Its mission is to inspire and facilitate the daily lives of its customers with a wide and varied range of products and solutions that challenge the creativity, the imagination and the knowledge.

Over the past few years, the store has been a big ally of students, parents and professors because it offers a comprehensive range of products and services to the school community as a large selection of stationery products and brands, the best selection of school fashion brands, a complete catalog of school support books and the National Reading Plan, and a simple, convenient and intuitive textbook reservation service.

Besides that, it sells literature, children's, technical, health and wellness, biographies, science fiction and many other types of books. At the stationary part, it sells products to draw, paint, color, school supplies, backpacks, pencil cases, lunch boxes, etc. In the range of gifts, there are sundry products such as gadgets, decoration and storage items. Also, muggles, notebooks, diaries, bottles and postcards, all with fun and cute prints on them. The store also has a wide variety in the toy sector. There are toys for children, for babies, puzzles, games, collectible items such as Funko pop figures, cars and others.

The insignia has a very strong visual identity with a pattern in all stores in the chain that create an experience for the customer who visits its physical store. Products are cleverly displayed to attract lovers of fun and cute stationery and products. In addition, like other brands of the Sonae group, including Continente, the store has its private label of stationery items, which are sold at a more affordable price. We can find private label products such as pens, notebooks, labels, notepads, reams of paper, folders, erasers, backpacks, diaries, lunch boxes, among many others.

The store offers several advantages for its clients. For those who have the Continente card, the store offers monthly discount coupons. For those who are teachers, the store offers benefits and discounts on school support books, copies and prints. For parents and students, the store offers a customer loyalty program with several benefits throughout the school year, such as free deliveries, exclusive promotions and first-hand news.

Its biggest competitors in Portugal are retail chains for books, stationery, gifts and toys such as Fnac, Staples, Bertrand and Flying Tiger Copenhagen. Fnac is a large French retail chain selling cultural and electronic products, where you can find books, stationery, and gifts. Currently, in Portugal, there are 34 physical Fnac stores. There are fewer Fnac stores than Note stores! in the country, however, the chain arrived in Portugal in 1998 and is a consolidated brand recognized by the Portuguese and according to its website, in addition to the diversity of products available in stores, Fnac offers numerous services to its customers, such as the Fnac laboratory, the Fnac Clinic, differentiating shipping methods, exclusive campaigns for members, Click in Store and MarketPlace offer. Also, the company has been in the digital market for years and has a very complete and friendly website for shoppers (Fnac, 2022).

Staples is the leader in the sale of stationery and office supplies and the 2nd largest online sales operator in the world, with more than 2000 stores and around 88 thousand employees worldwide. It was founded on May 1, 1986, in Massachusetts (USA), and arrived in Portugal in 1996, having opened the first store in Alfragide. The Staples brand is aimed



at different audiences, from companies to professionals, to the final consumer. Its consumers have the possibility to buy through its website, by phone or from one of the 34 stores of the Staples chain found from north to south of the country (Staples, 2022).

Bertrand is the largest and oldest bookstore chain in Portugal. It was founded in 1732 and today has 58 stores spread across the country. In addition, it has a consolidated online commerce, a very complete website with exclusive comments from several book authors (Bertrand, 2022).

Flying Tiger Copenhagen is a Danish variety store chain. Its first shop opened in Copenhagen in 1995 and the chain now has nearly 1000 shops all over the world, and it is possible to find them also online. It has a variety retail concept that designs its own products that are basically everyday products and gifts (Flying Tiger Copenhagen, 2022).

### 3.1.2 Note! e-commerce SWOT analysis

# SWOT ANALYSIS



Figure 13. Note! e-commerce Swot Analysis

A SWOT analysis was carried out for the purpose of analyzing the store website, the whole buying and selling process, its advantages, opportunities as well as its weaknesses and threats in the national market.

Note! e-commerce's greatest strengths are consistent with its mission: to inspire and facilitate the daily lives of its customers with a wide and varied range of products and solutions. The online store offers a comprehensive range of products and services such as

books, stationery, gifts and a copy and printing service. Like its physical stores, the website also offers stationary items of its private label with more affordable prices and has a strong visual identity that makes it possible to create a differentiated customer experience. The website "noteonline.com" is not the only platform used to sell. The store also uses other

marketplaces and the delivery APP Glovo to reach more customers. Another strength is the fact that the store has an Instagram account with more than 44.000 followers. Those followers, when seeing the advertising made on Instagram, are directly directed to the website to make the purchase.

On the other hand, its e-commerce started only two years ago. That means, it is pretty new in comparison to other competitors and many people do not know it yet. In addition, the store faces beginner problems, such as the fact that they use a simpler sales platform that does not meet all the store's needs, limited payment method and not so fast delivery due to logistical problems, such as, for example, only one storehouse to supply online purchases from all over the country.

The opportunities that the store has is to offer a better service and shopping experience, optimizing the shipping process and decrease the delivery time. For this, it would be necessary to use more storehouses in strategic regions of the country. Also, they should change the platform to a more complete one and improve the payment methods, including payment with MBWAY and a bigger range of credit cards. Besides that, it is important to create a database with all the shipping and payment information, to accelerate and facilitate the customer's next purchases. Another big opportunity to improve the shopping experience is to create an APP, that is an important platform utilized by a lot of stores currently, including its biggest competitors.

The biggest threats that the store faces are its competitors. Note!'s most important competitors are big store chains with a lot of investment in advertising and in their websites. For having started their e-commerce longer than Note!, they have more experience in the market, more complete websites and some of them can offer fast delivery and low shipping costs.

### **3.2 Inside Note!**

This subchapter will be based on personal and practical experience and on the progressive report written in order to describe the work done during this period inside the company. It will include details of the daily work and the main tasks fulfilled.

The internship started on 16th of November 2020 and finished on 15th February 2021. It had a duration of 3 months (480 hours). Sonae's office is at the Sonae Building in Matosinhos, Portugal. However, due to Covid-19, the internship needed to be adapted from the beginning, so for most part of it, I worked from home, with the exception of a few days of training. Through the months of December and January, home office was mandatory in Portugal, since there was a worsening in the number of Coronavirus cases.

