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Opportunities for Short Food Supply Chains

- attractive communication strategies within a Swedish REKO-ring

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Filippa Isaksson and Marie Leijon Cedermark

Abstract

The interest in locally produced food has increased in Sweden, this has led to several initiatives where consumers can buy products directly from producers. One example of an initiative is REKO-rings, which is an initiative based on contact via the internet, where consumers can shop directly from producers without intermediaries. Initiatives within in SFSC receive support from both the Swedish government and the EU, as REKO-rings are considered to be SFSC that contribute to a more sustainable market. Despite the recognition and an otherwise great interest in REKO-rings, there are few studies on the subject.

The aim of the study was to understand how producers communicate with consumers in a SFSC. The study has used a qualitative methodology and had an inductive approach. A case study was conducted with five producers in the network linked to REKO Jönköping-Huskvarna. The gathered data is presented and analysed as a SFSC and a network where communication strategies are used by the producers. In order to fulfil the aim, the research question is about what elements are perceived by producers within SFSC to attract consumers. The research question is analysed and answered based on the theoretical framework of this study which consists of SFSC, network theory and the 4C marketing model.

The study's findings show that several elements are perceived as important for the producers when trying to attract consumers. Some of the elements are direct relationship, being active within the network, meeting the consumers demand, generating awareness and informing. An interesting topic for future research would be to include the consumer's perspectives and insights on the communication between producer and consumer in REKO-rings.

Sammanfattning

Intresset för lokalproducerad mat har ökat i Sverige, vilket lett till att flera initiativ där konsumenterna kan köpa produkter direkt från producenter har ökat. Ett exempel av ett sådant initiativ är REKO-ringar, vilket är ett initiativ som baseras på kontakt via internet, där konsumenterna kan handla direkt ifrån lokala producenter utan mellanhänder. Initiativ inom SFSCs erhåller stöd både från den svenska regeringen och EU, då REKO-ringar anses vara SFSCs som bidrar till en mer hållbar marknad. Trots erkännandet och ett i övrigt stort intresse för REKO-ringar finns få studier i ämnet.

Syftet med denna studie var att förstå hur producenter kommunicerar med konsumenterna i en SFSC. Studien använde sig av en kvalitativ strategi och hade en induktiv ansats. En fallstudie har utförts genom intervjuer med fem producenter i nätverket kopplat till REKO Jönköping-Huskvarna. Insamlad data presenteras och analyseras som en SFSC och ett nätverk där kommunikationsstrategier används av producenterna. För att uppfylla syftet handlar forskningsfrågan om vilka element som uppfattas av producenter inom en SFSC för att attrahera konsumenterna. Forskningsfrågan analyseras och besvaras utifrån det teoretiska ramverket i denna uppsats vilket består av SFSC, nätverksteori och 4C marknadsföringsmodell.

Studien visar att flera element uppfattas som viktiga för producenterna när de kommunicerar på ett sätt som attraherar konsumenterna. Några av elementen är direkta relationer, möta konsumenternas efterfrågan, generera medvetenhet och informera. Ett intressant ämne för framtida forskning skulle vara att inkludera konsumentens perspektiv och insikter på kommunikationen mellan producent och konsument i REKO-ringar.

Abbreviations

AFN: Alternative Food Network

BC: Brundtland Commission

CAP: The Common Agricultural Policy

EU: European Union

FSP: Food Strategy Plan

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation

REKO-JH: REKO Jönköping-Huskvarna

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

SFSC: Short Food Supply Chain

SME: Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

WCED: World Commission on Environment and Development

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1 Introduction

This chapter includes background and problem formulation, followed by aim and research question of this study. Further, delimitations of the study are stated and the outline for the thesis presented.

1.1 Background

It is now over three decades ago that *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987) was published by the Bruntland Commission (BC). The BC defined that sustainable development can be considered as “*something that meets today's needs without compromising with the ability of next generations to meet their needs*” in the world-changing report *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987, p.43). Two major challenges for future organizations are: the increase of the world's population and the climate change (Govindan 2018).

To reach sustainable food consumption, the production needs to be sustainable as well. Therefore, food supply chains in the future need to have actors where each contribute to the sustainable development goals (Govindan 2018). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) discusses different aspects of food frequently. In the last report presented by the IPCC (2019), conclusions are drawn about the consumption of locally and efficiently grown foods, since this can reduce the Greenhouse Gas emissions. The European Union (EU) underlines the importance of establishing alternative ways to distribute food for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), that differ from the global food systems and the long food supply chains (Kneafsey *et al.* 2013).

The food systems activities are related to the utilization and availability of food as well as environmental factors (IPCC 2014). The food systems include everything from catching, growing, harvesting to manage storing, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, and consuming of food as well as the disposing after consumption (Ericksen 2008; Ziervogel & Ericksen 2010; Ingram 2011). The agri-food sector is characterised by fast changes that allow additional products to continuously enter the food market (Ménard & Valceschini 2005). The fast changes within the food industry contribute to developing various initiatives for consumers to buy food directly from producers (Ilbery & Kneafsey 1999; Parrott *et al.* 2002; Allen *et al.* 2003; Hinrichs 2003; Morris & Buller 2003; Watts *et al.* 2005). At the same time, consumers express increased requirements for guarantees and detailed information from retailers about the products (Ilbery & Kneafsey 1999; Watts *et al.* 2005). Both short- and long-term certifications, with regard to both environmental qualities and health qualities, are also requested (*ibid*). In the EU and in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the support for SFSC initiatives steadily increases (Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). The effect can be that more local producers are receiving different types of support and being encouraged through direct sales channels (*ibid*).

AFN is suggested as an overall term that covers the emerged networks of producers and consumers, all making choices beyond the standardised industrial supply of food (Murdoch *et al.* 2000). Marsden *et al.* (2000) and later Renting *et al.* (2003) presented the concept SFSC as one kind of an AFN. SFSC is a wide-ranging concept and one definition is that it is a chain that includes a minimized number of intermediaries, which means that it should be as few actors as possible within the chain (Ilbery & Maye 2005; Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, it is of great interest that several researchers are discussing how to achieve sustainable supply chains (Pagan & Lake 1999; Kaipia *et al.* 2013; Fabbriizzi *et al.* 2014). Pagan and Lake

(1999) presented ways for a more sustainable supply chain in form of, better resource efficiency, a deeper understanding of the demand from the consumers, application of new technology and the education of consumers as well as how the food industry responding to challenges. Further, Fabbrizzi *et al.* (2014) pointed out the benefits with the SFSC where the effects are beneficial for not only the producer but the consumer and community as well. This can bring together consumers and producers and also increase the added value for the producers (*ibid*). When the chain is efficient and organized with clearly calculated costs, this enable the support for environmental sustainability, improving the farms income and increase the producer's competitiveness (*ibid*).

The Swedish Government developed a Food Strategy Plan (**FSP**) that partly contains a strategic goal for an increased local food production (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017). The strategy applies until year 2030 and focus on promoting the Swedish food industry, and includes for example, achieve sustainable growth in the whole country as well as the consumer should be able to make sustainable choices by for example buying locally produced food. (*ibid*). Further, this has contributed to several new initiatives in the market (Wretling Clarin 2010). Initiatives with SFSC in Sweden for example Local Food Nodes, Rude food, Matkooperativet Helsingborg and REKO¹-rings. REKO-rings are platforms for consumers to buy food without intermediaries (The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies n.d.a). The trade is initiated in a Facebook-group where producers sell, consumers order and buy directly from producers (*ibid*). Furthermore, the concept being described as a network with logistics characterized by the producers and consumers that sell and buy online, and later meet every or every other week for the pick-up. The pick-up is continuously and have a specific place and time to trade the local food products. There are about 175 number of REKO-rings with approximately 500 000 members, that exists locally in several municipalities throughout Sweden (*ibid*).

1.2 Problem

Today, the food consumption in many food markets is a mix of local production and imported conserved foods (Smith 2008). This has caused the development of complex food chains (Smith 2008; Feldmann & Hamm 2015). One aspect of the complexity is that food products are increasingly global, this is because, in some cases, products are transported through several different countries before they finally reach their final destination. A significant share of the consumed food finds its way to consumers through long, complex industrial food chains (Marsden *et al.* 2000). Long food supply chains create a greater distance between the consumer and producer, in both physical and emotional terms (Mount 2011). The global food systems that's operating in today's food industry in combination with the mainstream markets are considered as something that becoming more unsustainable as time goes by (Reisch *et al.* 2013; Forssell & Lankoski 2015; Giampietri *et al.* 2016). The global food systems main focus lies on the processing part, ensuring food security, to be reliable and keep low prices (Renting *et al.* 2003; Vorley *et al.* 2008). Problems with long chains is that the structure and logic of these supply chains cause unsustainability in the industry, where the opportunities for transactions do not reach the small-scale producers (Marsden 1998).

Producers within SFSCs networks use direct marketing channels in order to sell their products directly to consumers (Giampietri *et al.* 2016). In SFSC network, it is important to understand how and when actors are interacting with each other (Bellamy & Basole 2013).

¹ REKO means and is an acronym for "REjälKOnsumtion", the authors translate it to "responsible consumption"

This in order to choose the right kind of direct communication channels and marketing strategies that meet the consumers' different preferences and their demand (Martinez *et al.* 2010; Ahearn & Sterns 2013). The sales of Swedish produced food have increased during the last years (Från Sverige 2016). Elghannam *et al.* (2017) present in their research that social media marketing is a strategy that can contribute to an increased level of sales and profits, especially for SFSC actors. At the same time, if consumers need is not considered, there may be a decrease in the demand for the product within the SFSC (Feldmann & Hamm 2015). This also may cause a decreased level of sales and profits (*ibid*). Furthermore, Noble and Mokwa (1999) describes the importance of using a communication that involves the different aspects in order to reach the consumer. Therefore, it can be considered important for the producers to communicate in the right manner in order to attract the consumers.

In this thesis the authors want to provide a better understanding on how producers' use attractive communication strategies within SFSC and how these can attract consumers. Theoretically the study can be relevant for the emerging research of SFSC literature when developing understandings about which communication strategies can be used in this context. The topic can be empirically relevant for producers within REKO-rings and other SFSCs actors in Sweden. This, in turn, may lead to an increased understanding of communication strategies within the phenomena of REKO-rings. Few earlier studies have been done on Swedish REKO-rings, this includes perspectives about the motivation of the consumers and demographics about the consumers and producers. According to Giampietri *et al.* (2016) the CAP supports initiative within SFSCs and points out the needs for ways of tailoring communication and marketing strategies for both producers and consumers. Due to the limited amount of studies regarding REKO-rings in Sweden in connection to the producer's way of communicating to the consumers, this study fills a gap in the current literature regarding how producers communicate and attract consumers to their products in a Swedish context.

1.3 Aim and research question

The aim of this study is to understand how producers communicate in a short food supply chain (SFSC) network. In order to fulfil this aim, the following question will be answered.

- What elements are perceived by producers within SFSC to attract consumers?

1.4 Delimitations

In this study the following delimitations have been made to provide an answer to the research question and reach the aim of this thesis. SFSCs are networks that focuses on creating direct relationships between producers and consumers (Renting *et al.* 2003). As the REKO-ring will be presented as a SFSC, and since this REKO Jönköping-Huskvarna (**REKO-JH**) is a Facebook group with recurrent pick-ups dates, this study will be seen as a network and investigated by using network theory.

This thesis looks at one REKO-ring with focus on producers' way of use attractive communication strategies, within the region of Jönköping. A single case study will be conducted on the REKO-JH in order to understand how producers in this REKO-ring communicates to the consumers. When "value" is described and analysed in this study, it is always described from the perspective of the producers. The study is limited to the producers' view and will not consider what drives or motivate consumers to shop via REKO, and how the consumers perceive that producers communicate in the REKO network. This study only

investigates one REKO-ring in Sweden and does not consider other initiative in Sweden or Europe. The thesis does not claim nor aim to find any correlation between which products are most purchased or which products the consumers value or motivates the consumers to purchase. Further, diversification among producers, in terms of the performance, size of production, background and types of producer will not be considered. This thesis is restricted to the communication strategies that are being used in this specific REKO-JH and do not consider communication strategies that is used in other similar initiatives.

The authors know that there are other ways to ask the research question to understand the aim. The research question in this study is chosen since it allows the authors to gather information that give a clear picture of how the producers communicate within the REKO-JH's context, and how communication strategies can contribute to attract consumers. Other research question could have been including the consumers' point of view as well as the administrators'. The consequences of the choice with only producers as respondents, is that the authors do not know if the result would be the similar including the consumers' point of view. The study uses SFSC, Network theory and the 4Cs marketing model, other theories that could have been used in order to reach the aim are for example firstly, Storytelling that according to Medina and Vu (2014) is described as a type of communication tool with the aim to provide understandable, interesting and memorable information, to the consumers (Pulizzi 2012). Secondly, Word-of-mouth is a marketing strategy that occur when interaction between consumers leads to marketing for the company (Dellarocas 2003). Since the research question in this thesis is about identifying elements that are important in order to create attractive communication strategy, Storytelling and Word-of-mouth is not suitable since they mostly focus on the consumer point of view, and in this thesis the authors only focusing on the perspective of the producers.

1.5 Outline of the study

In order to provide an overview of how the study is structured, the thesis outline is presented below (*Figure 1*).



Figure 1. Illustration of the outline of the study (Own processing)

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter one (1) includes an introduction to the study's background, problem, aim, research question and delimitations. Chapter two (2) presents a literature review on the concept SFSC and the theoretical framework for this study is presented. The theoretical framework will be used to analyse the findings of this study. Chapter three (3) presents the method that will be used in the collection of both theoretical and empirical data. The following chapter four (4) presents the findings and the data that was collected. Chapter five (5) presents the analysis with the study's findings in relation to the theoretical framework. Chapter six (6) involves the discussion and answers the research question. The final chapter seven (7) answers the aim and presents the conclusions drawn from this case study and presents suggestions for future research.

2 Literature review and theoretical framework

The second chapter starts with presenting a brief illustration of how the thesis is positioned in the literature. A presentation of the literature review has the purpose of introduce the concept SFSCs as well as initiatives within SFSCs. Through a literature review, the reader being introduced to the theoretical framework that will be presented in this chapter and used in this study. The theoretical framework includes SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model.

The study aims to contribute to the academic research on SFSC and marketing theory, by utilizes communication and networking theory that is a part of marketing theory. To fulfil the aim of this study it is necessary to discuss SFSC in combination with network theory and the 4C marketing model. This combination makes it possible to get insights and understandings of how the producers communicate to their consumers in their specific context. In order to answer the research question, this study is positioned in the marketing field which is a part of the topic business administration that enables the enterprise to create value for consumers, and at the same time build strong consumer relations (Kotler *et al.* 2016).

