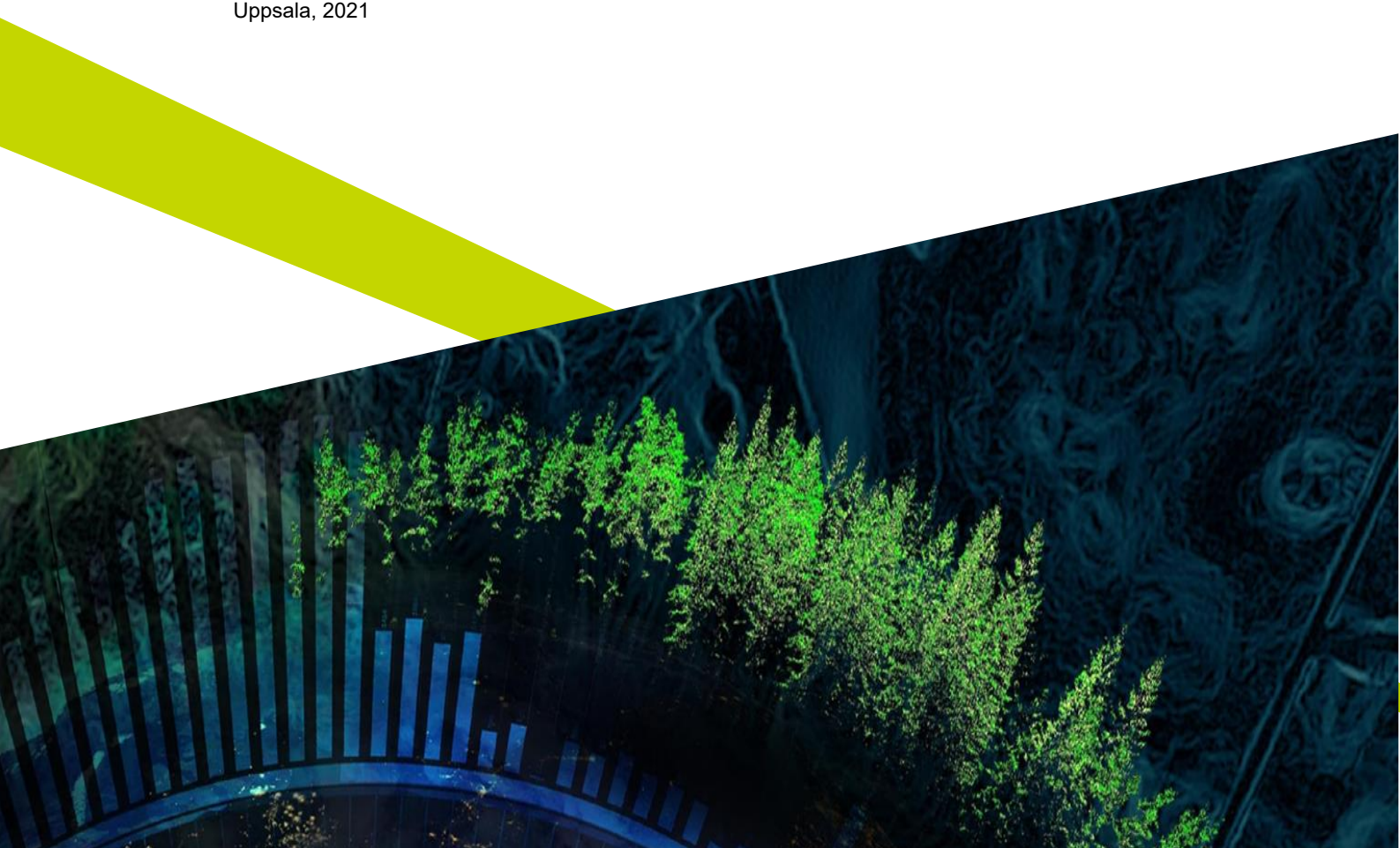# Choice Editing for Sustainable Development

– Consumer Attitudes Toward Food Retailers Limiting Food Choices

Andrea Biro and Emma Svensson

Choice Editing for Sustainable Development - Consumer Attitudes Toward Food Retailers Limiting Food Choices

Andrea Biro and Emma Svensson

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Department of Molecular Sciences

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Summary

Society is facing significant challenges in transforming to a sustainable food system where healthy food is provided, while reducing the negative environmental impact. Yet, it is debatable whose responsibility it is to provide healthy, environmentally friendly food from sustainable food systems. As food retailers have huge power through their supply and placement, it has been argued that they could steer consumers towards sustainable choices. Shifting from nudging- and sustainability marketing initiatives towards retail led in-store choice restrictions have therefore been suggested to enable a sustainable food system but has not been executed to great extent due to the fear of losing consumers.

The aim of the study was to explore consumer understandings of and attitudes towards retail led in-store choice restrictions aiming to reduce the negative environmental and health impacts from food consumption. This was assumed to provide insights regarding where the perceived burden of responsibility lies and in what ways food retailers could be a leverage point for shaping sustainable consumption. The study used a qualitative approach where four semi-structured individual interviews with Axfood, Coop, ICA and WWF as well as four semi-structured focus group interviews with consumers were conducted and continuously integrated with a literature review. A content analysis of the collected empirical data was conducted with the help of the theoretical framework following Kahneman's fast- and slow thinking systems, perceptions, the Functional Theory of Attitudes, nudging, choice editing and different types of paternalism.