### **3.2.1 Role and Experience**

The internship at Note! started at the end of 2020, on 16st November, a period near to Christmas and the holidays, which allowed me to figure out, through the work done, how a retail store present throughout the country works, what are its values, its strategies, its logistics, mainly in a period of large amount of shopping.

On my first day, a warm welcome was given by the team and the human resources at the office. They explained how the Sonae worked, its history, culture, and the people who work there, focusing on introducing the Note! team via Microsoft Teams, since most people were working from home.

The people I worked directly with were the Manager of Note!, the head of digital and e-commerce and my intern colleagues. The first month, I was still adapting to the way that the company works and to the tasks, whereas they were totally new for me. It was a period of intensive training with a lot of online meetings. In the second month, one of my intern colleagues, who was already working there when I started and helped me a lot through this first month, finished her internship there. So, all her functions had become my responsibility, since the other intern was responsible for Information Technology (IT) functions. It was not hard to adapt, I really enjoyed the process and to experience working in a big company.

There were not many difficulties during this period, it was a great environment to work, where I felt very welcome. Everyone one was very helpful, professional, mainly the ones I work with directly. I also had good support from my intern colleagues. Sonae is a consolidated company with values that are respected by the people who work there and I can assure that it is a good place to work, even though my experience working there was a little different, since most part of it was working from home.

Inside the Insignia, there are many sectors, but my main role was to support the digital and e-commerce team. The store website was really recent at the time, (what will be

explained why in the next subtopic in detail) and for that reason, there was plenty of work to be done in this sector. It was necessary to lineup strategies, design, new ideas with the stock management and the technical issues that could come up in the digital platform.

In this position, I was responsible for processes within the website and marketplaces. The products are not only sold at the Note! official website, but at the Dott and Worten marketplaces. Then, my main functions were to make daily reports of all the data that could be extracted from these three platforms using advanced Excel tools. In the morning, I extracted the data of what had been sold and with the help of a programming software, this data was transformed into a stock report and passed on to the physical stores and to the stock manager. After this report was ready, I could update the stock on the digital platforms. At the end of the day, another report was needed. I used to extract all the orders data from those three platforms, using a programming software to process them again, and then Power Bi to analyze these results to send to the rest of the team.

I also had tasks inside the Note!'s digital platform such as to check paid and pending orders, refunds, extract customer messages and pass on to the sector responsible for answering them. The range of products sold in the store was very large, with new products being added frequently. Then, I was responsible for adding them to the website. To create a product in the platform was necessary: its specifications, image, price, logistical data and other details. So, in order to do this, a database with all this information was provided in an Excel spreadsheet. Sometimes, the product had no image. Then, one of my functions was to contact the supplier to get a good image to put in the website, since a good picture is most times the reason the customer will decide to buy that product. Other times, it was necessary to create a description for some products and also, to translate book titles and subtitles in other languages. Once the product was added into the website's platform, it had to appear in the stock report the next morning.

Moreover, I participated in meetings that involved issues and discussions both about the website and how to improve it, as well as issues related to stores and stock. There were many logistical problems to be managed, mainly due to the fact that there was only one storehouse responsible for stocking the products offered in the online store. Besides, as the website was a new project, there were many things to be discussed about the website design, what information to put in or take out, details like colors, font, size of images, how the product and service category divisions should be done inside the website, what information should be placed on the site's home page, among other things. In these meetings that I had

the opportunity to participate in, it was also decided what the store's next promotions activities would be, what the shipping cost would be, the products that would have discounts and which products were having the best sales performance. As an intern, it was not my responsibility to decide promotions, discounts or manage costs, but I was able to learn a lot how to analyze the market, demand and costs to manage promotions on specific dates such as Christmas (a peak season sale) and the post-Christmas (a low sales season). I was also able to learn that details can make a lot of difference, such as, for example, a catchphrase to call the customer to a particular sale promotion, a font and color can create a strong visual identity, understand what customers are looking for when they are shopping online and improve their experience.



## **4. Note! and its challenges during the pandemic**

### **4.1 Lockdown and restriction measures**

As stated through this work, the pandemic caused a sharp deceleration in the economy, since because of restrictions measures and other interventions, only what was essential was open, such as supermarkets and pharmacies, which was not the case of Note!. Although Note! was a large retail chain with more than 80 stores in Portugal, it was unprepared for something like this. One impact within this, however, has been an uptake in e-commerce resulting from the need for much activity to move online. The use of digital and e-commerce was already a reality for Sonae and its Insignias. For that reason, Note! had a plan to become digital and create an online platform. However, this plan was scheduled for the next few years and took place at the moment the pandemic was officially declared. A sector was created inside the store to focus all efforts in developing a website and getting the customer's attention to this new way of shopping. This digital team played an important role in finding the opportunities and risks for e-commerce that have emerged during the crisis and worked together to improve understanding of the challenges faced by e-commerce businesses in record time, since the only options were: to come up with a solution or stop the sales for an indeterminate period of time. It was time for action.

### **4.2 Creation of digital platform**

The store started to use the services of Glovo to help with sales on 27st January 2020. Glovo is a quick-commerce start-up founded in Barcelona in 2015. It is an on-demand courier service that purchases, picks up and delivers products ordered via its mobile app. The company is very popular for offering food delivery services, but it also offers multiple services. For that reason, Note! started to use the app to offer not only its products, but their services too, as its copy and printing service. The app was a good ally, since it was already popular in the most populous cities in Portugal. However, for the store to reach the entire country, it was important to have its own platform, where deliveries would be made by mail. Whilst the website project was in development, the company started using the Worten Marketplace on 24st April 2020 and the Dott website on 18st May 2020. Worten is a Portuguese consumer electronics and entertainment company and its marketplace allows other brands and partners to sell their products there, offering the same shopping experience.

Dott is the biggest generalist Portuguese marketplace. Both belong to Sonae MC.