SFSCs are used in order to investigate a Swedish initiative with SFSCs and the authors can understand the network of REKO and together with the 4C marketing model see which marketing strategies are attracting consumers. The following figure (2) presents how the thesis is positioned in the literature. REKO-rings are viewed through the use theoretical framework that includes; SFSC, network theory and the 4C marketing model. In this study SFSC is used to describe the food chain of REKO-rings. The network theory describes the aspect of networks and presents how networks may be examined. The 4C marketing model is used in order to establish the marketing strategies that occur in the REKO network.

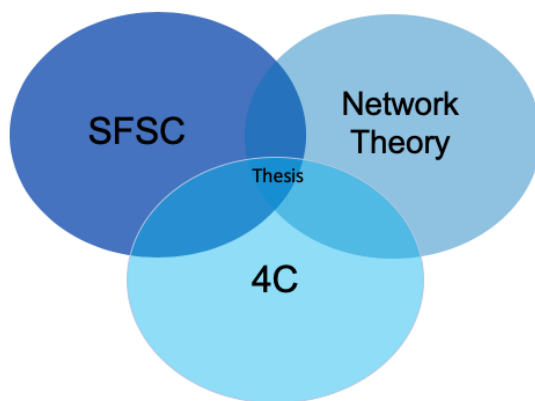


Figure 2. Thesis position in the literature (Own processing)

2.1 Literature review

The EU underlines the importance of establishing alternative ways to distribute food for SMEs, that differ from the global food systems and the long chains (Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). Further, the consumers' increased demand for transparency is rooted in the problem with non-transparency that comes from increasingly larger distances between the place of consumption and the place of production (La Trobe & Acott 2000). Several researchers mention the inadequate communication between producers and consumers about the products as well as the opportunities for productivity of surrounding areas (Curtis & Cowee 2009; Alonso 2010; Alonso & O'Neill 2010; Sharma *et al.* 2014). Further, this can cause a decline in consumers

trust (Renting *et al.* 2003). As a response to this, another type of supply chain has been developed, which is called SFSC (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003; Ilbery & Maye 2005; Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). SFSC is a kind of chain that creates initiative for food producers to reconnect the consumers with the producers (Hinrichs 2003; Renting *et al.* 2003; Feagan 2007; Allen 2010; Mount 2011; Aggestam *et al.* 2017). SFSCs are chains that are an alternative way towards a more sustainable direction (Torjusen *et al.* 2008; Giampietri *et al.* 2016) and encourages initiatives within this chain to re-socialise food through relationships between producers and consumers (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003; Hallett 2012). One part of SFSC involves face-to-face activities where consumers can buy products directly from producers (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003). The face-to-face activities meets the growing demand from consumers that wants more information about the agricultural products and the knowledge about all the steps in the chain (Handayati, *et al.* 2015).

The interest in AFNs and SFSCs has contributed to increased research within the field (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003; Sage 2003; Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). Kneafsey *et al.* (2013) describe that SFSCs are embedded with values concerned with consciousness to the environment. One environmental aspect is the number of food miles, also called the transport of the food in the chain (Coley *et al.* 2009). The food miles have been linked with concern of the emissions and the climate change related to it (*ibid*). Renting *et al.* (2003) mean that SFSCs and AFNs can reduce the food miles and carbon emissions and contribute to a more sustainable farming, local food supply chains can therefore be assumed to be more sustainable (Nestle 2007). Furthermore, the IPCC (2019) states practices that can be optimized in order to advance food systems. On the supply-side, for example: about increased soil organic matter and erosion control and improved management, and diversification within the food system for example implementation of integrated production systems as a key strategy to reduce risks (*ibid*). On the demand-side, for example: adoption of sustainable and healthy diets, together with reduction of food losses and waste, for contributions with the aim of reduce the number of hectares of land needed for food production (*ibid*). Earlier research states that the interest in domestic local markets and local food products has increased, this is also considered to promote consumers' knowledge of food production (Brown & Miller 2008). The Swedish consumers demand a greater extent of Swedish food products (Wretling Clarin 2010).

Feldmann and Hamm (2015) state that initiatives within AFNs and SFSCs create a relationship between producers and consumers, which also makes the consumers aware of the food origin. Interactions and collaborations that are established in these types of initiatives, create value for both the producers and the consumers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). Several researchers mention the importance of understanding the consumers perceived value of the firm and how that can influence the firms' competitive advantage (Prahalad & Ramaswami 2004; Lusch & Vargo 2006; 2014). This has also contributed to the discussion concerning how the added value around the products involves more than just the product itself (Prahalad & Ramaswami 2004). The added value consists of the consumers' experience which is co-created with the producers' through interaction (*ibid*). Initiatives within SFSCs can provide information and insight to the phenomenon of value creation through interaction (*ibid*).

2.2 Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC)

A SFSCs is a network that focuses on consumers' needs, creating direct relationships between producers and consumers as well as supporting sustainable modes of production (Renting *et*

al. 2003). Categories of SFSCs are divided in, *face to face*, *spatial proximity/relations of proximity* and *spatially/extended relations* (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003; Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). In recent research, SFSCs are perceived as one step toward sustainable agricultural production in social, economic and environmental dimensions (Roos *et al.* 2007; Galli *et al.* 2015; Bimbo *et al.* 2015).

AFNs and SFSCs represent an alternative that differ from the long and complex industrial food supply chains (Marsden *et al.* 2000). The changes have resulted in long and complex food chains, which have led to that food producers creates a new form of initiative to reconnect the consumers with the producers (Hinrichs 2003; Renting *et al.* 2003; Feagan 2007; Allen 2010; Mount 2011). This kind of initiative creates other types of production processes, which differs from the industrial mode and adds value to the primary producers (Marsden *et al.* 2000). The possibilities with these initiatives lie in the manner of re-socialising food through relationships between producers and consumers (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003; Hallett 2012). Marsden *et al.* (2000) state that the aim with SFSCs is to reconnect and re-socialising the producer-consumer relationship in terms of providing information about the food and its origin to consumers. This creates ways for the producers to give the consumer wider insights and more personal information about the production and products (Sage 2003).

Today consumer demands more information about the food they consume, SFSCs makes it possible for consumers to get more information and to see the true value of the agricultural products (Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). The products are embedded in information that involves for example the production, process and the clear picture of the producer (Aggestam *et al.* 2017). SFSC involves characters of social embeddedness, through principles of trust, social connectivity, and reciprocity (Granovetter 1985; Hinrichs 2003; Sage 2003). These factors enable a strong relationship between the consumers and producers in SFSC networks (Aggestam *et al.* 2017). Producers and consumers embedded information is easily accessible in SFSCs, because of that it is easier to interact with each other in a small network compared to a complex industrial food chain (Migliore *et al.* 2014). The researchers Winter (2001) and Solan (2002) mention that consumers wants to be a part of this kind of initiatives in order to support the producers in their local area.

The SFSC is one sort of AFN, which is a wide-ranging concept coined by Marsden *et al.* (2000). The definitions used in this thesis are, first; the recurring definition that SFSC is a chain that includes a minimized number of intermediaries (Ilbery & Maye 2005; Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). Second; where the European Council SFSC defined SFSC as a supply chain that involves a limited number of actors that are connected to a local geographical area which lead to a relationship between producers and consumers (Kneafsey *et al.* 2013; Elghannam *et al.* 2017). Furthermore, the literature identifying that initiatives with SFSC can contribute to stronger links between local actors and regenerate rural communities (Pretty 2002; Galli & Brunori 2013). Aggestam *et al.* (2017) state that producers appreciate the value of having a direct contact with the consumers through SFSCs.

The SFSCs consists of three main categories, *face-to-face*, *spatial proximity or relations of proximity* and *spatially or extended relations* (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003). In this study the authors focus on the face-to-face category, since this describes the way members within REKO-rings interact. Category *face-to-face*, is when the consumer buys the product direct from the producer or processor (Renting *et al.* 2003; Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). This can happen at, for example, the farm, in a farmers' market or similar local markets

(Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, this kind of transaction connect the consumer and producer, leading to trust and authenticity being transformed through personal interactions (Renting *et al.* 2003). Recently, the internet has created new possibilities for this type of transaction through online trading and e-commerce (*ibid*).

Some challenges that SFSCs are facing are that SFSCs only focus on a special type of consumer, since it is considered as a niche market with conscious consumers (Hinrichs 2003; Born & Purcell 2006). Another challenge is that larger retailers in Sweden want to increase the supply of agricultural products from the region that the stores are placed (Björklund *et al.* 2008). The larger retailers have completely different prerequisites for being able to influence the availability of these products compared to networks within SFSC (*ibid*).

In sum, SFSCs are used in order to explain the phenomena of REKO, since it is a channel that re-connect the consumers and producers directly with each other. Further, a SFSC includes a minimized number of intermediaries (Ilbery & Maye 2005; Kneafsey *et al.* 2013) and connects the consumer and producer, therefore trust and authenticity can be transformed through personal interactions (Renting *et al.* 2003). These connections and relations will further be explained and by using Network theory.

2.3 Network Theory

The fundamental components of a network are described by O'Donnell *et al.* (2001) to be *nodes* and *connections*. Nodes can refer to actors such as individuals or a group of individuals (Davern 1997). A network also describes the relationships between individuals, groups or organizations over a period of time (Lee 2015). In the literature the term networks have several definitions and is adapted in different various types and uses different units of analyses (O'Donnell *et al.* 2001). In earlier research, businesses are considered to be interconnected in several of various relationships and because of that a business should not be viewed as a single unit, more like a unit in relation to other actors and businesses (Axelsson & Easton 1992; Håkansson & Johanson 1993; Hilmerston 2011). Hilmerston (2011) describes that a business relies on the connections and relationships around their network, “*no business is an island*” (Hilmerston 2011, p.18). Further, in previous research it is found that it is important to identify existing flows of information in the rural communities (Moetsabi 1998; Girard 2003; Clark 2006). Wasserman and Faust (1994) describes that the network is influenced by the relationships and activities as well as the how the information flows between the actors. Furthermore, Clark (2006) describes that one way to improve the flow of information and strengthen the network is by well-established relationships, were the actors need to constantly be working with the actors in the network.

Each individual, group or actors in the network is represented as a node, between the nodes there are ties or connections that are drawn depending on how they are connected (Lee 2015). Strong ties show a closer connection based on high commitment, trust, understanding as well as knowledge in the network, which can provide different kinds of information (Kontinen & Ojala 2011; Söderqvist & Kamala Chetty 2013; Jeong *et al.* 2019). The information in strong ties, contains more trust and are more accessible for the actors, which it is not in weak ties (Granovetter 1992). A weak tie is “*a superficial tie not yet based on strong trust and where the parties do not know each other well and are not emotionally close to each other*” (Söderqvist & Kamala Chetty 2009, p. 9).

In sum, a network consists of relationships between individuals, groups or organizations over a period of time (Lee 2015). Each actor in the network is represented as a node, between the

nodes there are ties or connections that are drawn depending on how they are connected (*ibid*). These connections represent the relationships with their network (Hilmersson 2011). How the actors communicate within the network is further explained by using the 4C marketing model.

2.4 The 4C Marketing Model

Marketing can be described as the activities that are carried out by an enterprise in order to present both consumers' and potential consumers' interest for what the company is offering (Kotler *et al.* 2016). Marketing is a component in the field of business administration that enables the enterprise to create value for consumers and at the same time build strong consumer relations to get the consumers interest over a period (*ibid*). The Marketing Mix is used to play an important role in order to achieve a successful marketplace and therefore it is one of the central principles of the marketing literature (Belz & Peattie 2012). The marketing mix adapted from McCaryhy (1960) is a well-known tool for strategic marketing that originally included the coordination of the four elements called 4Ps; Product, Price, Promotion and Place (Wasmer *et al.* 1997).

Furthermore, a modern version of 4P's is called 4C's, that involves the consumers perspective (Lauterborn 1990; Kotler 2001). The 4Cs were developed by Robert Lauterborn (1990) and later further develop by Kotler (2001) and included Consumer solution, Costs, Communications and Convenience (see figure 3). The 4C enables enterprises to think more about the consumer interest. The marketing strategy based on the 4C's is recognized as a consumer-oriented marketing philosophy (Wasmer *et al.* 1997). Lauterborn (1990) states that a marketing plan should have the consumer in the center and use the 4Cs in order to create what the consumer wants and needs, cost to satisfy, convenience to buy, and communicate it. The 4C's added together, creates an overall picture for the producer to understand their consumers.

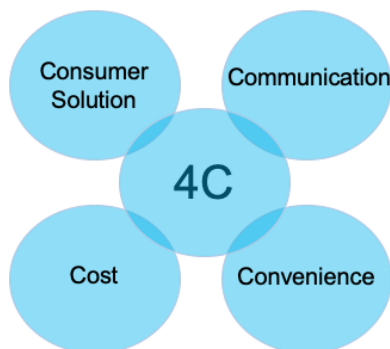


Figure 3. Illustration of the 4C marketing model (Own processing)

Kotler *et al.* (2001) state that the 4C's is a marketing mix that is adapted to the needs of e-commerce and is about creating value to the consumers. Furthermore, value-creation is not only about meeting the consumers demands, it is about understanding the consumers in order to provide unique values (Sommer 2012). "*The 4C elements help companies to create marketing value with different capacities in various situations*" (Umit Kucuk 2011, p.360). In the following subheadings the 4Cs are described and defined.

2.4.1 Consumer solution

The first C focuses on identifying the consumers' needs and wants, as well as to get knowledge about their problems and then present a solution to the consumers' problem (Chaffey *et al.* 2009). Belz and Peattie (2012) describe this as a problem-solving perspective,

which is central in the aspects of reassuring innovation. The consumer solution has some similar characteristics as the Product of 4Ps theory, which involves the demands from consumers and aspects of value and benefits (Dennis *et al.* 2005). Belz and Peattie (2012) describe that consumers seek solutions of a need or to be satisfied and the solutions can be either material or immaterial. Belz and Peattie (2012) state that consumers demand solutions that are both socially and environmentally sustainable, in the same way the consumers are generally not open to compromising terms such as cost, function or quality.

2.4.2 Cost

The next C is cost, which involves all types of monetary and non-monetary types of costs for the consumer to purchase a product (Wasmer *et al.* 1997). The total cost to the consumer is equal to the total amount of all various forms of monetary or non-monetary values that the consumer pays to purchase the final product (Armstrong & Kotler 2013). The purchase includes the price of the product, as well as the psychological, environmental, social cost connected to the product including using and disposal (Belz & Peattie 2012). From the producer's point of view costs are the only part in the 4C's that includes revenues, especially in the long run when all operational costs are covered by the revenues (Kotler & Armstrong 2004).

Belz and Peattie (2012) state that the price of a product is a tool in marketing that can influence the demand, but marketers of sustainable products move beyond the price aspects and include the total cost for the consumer. The 4C's aim is to reduce the total consumer cost and at the same time trying to make the consumers aware of the costs (*ibid*). By choosing a price setting approach, it can create possibilities to lower the total consumers' cost (*ibid*). Belz and Peattie (2012) present two approaches; *value-based pricing* or *cost-based pricing*. Value-based pricing is a differentiation strategy that uses buyers' insights of value and is consumer-driven to state the price (Belz & Peattie 2012). In some cases, this approach can be used to change the market price and push the price as long as the market allows, especially used when it comes to unique products (*ibid*). Comparing with cost-based pricing which determines the price based on the product and is production-driven which also means that the price needs to cover all operational costs (*ibid*). Furthermore, another aspect of the cost is to make the consumer aware of the total costs. The producer can provide the consumer with product-specific information with regard to the costs of the product, in order to make the consumer aware of the costs connected to the product (Belz & Peattie 2012).