The results indicated that consumers have diverse attitudes towards paternalistic measures. Food retailers' choice editing strategies aiming to reduce the negative environmental impacts from food consumption were highly encouraged and accepted due to a perceived collectivistic responsibility for maintaining our common earth. On the other hand, food retailers' choice restrictions aiming to reduce the negative health impacts met great disapprovals, due to health limitations being perceived as an insult towards consumers' individual body, identity and liberty. However, eliminations contributing to a greater overall health- and well-being was encouraged only if executed by legitimate and trusted authorities with reasonable, non-profitable driving forces where a democratic society was at the foundation. Choice editing is not an easy strategy for food retailers to apply as it interferes with consumers freedom of choice but is necessary as nudging and sustainability marketing are too soft strategies to steer consumer's often irrational decision-making and will not be enough for a global, sustainable transition. However, food retailers alone cannot bear the responsibility- or be the only leverage point as governmental measures are needed.

Keywords: *choice restrictions, environment, food retailer strategies, freedom of choice, health, paternalism, perceptions*

Sammanfattning

Samhället står inför betydande utmaningar när det gäller att omvandla till hållbara livsmedelssystem där hälsosam mat tillhandahålls, samtidigt som negativ miljöpåverkan minskar. Der är oklart vems ansvar det är att tillhandahålla hälsosam, miljövänlig mat från hållbara livsmedelssystem. Eftersom dagligvaruhandeln har enorm kraft genom sitt utbud och placering, har det hävdats att de skulle kunna styra konsumenterna mot hållbara val. Att skifta fokus från nudging- och hållbarhetsmarknadsföring till att dagligvaruhandeln införde val-begränsningar i butik har därför presenterats för att möjliggöra ett hållbart livsmedelssystem, men har inte genomförts i större utsträckning på grund av rädslan att förlora konsumenter.

Syftet med denna studie var att förklara konsumenternas uppfattning om detaljhandelsledda konsumtionsval i butik i syfte att minska de negativa miljö- och hälsoeffekterna av livsmedelskonsumtion. Detta antogs ge insikter om var den upplevda ansvarsbördan låg och på vilka sätt dagligvaruhandeln kan vara en hävstång för att utforma hållbar konsumtion. Studien följde ett kvalitativt tillvägagångssätt där fyra semistrukturerade, individuella intervjuer med representanter från Axfood, Coop, ICA och WWF samt fyra semistrukturerade fokusgruppsintervjuer med konsumenter. De empiriska studierna genomfördes och integrerades kontinuerligt med en litteraturöversikt. En innehållsanalys av den insamlade empiriska datan genomfördes med hjälp av det teoretiska ramverket; Kahnemans snabba och långsamma tänkande, uppfattningar, funktionell teori om attityder, nudging, valredigering och olika typer av paternalism.

Resultaten visade att konsumenterna har olika attityder till paternalistiska åtgärder. Dagligvaruhandelns valredigeringsstrategier som syftar till att minska negativ miljöpåverkan från livsmedelskonsumtion uppmuntrades och accepteras på grund av ett kollektivistiskt ansvar för att upprätthålla vår gemensamma jord. Å andra sidan mötte dagligvaruhandelns valredigeringsstrategier som syftar till att minska de negativa hälsoeffekterna stort motstånd, då begränsningar som rör den individuella hälsan anses vara en kränkning mot konsumentens kropp, identitet och frihet. Elimineringar som bidrog till förbättrad hälsa och ett ökat välbefinnande uppmuntrades endast om de utfördes av en legitim och betrodd stat med rimliga, icke-lönsamma drivkrafter där ett demokratiskt samhälle fortfarande bestod. Slutsatsen var att valredigering inte är en lätt strategi för dagligvaruhandeln att tillämpa eftersom det stör konsumenternas valfrihet, men är nödvändig eftersom nudging och hållbarhetsmarknadsföring är för mjuka strategier för att styra konsumentens ofta irrationella beslutsfattande och kommer inte att räcka för en global, hållbar övergång. Dagligvaruhandeln kan dock inte ensam bära ansvaret då statliga åtgärder också behövs.

Nyckelord: dagligvaruhandelns strategier, hälsa, miljö, valfrihet, valredigering, paternalism, uppfattningar

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Abbreviations

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
SLU	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
TNC	Transnational Corporations
WWF	World Wildlife Fund for Nature

1 Introduction

Society is facing significant challenges in transforming to a sustainable food system where healthy food is provided, while reducing the negative environmental impact from food consumption (Willet *et al.*, 2019). However, nutritious food is inaccurately distributed as approximately 820 million people are suffering from insufficient access to food and micronutrient deficiencies, while others are indulging unhealthy food causing diet-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes (FAO, 2019; Willet *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, healthy diets where an increased intake of seafood, fruit, vegetables and legumes are required, while shifting from greenhouse gas intense products such as meat and dairy (Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Moberg *et al.*, 2020; United Nations, 2020; Willet *et al.,* 2019). Greenhouse gas intense products, together with other factors within the food industry, cause roughly 25 percent of the CO_2e emissions (Gordon *et al.,* 2017). This means that the food industry is putting an unsustainable pressure on the planetary boundaries where four out of nine, including climate change, biodiversity loss, land-system change and altered biogeochemical cycles, have already been exceeded (Gordon *et al.,* 2017; Willet *et al.,* 2019). Climate change, especially, has been acknowledged as one of the crucial threats to the environment, humankind and the economy (Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). Humanity is therefore urgently calling for sustainable development to meet *"the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"* (Brundtland, 1987:41).