In order to make this project feasible, it was necessary a platform that would make this process fast, had low initial investment and be easy to operate, to offer a good shopping experience for Note!’s customers. The platform chosen was Shopify, a leading provider of essential internet infrastructure for commerce that offers trusted tools to start, grow, market and manage a retail business. The advantage of Shopify is to offer a platform and services that are engineered for reliability, while delivering an excellent customer experience. Founded in Ottawa, Shopify powers over 1.7 million businesses in more than 175 countries and is trusted by consolidated brands such as Allbirds, Gymshark, Heinz, Staples and many others according to its website. Alongside with the e-commerce boom, a big wave of new merchants joined Shopify and its revenue increased 57% in 2021. That happened because the company gave entrepreneurs, brands and small business around the world a chance to create their own certainty, in the middle of the uncertainties brought by the pandemic. That rapid growth resulted in significant updates to its platform infrastructure, expanding strategic partnerships, and advancing its portfolio of growth initiatives to be prepared for the digital's future.

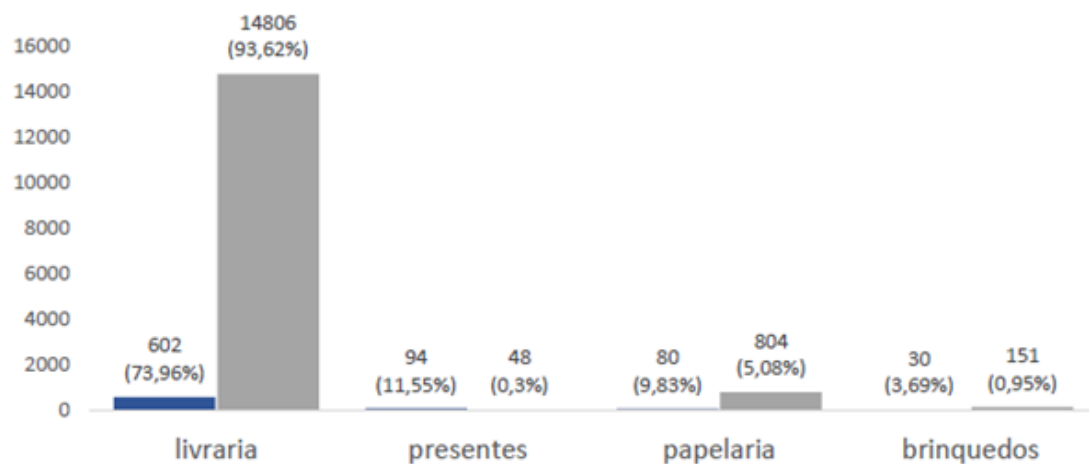
The platform was settled, but there was still a lot to do. The website had to be filled with information, content, products and a design that would correspond to the store's visual identity. So, throughout the year of 2020, the website was creating shape, growing and generating more and more visibility and even with its success, the store chose to continue with the help of Glovo and marketplaces.

### **4.3 Analysis of Note!’s evolution in 2020**

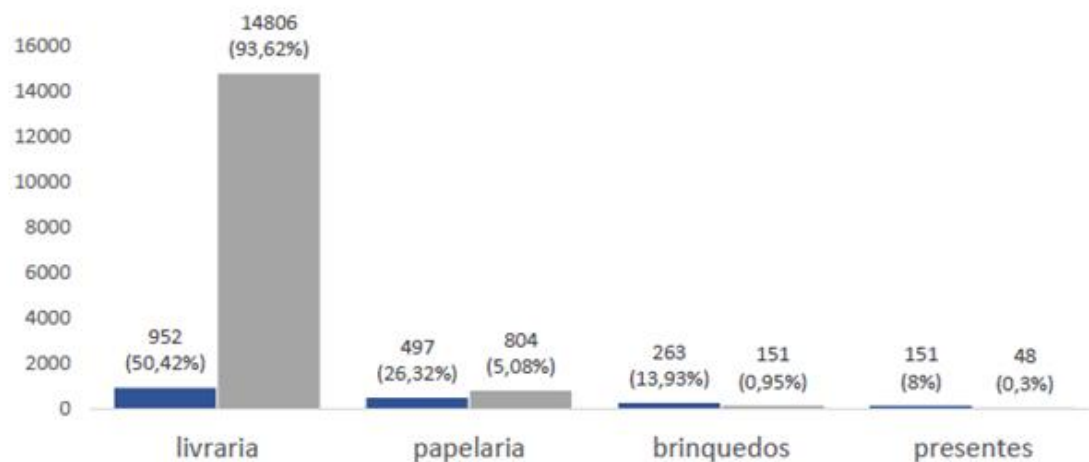
In order to confirm the company's successful digital transformation, data were collected from Dott, Worten Marketplace and Shopify for analysis of the results.

The first range of products to be sold at the beginning of the e-commerce had 814 products, while on 31st December 2020, the range consisted of 16.500 items, which totaled an increase of 2000%, as seen in Figures 14, 15 and 16. The blue bar indicates the range in the beginning of the website, while the grey bar indicates the number of products at the end of the year. The category with the biggest growth in the three channels (Shopify, Worten and Dott) was Bookstore (“livraria”), followed by stationery (“papelaria”).