2.4.3 Communication

According to Belz and Peattie (2012) communication can be carried out through different kinds of media, but the most important part is to communicate with consumers. Communication with the consumers makes it possible to get to know the consumer better (*ibid*). Communication involves all the interactions between the actors and ways a business communicates and informs their consumers (Dennis *et al.* 2005). The mix of communication includes information flows and communication from the media, this in order to create a dialogue, as well as to build trust and credibility (Belz & Peattie 2012). It is a two-way communication where a sender encodes a message to the receiver who decodes and interprets it (Belz & Peattie 2012; Armstrong & Kotler 2013). The message can involve words, pictures or symbols (*ibid*). Marketing communication often refers to the first P (promotion) within the originally 4P's, Promotion mainly focuses on promoting products to consumers by advertising, sales and public relations (Belz & Peattie 2012). In the 4Cs the communication involves the communication between the business and the consumer, where information is collected by listening and learning from consumers in order to be able to constantly improve

their products (*ibid*). Indoria (2012) describes the importance of making the consumers aware of about the business' products, this is done by creating and spreading the message about the benefits of the products between consumers. This can be reached through using, for example, social networks and posting information that makes the consumer aware (*ibid*).

The 4Cs focus on communicating sustainable solutions (Belz & Peattie 2012). Belz and Peattie (2012) present that communications strategies involves following objectives; *generating awareness, informing, motivating and connecting*: *Generating awareness*, is an objective that involves making the consumer aware of the product, which is important in today's busy, big and fast-moving market (Belz & Peattie 2012). Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008) mention that one main factor that slows down the development of the market for sustainable products is the lack of awareness' among consumers which has been utilized by well-established competitors. *Informing* is an objective that includes the part of informing the consumer concerning the products, the products availability and value chain of the products as well its content (Belz & Peattie 2012). *Motivating* is about the objective that includes the part of motivating the consumers to make a change or to make the consumer to respond (*ibid*). By, for example, trying a free example of the product or by clicking into a website with information about the products (*ibid*). *Connecting* is about the importance of relationship-building and connecting with consumers thorough both various types of communication by activities and interactions (*ibid*).

2.4.4 Convenience

Convenience involves how the consumers want to use the product and how this product meet their needs as well are easily accessible (Belz & Peattie 2012). Convenience considers consumers' choices for place of a purchase, and consumers choose the most convenient purchase venue (Dennis *et al.* 2005). Convenience replaced the original P for Place which manly focuses on the location and supply perspective, while the C involves the consumer and how to make it as convenient as possible for the consumer (Lauterborn 1990; Kotler 2001; Belz & Peattie 2012). Consumers are often choosing the easiest option available and Chaffey *et al.* (2009) mention that the internet acts as a distribution channel that is constantly accessible for consumers to use and can be used as a direct selling option. Internet is easily accessible and therefore an example of something that is more convenient, and convenience is extremely valued by the consumers (Belz & Peattie 2012). Consumers make decisions based on how easy it is to find information and purchase the product (*ibid*).

Conventional marketing is divided into different categories where one category is *speciality goods*, this category is viewed from the consumers perspective and how they purchase their goods (Belz & Peattie 2012). In some unique cases the consumer would make an exception and go through a special dedicated purchasing effort in order to buy *speciality goods* (*ibid*).

In sum, the 4C marketing model, includes Consumer solution, Costs, Communications and Convenience (Lauterborn 1990; Kotler 2001; Belz & Peattie 2012). The 4Cs together play an important role in the producer's communication strategies (*ibid*). The 4Cs model together with SFSC and Network theory is further described how they are linked together and presented as this study's theoretical framework.

2.5 Theoretical framework

In this study, the theoretical framework consists of theories that have been presented earlier in this chapter and theses are illustrated in figure 4. The purpose of the theoretical framework is to explain how SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model are linked together, and

how a combination of these can contribute to answer the research question and to reach the aim of this study. The aim of this study is to understand how producers communicate in a SFSC network. Further, the theoretical framework is important in order to be a guide through the analysis and discussion as well as for achieve relevant concluding's within the frame of business administration.

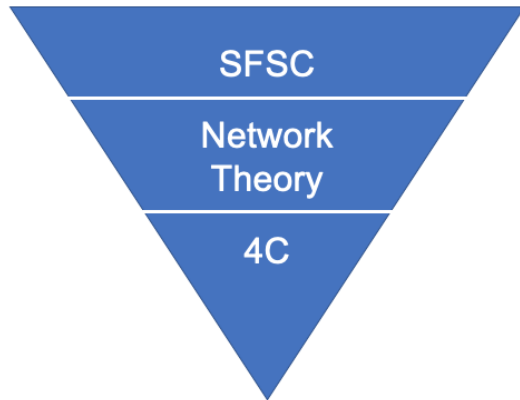


Figure 4. Illustration of the theoretical framework of the study (Own processing)

Figure 4 illustrates the theoretical framework and as depicted in figure 4, it is form as a triangle in order to show the abstract levels of the chosen concept and theories. The theoretical framework includes; SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model are relevant to each other in this study, SFSCs is used as a way to explain the phenomena of direct sales between consumers' and producers' channels without any intermediaries. SFSC initiative is seen as a network, since the actors within in it connects with each other continuously and have face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, in this kind of network, the 4C marketing model help us to investigate how the producer communicate within the network.

As mentioned before the SFSCs are networks that focus on consumers' needs, creating direct relationships between producers and consumers as well as support sustainable modes of production (Renting *et al.* 2003). Further, one category of SFSC is face-to-face, which is when the consumer buys the product direct from the producer or processor (Renting *et al.* 2003; Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). Face-to-face is one of the main applied methods in SFSCs, mainly because it can be used in order to gain trust between consumers and producers (Aggestam *et al.* 2017). Therefore, the SFSC is appropriate and contributes to understandings in this study. Recently, the internet has created new possibilities through online trading and e-commerce (*ibid*). In the recent decade initiative within SFSC uses different marketing channels, for example online websites and social media (Elghannam *et al.* 2017).

The concept SFSC alone cannot contribute with an understanding of complex networks and how to analyse them, therefore the choice of using Network theory was made. A network consists of relationships between individuals, groups or organizations over a period of time (Lee 2015). In order to be able to investigate how producers communicate to consumers in a SFSC network, it is important to understand how networks are designed and which marketing strategies are used in the network. The 4C marketing model was identified in order to be able of analyze actual outcome of how producers communicate their products through SFSCs. The 4C can be used to understand which marketing strategies are used, through the use of identifying the 4 elements as consumer solution, cost, communication and convenience (Lauterborn 1990; Kotler 2001; Belz & Peattie 2012). By investigated the 4C elements it can help to define different kinds of value that occur in this context.

3 Method

The third chapter motivates and presents the applied method with regards to the aim of this thesis. This chapter also presents the way of collecting, analyzing and presenting data as well as discuss ethical aspects.

3.1 A qualitative approach

This study is built upon a qualitative strategy with an interpretative perspective and using a structuralistic ontology (Bryman & Bell 2015). This means that the authors consider people's different experiences which create complexity with the different view about reality (*ibid*). While the collection of empirical data will relate to relevant theory, space will be given to interpret relevant parts based on both the empirical and the theoretical material (Shank 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1986) state that the researchers epistemological and ontological views are central factors and important to consider when choosing a methodology. The aim of this study is to understand how producers communicate in a SFSC network. A qualitative method is often used when the goal is to understand how different factors and events have affected processes and strategies (Bryman & Bell 2015). Few earlier studies have been done on Swedish REKO-rings, this includes perspectives about the motivation of the consumers and demographics about the consumers and producers. The empirical context of REKO-JH has not been studied extensively in previous studies. This in-depth study of interacting aspects; the SFSC, the network, and the 4C marketing model, aim to aid the understanding of initiatives such as REKO-ring and how they may further be studied suitably.

To contribute to understandings of the complexity within REKO-rings and their way of communicating, the authors build upon the constructivist perspective that originates from the ontological perspective (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006). The paradigm of the constructivist perspective understands human as individuals which decisions are influenced by the context in which they exist (*ibid*). This is highly relevant since the producer within the contexts of REKO-rings can be considered as affected by their environment and network, where different prerequisites may contribute to different communication strategies.

Furthermore, the epistemological consideration interpretivism, is a position that requires a grasp of the social action and subjective meaning (Bryman & Bell 2015). The interpretivist epistemology takes into account the differences between society and nature and takes into account people's different experienced social reality (*ibid*). Therefore, the understandings of this study are based upon the experiences of the people within the REKO-ring network. In this study it is important to understand the producers within this specific REKO-JH and listen to their perspective and experiences.

An inductive method is common for qualitative studies and the empirical study's case of one REKO-ring, with regards to their ways of communication have not being studied before. Through the collected data that comes from real-life situations, the inductive approach illustrates factors that are natural, rather than statistical measurements (Bryman & Bell 2015). Statistical measurements are characterized by large samples including a great number of observations (Davidsson 1997). Statistical measurements within the quantitative research strives for statistic, measurable and generalizable results (*ibid*). Since the REKO phenomenon is quite new in Sweden, and the aim is to collect data and observe to generate theory, the inductive approach is being used (Given 2008).

3.2 Literature review

According to Given (2008) a literature review contains several purposes. In order to deepen the knowledge through searching in the current literature and create a foundation, as well as create a theoretical framework. By conducting a literature review in the research area, the authors can identify and map out previous research and identify a gap within the theory (Bryman & Bell 2015). Further, this enables the authors to conduct a relevant analysis and contribute to the research field with descriptions regarding the interacting aspects of REKO-rings.

As proposed by Bryman and Bell (2015), a narrative literature review was conducted to gain ideas, learn about previous research and gain the opportunity to learn from other mistakes. Since the narrative literature review is less strict than the systematic one (*ibid*), the narrative is preferable in the case of a qualitative study. This because the authors can develop new understandings of the topic along the way during the process (*ibid*).

To find relevant reports, books and articles for this study the author's used databases as Google Scholar, Primo and Web of Science. To ensure the quality of this study only peer review articles have been used. During the literature search, keywords such as; "Short Food Supply Chain", "Network Theory", "Sustainable Food", "REKO-ring" and "4C Marketing Model" were used in different kinds of constellations to specify the search and reduce the number of results.

3.3 Case study design

A case study is appropriate when the researcher wants to be able to find out complex relationships between certain phenomena that is relevant to the study (Yin 2009). Furthermore, Stake (1995) mentions that a case study is supposed to obtain the complexity of a single case. In this case the complexity applies to this special type of REKO-network, where producers have different prerequisites, use different types of marketing and attract consumers. REKO-rings in Sweden are of a growing interest and pops up all over Sweden (The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies n.d.a).

According to Creswell (2013) a case study can be either *single or multiple*. Bryman and Bell (2015) describe a single case study as an approach that generates a deep understanding for the topic being studied. The case study approach allows the authors to investigate a specific area through one case (*ibid*). In this study, a single case study is conducted where the unit of analysis is REKO-JH. The aim of this study is not to compare different communication strategies within several REKO-rings, rather highlight the elements that are crucial for the insights of the REKO phenomenon. This can further be valuable for other producers with REKO-rings around Sweden and for the research areas around SFSCs.

A multiple case study was not appropriate since the authors needed a deep understanding and find crucial elements rather than compare different REKO-rings. This is due to the chosen aim, research question, and the unit of analysis. According to Flyvbjerg (2006) an in-depth case-study is as a necessity in order to reach an understanding of the environment in which the respondents are living. Therefore, the authors have considered an intensive and detailed study of this single case. The authors' focus on the producers' strategies when communicating their products. In this thesis, five producers within REKO-JH have been interviewed and from now on, the interviewed producers will be mentioned as the respondents in this chapter.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Choice of respondents

The authors have selected one of the major REKO-rings in Sweden, since this can be considered as a SFSC. In April 2020 there were about 175 REKO-rings in Sweden with approximately 500 000 members (The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies n.d.a). The numbers of members in each REKO-ring differs and can be from only a few producers and consumers to several thousands (*ibid*). The REKO-JH was chosen since this is the greatest in the region, and this enable a larger number of meetings between producers and consumers. Hence, the producers in REKO-JH assume to have insights about how the REKO network operating. Furthermore, criteria's when selecting respondents, where that the business needed to be members within REKO-JH and are determined to sell their products via REKO. These respondents thereby possess the opportunity to identify important elements within their communication within the REKO-JH network. Another criteria was that the respondents needed to have different productions and diversified products in order to get proliferation, and obtain representable information from the interviews. The authors were striving for understandings of how producers communicate in the REKO-network.

3.4.2 Sampling strategy

Purposive sampling techniques are about sampling cases in a strategic way, so they are relevant for the research question and this also means that the researcher is not able to generalize this to a population (Bryman & Bell 2015). The sampling technique that is used in this study is *purposive sampling*. This sampling strategy is a useful and suitable technique to use in a case study (Bryman & Bell 2015; Robson & McCartan 2016). The chosen technique suits this study since the goal is to highlight notable insights about crucial elements of communication strategies within REKO-JH, which is both beneficial for the businesses and academia. The purposive sampling process is limited to REKO-JH where producers and consumers communicate and interact with each other. The REKO-JH had a strong growth since the start two years ago in connection with that consumer in the area demands to know what they buy (SVT Nyheter 2020).

3.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

A qualitative research interview enables a deeper understanding of the respondents' perceived reality (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). Bryman and Bell (2015) state that interviews can be categorized as *standardized or as semi-structures interviews*. *Semi-structured interviews* are based on questions that are preset with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell 2015). The questions are used in semi-structured interviews should be questions of an open character with the possibility for the researcher to make his/her own interpretation and not be leading questions (Creswell 2012). This differ from the structured interviews that can be surveys with specific questions that mainly offers a fixed range of answers (Bryman & Bell 2015). "*The general goal of the semi-structured interview is to gather systematic information about a set of central topics, while also allowing some exploration when new issues or topics emerge. Semi-structured interviews are used when there is some knowledge about the topics or issues under investigation, but further details are still needed*" (Wilson 2014, p.24).

The interviews in this study are done with five REKO-ring producers. The authors contacted the producers either at the pick-up, through email or via Facebook, and asked for an interview and what time was preferable for an interview. The producers then received the prepared

interview guide (Appendix 1) before the interview. Each telephone interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to gather information and insights about the producer's context, as well as their view and interaction within the network. In combination with knowledge about their used communication strategies this was important for both the analysis, results and discussions. Before each interview the respondents were asked to sign the form about processing of personal data in independent projects (Appendix 2), and about consent for sounded recording. The form about personal data includes information about **GDPR** (General Data Protection Regulation) and is used to ensure the integrity of the participants and protection of their personal data. Through using sounded recording during the interview sessions, a careful analysis was done afterwards. The authors asked for feedback from the respondents to ensure that the authors' interpretation was in line with the respondents. This was done by sending the transcribed interviews by email.