1.1 Problem Background

Researchers are in consensus that progress towards sustainable development will demand a tremendous consumption shift (Schill *et al.,* 2019; Willet *et al.,* 2019). Yet, it is debatable whose responsibility it is to provide healthy, environmentally friendly food from sustainable food systems. Folke *et al.* (2019) claim that a few transnational corporations (**TNC**) have a considerable force in shaping an intertwined global system which could accelerate sustainable efforts combined with public policies and government regulations. Clapp (2016) further visualizes the food system as an hourglass where there are a vast amount of producers at one end and various consumers at the other, but only a small group of dominating retailers

in the middle deciding which foods end up on the shelves. This means that food retailers are both influencers and contributors to current sustainability challenges. In regard to Sweden, this implies that Axfood, Coop and ICA who are covering 86 percent of the Swedish food retail market (Adamsson *et al.*, 2018) are powerful players in enabling a sustainable food system (Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). It is thereby suggested to focus on mobilizing these key players to become stewards of the transformation and direct policy instruments towards them as they have the greatest opportunity to influence what consumers eat (Gordon *et al.*, 2017; Röös *et al.*, 2020).

As food retailers have a huge power position through their supply, placement and market shares it has been argued that they could steer consumers towards sustainable choices (Stigzelius, 2017; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). This has for example reinforced the importance of food retailers' so-called Corporate Social Responsibility (**CSR**), referring to their voluntary but equal responsibility to economic, social, and environmental concerns (Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007). Moreover, advocating sustainability marketing strategies to foster sustainable consumption have been emphasized (Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). Also, food retailers have continuously focused on nudging as a strategy to push consumers towards making better choices while retaining their free will (Hansen, 2016; Lehner *et al.*, 2016). This strategy has however been criticised as only leading to short-term improvements and will, without complementary regulations, take too long to obtain a global sustainable food consumption pattern (Alberto & Salazar, 2012; Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Marteaur *et al.*, 2011; Stigzelius, 2017).

Except CSR policies, sustainability marketing and nudging, another more radical method to ensure consumers make the best choices possible is the so-called *choice editing* strategy. This strategy refers to food retailers phasing out products that are connected to environmental, social, health and ethical problems (Thaler & Sunstein, 2003). Food retailers however seem reluctant in influencing consumer choices too much as:

"*it is consumers' demand that guide their decisions and they [only] provide alternatives.*" (Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015:135)

This argument is wrongly based on the assumption that customers are well informed and understand what is best for them and future generations (Stigzelius, 2017; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). The assumption that consumers should be free from restrictions when making choices could for example be founded on the perception that consumers are good at it, but this statement has little empirical support (*ibid*). Research has, in contrast, stated that consumers neither possess all information nor

the cognitive ability to make optimal choices as life involves complex decision-making mechanisms (Kahneman, 2011).

1.2 Problem Statement

Consumers are assumed not to be enough to lead a sustainable transformation, which means that policy instruments need to be directed towards the food retailers, the authorities as well as other actors instead (Röös *et al.,* 2020). However, which policy instruments that should be included and which can balance conflicting objectives whilst receiving acceptance from the public have been questioned (Röös *et al.,* 2020). Moreover, research questions how progressive food retailers strategies can be and to what extent for example environmental visions can be translated into real actions (Gunn & Mont, 2014; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). In this context, using choice editing as a strategy has been stated as controversial as it interferes with consumers liberty and questions who should be the final decision maker of what can be purchased (Gunn & Mont, 2014). However, as previous research has continuously focused on actual consumer behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), there seems to be a knowledge gap of consumer attitudes and perceptions towards food retailers' editing the supply. Also, where the burden of responsibility lies and why some choice restrictions receive acceptance and others aversion have not been subject to thorough research (Alfnes, 2017; Dixon & Banwell, 2012; Gunn & Mont, 2014).

1.3 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study was to describe consumer understandings and attitudes towards retail led in-store choice restrictions aiming to reduce the negative environmental and health impacts from food consumption. This was assumed to provide insights regarding where the perceived burden of responsibility resided and in what ways food retailers were a leverage point for shaping sustainable consumption. To achieve the aim, the following research questions were identified:

1. *What attitudes and perceptions exist among consumers towards food retailers limiting consumers' freedom of choice?*
2. *What determines that some choice restrictions receive consumer support- and acceptance, while others are met with aversion?*

1.4 Delimitations

Regarding methodological and empirical delimitations, the study has only conducted four qualitative, semi-structured individual interviews and five semi-structured focus group interviews with consumers, where one was a pilot focus group interview. Through a convenient selection, the study gathered consumers aged 20-60, meaning that consumers outside this age span were not included. People with various backgrounds have been involved but consisted of only Swedish speaking consumers. The study included The World Wildlife Fund for Nature (**WWF**) and the three biggest Swedish food retailers (Axfood, Coop and ICA) which are participating in Hållbar Livsmedelskedja (**Sustainable Supply Chain for Food**) as these are covering a majority of the Swedish food retail market. Neither farmers, producers, restaurants or other actors within the food chain have been heard, nor has other Swedish food retailers or international ones been accounted for.