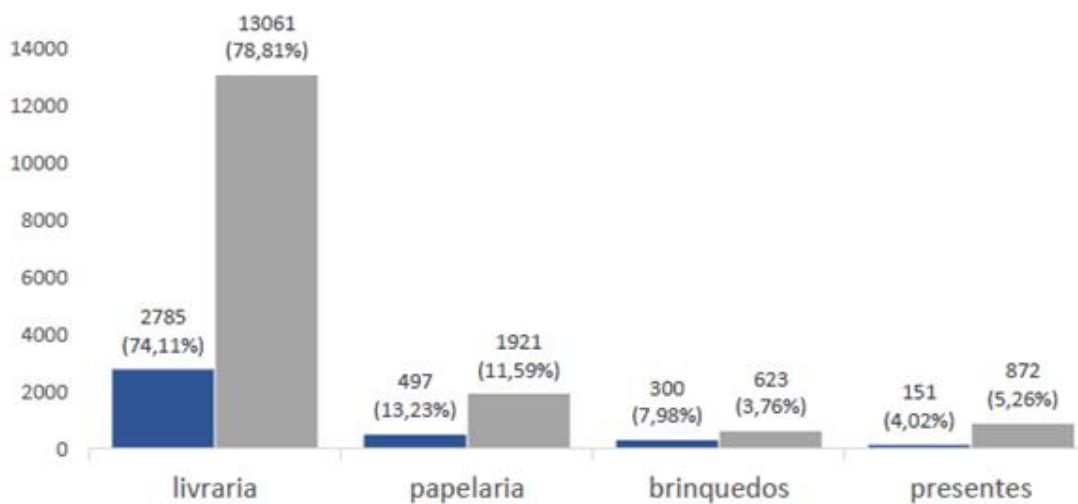




**Figure 14. Category Evolution at Worten**  
Source: Sonae MC Annual Report (2020).

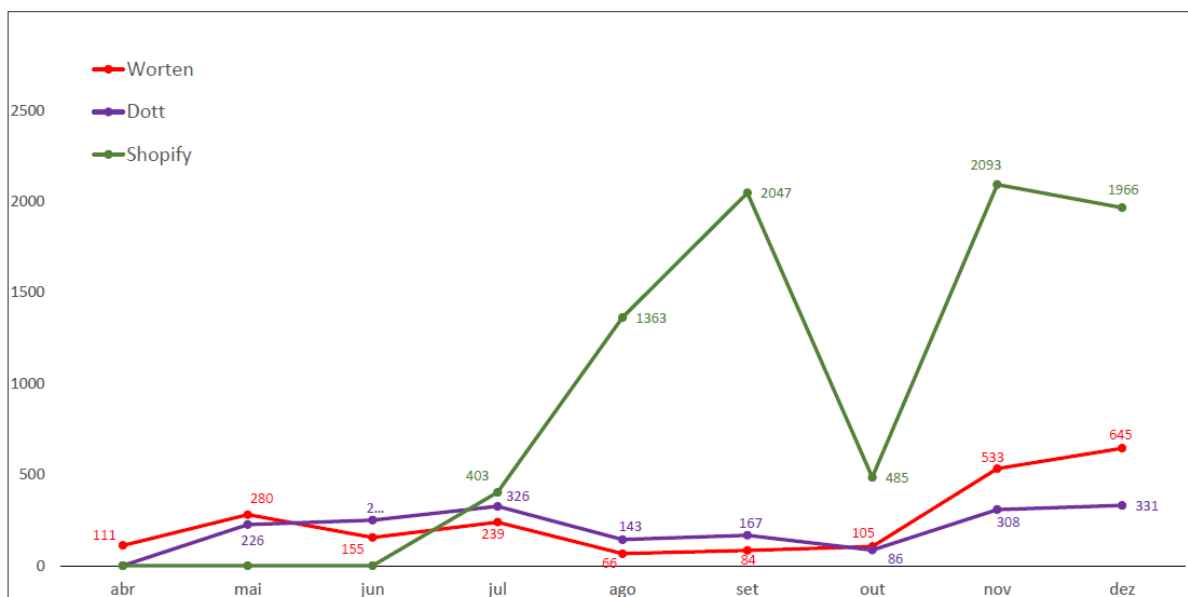


**Figure 15. Category Evolution at Dott**  
Source: Sonae MC Annual Report (2020)



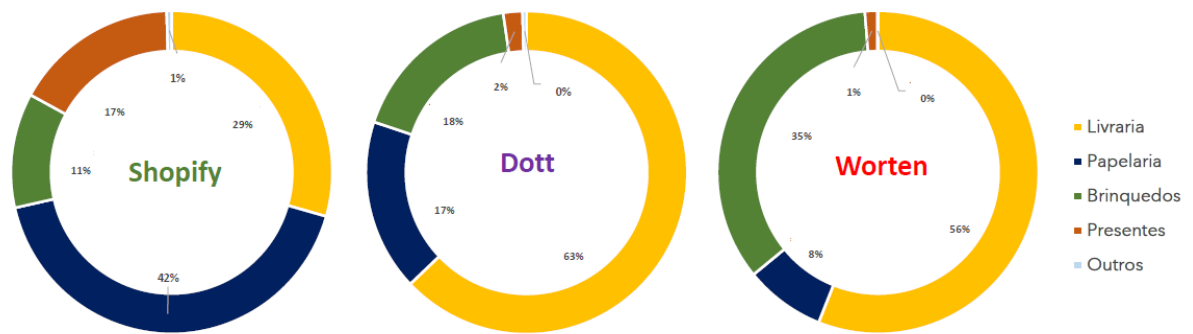
**Figure 16. Category Evolution at Shopify**  
Source: Sonae MC Annual Report (2020).

The evolution of sales in 2020 was very promising, with emphasis on the sales growth of Shopify. Through the Figure 17 it is possible to see a rise in sales in the back-to-school period between August and September, mainly through Shopify. And considering the 3 channels, December was the month with the most orders, while October was the month with the least number of orders.



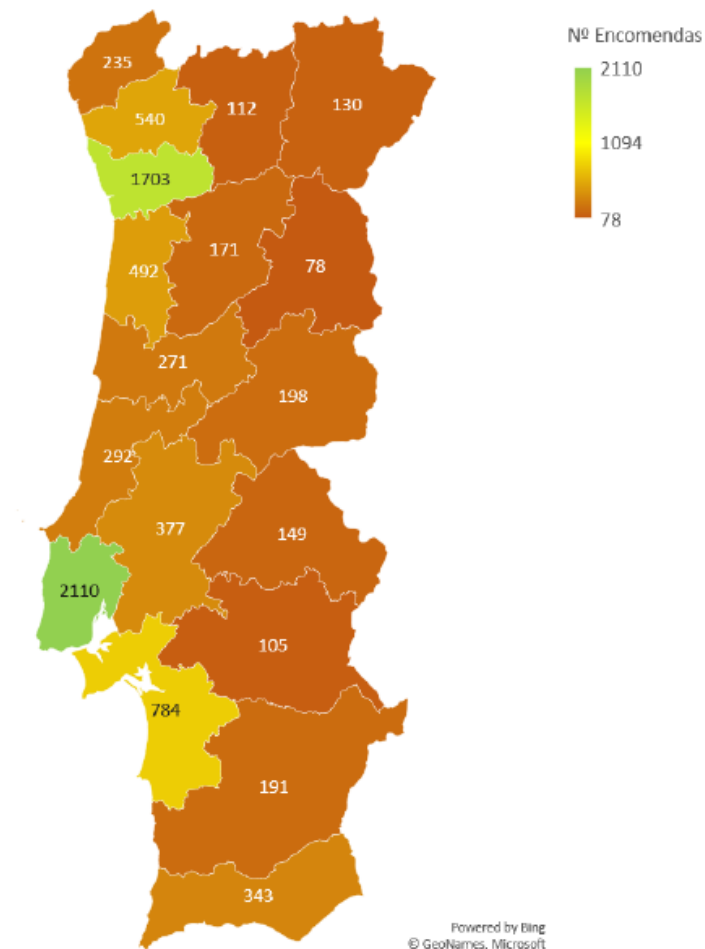
**Figure 17. Sales Evolution Online in 2020**  
Source: Sonae MC Annual Report (2020).