An interview guide is used as a tool for assuring that the relevant information and details are collected, to be able to answer the research question. According to Wilson (2014) an interview-guide should include; *“(1) introduction to the purpose and topic of the interview, (2) list of topics and questions to ask about each topic, (3) suggested probes and prompts, (3) and closing comment”* (Wilson 2014, p.24). In this thesis, the interview guide was sent to the respondents in order to enable an opportunity for them to read about the topic and see the question beforehand. This thesis' interview-guide (Appendix 1) was designed into sub-areas concerning: “Marketing strategies”, “Concept of REKO”, “SFSC”, “Network theory”, and “4C marketing model”. All sub-areas are related to the theoretical framework, presented in chapter 2, and are important in order to answer the research question of this study. The interviews and transcriptions were held in Swedish and thereafter translated into English. During the translation there may have appeared some misinterpretations, although the authors performed, transcribed and translated together which is considered to reduce the risk of misinterpretations of the findings.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews may cause an “interviewer effect” where the background and other demographics influence how much information respondents are willing to reveal in an interview (Denscombe 2010). At the same time, semi-structured interviews have the strengths as ensuring that particular points are covered with each participant and also allow users and interviewers to raise additional concerns and issues (Wilson 2014). The in-depth semi-structured interviews were transcribed in the days after the interviews were held. Quotes that were related to SFSC, network theory and the 4C marketing model were coded and organized thematically in the order they related to the theory's premises.

3.5 Data analysis

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), the amount of data in a qualitative study is often extensive. As the purpose of the analysis is to interpret and explain the connections between the theoretical framework and the empirical findings, the guidelines for the analysis in this study is structured according to the chronological order for theoretical framework. This enables the authors to see which elements are important for the producers within REKO. Furthermore, this study implements a qualitative content analysis after the empirical data is collected and transcribed. The qualitative content analysis was chosen since it allows the authors to find patterns and themes regarding the topic (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009). According to Babbie (2011, p. 304) content analysis is defined as “the *study of recorded human communications*”, this is linked to REKO-JH as a network and ways of communicating to consumers. The process of labelling the data through transferring ideas and

concepts from the raw data into systematic categories is called coding. The coding allows the authors to find differences and similarities which is of great importance for the quality of the data analyze (Given 2008). According to Eisenhardt (1989) and Zhang & Wildemuth (2009), quality approaches usually relate to an inductive coding, but it is also an opportunity to use already existing theories for the process of coding. In an inductive analysis, the coding process can be divided into five steps; “(1) *initial read through text data*, (2) *identify specific segments of information*, (3) *label the segments of information to create categories*, (4) *reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories*, and (5) *create a model incorporating most important categories*” (Creswell 2002, p. 266).

Furthermore, content analysis allows the authors to provide conclusions from the findings through the coded data. For this thesis, the unit of analysis is REKO-JH, which is considered a SFSC initiative. In order to achieve a deep understanding of the ways of communication within the network, five producers with different types of products were evaluated. The content analysis emphasis the elements that are crucial for producers to succeed or not with attract consumers.

3.6 Quality assurance

For the study to be considered *trustworthy* Bryman and Bell (2015) refers to Lincoln and Guba (1986). Trustworthiness is based on four different criteria; *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (*ibid*). Bryman and Bell (2015) also argue that *authenticity*, means that the study aims to give a fair picture of respondents' perception of the reality is important.

3.6.1 Trustworthiness

In this study the data collection contains of semi-structured interviews and secondary sources, for example by academic reports, websites and newspapers. Yin (2009) states that it is advantages in having several kinds of sources in qualitative studies. Since it allows the authors to collect both primary and secondary data to contribute to a broad view of the topic. Information were collected from websites such as the REKO-rings' Facebook pages and the organization behind REKO-rings in Sweden; The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies and Swedish Board of Agriculture.

In order to ensure the *credibility* of the study, Guba and Lincoln (1986) argues that one should adopt a reviewing approach, and ensure that a complete and accessible account of all phases of the research process is created. A clear statement is satisfactory through the clear disposition of the work and detailed descriptions from transcribed data collection. A well-structured reference list suggests reasoning with theoretical support. The interview respondents were informed that both the participation in the study and the sounded recording was voluntary. The authors have used respondent validation in order to ensure that the respondent's context is perceived by the authors, as the respondents see it. Guba and Lincoln (1986), mentioned that it is only the respondents that can judge the credibility of the study.

The criterion *transferability* can be met by descriptions of the context being studied, as well as to strive for a deep rather than a broad understanding of the context (Lincoln & Guba 1986). The authors have presented a detailed description of the phenomena ‘REKO-rings in Sweden’ in chapter four, which gives the reader the opportunity to take note of the context-specific conditions prevailing in this study and the ability to reflect on the context in which the results are useful. The aim of this study is to understand how producers communicate in a SFSC network.

Bryman and Bell (2015) present *dependability* as concerning what findings the authors intend to collect. The dependability of the empirical data collection is achieved by the authors asking counter-questions in connection with each interview. This means a direct feedback on whether the authors interpreted the respondents' perception correctly or not. It also meant that the respondents gave further and more detailed answers, in cases where it seemed incoherent to the authors.

The *confirmability* criterion means that the thesis results are not distorted due to the personal values of the authors (Bryman & Bell 2015). Due to personal values, and with regards to an interest in questions related to the topic of the thesis, the authors acted with an objective approach and with good faith. In this study, a broad theoretical framework as well as the study's aim, and research question are consciously formed based on an existing need in both the theoretical literature and in the empirical evidence.

3.6.2 Authenticity

By elaborating the literature review and being sensitive to the REKO-ring context, as well as maintaining a broad and rich description of theories used, this contribute with effect and significance for producers of Swedish REKO-rings and for further studies in the field. The focus is placed on producers' communication strategies, which means that the empiricism in this study was the basis for a true and fair picture. The authors have critically reflected, discussed and analysed the collected empirical data in order to ensure a correct description of the empirics. The authors have used respondent validation for ensuring that the respondents' context is perceived by the authors as the respondents see it. The authors consider the strong link between the network and private life, as something that can be intrusive on respondents' privacy and thus only anonymous names are used in the study. Further, the quality and good presentation of the respondents' reality are key factors (Bryman & Bell 2015).

With the producer as a central figure for what communication strategies are being used, it may be possible to understand their context and gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of this kind of network. Hereby, the authors help to raise awareness within and outside the REKO network. By investigating the producers' way of communicating their products, the study has strengthened the relevance and given a picture as well as a credible and genuine opinion.

3.7 Ethical considerations

According to Bryman and Bell (2015) it is the authors responsibility to take action and to be aware of the crucial part of business research as well as the ethical principles. According to Diener and Crandall (1978) there are four areas to take into account. Firstly, if there is a risk of injury to the respondents. Secondly, if there is a lack of consent. Thirdly, if the study violates the respondents' privacy. Fourth, if there are false reflections or withholding of important information. Bryman and Bell (2015) state that it is the researcher's responsibility to take action in order to reduce every possible risk that may harm the respondents that participate. To consider minimizing the risk of harm for the respondents, the authors have chosen to use the anonymous variables and names. Furthermore, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) address four areas that are usually discussed in ethics the guidelines for authors that uses interviews for data collection. The four areas are *informed consent*, *confidentiality*, *consequences* and *the role of the researcher*.

Informed consent means that the respondent has been informed of the purpose, risks and benefits of participating in the study. The authors informed the respondents through sending the interview guide, via email, together with a document explaining the purpose of the study. For the authors, the interview request was a way to get the respondents interested in being involved as well getting the opportunity to prepare for an interview. Participation in our study was voluntary, and the respondents were also informed that they are allowed to discontinue the interview at any time. Furthermore, the respondents were informed that the study was intended to be published, and this means that the study was conducted with informed consent from respondents' side. The respondent also signed the letter of consent about GDPR (Appendix 2). Since using anonymity might reduce the context that is important in qualitative research, the authors have considered the trade-off for the generated findings in the study (Robson 2011).

Confidentiality in research means that respondents' private data potentially can be recognized by others and therefore shall data be approved by the respondents before publication (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). In this study, the authors collected data through interviews and identified the respondents with a random letter. All the data was collected anonymously in order to only get the relevant information for this study and protect the members of REKO-JH.

Consequences of the research must be assessed both after the possible harm to the participants suffer and for the scientific benefits that the study can provide (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). Since the authors anonymize the respondents, information which can harm respondents is eliminated. Respondents also had the opportunity to influence the content of their answers, which reduces the risk that we disseminate information that they perceive as sensitive.

The role of the researcher is a decisive factor for the quality and ethical sustainability of scientific knowledge. This is especially important in interviews because the researcher can, for example, direct her questions to get the answers that are wanted. In this study the authors knowledge, experience, honesty and decisiveness are crucial. The results published need to be accurate and representative of the area. To ensure this, independency of financiers and participants is of great importance (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). To consider and be aware of these factors during the process of the study is a way for the authors to show reflexivity (Bryman & Bell 2015). Furthermore, reflexivity is about understanding ourselves and the role as researchers (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton 2009). In this study, has been affected by its respondents as well as the authors.

In sum, the content of the interviews has been sorted and only what has been relevant to the study has been included. For the authors, it was a way to make the material manageable and to facilitate for respondents when asked to validate the data. The authors are independent of the REKO-JH, as well as aware that it is possible to interpret in other ways than the authors in this study have done.

4 Findings

This chapter starts with the concept of REKO-rings in order to provide an understanding of the phenomena, followed by presenting the case study example. Afterwards, the findings from the in-depth interviews are presented along with the theoretical framework, in the following order; SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model.

4.1 The Concept of REKO-rings

The concept of REKO-rings originally started in Finland and it was influenced by similar types of networks from France. The main inspiration was coming from the French AMAP network, which is a supported community for agriculture (Urgenci 2018; The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies n.d.b). In Sweden, the first REKO-rings were established in 2016 and during April 2020, there were approximately 175 REKO-rings with around 500 000 members (The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies n.d.a). The REKO-rings are administrated through Facebook-groups that are divided geographically and have the aim to represent a local area (*ibid*). The concept stands for locally produced and without intermediaries and does not require any membership payment or subscription of products (*ibid*). Furthermore, the concept being described as a network with logistics characterized by the producers and consumers that sell and buy online, and later meet every or every other week for the pick-up. The pick-up is continuously and have a specific place and time to trade the local food products. Further, the consumer has pre-purchased or pre-ordered the products before the pick-up since sales are not allowed during the time of the pick-up (The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies n.d.c). This is because otherwise there is a need for a market permit in Sweden and this is avoided by not selling on site.

REKO-rings are run by the members and administrators within each REKO-ring, the administrators' work is voluntary, and some administrators are both producers and consumers within the network (The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies n.d.a). Furthermore, there is none central organization that governs all the REKO-rings (*ibid*). The responsibility is placed on the producers and if someone misbehave, the administrators have the possibility to ban this member. There are guidelines and information that are given at the website of The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies, and the REKO-rings share all the same concepts concerning connecting consumers with producers and facilitate local and small-scale production (*ibid*).

4.2 REKO Jönköping-Huskvarna (REKO-JH)

REKO- JH was started in the 10th of April 2018 and is placed in the parking lot at the M2 center in Jönköping. In May 2020, the Facebook group had about 10 000 members and include 180 producers and four administrators. The number of consumers and producers varies between the observed pick-ups. At REKO-JH the pick-ups take place every other week on Thursdays between 18.00-18.45. Due to Covid-19, the administrators chose to extend the delivery time to 19.00 to reduce close contact and queues.

In this study the authors interviewed five producers at REKO-JH and they mentioned that producers at REKO-JH together, offers a wide range of different food products, for example vegetables, potatoes, mushrooms, bakery products, mustard, beverage, meat, fish, dairy, ice cream, eggs, and honey. Several of these producers deliver at every pick-up. For this thesis the authors held interviews with five producers that were characterized by having different

products to sell. In order to achieve a better understanding regarding the respondents within this study, information about the respondent's orientation and background information can be seen in table 1 below and explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 1: Description of the respondents

Company	Member in REKO since	Level of activity in REKO	Other similar initiative	Goal and vision with participation	How communicate with consumer	Values that occur in REKO
A	2018	Each pick-up	7 other REKO	Sell more Increased locally produced food Less intermediaries	Email, website, phone, Facebook or Messenger	Collaborations among producers
B	2019	As many as possible	2 other REKO	Sell as much as possible Use this as a marketing channel Give consumers a good experience	Facebook	Trust the products at REKO Producers can be well paid for their product
C	Since the start	As many as possible	4 other REKO	Sell products Give the consumer products with high quality Keep selling direct to consumer	Facebook	The personal relation direct with consumers Direct feedback for producer Consumers value small scale and local produced
D	Since the start	Each pick-up	1 other	Sell as much as possible Increase the production	Facebook, Instagram, personal Messages and phone calls	Trust the products at REKO Share values
E	Since the start	Each pick-up	8 other REKO	Sell direct to consumer Have a better margin	Facebook, personal meetings, Instagram and website	Direct feedback for producer Trust the products at REKO Shared values

When the respondents were asked about their business a range of answers come up. In table 1 these answers are presented. Three of the respondents have been members since REKO-JH started and the other has been member for about one to two years. One respondent mentioned that it was actually some of their consumers who heard about REKO and suggested that they should be a part of REKO-rings. All of the respondent's states that they are active in the REKO network and is present among as many pick-ups as possible, so their level of activity is high. Some of the respondents mentioned that REKO is their main sales channel. A majority of the respondents answered that they also participate in several other REKO-rings around the Jönköping area besides REKO-JH.

In table 1 and the column about goal and vision with participation within the REKO, all respondents stated that their goal and vision is to increase their sales volumes and continue their sales directly to the consumer, with as few intermediaries as possible. Some of the respondents mentioned that REKO makes it possible to offer consumers good products and to give them good experiences. Furthermore, all the respondents explain that they communicate through Facebook with their consumers. Some also uses other social medias, such as

Instagram or Messenger. Two of the respondents also points out their website as an important communication tool.

When questioned if some values occur in REKO, a majority of the respondents answered that it is the values about meeting face to face and that consumers are able to trust the producers at REKO and their products. This is in line with the foundation of REKO and that people see a value in the concept. The respondents also described that other value that occur is for example that the producers get the chance to get direct feedback from the consumer as well as it creates collaborations among producers.