The study has, in regard to its theoretical framework and interdisciplinary literature review, focused on consumer perceptions and attitudes, but not their actual behaviour. The theoretical part included several forms of paternalism to give the reader a broad background of the concept. However, in the study's analytical section, only a few of them were used as there were only some that were exemplified and of relevance.

1.5 Outline

The following section intends to provide the reader with an overview of the structural framework the study has followed, which is illustrated in Figure 1.
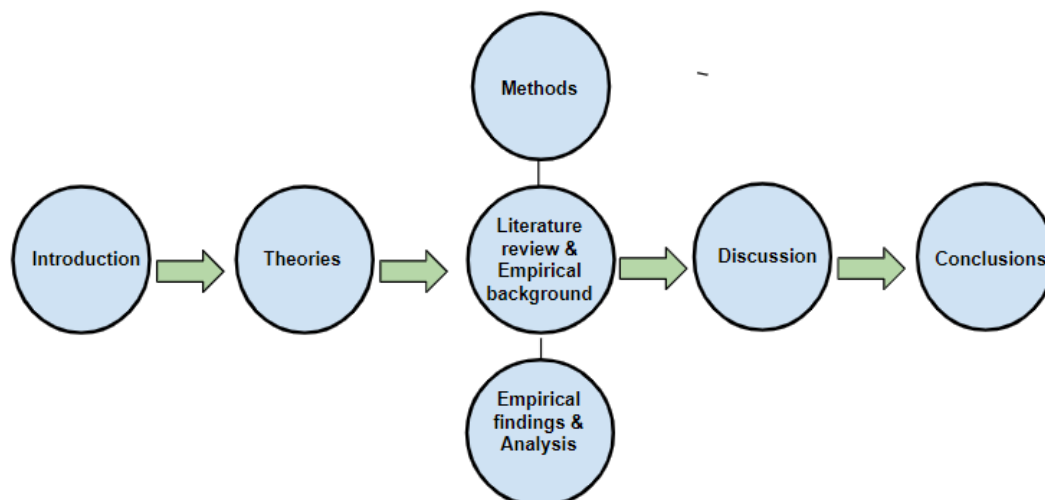
Figure 1. Illustration of the structural framework the study has followed.

The study begins with chapter one which is presenting the topic, the background, problem, the aim and accompanying research questions. Chapter two presents the theoretical framework. Chapter three displays the methodological procedures, the analytical techniques and ends with ethical- and critical reflections. Chapter four presents the literature review and empirical background, as the continuous research process has been based on a literature review to obtain an understanding of the problem and how it has been methodologically studied before. This is followed by chapter five, which presents the empirical findings and analysis, which is where the research questions stated in chapter one are addressed by analysing the empirical results in relation to the theoretical framework. Chapter six, the discussion, puts the analysis in further connection to earlier studies presented in chapter four. Finally, chapter seven addresses the aim and research questions presented in chapter one by displaying what the study has shown and what conclusions that has been made as well as gives suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework

The following chapter explains the theoretical framework used for analysing the empirical material. The section begins with Kahneman's fast- and slow thinking systems, 'perceptions' as well as 'The Functional Theory of Attitudes' to explain how consumers are reasoning towards different types of choice editing strategies. Thereafter, retail strategies impacting consumer choice such as nudging, choice editing and ethical sourcing are explained, followed by different types of paternalism. The chapter ends by visualising how these theories are combined in a conceptual framework.

2.1 Fast Versus Slow Thinking and Perceptions

To describe consumer understandings of- and attitudes towards retail led in-store choice restrictions, there is a need to explain Kahneman's fast and slow thinking systems as well as perceptions.

Firstly, Kahneman's main thesis is that there is a dichotomy of people's thoughts and that the brain has two operating systems (Kahneman, 2011). Kahneman (2011) explains that people do not always act in rational and economic manners, as life involves complex decision-making mechanisms and people's cognitive ability is restricted. The first "fast" thinking system implies that one's mind is automatically steered, intuitive and that the decision-making is to a large extent unconscious. The second "slow" thinking system is in comparison rather intentional, decisions are made of effort, reflective and where one is consciously making sense of the world (Kahneman, 2011). Consumers often associate themselves with the second system, in other words, as a conscious and reflective individual who makes active choices based on their values and judgments. According to Kahneman (2011), this is however rarely the case, as the primary source influencing one's decision making is the first system stemming from emotions and experiences. As food retailers influence consumers purchasing- and decision making patterns, it can be assumed that it affects consumers' thinking schemes and how they reason towards food retailers limiting their decision-making.

Secondly, this can be compared to perceptions as Kahneman's thinking- and decision making scheme is what shapes perceptions (Kahneman, 2011). *Perception* is described as one's subjective recognition, previous experiences as well as a one's reaction to a stimulus which is based on one's needs, expectations and values. All three factors determine one's interpretation of information and decision making

(Subramaniam *et al.,* 2014; Williams, 2014). Consumers being exposed to the same stimulus can in other words result in different perceptions and decisions, meaning that perceptions need to be understood as a highly individual process.