It is possible to observe in Figure 18 the percentage of accumulated sales by category. The bookstore range was expanded in November, which explains the largest peaks in orders across all channels. Bookstore is the best-selling category on marketplaces, while Shopify is the most popular channel for stationery purchases, which explains the large number of orders in the back-to-school months in Portugal through Shopify. Bookstore is the second best-selling range on Shopify, which makes this category very important to the company's portfolio.



**Figure 18. Accumulated sales by category (percent)**  
Source: Sonae MC Annual Report (2020).

Analyzing only Shopify data, the big centers such as Porto and Lisbon are the regions that registered the highest number of orders (Figure 19).



**Figure 19. Evolution Sales by Region**  
Source: Sonae MC Annual Report (2020).

Data extracted from Shopify revealed that in the bookstore category, the digital store sold 2,3 times more than the average of the physical stores. While considering the toys

category, the digital store sold 7 times more than the average of the physical stores. Lastly, by analyzing the main metrics such as number of visits and conversion rate, that is a metric used to track how much of your audience actually converts and drives business results, it is possible to conclude that December and November had the best results since the website launch through Shopify, according to Figure 20.

Months	Numbers of Visits	Months	Conversion Rate
1º December	326 625	1º November	1%
2º September	289 175	2º September	0,7%
3º August	266 139	3º July	0,6%

**Figure 20. Conversion rate and number of visits**  
Source: Sonae MC Annual Report (2020).

The company's annual reports also state that at the end of 2020, 12.400 packages were sent via Portuguese mail (CTT) and 2.000 meters of bubble plastic and 10.000 personalized Note! boxes were used. The growth of online sales was significant and managed to compete with the physical stores at the same time.

Other things that had influence on those results are: the fact the company offers several payment methods, which allow its customers to select the modality that best suits his profile, in terms of convenience and security; for a few periods of the 2020, it offered free shipping, to not harm the recurrence of purchase; it created a dynamic of promotions that have taken the shoppers to visit its website more often; it developed newsletter and email marketing campaigns aiming the finalization of purchases that were abandoned during the checkout process; and last but not least, the fact that it offers a short delivery time, around 3 days, as this is one of the biggest customers requests.

The prospects for the future are very optimistic, Note! online is promising, it came up from a challenging period, but generated good results that could accelerate the company's growth and development, fitting into this new e-commerce trend and new consumer habits.

The focus now is on maintaining the momentum gained from the pandemic-driven changes in consumer behavior, since ongoing supply chain and fulfilment issues could pose a further threat to the next few years. A good strategy would be to continue the development of these areas and start to think about expanding the business by making it go mobile. As it

was presented in this work, the use of apps can increase sales and bring many benefits to the company.

**CHAPTER V – LINK BETWEEN THE TRAINING  
DURING MA PROGRAM AND THE INTERNSHIP**

## **5. Link between the Training during MA Program and the Internship**

Globalization and its subsequent effects are part of the everyday experience. That is why the intercultural studies are important, mainly in a contemporary world, within which the social and cultural multiplicity of the human being has become explicit and visible both on the streets and through the media. There are a multitude of ways to share cultures and critically reflect on the phenomenon of omnipresent diversity and how it impacts our lives. In the Master's program of Intercultural Studies for Business, diversity, interculturalism, multiculturalism were a particular focus of the courses "English Culture for Business I" and "Culture and Development", because these are topics that are deeply involved with everyday reality, since we live in a world that englobe relations between geographically distant cultures, between marginal and mainstream, youth and senior, rich and poor, traditional and contemporary and among different religions and cultures. And to highlight the importance of those topics and learning, I quote a sentence taken from a paper published by my professor in those courses mentioned above:

"The contemporary intercultural travel is a global journey, a circumnavigation powered by the speed of digital technologies and this concept of intercultural underwrites all the comings and goings, the transmission and reception of information that are implicit in communication, diversity and in the transit that the prefix inter suggests. Intercultural transits have always been present, from the perverse intercultural dialogue of colonialism to the current cultural heteroglossia of the Internet." (Sarmiento, 2016, p. 123).

The classes explored transformative dynamics of communication and the ways to make intercultural environments successful, instead of creating barriers. Skills that must be practiced 'at home', 'at work' or abroad. Those were very important learnings, especially to me. I am a Brazilian student who had the opportunity not only to study in a foreign country, but to work also. Those experiences complement each other. These classes helped me to understand how culture can affect the behaviors in several situations and how to avoid conflicts in the work environment. "Chinese Culture for Business" and "German Cultural for Business I and II" were fundamental not just to learn more about distant cultures, but to open my mind towards differences and respect them. During the internship, I was able to socialize and work with people from different nationalities and cultures, which was a

challenge due to mainly language problems, even though our main language was Portuguese, there are significant differences in the way we express ourselves. Our cultural backgrounds were very distinguished, leading sometimes to misunderstandings and during this process, I could put into practice some learnings from the course. During the internship, there was the opportunity of making an aside and perceiving in real terms how culture can affect the behaviors in several situations and of experiencing how the majority of the possible issues can be solved by being kind and open-minded.