4.3 SFSC

During the interviews the respondents were asked about their supply chain and their number of intermediaries. In table 2 these answers are presented and explained in detail in the following paragraphs. The respondents have different types of production, from pig production and egg production to potato and dairy production. One respondent explains how the pigs are transported from the farm to the slaughterhouse, from where they are then sent directly to the butcher and lastly the producer retrieves the finished products from the butcher and delivers these directly to the consumers. Another respondent tells about how they grow and sort the potatoes by themselves and they also deliver to the consumer by themselves. The respondents with the dairy production, runs both the dairy production and processes the milk into various dairy products or Ice cream.

Table 2: Respondents' answer regarding distribution chain and number of intermediaries.

Company	Number of actors (no consumer)	Sustainability aspects
A	2	Minimized transports is both more time-efficient, economically and environmentally better.
B	none	Sustainable agriculture IP certification the producer follows the laws and regulation and goes a step before the laws and regulation.
C	none	The primary production is partly the major part of sustainability. Optimize the production based on the local conditions. Like, grazing, biodiversity, food waste and the packaging
D	none	Start from the local conditions when optimize the production. One way is regenerative agriculture where the focus is on grow soil instead of crop. The soil is essential for our living and continuous improvement
E	none	To work logically and with locally produced products, everything can't be done but we have founded things we think are good stuff. To contribute to business in the countryside and have collaboration is important.

The respondents were asked about, if they consider sustainability aspects, what sustainability is for them, and how they integrate this into their business. Various answers were received, and one respondent pointed out the importance with minimized transports since this is both more time-efficient, economically and environmentally better. One respondent highlight that *“The agriculture is crucial for us, if we are supposed to live on our land for many years to come”*. Further, one respondent also describes about the importance of always starting from the local conditions when optimizing the production. Since the soil is essential for our living, one respondent mentioned regenerative agriculture that have the focus on growing soil instead of crop. Further, the respondents saw sustainability as “continuous improvement”. Taken together, all the respondents highlight the importance of working locally. To work logically and with locally produced products, progress will be made, they say.

One respondent mentioned that another example is to use an IP certification where the producer follows the laws and regulations. IP certification is an independent standard for certification of food safety, animal care and environmental responsibility for companies in the food industry (Sigill n.d.). In the dairy production one respondent mentioned that the primary production is one of the major parts with regards to sustainability. *“It is important to optimize the production based on the local conditions and graze as much natural pasture as possible, since that is important for the biodiversity”*, the respondent stated. The respondents also talk about food waste and the importance to keep this as low as possible. The packaging is sometimes hard to managed with regards to the logistics, the respondent added. Two of the respondents mentioned that it is important to support other local initiatives especially when it comes to buy ingredients, which is positive both for the local store and the producer when the producer does not have to drive far, and the local shop increases their margin, the respondent concludes. To contribute to business in the countryside and have collaboration seems to be important.

4.4 Network theory

When questions were asked related to the network of REKO-JH, a majority of the respondents stated the high value of the network in terms of the direct consumer connections and the network between the producers. In table 3 these answers are presented and explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 3: Respondents' answers regarding Network theory

Company	REKO-ring network and interactions within it	Values from these interactions	Active within this REKO network
A	Interactions with consumers and producers Collaborations between producers and helping each other	We are each other's work colleagues We become important to each other	It is most important, to be active and must be seen/promote the business
B	Interactions with consumers and producers A fairly loosely composed network	Business partnership and collaborations between producers	Yes, it is important to be active and be able to give your opinion Brief meeting at the pick-up.
C	Interactions with consumers and producers Creates opportunities to exchange information & products	Producers are like work colleagues; fun and social community	It is very important, a big part of my sales REKO is more effective than standing in markets
D	Consumer-producer Interactions between producers	Network between consumers Sells each other's producers and uses each other's raw materials Collaborations	REKO based on solidarity and trust, to be part of it you have to be active. Important to create a relationship & that is what is unique about REKO
E	It is a great contact networks with other producers Collaborations between producers and tips each other	Collaborations between producers Helping each other and recommend one another to different events	Yes, it is quite important, the business needs to be seen Producers interacts and help each other

When questioned about the REKO-rings network and interactions within it, a majority of the respondents answered that the interaction between the consumer and the producers is the

main part in the network. REKO-JH is one of the main SFSC-platforms in the area with 10 000 members. The respondent's state that they have, thanks to the REKO network, reached out to more consumers and increased the connections with consumers. A few respondents describe the pick-ups, where there are a lot of interactions between the consumers. Especially in the queues, where they ask each other about their purchases and there is also consumer that stay after the pick-up and wants to chat. One respondent also mentioned that some consumers have started a collective consumer group, with for example three or four consumers that have placed joint orders and take turns picking up their products. However, the respondents also mentioned that far from all producers and consumers within REKO-JH are active. One respondent state that *"producers and consumers who return week after week, are satisfied and hope that REKO will develop and become even better"*.

All of the respondents describe that the REKO-ring is a great network for connecting with other producers. The respondents answered that the interactions between producers is well developed and consists of different collaborations between producers, helping each other and creates opportunities to exchange information and products with each other. REKO-JH has their own Facebook group for just the producers, where they interact with each other in questions or problems that occur. Like for example with the circumstances around Covid-19, the producers have together in the group come up with how to act in the best way, for both consumers and producers. Furthermore, one of the respondents describes the REKO-network as a pretty loosely composed network. This because the meeting between consumers and producers on the pick-up is very brief, since the pickup takes place in just 45 minutes and the structure of the network depends on how involved the administrators are.

When questioned if some values occur through interactions within the network, a majority of the respondents answered that the producers have become important to each other. Most of the producers have farms and do not have so many other work colleagues, through the REKO-network they have each other. The majority of the respondents present the network between producers as very important and valuable, as well as a social community. The respondents refer to the other producers at REKO as their work colleagues and there are a lot of collaborations between producers. These collaborations can be characterized through the share of raw materials, selling each other products and invite each other to different events.

In table 3 and the column about how important it is to be active within the REKO-network, all respondents stated that it is important for their business to be active within the network. Since of the size of the network it is important to be seen, present, promote your products and business as well as give your opinion. One of the respondents explain that REKO is based on solidarity and trust, *"you have to be active in order to communicate this and to build relationships within the network"*. A few of the respondents also mentioned that it is important to be active and act continuously, this for building trust and relationship with the consumers. Even if the respondent some pick-ups only have two consumers, in the long term each pick up counts.

4.5 Elements of the 4C

This section presents the respondents answers regarding to the 4Cs elements; Consumer Solution, Cost, Communication and Convenience. These four elements together play an important role in the producer's communication strategies.

4.5.1 Consumer solutions

When the respondents were asked about consumer solutions, a range of answers come up. In table 4 these answers are presented and explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 4: Respondents' answers regarding consumer solutions

Company	Why do consumers choose to buy and how do they get to know the consumers' needs and wants?	What types of reactions does the producer meets
A	Different types of supply and transparency through pictures and paid advertising Uses of Facebook and Instagram	Positive reactions
B	Large consumer network and consistency in delivery, as well as good looking and quality products Balance between producers' needs and what the consumer prefers to buy. Flexibility	Consumers that returns is a positive reaction
C	Believes in small-scale production Balance between own interest and what consumer ask for	Consumers that returns is a positive reaction
D	Like the story and share the same values Communicating and explaining why it is what it is and what a producer can offer and why	Most of them are extremely positive
E	To be yourself and to be honest holds the longest Cannot do everything, but as much as possible in the manner of offer the best products	Most positive, the negative do not return.

All the respondents mentioned few or none competitors that offer the same products as an underlying reason why they get consumers. Some uses paid advertising on Facebook and some share picture and video in the REKO advertisement. The respondents mentioned that both large consumer network and loyal consumers are important for the producers. Even if the sales are going up and down it is always important to give the consumer a good experience when they buy and make sure that the consumer appreciate what they buy. One respondent pointed at the specific demand on small-scale producer and the benefits that follows in form of direct contacts and appreciation from consumers. As well as shared values were important for the majority.

All respondents agree about the importance of get to know the consumers need and wants, and this can for example be done through the using of social media or in dialogue with consumers. But it is equally important for consumers to understand the needs as a producer have. Furthermore, a common topic was about the balance between these two, that is the producers and the consumers' needs and wants. The balance deals with what the producer needs to sell and what the consumer prefers to buy, and this requires flexibility. The goal is always to try to meet everyone's needs, by selling what the consumer wants.

The respondents mentioned that one main pillar is about communicating and explaining the conditions and circumstances, why it is what it is and what a producer can offer. Several mentioned the importance of producing something that they believed in and are convinced about that it will work out well. It is not an option to only produce something only for the consumer, if it is not of interest for the producer. It is a balance where it is important to have a good time and produce products that both the producer and the consumer will enjoy.

Sometimes it is not possible to produce what consumers demand without making an exception, it always needs to be considered if it is the best option in the long run.

A majority of the respondents' experience that they receive positive feedback and have good relations with the consumer. One respondent mentioned that sometimes there are not so many reactions, but if consumers return this can be considered as a good reaction. Producers who work a lot by their own and then get a lot of positive feedback direct from consumers think this is really fun and an incredible benefit to work under these conditions. Furthermore, it is nice and cheerful and encouraging, when consumers come up with ideas about tastes. A lot of products at REKO are unique and cannot be bought in the regular food store, some producers explain that demand is higher than supply during some periods, for example, during holidays like Christmas or Easter.

4.5.2 Cost

When the respondents were asked about their view of costs different descriptions were presented. In table 5 these answers are presented and explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 5: Respondents' answers regarding cost

Company	How to make consumer aware and provide enough information and what type of reactions do you meet with regards to the cost?	Do you have a price setting approach and is there something special considered when pricing the products?
A	Available web page and information about the product In REKO people know that it costs more	Count for how much per kg is needed An ordinary person should be able to buy
B	By embroider the words a bit around the products and enter that information on Facebook, this makes the price may be a little higher. No reaction, customers are terribly insensitive to the costs.	Base the price on the production cost Balancing the price so it is not to low or to high
C	Answer all different kinds of questions from consumers It varies a bit; most people say nothing at all and where personal contact exist the price not seem to be a problem	By looking on competitors and be aware of the cost of production. This also includes the time spend, investments, electricity and administration.
D	Explain what it is that takes time and being clear that as a farmer it is important to be paid for the time spend. Most people do not comment	Production costs including salary The goal is to pay for itself and be an acceptable price for the consumer.
E	Being open and writes about our good stuff, that only contains good stuff and no strange things. Those who think it is expensive they do not buy.	Does calculation for each variety and it is important to find a level where sales go lost If the sale is to a dealer or directly to consumer the price will differ

When the respondents answered the question about how they are making the consumer aware about the product, they mentioned the importance of the availability of a website and information about the product as well as a list of contents. An advantage of REKO-rings is that producers can embroider the words a bit around the products, in a way that is not possible when the producer meet the consumers just briefly during the pick-ups. Respondents pointed out how they focus specific on the ingredients and that it is “*only good stuff in their*

products". When entering information on Facebook, this adds value so that the price may be a little higher, because the consumers get a little more information. Further, it is important to get the information online and not only have thoughts about marketing ideas. Some respondents explained how and what it is that takes time, respondents think some consumers understand that time costs money. Furthermore, one respondent explains how they have been extremely clear about that as a farmer they should be paid for all worked hours, and therefore follow up every worked hour and all costs.

When the respondents answered the question about reactions due to the cost most of respondents explain how member within REKO-rings know that it costs more. One respondent explains that the reactions varies a bit, but most consumers say nothing at all. Some have experienced no reaction and point out that consumers in REKO-rings are insensitive to the costs. Respondents also mentioned that consumers they have had contact with do not seem to consider the price as a concern, and most consumers do not even comment this. The majority of the respondents mentioned that once in a while an angry mail about the price have been received. Sometimes it is very difficult to explain for the consumer about all the underlying causes that affect production in different ways.

Respondents in this study have some similar and some different price setting approaches, which also has a natural explanation as it has different types of production and products for sale. One respondent calculates on how much per kilo is needed and the small amount of waste always needs to be considered during the processing part. Some respondent's trying to keep about the same prices at the different sales channels. By looking at local stores and see what they charge, the producer knows roughly what to charge as well. It's a variation, a bit of a look at what colleague's charge, to be decent and not price dumped. Then it is to calculate how much time it takes to make the product. The price needs to mirror what it costs to produce the product with the salary needed for that job included. By a calculation for each variety the producer of knows exactly what each variety costs to produce. It seems to be important to find a level where sales do not goes lost.

The respondents consider different aspects when pricing their product. From the willingness that an ordinary consumer should be able to buy to ensure that the production cost will be covered. But the price cannot be either too high or too low. There is a need to evaluate how much the producers also have in stock. It is difficult to charge the price that sometimes had to be charged. The willingness from the producer to ensure that the consumers are satisfied is high. As well as a satisfied consumer are important are the amount of worked hours, investments, electricity and administration important to consider. It is important to being able to cover both short-term and long terms costs and at the same time think about where the limit goes for the consumer.

4.5.3 Communication

Questions were asked related to the communication, a majority of the respondents stated that their communication with consumers are important. This in order to deliver information, that the consumer wants and needs to purchase their products. In table 6 these answers are presented and explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 6: Respondents' answers regarding communication

Company	What type of communication strategy do you use and how do you communicate within REKO?	What motivates the consumers to purchase your products?
A	Guidelines from the administrators Post the most important and link to our website With pictures that includes the respondents together with their products or animals	Meets special requests and demand Supply unique products
B	Sell a concept Describe quite a lot about our products, as detailed as possible. Non common strategy at REKO-rings	It is about the desire to buy and knowing what you get To benefit their local producers Supply unique products
C	Be active on Facebook and post information at regular basis Use positive pictures, many animal pictures such as happy cows more than products pictures.	Consumers see that the animals are doing well Quality and taste of the products
D	Transparent and honest Consumers welcome home to the farm and visit Sell a concept	Shared values Quality and taste of the products
E	Be active on Facebook and post information at regular basis Sell a concept	Supply unique products Quality and taste of the products

All of the respondents used Facebook to communicate with their consumers, but how and what information as well as what kind of communication strategy they use differs. A few of the respondents want to promote and sell a concept. The respondents mentioned for example the following used concepts; (1) familiarly feeling, (2) “*only good stuff in the product*” and (3) selling a story including transparency and honesty. One of the respondents’ states that when using a concept as strategy, it is perceived as it becomes easy for the consumer to choose, even if it leads to a lot of text or information. Other respondents explain that it is difficult to find the balance with enough information, but not too much information to make the consumer satisfied.