2.2 The Functional Theory of Attitudes

To further describe consumer attitudes and how they are reasoning about different types of choice editing strategies aiming to reduce the negative environmental and health impacts from food consumption, there is a need to explain 'attitudes'. An *attitude* can be defined as a:

"psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of degree of favour or disfavour" (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993:1)

In other words, attitudes are about what thoughts, opinions and feelings one has to something and are expressed through what degree one thinks something is positive or negative. Attitudes follow what one has registered, meaning that everything a person is able to evaluate is also possible to have an attitude against: it is a so-called attitude object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) mean that one can both have an attitude towards specific objects, such as a table or a building, but also towards more abstract objects such as socialism.

An important part in understanding attitudes is to answer why one is having a certain attitude and its function (Katz, 1960). Katz (1960) explains the *'Functional Theory of Attitudes'* by suggesting that attitudes are based on four different functions: knowledge, utilitarian, value-expressive and ego-defensive. The first attitude function, *knowledge*, helps consumers with the decision-making process as it is simply based on what the consumer already knows about a specific product (Katz, 1960). One study by Onel and Mukherjees (2016) did for example show that consumers' attitudes towards scientific facts were having a direct influence on knowledge regarding the environment. This subjectively formed perceptions of environmental issues and the willingness to pay for the environment (*ibid.*). In regard to health, it has been found that knowledge often includes misconceptions about nutrition and what 'healthy' food is (Dickson-Spillmann, 2011; Lusk, 2019). However, knowledge as a function of attitude is simply expressed through actions where consumers actively seek information to know- and understand the world they are living in (Katz, 1960).

The second attitude function, the *utilitarian* one, is focused on rewards and punishments which means that consumers establish positive- or negative attitudes depending on how much happiness or discomfort a certain product can offer (Katz,

1960). This is expressed through decision-making of what is assumed to give the greatest amount of satisfaction and well-being for all (*ibid.*). For example, consumers do not only perceive environmental benefits of a product as an utilitarian aspect (Steinhart *et al.,* 2013), but do also see a utilitarian value in buying or eating healthy food (Yoo, 2020) even if it may come with a discomforting, expensive price.

The third attitude function is the *value-expressive* one, which simply enables individuals to express their fundamental, personal values and morals which later reflects their decision making (Katz, 1960). This can for example mean that a consumer who values high animal-welfare standards, environmental sustainability and personal health may only buy animal-friendly products to support one's self-image, values and not cause a moral dilemma (Lin-Schilstra & Fischer, 2020), or simply not buy animal-products at all.

The fourth attitude function is the *ego-defensive* one, which is used when wanting to justify something that one knows is bad but where facts are disregarded and purchases still occur (Katz, 1960). The attitude is similar to cognitive dissonance as it could be expressed as a defence mechanism where consumers' choices contradict with values and beliefs by overlooking unpleasant realities (Festinger, 1962). The attitude could for example be demonstrated through a consumer buying cigarettes when knowing smoking is bad for their health or traveling by airplane while it is considered climate damaging. This could also be expressed through ignorance and criticizing others while justifying their own actions with doubt and lack of knowledge (Cocolas *et al.,* 2020). Lastly, the Functional Theory of Attitudes imply that attitudes are central and highly important for an individual's psychological function regardless how accurate the attitude may be and can therefore be argued to be a powerful tool for advertising, decision-making and policy measures (Lutz, 1978).

2.3 Strategies Impacting Consumer Choice

Food retailers have a long history in applying all sorts of strategies, such as nudging and choice editing, to inform, influence and manipulate consumer attitudes and purchasing patterns (Gunn & Mon, 2014). Barnhill (2014) explains manipulation as an unethical, intentional act of influencing another person's values, beliefs and attitudes by perverting the choice to meet the self-interest of the influencer, for example by changing the available options.

Influencing consumers towards certain decisions while retaining their free will is called *nudging* (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). This strategy has been criticized as a 'too

soft' measure as it will take too long to achieve the desired result of a global, sustainable food consumption (Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Marteaur, *et al.,* 2011; Stigzelius, 2017). In comparison to nudging, the strategy called *choice editing* refers to removing options connected to environmental, social, health or ethical concerns while improving the supply of sustainable products to ensure that consumers make the best choice possible (Gunn*,* 2011; Lindahl & Jonell, 2020). This could be explained as acts of food retailer's so-called *ethical sourcing,* where

"products sourced [...] meet specific environmental and social standards" (Roberts, 2003:1)

and simply proves that the business is managing environmental and social concerns in their supply network (Roberts, 2003), whilst suppliers not meeting these requirements might be sorted out. These strategies are all part of food retailer's product portfolio management, which is a set of gathered products or programs to assist the process of their combined management and specific business objectives (Costanza, *et al.,* 2000). Portfolio management also assists in strategic choices regarding the distribution of resources to the most suitable to avoid resource inefficiency or other market risk factors (*ibid.*).

2.4 Paternalism

Choice editing is a strategy which is already to some extent implemented by- and part of food retailers' corporate strategy to steer consumers towards a sustainable transition by making the decisions for them (Gunn & Mont, 2014). It is, however, controversially discussed how far the food retailers can push the boundaries of choice editing as it interferes with consumers' freedom of choice (*ibid.*). Choice editing could be argued as being a strategy grounded from *paternalistic* perspectives: a concept referring to actions that inhibits personal freedom or autonomy of an individual or society and which are intended to encourage the overall good or compelling against someone's wants, desires or values (Dworkin, 1972; Thaler & Sunstein, 2003). The etymology of paternalism is established in the Latin word *pater* and means 'father' as it represents the patriarchal and hierarchical societies where fathers and male figures were accountable for the welfare of their subordinates (Thompson, 2013).