During the “German Culture for Business III” classes, it was possible to learn about different types of corporate cultures as well as their responsibilities towards society and the environment. In these classes, we analyzed the history, mission and values of several European companies and learned the importance of a solid corporate culture, with values that respect the environment, society and especially its employees. Thus, in this experience, I was able to see how the European corporate culture, more specifically Portuguese, actually works and notice that Sonae has a very strong culture of respect for its employees and Portuguese citizens. As a result, there are employees who work there for many years and the company is one of the largest in the country, as well as being highly respected by the population.

Another essential course that was directly connected to my internship was “Entrepreneurship in Culture”. Since, at the class I have learned the importance of entrepreneurship for society and business model concept as a tool for strategic management and to determine the correct direction of change, mainly in the moment of digital transformation that we have been passing through the years which was accelerated by the Coronavirus pandemic. Digital transformation brought tools that allowed more constant interaction with the market, more specifically through digital platforms. The digital development is breaking down the traditional barriers of the industry, providing more cooperative environments, embracing organizational ambidexterity, reducing supplier dependence and improving the information flow to and from end users.

Since the beginning of the Internet, creating a digital platform has been a viable business model. As was shown in this study case, the special circumstances that the pandemic brought, had a direct affect in the Note! Insignia. The store had to create strategies and find solutions to continue working through the restriction measures. During the “Entrepreneurship in Culture” course, the concept of entrepreneurship and its importance to



society and community development was approached, in addition to tools, strategies, solutions and the many types of business models.

Due to globalization and the fact that Sonae MC is a multinational company, an important subject was to know how international trade works and the course “Intercultural Economic Relations” provided me with some conceptual basis for understanding the major international economic questions and its stakeholders. After the end of this course, I was able to analyze specific elements of international relations and connections between economies, understand international trade, understand the different types of regional trading arrangements and the relevance of international economic cooperation. This class was of great importance mainly for the study of the economic context and for the construction of this report, since it deals with the analysis of the economic consequences that the pandemic has brought to various sectors, especially for e-commerce.

All those learnings were extremely necessary during the internship, where I was working in a company, in a moment of big change and difficulties and I had the theoretical foundation to be analytical and contribute to the company development.



## 6. Conclusion

From the theoretical point of view, the crisis created by the covid-19 affected all sectors of the economy and none remained indifferent relative to the measures implemented by the governments in order to contain the pandemic. Confinement, the obligation to maintain social distance, the increase in unemployment and the decrease in income of a large part of the population were the main causes for the negative impact in most sectors. In the EU, the service sector and the industry sector were the most affected with a major negative impact mainly on the tourism, transport and manufacturing industry. These industries saw their activity drop dramatically and were forced to cancel all growth strategies. The knowledge sector was one of the least affected, even feeling the impact of the crisis, it saw positive economic results with a perspective of growth thanks mainly to the ICT industry, with the increase in telework and e-commerce.

The positive point in these sectors was due to a change in consumer behavior and the capacity that companies had to adapt and respond to the new needs of the population. With this change, the growth of Ecommerce was accelerated and the demand for online products increased considerably during the lockdowns. It was undoubtedly an industry that helped many companies to increase their revenues and others to survive. Despite the crisis in other industries having affected e-commerce with impediments to circulation, closing borders and labor shortages, e-commerce has not stagnated and its growth has helped to balance the economic balance in the EU.

The crisis will not finish with the end of covid-19 cases in the EU and the impact of the pandemic will have long-term recurrences. To try to minimize the negative effects caused by the measures imposed to contain the spread of the Virus, the market and the sectors had to create new strategies and adapt to the new behavioral trends that have emerged. It was the case of the Note! Insignia that, in the beginning of 2020, had a chain of physical stores throughout Portugal that were threatened by the pandemic. Note! was forced to rapidly change its strategies as a result and created its own digital platform. The Insignia also chose to sell its products through two other digital channels (Dott and Worten Marketplaces) and by using the app Glovo.

Regarding the experience at Note!, how a big retail company works. Since I was doing an internship inside a multinational business group that is very important to Portugal's

economy. The company has a big structure, with all sectors well organized and consolidated and its values are respected by all the employees. Those three months were undoubtedly a source of learning and of personal growth, and a great opportunity to develop a wide range of soft skills, such as autonomy in performing tasks, the ability to adapt to a new situation, the ability to quickly assimilate new knowledge and analyze complex technical information. Also, I could improve hard skills such as knowledge of Excel, Power BI and some retail software used inside the company. In addition, during the path it was possible to learn several topics related to Marketing, E-commerce, Economics, International Trade, Business Management and how a retail company works and its daily challenges but also, had the chance to put into practice what was learned during the master's degree course.

During the course, I learned a lot about corporate cultures and their role in society. In addition, I learned how to take a problem that society experiences and transform it into a product or service, creating a business from scratch and going through all the stages of its structuring. With this, it was possible to analyze the business of Note!, look for opportunities and failures, and be able to contribute with the store team my ideas and opinions, as well as write this report.

About the intercultural studies, it was very important to have this notion of international business and learn the different ethical habits before starting the internship, mainly, because I am from a different culture. The company, on the other hand, already understand diversity and has a commitment to develop caring attitudes towards everyone, by promoting individual rights, giving equal opportunities to everyone rejecting any type of discrimination. Since Sonae has become global, it demands that its workforce travel to foreign countries, communicate effectively with foreign clients, colleagues and customers. So, after this period inside the company, I can affirm that it is a multicultural, healthy and respectful environment. Hence, it is one of the most important companies in Portugal.

The most difficult part in this period was the fact I could experience working inside the office, since because of the lockdown, I could only attend to the office a few times. The daily work was from my home, which hindered the development of interpersonal relationships and the process of getting to know my colleagues better. Concerning the writing of this report, the most pleasurable part for me was researching on a current social and economic topic that has a direct impact in our society. Meanwhile, the biggest challenge was

conciliating work and study. The internship at Sonae MC opened doors to a great job opportunity that made my time to focus on this report shorter.