The respondents described that all advertisements at REKO-JH’s Facebook page need to be based on the guidelines from the administrators. All the respondents use their own Facebook page to post their advertisements and had similar goals for both the advertisement at the REKO group as for their own Facebooks page. A few respondents stated that one goal is to be active and post information at regular basis. One respondent uses the same text to the advertisement at REKO-ring but vary the pictures that suits the time of year and on animals. According to the respondents using pictures, is important because they have noticed the difference in what type of pictures that are used in their advertisements. For example, positive pictures and preferably on animals often generate more sales. Due to the respondents, pictures on happy cows or producer's together with their products or animals is in some cases more popular among consumers than pictures of their actual products. A few of the respondents mentioned that the information needs to be clear and as detailed as possible. The respondents state that there is no common strategy at REKO-JH, every producer’s tries in their best way to promote their products. “*Some producers have little the same products but communicate itself in completely different ways. Which is what is exciting about REKO-rings is that you can create your own success by thinking about this.*”

According to all the respondents, it is the supply of unique products, the quality and taste of the products that motivates consumer to purchase products at REKO-rings. One respondent described that the phenomenon of REKO-rings “*is about the desire to buy and know what you are buying*”. The respondents highlight that the consumers can see that the animals are doing well, this can contribute to more values for the consumers. Furthermore, the respondents also mentioned that consumers wants to benefit their local producers and some producers at REKO-rings meets special requests and demands.

4.5.4 Convenience

When questions were asked related to the convenience and if REKO-JH is easy to find for the consumers. All of the respondents stated that it is easily accessible for both consumers and producers. In table 7 these answers are presented and explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 7: Respondents' answers regarding convenience

Company	Is REKO-JH easy to find for the consumers and what reaction does you meet from the consumers?
A	Easily accessible to both consumers and producers
B	Easily accessible for both consumers and producers Maybe it would have been easier to find a place in the city center.
C	Easily accessible for both consumers and producers Continues to grow with new members
D	Easily accessible for both consumers and producers Once you've been there, there usually no concerns A little resistance with Facebook that not everyone has or wants to have
E	Easily accessible to both consumers and producers

According to all respondents the consumers think that the REKO-JH is accessible and simple for the consumer to find, even if some first-time consumers seems a little confused and thinks that it is complicated. Once the consumer has been there, there usually is no concerns, they say. Further, one respondent mentioned that the position of REKO-JH is a little misplaced and could be more including if it was placed in the city center. On the other hand, the respondents clarify that the position today is on the way home from work for many consumers and that some consumers can walk to the pick-up. The respondents also mentioned that REKO-rings is continuously growing with new consumer each pick-up.

One respondent mentioned resistance to using Facebook, since not everyone has or wants to have Facebook. This limited the availability for reaching out to all types of consumers, which contributes to that some consumers cannot get information about REKO-rings. The respondent points out that it is probably the biggest obstacle that eliminates a large part of consumers. Initiative that can compete with REKO-rings and where consumers do not need Facebook is for example Local food nodes.

In sum, this chapter presents an overview of the concept of REKO-rings and insight about the case study. Followed by presenting the findings from the in-depth interviews regarding to the themes of SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marking model was identified. These findings will be analyzed in the next chapter with regard to the theoretical framework.

5 Analysis

In this chapter, the study's findings are put in relation and analyzed based on the theoretical framework; SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model.

5.1 Analysis of SFSC

In order to develop an understanding about the REKO phenomenon, an analysis of the SFSC in connection with the empirical findings will be presented. The respondents of this study are producers within REKO-JH.

5.1.1 Description of the SFSC

The European Council define SFSC as a supply chain that involves a limited number of actors (Kneafsey *et al.* 2013; Elghannam *et al.* 2017). The empirical findings tell that the respondents within this REKO-JH have a supply chain that include zero or two intermediaries and thus, are being considered as SFSCs. The interviewed respondents were characterized by having different types of production which also demands different types of processing and packaging. According to Renting *et al.* (2003) and Kneafsey *et al.* (2013) one type of SFSC is face-to-face where the consumers buy directly from the producers through for example online trading channels. The respondents in this study mentioned for example that their goal with REKO is to sell directly to consumers and increase the sales as well as the locally produced food. This may indicate that our findings are in line with Renting *et al.* (2003) and Kneafsey *et al.* (2013) that describe SFSC and face-to-face initiatives.

The literature states that possibilities with SFSCs initiatives lie in the manner of re-socialising food through relationships between producers and consumers (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003; Hallett 2012). Respondents mentioned that the power of REKO is the socialising and direct contact between producer and consumers. Further, in REKO this is done through Facebook groups for information about the products and ordering products by commenting. The pick-ups are where delivery takes place every two weeks. This way makes it more possible to give the consumer a wider and more personal information about the production and the products (Sage 2003). The respondents mentioned that this is done by for example provide the consumer with information, in form of a list of contents or through social medias where consumer can have direct contact with the respondents for questions about for example the production systems. Further, they described that consumers appreciated this way of communication. Different types of marketing channels are being used, such as Facebook, Instagram and websites.

Aggestam *et al.* (2017) present that the products within REKO are embedded with information that involves for example the production, process and the clear picture of the producer. According to the respondents it is about trust, if the consumer trusts the producer, the producer has no problem with being well paid for their products. Furthermore, the respondents mentioned that the personal relations and direct contact with consumers, the direct feedback and the small scale local produced food seems to be important for the consumer. The literature identifying that initiatives with SFSC can contribute to stronger links between local actors and regenerate rural communities (Pretty 2002; Galli & Brunori 2013). As the respondents tell about how the REKO networks is developed in connection to that all respondents highlight the fun part of both produce the product and sell to the consumers, the stronger links and regenerative rural communities seems to be experienced.

5.1.2 Sustainability aspects within SFSC

SFSCs are perceived as one step toward sustainable agriculture production in social, economic and environmental dimensions (Roos *et al.* 2007; Bimbo *et al.* 2015; Galli *et al.* 2015). From our empirical findings, the respondents mentioned that minimized transports are both more time-efficient, economically and environmentally better. Further, some of the respondents also mentioned that by following laws and regulations as well as being proactive with productions systems is considered as important due to sustainability aspects.

According to Brown and Miller (2008) the interest in domestic local markets and local food products has increased. From our empirical findings, the respondents mentioned that one aspect is the interest for their products from a sustainability perspective. According to IPCC (2019) there are many practices that can be optimized in order to advance food systems. On the supply-side, for example increased soil organic matter and erosion control, and improved management (*ibid*). With regards to the dairy production, one respondent mentioned the primary production as crucial in order to optimize the production based on the local conditions, and graze as much natural pasture as possible since that is important for an increased biodiversity. One respondent also describes the soil as essential for our living and presented regenerative agriculture that have the focus on growing soil instead of crop. On the demand-side, for example adoption of sustainable and healthy diets, together with reduction of food waste, can contribute to reduced area of land needed for food production (IPCC 2019). The respondents mentioned food waste and the importance to keep this as low as possible, as well as optimize the way of packaging. IPCC (2019) point on practices as diversification within the food system, as for example implementation of integrated production systems as a key strategy to reduce risks. Furthermore, the respondents' answers can be summarized by saying that sustainability can be seen as "continuous improvement" and the willingness to do what is most appropriate for unique local conditions.

Further, SFSC is an initiative that creates other types of production processes and adds value to the primary producers (Marsden *et al.* 2000). REKO is built upon local producers with none or just a few intermediaries. The REKO concept stands for local producers with none or just a few intermediaries. The respondents mentioned that this is one of several reasons to an increased consumer demands with regards to REKO. According to Winter (2001) and Solan (2002), consumers want to be a part of this kind of initiatives in order to support the producers in their local area. The respondents highlighted the importance of working both locally and logically with locally produced products. Everything cannot be done right away, but producers can decide about what ingredients are really needed and consider if they are the most sustainable choice or not. It is positive both for the local store and the producer when the producer does not have to drive far for shopping, and the local shop increases their margin and can be economically more sustainable. Today consumer demands more information about the food they consume, SFSCs makes it possible for consumers to get more information and to see the true value of the agricultural products (Kneafsey *et al.* 2013). To contribute to business in the countryside and have collaboration seems to play an important role. The respondents tell about their experiences, both with regards to satisfied consumers and due to a higher demand than supply during periods as Christmas and Easter. This indicates a need for a more transparent and shorter food chain with local produced food where the producer has opportunities for a higher margin in order to be sustainable in the long run, social, environmentally and economically.

5.2 Analysis of Network theory

An analysis of the REKO-network and how the REKO-ring network is designed as well as how the producers and consumers interact and what kind values that occur is presented in the paragraphs below.

5.2.1 Interactions and values in the network

A network includes connections and are about how relationships between individuals or organizations can be connected with each other (Davern 1997; O'Donnell *et al.* 2001; Lee 2015). From our empirical findings the network included interactions between producers and consumer as well as between producers. Further, the respondents mentioned that REKO-JH is one of the main channels in the area and it has increased their number of interactions and sales thanks to the REKO network. Therefore, it can be seen that the REKO network includes several kinds of interactions and is well developed, since it occurs different kinds of connections and relationships between both consumers and producers.

Depending on how well and deep the connections are, the networks connections are either strong or weak (Lee 2015). Strong ties indicate closer connection that relies on deep trust, high commitment, understanding as well as knowledge in the network, which can provide different kinds of information (Kontinen & Ojala 2011; Söderqvist, & Kamala Chetty 2013; Jeong *et al.* 2019). The empirics provided evidence that the REKO network creates opportunities for both producers and consumers to communicate with each other, as well as exchange information between products. In some cases, between producers there are a social community, were producers' help each other as work colleague as well as other kind of collaborations between producers occur. Thereby, it shows that the relationships and connections in the REKO network are well established, since the majority of the respondents refers to other producers as their work colleagues and not competitors.

Wasserman and Faust (1994) argue that the network is influenced by the relationships and activities as well as the how the information flows between the actors. Several of the respondents mentioned that these interactions contribute to a various type of relationships that involves different kinds of values. The empiricism emphasizes that the producers help each other and try to lift each other through, for example, collaborations, advises or recommend each other to sales opportunities. Respondents values the relationships that enables within REKO-rings. The REKO network enable the opportunities to transfer knowledge and information between producers and consumers.

5.2.2 Activity within in the network

According to Hilmerston (2011) a business relies on the connections and relationships around their network. Further, Clark (2006) describes that one way to improve the flow of information and strengthen the network is by well-established relationships, were the actors need to constantly be working with the actors in the network. From our empirical findings all the respondents stated that it is important for their business to be active within the REKO network. The respondents mentioned several reasons to be active within the network. Since the REKO-JH network has 10 000 members it is important to be visible, present, promoting the products and business as well as give opinions within the network. Even though, one respondent mentioned that the REKO network is a fairly loosely composed network mostly because of the brief consumer meeting at the pick-up. A few of the respondents also mentioned that it is important to be active and act continuously, this for building trust and relationship with the consumers. Even if the respondent some pick-ups only have two consumers, in the long term each pick up counts. This may indicate that our findings are in

line with Clark (2006) since the respondents mentioned that it is important to be constantly active and interact within the network.

5.3 Analysis of the 4C Marketing model

The 4C marketing model identifies four elements as Consumer Solution, Cost, Communication and Convenience (Lauterborn 1990; Kotler 2001). The following section present the 4C elements together with the answers from the respondent in this study.

5.3.1 Consumer solution

According to Chaffey *et al.* (2009), the focus in consumer solution is to identify the consumers' needs and wants, as well as to get knowledge about their problems and then present a solution to the consumers' problem. All respondents agree about the importance of getting to know the consumers' needs and wants, and this can for example be done through the using of social media or in dialogue with consumers. Due to the respondents it is equally important for consumers to understand the needs of the producer. Further, the empirics highlight that the balance about what the producer needs to sell and what the consumer prefers to buy is important. Some respondents mentioned that it is a balance where producers need to have a good time and produce products that both the producer and the consumer will enjoy. Sometimes it is not possible to produce what consumers demand without making an exception. One respondent also mentions that even if the sales going up and down it is always important to give the consumer a good feeling when they buy and make sure that the consumer appreciate what they buy.

Belz and Peattie (2012) describe that consumers seek solutions of a need or to be satisfied and the solutions can be either material or immaterial. One respondent pointed on the specific demand on small-scale producer and the benefits that follows in form of direct contacts and appreciation from consumers. As Belz and Peattie (2012) state that consumers demand solutions that are both socially and environmentally sustainable, in the same way the consumers are generally not open to compromising terms such as cost, function or quality. Majority of the respondents meet positive reactions and experience that they receive positive feedback with regards to their production and products. As well as sometimes there seems to be not so many reactions, but if consumers return this can be considered as a positive reaction. Some of the respondents mentioned that producers who work a lot by their own and then get a lot of positive feedback direct from consumers think this is fun and an incredible benefit to work under these conditions. Furthermore, it is nice and cheerful and encouraging, people come up with ideas about tastes and such things. A lot of products at REKO are unique and cannot be bought in the original food store, some producer explain that demand is higher than supply during some periods.

5.3.2 Cost

The total cost to the consumer is equal to the total amount of all various forms of monetary or non-monetary values that the consumer pays to purchase the final product (Armstrong & Kotler 2013). Furthermore, Belz and Peattie (2012) state that price of a product is a tool in marketing that can influence the demand, but marketers of sustainable products move beyond the price aspects and includes the total cost for the consumer. The respondents mentioned an advantage of REKO which is that producers can embroider the words a bit around the products, in a way that is not possible when the producer meet the consumers just briefly. This enable a unique way of communication between the producer and the consumer through the use of Facebook as a platform. According to Belz and Peattie (2012) one element of the cost is to make the consumer aware of the total costs, the producer can do this by providing

the consumer with product-specific information with regard to the costs that are involved. When the respondents answered question about how they are making the consumer aware about the product and its costs, they mentioned importance of the availability of a social medias, website and information about the product as well as a list of contents. This provides the consumer with enough information and increase the transparency.

Belz and Peattie (2012) described that by choosing a price setting approach, possibilities can be created to lower the total cost faced by the consumers. Value-based pricing or cost-based pricing are two approaches (*ibid*). Respondents in this study have some similar and some different price setting approaches, which also has a natural explanation as it has different types of production with different products for sale. Further, Belz and Peattie (2012) describe value-based pricing as a differentiation strategy that uses buyers' insights of value and consumer-driven to state the price. This approach can in some cases be used to change the market price and push the price as long as the market allows, especially used when it comes to unique products (*ibid*). REKO-JH have a lot of different and unique products to offer, and the respondents pointed out how they focus on specific ingredients and that it is "*only good stuff*" in their products. When entering information on Facebook, this also add value so that the price may be a little higher, because the consumers get a little more information and the transparency is high.

Comparing with cost-based pricing which determine the price based on the product and are production-driven which also means that the price needs to cover all operational costs (Belz & Peattie 2012). This was illustrated from several respondents that tell about the importance of calculating the cost per kilo as well as consider the small amount of waste that occur during the processing part. Furthermore, the respondents in some cases calculate about how much time it takes to produce the product.

From the producer's point of view costs are the only part in the 4C's that includes revenues, especially in the long run when all operational costs are covered by the revenues (Kotler & Armstrong 2004). Few of the respondent's trying to keep about the same prices at the different sales channels and it is important that the revenues cover all the costs. Respondents state the it is important to find a level where sales do not goes lost and acknowledge what colleague's charge, to be decent not to price dumped.