For an action to be considered paternalistic, it needs to include three essential elements. Firstly, it should limit the rights or opportunity of a subject to choose freely. Secondly, it needs to be carried out without the consent of the subject or without advice and thirdly, it must be carried out with an advantageous intention of fostering the perceived benefit or well-being of the person (Dworkin, 1972; Thomas

& Buckmaster, 2010). In general, paternalism requires contrasting opinions between individual rights and authoritative social power, but questions related to paternalism can also involve for example human rights, social security, and the legal and socially legitimate means of satisfying those claims (Thompson, 2013).

Dworkin (1972) contrasts between different forms of paternalism, for example *hard or soft*, *moral or welfare, wide or narrow, pure or impure and libertarian paternalism,* which provide a broad background to the phenomenon. Advocator of *hard paternalism* are primarily concerned with the protection and health of the individual and would allow restrictions of freedom to avoid for example suicide or severe personal injury, even if the person is fully aware of the consequences of his/her action. On the other hand, an advocate of *soft paternalism* would mainly be involved with the individual's liberty. This means that restrictions of an individual's freedom are only justified to ascertain whether the person in question did choose to harm or put him/herself at risk with full desire and knowledge of the potential consequences. Soft paternalism would therefore not deny the freedom to inflict self-harm or even death if it were authentic (Dworkin, 1972; Thompson, 2013).

Furthermore, the concept of *moral paternalism* differs from *welfare paternalism*. When a paternalistic measure is performed to encourage a person's moral compass it is morally determined; in other words, an action that is morally wrong would also be restricted (Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010). When it is intended to improve health and well-being in terms of material or physiological benefits it is welfare motivated.

Moreover, *wide paternalism* would involve pressure from any source- or actor to limit or regulate a behaviour, including for example private institutions, societies and families, while *narrow paternalism* would only involve the authorities and legal coercion (Dworkin, 1972; Thompson, 2013).

Pure paternalism is when an interference is clearly directed to only a specific person or group of people, meaning that those are the only ones getting their freedom or autonomy limited (Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010). This meant, for example, that pure paternalism would include policies that aim to influence the choice of people to smoke, such as limiting the areas where smoking is legal. This would only affect smokers but not those not smoking. *Impure paternalism* does, on the other hand, intervene with the freedom of a wider group of people than only those primarily being protected (*ibid.*).

Lastly, the concept of *libertarian paternalism* arose as a new perspective to the phenomenon (Thaler & Sunstein, 2003). Rebonato offers an explicit definition of the concept as a:

"*...set of interventions aimed at overcoming the unavoidable cognitive biases and decisional inadequacies of an individual by exploiting them in such a way as to influence her decisions (in an easily reversible manner) towards choices that she herself would make if she had at her disposal unlimited time and information, and the analytic abilities of a rational decision-maker*" (2014:359).

Thaler and Sunstein (2003) argue that libertarian paternalism is both feasible and legitimate for the private and public sector to affect individual actions but at the same time upholding individual liberty. This could potentially be concluded as the golden mean for meeting the diverse consumer attitudes towards food retailers choice editings aiming to reduce the negative environmental and health impacts from food consumption.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework included several perspectives being linked to the empirical material, which is illustrated in Figure 2.
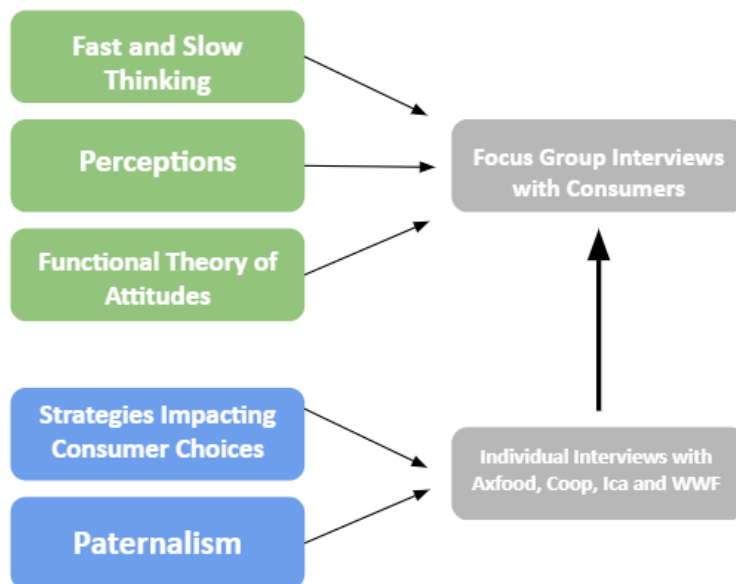
Figure 2. A conceptual framework for analysing the empirical material.

The conceptual framework provided a structure for how the empirical data was analysed and reflected in the five theoretical perspectives that were of explanatory value. To describe consumer understandings of and attitudes towards choices editing strategies aiming to reduce the negative environmental and health impacts from food consumption, there was a need to analyse the empirical material according to the concepts of Kahneman's fast and slow thinking systems, 'perceptions' and 'Functional Theory of Attitudes'. These were throughout the

analysis combined, where for example the consumers within the focus group interviews were asked questions regarding what perceptions and attitudes that occurred towards food retailers limiting their freedom of choice, as well as examples that could explain why some choice restrictions receive support and others aversion.