Moreover, it was a peculiar moment of big changes and a lot of difficulties around the world, and to be inside a company that not only solves problems in innovative and creative ways, but also creates jobs and conditions for a better society. In conclusion, e-commerce offers developing countries new ways of building economic advantage, creating jobs and enterprises. The solution that Note! came up with creating a digital platform, according to the case study presented in this report, clearly revealed the growth of this channel and made the company maintain its revenue and its employability rate as well, because it was not forced to stop the sales during the lockdown. A digital revolution is in place and the prospect of growth through the use of online media is great and very promising. It is time to think of the next steps that could be to create an App, as shown in this present work, can create an easy connection with the customers and has a lot of benefits to grow a business.

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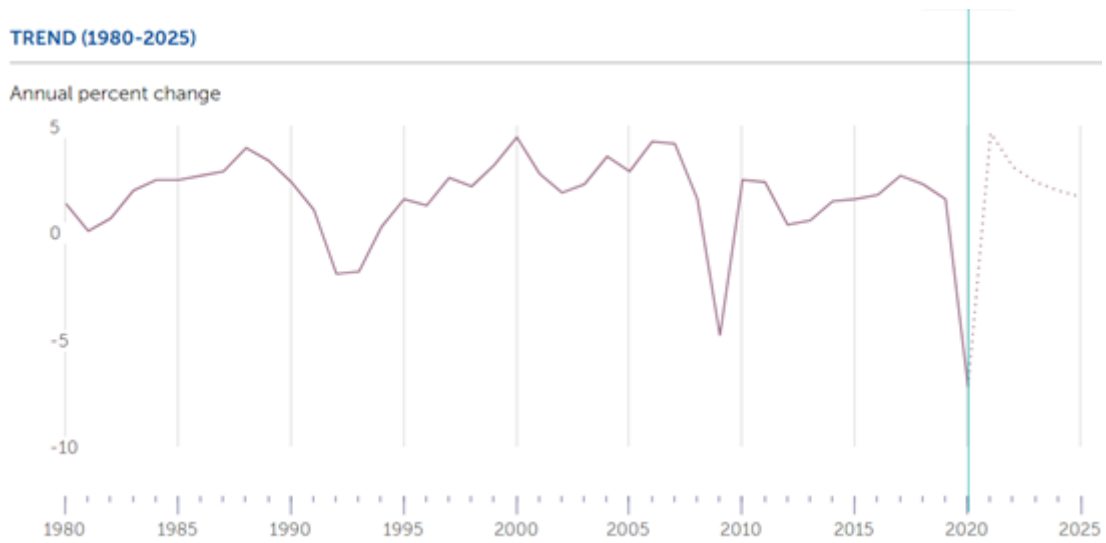
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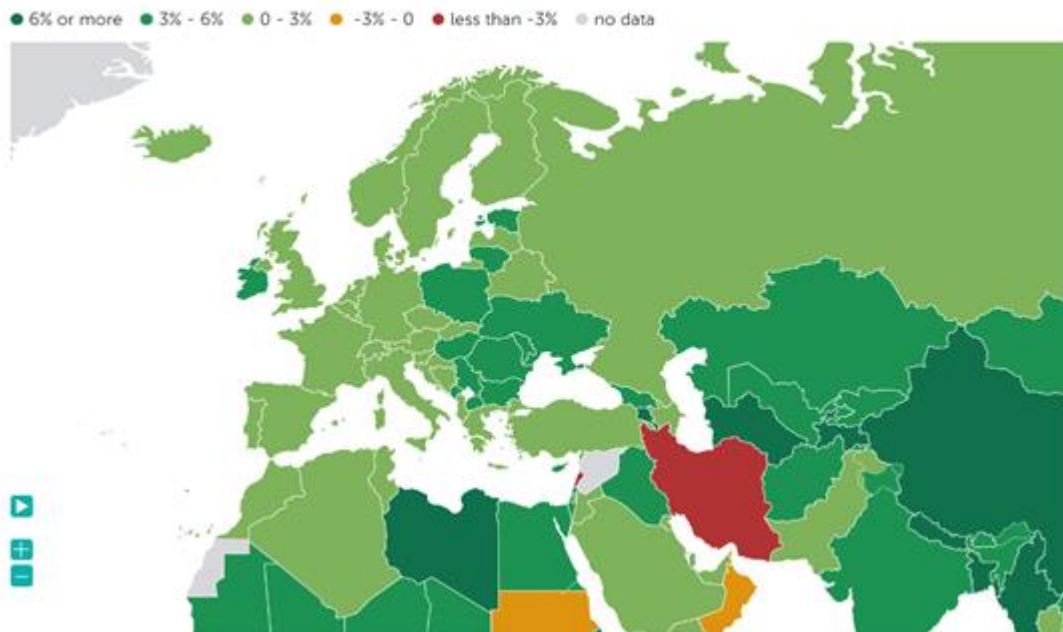
## Annexex

### Annex n. 1 - REAL GDP GROWTH IN EUROPE (ANNUAL PERCENT CHANGE)



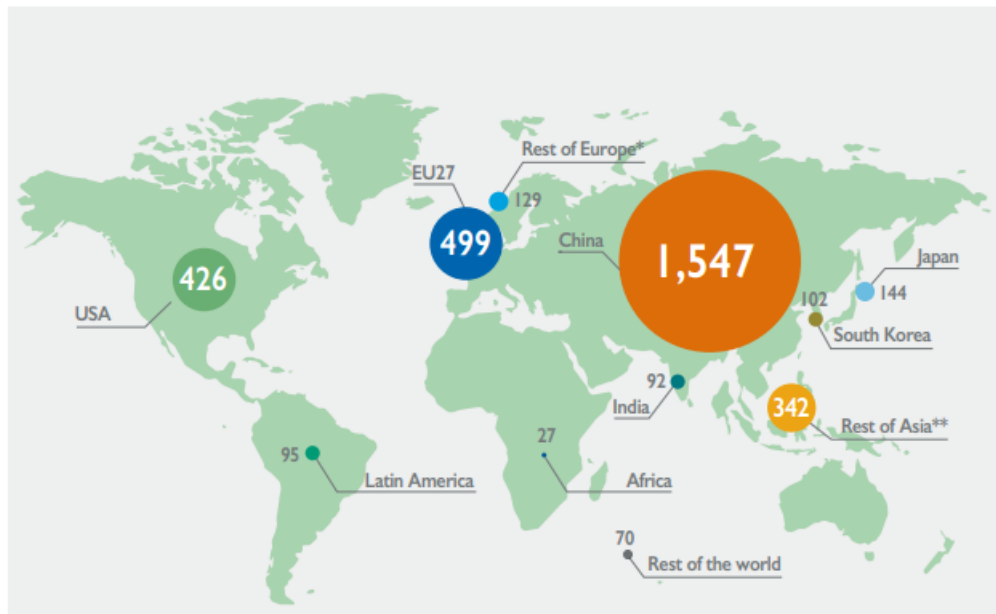
Source: International Monetary Fund (2020).