5.3.3 Communication

The most important part is to communicate with consumers. According to Belz and Peattie (2012) and Dennis *et al.* (2005) communication can be through different kinds of media. The mix of communication includes information flows and communication from the media, this in order to create a dialogue, interaction, as well as to build trust and credibility (Belz & Peattie 2012). From our empirical findings the majority of the respondents stated that their communication with consumer are important in order to deliver information so that the consumer wants and needs to purchase their products.

According to Indoria (2012) it is important to make the consumers aware about the company's products. By using for example social networks and promote the benefits of the products to consumers (*ibid*). From our empirical findings it is clear that all of the respondents used Facebook to communicate with their consumers. However, what information and the kind of communication strategy the respondents use differs. When defining different communications strategies, Belz and Peattie (2012) present that the following objectives can be used.

Generating awareness, is an objective that involves making the consumer aware of the product, which is important in today's busy, big and fast-moving market (Belz & Peattie 2012). The empirics provided by a few of the respondents want to promote and sell a concept. The respondents mentioned for example the following used concepts; (1) familiarly feeling, (2) *"only good stuff in the product"* and (3) selling a story including transparency and honesty. Furthermore, making the consumers aware of their products by using and promoting a concept, other respondents mentioned that it sometimes is a balance between enough information to make the consumer satisfied since it can also be too much information.

Informing is an objective that includes the part of informing the consumer concerning the products, the products availability and value chain of the products as well its content (Belz & Peattie 2012). A few of the respondents mentioned a way to informing consumer by make their advertisements based on the guidelines from the administrators at the REKO group as for their own Facebooks page. Each respondent uses their Facebook page to inform about their business, production and products, their goal is to post information on regular basis. Few of the respondents mentioned that the information needs to be clear and as detailed as possible. According to the respondents using pictures, is important because they have noticed the difference in what type of pictures that are used in their advertisements. For example, positive pictures and preferably on animals often generate more sales. Due to the respondents, pictures on happy cows or producer's together with their products or animals is in some cases more popular among consumers than pictures of their actual products. The respondents state that there is no common strategy at REKO-JH, every producer tries in their best way to promote their products. One respondent stated following *"Some producers have little the same products but communicate itself in completely different ways. Which is what is exciting about REKO-rings is that you can create your own success by thinking about this."* This may indicate that our findings are in line with Belz and Peattie (2012) since the respondents mentioned the importance in communicating with the consumers on regular basis and with detailed information.

Motivating is the objective that includes the part of motivating the consumers to make a change or to make the consumer to respond (Belz & Peattie 2012). From our empirical findings all the respondents state that it is the supply of unique products, the quality and taste of the products that motivates consumer to purchase products at REKO. One respondent describes the phenomenon of REKO-rings *"is about the desire to buy and know what you are buying"*. The respondents highlight that the consumers can see that the animals are doing well, this can contribute to more values for the consumers. Furthermore, the respondents also mentioned that consumers want to benefit their local producers and some producers at REKO-rings meets special requests and demands. The empirical findings are in line with what Belz and Peattie (2012) mention about motivating the consumer to pursue a product, since the respondents represent this as following elements; supply of unique products, the quality and taste of the products.

Connecting, is about the importance of relationship-building and connecting with consumers thorough both various types of communication by activities and interactions (Belz & Peattie 2012). The empirics presents an overview of REKO-JH as a phenomenon with over 10 000 members of which 180 are producers. The respondents mentioned that far from all producers and consumers within REKO-JH are active. One respondent state that *"the producers and consumers who return week after week, are satisfied and hope that REKO will develop and become even better"*. The respondents mentioned that they connect with consumers through

interactions as; face-to-face at pick-ups, communicate through social media and by phone calls as well as websites. This may indicate that our findings are in line with what Belz and Peattie (2012) describes as the element connecting.

5.3.4 Convenience

Convenience involves how the consumers want to use the product and how this product meet their needs as well are easily accessible (Belz & Peattie 2012). Furthermore, convenience is about the consumer and how to make it as convenient as possible for the consumer (Lauterborn 1990; Kotler 2001; Belz & Peattie 2012). According to all respondents the consumers think that REKO-JH is accessible and simple for the consumer to find, even if some first-time consumers seems a little confused and thinks that it is complicated. Once the consumer been there, there usually is no concerns.

Chaffey *et al.* (2009) mention that the internet acts as a distribution channel that is constant accessible for consumer to use and can be used as a direct selling option. Internet is more accessible and therefore an example of something that is more convenient, and convenience is extremely valued by the consumers (Belz & Peattie 2012). Consumers evaluate after how easy it is to find information and purchase the product (*ibid*). One respondent mentioned resistance in using Facebook, since not everyone has or wants to have Facebook. This limited the availability for reaching out to all types of consumers, which contributes to that some consumer cannot get information about REKO-rings. The respondent pointed out that it is probably the biggest obstacle that eliminates a part of consumers. Initiatives that can compete with REKO-rings and where consumers do not need Facebook is for example Local food nodes, another initiative within SFSCs.

In some unique cases the consumer would make an exception and go through a special dedicated purchasing effort in order to buy *speciality goods* (Belz & Peattie 2012)

The respondents described that once the consumers' been at REKO once, there usually is no problems. Further, one respondent mentioned that the position of REKO is a little misplaced and could be more including if it was placed in the city center. On the other hand, the respondents clarify that the location today is for many consumers on the way home from work and some consumer can walk to the pick-up. The respondents also mentioned that REKO-rings is continuously growing with new consumer each pick-up.

In sum, this chapter presents an analysis of this study's empirical findings in relation to theoretical framework; SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model. The analysis has divided into three different sections, SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model, in each of this section different elements has been identified, which is discussed in the next chapter.

6 Discussion

In this chapter, a discussion is carried out related to the findings and existing literature to answer the research question; What elements are perceived by producers within SFSC to attract consumers? Afterwards, a critical reflection is presented.

6.1 Elements in SFSC

The identified elements to attract consumers within REKO as a SFSC in this study are; the *limited number of actors, direct relationships and sustainability aspects*. The respondents state that having limited number of actors in their supply chain and having a direct contact with the consumers, are important aspects in their businesses. In contrast to the long supply chain, that according to Mount (2011) have a greater distance between the consumers and producers, the findings in this study shows that this initiative within SFSC, enable closer connections with less intermediaries and direct relationships between producers and consumers. Further, the findings imply that the producers easier can transfer embedded information with knowledge about their products and create trust among members within the SFSC, which support the research by Aggestam *et al.* (2017). The respondents mentioned that initiatives within SFSCs creates sustainable options for consumers' and thereby goes in line with the Swedish governments' FSP since it promotes the local Swedish food production (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017). Further, an interpretation by the authors is that since the Swedish government aims to increase the locally Swedish production, initiatives within SFSCs will probably increase in the future.

Further, SFSCs are perceived as one step toward sustainable agricultural production (Roos *et al.* 2007; Bimbo *et al.* 2015; Galli *et al.* 2015). From our empirical findings the respondents mentioned minimized transports, regulations and being proactive with productions systems, as well as improve agricultural land and an increased biodiversity. An interpretation from earlier research contributes to that the authors assume that there are sustainable aspects of SFSC, but that more research is needed in order to investigate exactly how sustainable it is.

6.2 Elements in Network Theory

The identified elements in the REKO network is *being active within the network* as well as *understand the network and the interactions* within REKO. From the findings of this study, the authors could identify that the producers at REKO-JH have to work with the advertising at Facebook, coordinate each pick-up, as well as with their primary production and processing. Beyond these activities, the producers need to consider the reactions from consumers and constantly improving their communication and information exchange in order to meet the consumer needs. In previous research by Moetsabi (1998), Girard (2003) and Clark (2006) it is presented that network theory is a way to identify key actors and existing flows of information, in order to advance the communication between actors. The authors argue that the findings in this study are in line with Moetsabi (1998), Girard (2003) and Clark (2006), this since the respondents mentioned that it is a network that creates opportunities to exchange information, products, knowledge to both consumers' and between producers. According to the authors these interactions and information exchanges enable an advanced communication in the network. Hence, the findings of this study imply that that the communication and interactions is done by using social media, meeting consumers face-to-face as well as phone calls. An interpretation by the authors is that these activities creates different kinds of relationships with the actors within the network and that this information influence the whole network. This goes in line with Wasserman and Faust (1994) research,

that states that the network is influenced by relationships and activities that occur between actors in the network.

From the empirics and the analysis, the authors identified that the producers' value the interactions that are enabled within the REKO network. This indicates that it is a strong connection between the actors in the REKO network. This confirms the literature that strong connections enable deep trust, high commitment, understanding (Kontinen & Ojala 2011; Söderqvist & Kamala Chetty 2013; Jeong *et al.* 2019). An interpretation by the authors is that, the relationships and well-established connection is important in this kind of network, since it builds on trust and commitment from both producers and consumers. Further, this may imply that the REKO network relies on the connections and relationships within it, which goes along with what Hilmerston (2011) argues. As well as with previous research that states that a business should not be viewed as a single unit, it needs to include the relation to other actors (Axelsson & Easton 1992; Håkansson & Johanson 1993; Hilmerston 2011).

The findings are in line with earlier research by Clark (2006) who state that one way to strengthen the network is by well-established relationships, where the actors need to constantly be working with the actors in the network. Further, it seems to be crucial for the respondents to find the most appropriate communication strategy, since this can lead to an increased amount of sales, as well as the margin of the products. On the other hand, trends, demands and what the consumers want, can change from one day to another. An interpretation by the authors is that, for producers to be successful within the frame of the REKO phenomenon it is important to be active as well as understand how to communicate in the best way to the consumers.

6.3 Elements in the 4C Marketing Model

Under the following headings the discussion on the findings related to the 4Cs takes place.

6.3.1 The element consumer solution

The identified elements to attract consumers found in this study is *knowing the consumers' needs and wants*, and *meet the consumers demand* as well as *meeting the producers need*. Our findings are in line with earlier research by Chaffey *et al.* (2000) that mention about the consumer solution about something that identifying the consumers' needs and wants. All the respondents agree about the importance of knowing the consumers need and wants, and this can for example be done through the using of social media or in dialogue with consumers. From the empirics and the analysis knowing the consumers' needs and wants involves continuous improvements for the producers in order to keep up with the consumers' demands. Meeting the consumers' demands is about finding out what the consumer wants, one example is being local and small-scale producers. Furthermore, the element regarding meeting the consumers' demands, supports the description presented by Belz and Peattie (2012) about that consumers demand solutions that are sustainable. The findings of the study imply that it is important for the respondents to find a balance between the consumers demands and the producers supply. Therefore, the respondents highlight that producers need to enjoy what they produce as well as that the consumer enjoy what they consume. An interpretation by the authors regarding these elements is that it is important to actively listen to what consumers demand and to be open as well as flexible to follow the trends that arise. Thus, the authors argue that food trends are constant changing and so the demand from consumers, constantly improvement is important for producers within SFSCs.

6.3.2 The element cost

The identified elements to attract consumers is *providing the consumer with information about the product* as well as *set an appropriate price*. From the findings of this study, the respondents mentioned the importance of making the consumers' aware by using social medias, website and information about the product as well as a list of contents. This provides the consumer with enough information and increase the transparency. Further, the respondents state it is a challenge to inform the consumer by provide correct and appropriate information that convince the consumers to purchase the product.

According to Belz and Peattie (2012) making the consumer aware about the total costs as well providing the consumer with product-specific information is important. This thesis shows that the respondents communicates product-specific information through social media and by phone calls as well as websites. To succeed with attract the consumers, the interpretation by the authors is about to provide both correct and appropriate information to inform the consumer. One observed challenge is both to reach the consumer and to make the information interesting, so the consumers attracts to it. This because it is a lot of information at the social media platforms that wants to draw the attention of consumers.

The findings indicate that producers use both value-based and cost-based price settings strategies. The findings pointed out that one way to set the price is done by consider the quality and the value of the ingredients. Another finding is a price setting approach that includes all the costs due to the production of the products. According to Belz and Peattie (2012) the price of a product is a tool in marketing that can influence the demand, but marketers of sustainable products, the consumers move beyond the price aspects. Our findings indicate this since several of our respondents mentioned that the price is not something that being questioned interpretation by the authors is that there are other values such as locally produced, direct contact and the knowledge about what products the consumers get, that are more appreciated at REKO-rings than the price.

6.3.3 The element communication

The identified elements to attract consumers is *generating awareness, informing, motivating and connecting*. The authors argue that these elements help the producer both to communicate, and to inform the consumers with interesting information that attract the consumers and makes them purchase their products. The first identified element is *generating awareness*. According to Belz and Peattie (2012) generating awareness is an element that involves making the consumer aware of the product. All the respondents mentioned that this is important to get the consumers' attention and connect with the consumers. The findings of this study indicate that one way to make the consumer aware, is by using different concepts, such as; (1) familiarly feeling, (2) "*only good stuff in the product*" and (3) selling a story including transparency and honesty. Common for the concept is that the respondents mentioned about creating a feeling or promoting something that the consumer can connect with. An interpretation by the authors is that when the producers uses this type of strategies it creates a recognition factor for the consumers and create a higher level of awareness.

The second identified element is *informing*. In the findings the authors see connections where each respondent uses social media to inform the consumers about their business. This confirms the literature by Belz and Peattie (2012) who states that informing is an element that includes the part of informing the consumer about the products. In this thesis the empirics and

the analysis highlights that the chosen pictures in the advertisement have an important role to play in the communication to the consumer. The respondents clarify that picture on animals are the most appreciated once, and often considers generating more sales. The findings also show that through using a strategy that stands out from the crowd by for example using pictures on happy cows. The authors argue that this can lead to a competitive advantage among producers within REKO.

The third identified element is *motivating*. According to Belz and Peattie (2012) motivating includes the part of motivating the consumers to purchase the product, which is confirmed by the respondents in this study. All of the respondent's stated that it is a supply of unique products, the quality and taste of the products that motivates consumer to purchase products within REKO. The authors argue that within SFSCs initiatives, the consumers are motivated to purchase products since consumers know what they buy. Hence, consumers purchase products they cannot buy at regular food stores as well benefit local producers.

The fourth identified element is *connecting*, which involves relationship-building and connecting with consumers (Belz & Peattie 2012). The findings of this study support Belz and Peattie (2012) definition, since the respondents mentioned several ways of how producers and consumers connect with each other. For instance, the respondents mentioned that they connect with consumers' face-to-face at pick-ups as well as communicating through social medias. All of the respondents pointed out that REKO-rings is a great network for connecting, since it is a large network with 10 000 members. It creates the opportunities to meet a large number of consumers' as well as connecting with other producers in the area. An interpretation by the authors is that initiatives within SFSCs such as REKO involves direct connection that makes it possible to create unique relationships between both the consumer and producer. Unique relationships are confirmed by the respondents through the notice if consumers that are coming back or not, as well as the respondents that refer to other producers as their work colleagues rather than their competitors.