Furthermore, strategies impacting consumer choices and paternalism were also described and analysed in combination, and thoroughly used in the analysis. These concepts laid the foundation for the individual interview questions that Axfood, Coop, Ica and WWF were asked, where the answers framed- and served as continued themes for the focus group questions. Questions regarding who determines supply and whose responsibility it is to take these decisions were asked for, as it was assumed to provide valuable insights regarding where the perceived burden of responsibility lies for shaping a sustainable consumption.

3 Method

The following chapter accounts for the methodological procedures. The section begins with a description of the qualitative approach, the unit of analysis and the literature review. An explanation of the empirical data collection including semi-structured, individual- and focus group interviews are given, followed by the analytical techniques, quality assurance and ethical- and critical reflections.

3.1 Research Design

The study has used a qualitative research design which aimed to describe and reach an understanding of a specific phenomenon rather than quantifying data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). A qualitative approach is not based on finding an objective reality but is instead socially constructed and should be understood as highly subjective (Falkheimer, 2014; Robson & McCartan, 2016). A qualitative method was, therefore, a suitable method for describing consumer understandings of- and attitudes towards food retailer's choice editing strategies. Moreover, the study has neither used a deductive nor an inductive method, but an abductive one where theory, empirical material and analysis were adopted simultaneously and iteratively (Eksell & Thelander, 2014; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Yin, 2013). This meant that an understanding of the problem led to the development of theories, empirical insights and analytical efforts pointed to needs to reinterpret conceptual models and initial understandings of the problem. Hence, an abductive approach was suitable to cover the complexity of this research field.

Falkheimer (2014) implies that a study with a qualitative- and socially constructed perspective is based on an epistemology and ontology where the purpose is to understand different perceptions of one's subjective reality. Moreover, Yin (2013) explains that such a study needs to answer questions such as *how* and *why*. According to our study, we seeked to answer *how* consumers perceive choice editing strategies as well as *why* these perceptions and attitudes exist. It was also suitable for answering how consumers perceived the burden of responsibility and why some choice restrictions received acceptance and others aversion. This meant

that it was the actual context and those involved who provided holistic explanations to the phenomenon, which extends the reader's understanding (Merriam, 1994).

3.1.1 Unit of Analysis

In contrast to 'how' and 'why', there was also a need to answer 'what' and 'who' as these were fundamental elements when describing what was studied. This is, in other words, referred to as the unit of analysis and occurs as soon as one specifies the aim and research questions as these are interrelated to one another (Yin, 2013). Therefore, food retailers, WWF and primarily individual consumers were chosen as the unit of analysis and their understanding of and attitudes towards choice editing strategies being studied.

3.2 Literature Review

A literature review holds several motives (Given, 2008; Robson & McCartan, 2016), whereas our motives were aimed to describe and provide an understanding of a phenomenon and increase the quality of the analysis and conclusions. The research process was therefore based on a multidisciplinary and narrative literature review to obtain comprehensive and continuous understandings of the research area, relevant concepts, explore what is already known, how issues in this field have been methodologically studied as well as identify research gaps (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A literature review is thus a thorough search for multiple works of literature in a specific area which is then critically compiled. To find relevant literature, The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (**SLU**) library search service Primo was used alongside literature from previous courses and scientific articles found on Google Scholar and Web of Science. Specific keywords were sought after to sift relevant literature such as 'consumer perceptions', 'attitudes' and 'food retail strategies' together with 'food systems', 'responsibility', 'power to change', 'nudging', 'choice editing' and 'paternalism'. Further through the literature review were relevant and essential literature examined, as this helped in constructing a theoretical framework (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.3 Empirical Data Collection

The empirical material was collected by using several methods which, according to Heide and Simonsson (2014), provides a more holistic view of the research. This is illustrated in Figure 3.
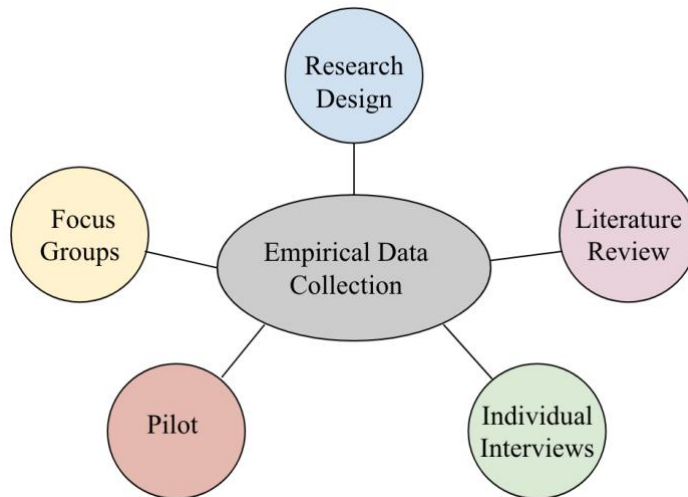
Figure 3. Illustration of the empirical data collection (based on Long Island University Post, 2020., "SAGE Research Methods: Home"; with minor modifications).