### Annex n. 2 - REAL GDP GROWTH IN 2019 IN EUROPE.



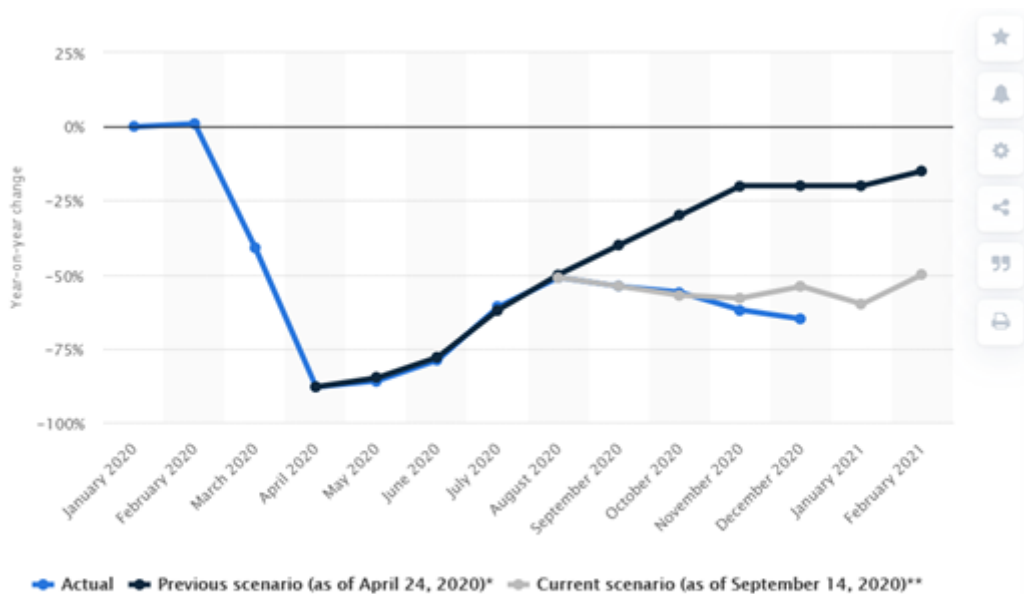
Source: International Monetary Fund (2019).

### Annex n. 3 – WORLD CHEMICAL SALES



Source: Cefic Chemdata International (2022).

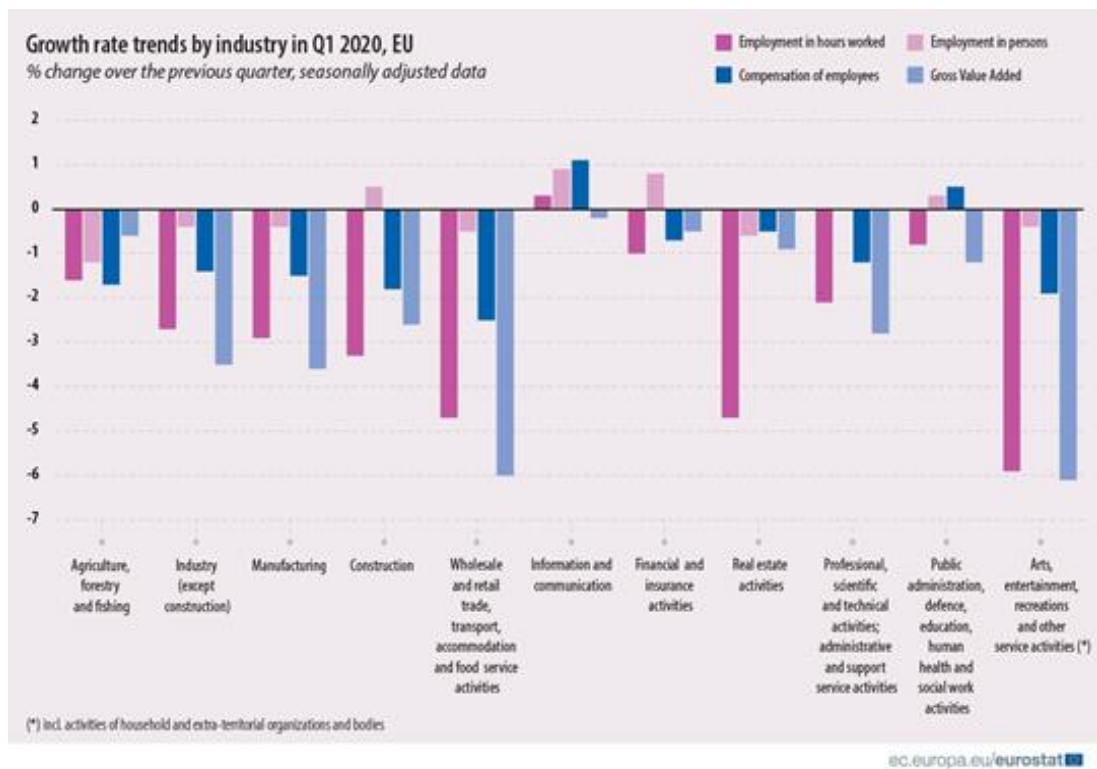
### Annex n. 4 – YEAR-ON-YEAR CHANGE IN PASSENGER TRAFFIC IN EUROPE FROM JANUARY 2020 TO FEBRUARY 2021



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Source: Statista (2020).

## Annex n. 5 – NATIONAL ACCOUNTS: COVID-19 IMPACT ON EU INDUSTRIES



Source: Eurostat (2020).