6.3.4 The element convenience

The identified elements to attract consumers is *making the products as easily accessible as possible for the consumers*. Convenience is according to Belz and Peattie (2012) how the product meets consumers' needs as well are easily accessible, this is confirmed by the respondents that mentioned that REKO-JH is easy to find. The respondents' states that the location is appreciated by the members despite if first-time consumers can be a little confused. Further, the today's position of REKO-JH could also be more including for other consumers and producers, if it was positioned within the city center. The authors' interpretation about how to make REKO-rings more accessible, is that some consumers or producers will always need to compromise because everyone's needs cannot be met.

The empirics and the analysis indicate that information about REKO-ring is easy to find for consumers due to the use of Facebook. This supports the literature by Elghannam *et al.* (2017) who state that social media marketing can contribute to an increased level of sales and profits, especially for SFSC actors. An interpretation by the authors is that the members within REKO appreciate the use of Facebook since it is easy assessable tool. Further, this enable consumers to evaluate the different products that are sold from producers when it suits them. The authors argue that this can contribute to an increased level of sales for the producers. On the other hand, Facebook can occur as a barrier, since not all consumer has it. One interpretation by the authors is that by the use of communication through Facebook, it is

not considered as accessible for everyone since both producers and consumer that not have Facebook is not included.

6.4 Summary

To conclude the authors have identified several elements that producers use in order to attract consumers to purchase products within REKO-JH. The elements are presented as related to the theoretical framework in table 8. Furthermore, each of the elements represents different factors in order to create an attractive communication towards consumers.

Table 8: The identified elements in this study

SFSC	Network Theory	C1: Consumer Solution	C2: Cost	C3: Communication	C4: Convenience
Limited number of actors	Being active within the network	Knowing the consumers need and wants	Providing the consumer with information about the product	Generating awareness	Making the products as easily accessible as possible for the consumers
Direct relationships	Understand the network	Meet the consumers demand	Set an appropriate price	Informing	
Sustainability aspects	Interactions within REKO	Meeting the producers need		Motivating	
				Connecting	

Table 8 consist of six column's were each column main heading represent each part of this study's theoretical framework, in the following order; SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model. Under these headlines the identified elements are presented within each part of the theoretical framework. The SFSC elements are; (1) limited number of actors, (2) direct relationships, and (3) sustainability aspects. The Network theory elements are; (1) being active within the network; (2) understand the network, and (3) interactions within the network. The C1 (consumer solution) elements are; (1) knowing the consumer need and wants, (2) meet the consumer demand, and (3) meeting the producers need. The C2 (cost) elements are; (1) providing the consumer with information about the product and (2) set an appropriate price. The C3 (communication) elements are; (1) generating awareness, (2) informing, (3) motivating and (4) connecting. The C4 (convenience) element is; making the products as easily accessible as possible for the consumers. These elements are important for producers to implement in their communication strategies within SFSC initiatives in order to attract consumers.

6.5 Critical reflection

According to the authors there is always reason to reflect upon the findings, analysis and discussion of a study. The findings presents the different elements that provide understandings about how the producers communicate, especially when the producers perspective is considered through the theoretical framework used in this study. The authors have chosen theories that have enabled an analysis and discussion about SFSCs, the REKO network and how producers communicate to consumers. The authors have included REKO as a SFSC together with the network, as well as the producers perspectives.

According to Giampietri *et al.* (2016) the CAP support initiative within SFSCs and points out the needs for ways of tailoring communication and marketing strategies for both producers

and consumers. This study fills a gap in the current literature regarding how producers communicate and attract consumers to their products in a Swedish context. The interviews have provided deep insights from the producers' perspective on REKO-JH as an SFSC, on the network and how they communicate to consumers. The respondents have not provided insights about the consumers points of view. The REKO-JH have 180 producers and the respondents in this study were five, since all of the producers within REKO-JH use Facebook as the platform for information, communication and ordering, this can be generalized to other SFSCs, as well as other SMEs that wants to improve their communication strategies.

The study uses SFSC, Network theory and the 4Cs marketing model. In this area of subject's other theories could have been used in order to reach the aim. There are for example two suggestions for reflection on choice of theory. Firstly, Storytelling that according to Medina and Vu (2014) are described as a type of communication tool with the aim to provide understandable, interesting and memorable information, to the consumers (Pulizzi 2012). Secondly, Word-of-mouth that is a marketing strategy that occur when interaction between consumer leads to marketing for the company (Dellarocas 2003). Since the research question in this thesis is about identify elements that are important in order to create attractive communication strategy, Storytelling and Word-of-Mouth is not suitable since they mostly focus on the consumer point of view. The aim of the study had a producer perspective, hence the authors focusing on the perspective of the producers, and acknowledge valuable information. The producers have contributed with their experiences and perspectives on how they communicate within the network to their consumers. However, it would have been of interest to investigate the consumer's experience of the producer's choice of communication strategies.

In sum, this chapter presents and discuss the identified elements in this study and finish of with a critical reflection. The identified elements is further used in the next chapter in order addresses aim and presents the major conclusion drawn from this study.

7 Conclusions

The last chapter addresses the study's aim and presents the major findings of the study and ends with suggestions for future studies.

The aim of this study is to understand how producers communicate in a short food supply chain (SFSC) network. In order to fulfil this aim, the following question will be answered.

- What elements are perceived by producers within SFSC to attract consumers?

The findings of the study provide insights on which elements are perceived by producers in a SFSC such as REKO-ring to attract consumers. Within this study, all of the identified elements are found in the case companies, whereas some elements are seen by more case companies than others. According to the findings, it can be identified that some elements might have a greater influence on the companies' communication than others. Some of the most significant elements that was used by the respondents in this study is the following five elements, *direct relationship*, *being active within the network*, *consumers demand*, *generating awareness* and *informing*. Further, these elements are presented in line with the theoretical framework in this thesis; SFSC, Network theory and the 4C marketing model.

The first element *direct relationship* in the SFSC context of the study occurs in initiatives such as REKO-rings. The element enables closer connections with less intermediaries and direct relationships between producers and consumers. This creates opportunities for the producers to transfer embedded information with knowledge about their products and create trust and relations with the consumers within SFSCs.

The element *being active within the network* in Network theory occur through the producers' participation in activities, as well constantly work with information exchange to meet the consumer needs. Further the findings show that it is the REKO network that creates opportunities to communicate and interact by using social media, meeting consumers face-to-face as well as phone calls.

Consumers demand is an element in the 4C marketing model occur through listening to the consumers face-to-face or communicating questions at social media. This dialogue is important, since there are fast changes of demands and food trends, there are a need for constantly improvements. Furthermore, a balance between the consumers demands and the producers supply is important, as the producers should enjoy what they produce, and consumer should appreciate what they consume.

Generating awareness is an element in the 4Cs and occur by using different concepts, that involves for example a familiarly feeling, products with special ingredients or storytelling. Findings indicate that concepts are about promoting a feeling that the consumer can connect with, this can enable a higher level of awareness in order to attract consumers.

The fifth element is *informing*, in the 4Cs and occur by informing that picture on animals are the most appreciated once and often considers generating more sales. The findings highlight that the chosen pictures in the advertisement have an important role to play in the communication to the consumer.

To conclude, this thesis reveals that for the respondents, these elements are of great interest to the producers in order to communicate in a way that attract consumers. This study has strived to get a deeper understanding on how producers communicate with consumer in a SFSC. Furthermore, this study focused on the initiative within SFSCs and companies within REKO-JH. The authors argue that the findings of the study are not exclusive for initiatives within SFSCs. Hence, the findings can be used by actors within SFSCs initiatives as for example REKO-rings as well as for SMEs outside the SFSCs to improve their communication strategies. For example, in SMEs where the resources on marketing are limited, they can use the findings of this study. To finish, the study contributes to the academic research on SFSCs and the field of marketing theory within business administration.

7.1 Further studies

This study focused on the producer's point of view and to see REKO-rings as an SFSC. It would therefore be interesting to involve the consumers' insights and reactions to the producer communication strategies. Further topics within the REKO phenomenon could be to investigate different sustainability aspects, both from the producer and the consumers' points of view. Other interesting aspects could be to analyse the network further and the consumers' actual behaviour within this type of SFSC. Finally, an interesting topic would be to look into the question of how to reach other customer groups and reach more consumers.

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Personal communication

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Company A, member in REKO since 2018. | Phone interview, 2020-04-01 |
| Company B, member in REKO since 2019. | Phone interview, 2020-04-03 |
| Company C, member in REKO since start 2018. | Phone interview, 2020-04-09 |
| Company D, member in REKO since start 2018. | Phone interview, 2020-04-09 |
| Company E, member in REKO since start 2018. | Phone interview, 2020-04-14 |

Appendix 1: Interview guide

- Introduction to the study, aim, research question and the authors
- The study is done for a thesis that will be published
- Assurance about anonymity, all participants will be anonymized
- Consent and approval from the respondents are required for the material to be used (GDPR) as well as approval for sound recording the interview.

1. Background information:

- What types of products do you sell?
- How long have you been a member of REKO-JH and how did you get involved?
- How active are you in this REKO and do you participate in other similar initiatives?
- What goal and vision do you have with your participation?
- What kind of relation do you have with your consumers and has it changes since you become a member of REKO?
- How do you communicate with your consumer?
- Does it occur different values for the members within this REKO-ring?
 - If yes, what values can you identify for you as a producer and for the consumers through the reactions you have experienced from the consumers?

2. Themes and theories regarding the interview:

2.1 Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC), REKO as a SFSC

- Can you describe your supply chain and name the number of actors within the chain?
- What is sustainability for you and how do you integrate sustainability in your business?

2.2 Network theory

- How do you see REKO-rings as a network and do you interact within the network, how and with whom?
- Do you experience that any kind of values occur from these interactions?
 - If yes, what and how?
- How important is it to you to be active within this REKO network?

2.3 The 4C Marketing model

- Consumer solutions
 - Why do consumers choose to buy from your business?
 - Is it important for you to get to know the consumers' needs and wants?
 - If yes, how do you do this?
 - If no, why not?
 - What types of reactions do you meet from consumer? And what do you think about those?
- Costs
 - How do you make the consumer aware and provide enough information to get to the consumer to buy your products?
 - What type of reactions do you meet with regards to the cost?

- How do you set a price on your products and do you have a price setting approach?
- Is there something special you take into account when you are pricing your products?
- Communications
 - What type of communication strategy do you use?
 - How do you communicate within REKO-JH? Do you think of anything special when marketing your products?
 - What do you think motivates the consumers to purchase your products and how do you share information as well as getting the consumers aware of your products?
- Convenience
 - What reaction do you meet from the consumers with regards to the convenience?
 - Is REKO-ringen easy to find for the consumers?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why not?

3. General discussion

- Something that you want to add or discuss

Appendix 1: Intervjuguide

- Introduktion till studien, syftet, forskningsfråga och författarna.
- Undersökningen kommer att bli publicerad
- Alla deltagare kommer att vara anonyma
- Godkännande från respondenterna krävs för att materialet ska användas (GDPR), samt för inspelning av intervjun.

1. Bakgrundsinformation

- Vilken typ av produkter säljer ni?
- Hur länge har ni varit medlemmar i REKO-JH och hur kom det sig att ni blev medlemmar?
- Hur aktiva är ni i denna REKO-ring, och deltar ni i andra liknande initiativ?
- Vad har ni för mål och vision med erat deltagande?
- Har relationerna till er kunder utvecklats sedan ni blev medlemmar?
- Vilken typ av relationer har ni med era kunder och har dessa förändrats sedan ni blev medlemmar i REKO?
- Hur kommunicerar ni med era kunder?
- Uppstår det olika värden för medlemmarna i denna REKO-ring?
 - Om ja, vilka värden kan ni identifiera för er som producent och för konsumenterna genom de reaktioner ni har upplevt från konsumenterna?

2. Teman och Teorier kopplat till denna intervju

2.1 Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC), REKO as a SFSC (Kort livsmedelskedja), REKO-ringen ses i denna uppsats som en kort livsmedelskedja.

- Kan ni beskriva er distributionskedja och nämna antalet aktörer inom kedjan?
- Vad är hållbarhet för er och hur integrerar ni hållbarhet i er verksamhet?

2.2 Network theory (Nätverks teori)

- Hur ser ni på REKO som ett nätverk och interagerar ni inom nätverket, hur och med vilka?
- Upplever ni att några typer av värde uppstår genom dessa interaktioner?
 - Om ja, vad och hur?
- Hur viktigt är det för er att vara aktiva i detta REKO nätverket?

2.3 The 4C Marketing model (Hållbar marknadsföringsstrategi)

- Konsument lösningar
 - Varför tror ni era konsumenter väljer att köpa från er?
 - Är det viktigt för er att förstå konsumenternas behov och efterfrågan (needs and wants)
 - Om ja, hur gör ni detta?
 - Om nej, varför inte?
 - Vilka typer av reaktioner möter ni från era konsumenter? Vad tycker ni om dessa?
- Kostnader
 - Hur gör du konsumenten medveten och tillhandahåller tillräckligt mycket information för att konsumenten ska köpa era produkter?
 - Vilken typ av reaktioner möter du när det gäller kostnaden?

- Hur prissätter ni era produkter, har ni en prissättningsstrategi?
- Är det något speciellt som ni tar hänsyn till när ni prissätter era produkter?
- Kommunikation
 - Vilka typer av kommunikationsstrategier använder ni?
 - Hur kommunicerar ni inom REKO-JH? Tänker ni på något speciellt sätt när ni marknadsför era produkter?
 - Vad tror du motiverar konsumenterna att köpa dina produkter och hur delar du information för att få konsumenterna medvetna om dina produkter?
- Bekvämlighet (Conveniences)
 - Vilka reaktioner får ni från konsumenterna när det gäller tillgängligheten/bekvämligheten?
 - Är REKO-ringar lätt att hitta för konsumenterna?
 - Om ja, varför?
 - Om inte, varför inte?

3. Slutlig diskussion

- Är det något som du vill lägga till eller diskutera

Appendix 2: Written consent

Processing of personal data in independent projects

When you take part in the independent project Opportunities for REKO-rings, SLU will process your personal data. Consenting to this is voluntary, but if you do not consent to the processing of your personal data, the research cannot be conducted. The purpose of this form is to give you the information you need to decide whether or not to consent.

You can withdraw your consent at any time, and you do not have to justify this. SLU is responsible for the processing of your personal data. The SLU data protection officer can be contacted at dataskydd@slu.se or by phone, 018-67 20 90. Your contact for this project is: Filippa Isaksson, fiis0001@stud.slu.se and Marie Leijon Cedermarck, mece0001@stud.slu.se.

We will collect the following data about you: First- and last name, audio and text from the interview session and email address.

The purpose of processing of your personal data is for the SLU student to carry out their independent project using a scientifically correct method, thereby contributing to research within the field of marketing and marketing strategies within the context of REKO-rings.

You will find more information on how SLU processes personal data and about your rights as a data subject at www.slu.se/personal-data.

☐ I consent to SLU processing my personal data in the way described in this document. This includes any sensitive personal data, if such data is provided.

Signature

Place and date

Name in block letters