The empirical material was based on a qualitative research design, literature review, four individual interviews with food actors, a pilot and four focus groups interviews which all provided insights into the topic. The literature review provided comprehensive understandings of the research area, which framed the interview guide for the individual interviews. The individual interviews were expected to provide knowledge and examples of choice editing strategies used as part of a sustainable transition. The answers from the individual interviews thereafter framed fundamental themes for the pilot- and focus group questions, which made these empirical steps cohesive. It was thereafter primarily the focus group interviews that, together with the theoretical framework, served as the basis for the study's analysis.

3.3.1 Individual Interviews

On the 29th of September, three food retailers participating in Sustainable Supply Chain for Food and the coordinator of the initiative, WWF, were sent an email with a request of conducting an interview about consumer perceptions towards choice editing strategies, followed by an explanation of the study, the aim and how each actor could contribute with their expertise. The four interviews (Table 1) were conducted to grasp an extensive understanding of each actor's perspective, exemplify choice editing strategies, their view on whose responsibility it is to foster

sustainable consumption and which later framed themes for the focus groups interviews.

Table 1. Overview of the individual interviews with food retailers

Respondent	Role	Type	Interview date	Summary sent to interviewee	Validation
Anneli Bylund	Senior Sustainability Strategist at Coop	Zoom interview	08-10-20	23-11-20	25-11-20
Anna Richert	Senior Expert in Sustainable Food at WWF	Zoom interview	09-10-20	23-11-20	02-12-20
Anders Axelsson	Head of Sustainability at ICA	Zoom interview	09-10-20	23-11-20	25-11-20
Åsa Domeij	Head of Sustainability at Axfood	Phone interview	23-10-20	23-11-20	16-12-20

The individual interviews were following a semi-structured method to bring an understanding of the topic from the interviewee's perspective (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Such interviews follow an interview guide with a list of suggested questions within a specific theme but are open to flexibility, meaning that the interviewees could elaborate their answers as well as enabling the researchers to ask follow-up questions that were not thought of in advance (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Wibeck, 2010). When the actors approved being interviewed, they were, therefore, sent an interview guide with suggested questions in Swedish, which were later translated to English to enable an understanding for all potential readers (Appendix 1 and 2).

Only interviewing four actors in Sustainable Supply Chain for Food can be argued of not giving other actors a chance to present their perspectives. WWF and the three food actors were, however, strategically chosen as they were assumed to be of significance for the study (Falkheimer, 2014) due to their sustainability expertise and professions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and the interviewees have thereafter, in the analytical section, been referred to by last name and organisation to distinguish them from each other.

3.3.2 Focus Group Interviews

When the individual interviews were completed, they had framed themes for the semi-structured focus groups interviews. Semi-structured focus group interviews enable the researchers to gather a small number of people to discuss a predetermined topic together (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Wibeck, 2010). It is a

suitable method for bringing deeper understanding for a specific topic from an interviewee's perspective by examining opinions, attitudes, knowledge, perceptions, arguments and the interaction amongst the participants (*ibid.*). This explains why it was used for studying consumer understandings of and attitudes towards choice editing strategies.

Focus group interviews also follow an interview guide (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Wibeck, 2010), just like personal interviews. An interview guide was therefore developed and written in Swedish but later translated to English to enable an understanding for all potential readers (Appendix 3) and was based on the learnings from the individual interviews. The questions within the interview guide were also established in the theories to find recurring themes to enable comparisons and analysis. The guide included an introduction to the topic, followed by key questions focusing on consumer attitudes towards specific choice editing examples regarding non-environmentally friendly and unhealthy products. Lastly, some concluding questions were asked to sum up the interview and make sure nothing was missed. An overview of the focus group interviews are visualized in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of the focus group interviews, colour-coded for each group

Respondent	Role	Type	Date	Validation
Carolina, female, 20-30 yo	Professional	Zoom interview (PILOT)	09-11-20	Direct oral
Rebecca, female, 20-30 yo	Student	Zoom interview (PILOT)	09-11-20	Direct oral
Ebba, female, 20-30 yo	Student	Zoom interview (PILOT)	09-11-20	Direct oral
Diana, female, 20-30 yo	Student	Zoom interview (PILOT)	09-11-20	Direct oral
Anna, female, 46-60 yo	Professional	In person interview	10-11-20	Direct oral
Magnus, male, 46-60 yo	Professional	In person interview	10-11-20	Direct oral
Ivar, male, 20-30 yo	Student	In person interview	10-11-20	Direct oral
Petter, male, 31-45 yo	Professional	In person interview	10-11-20	Direct oral
Elvira, female, 20-30 yo	Student	In person interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Albert, male, 20-30 yo	Student	In person interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Jon, male, 31-45 yo	Student	In person interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Hedda, female, 20-30 yo	Student	In person interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Dennis, male, 20-30 yo	Professional	Zoom interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Hanna, female, 20-30 yo	Professional	Zoom interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Rebecka, female, 20-30 yo	Professional	Zoom interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Sofia, female, 20-30 yo	Professional	Zoom interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Max, male, 20-30 yo	Professional	Zoom interview	11-11-20	Direct oral
Paul, male, 20-30 yo	Student	Zoom interview	12-11-20	Direct oral
Robin, male, 31-45 yo	Professional	Zoom interview	12-11-20	Direct oral
Ina, female, 31-45 yo	Professional	Zoom interview	12-11-20	Direct oral
Matilda, female, 20-30 yo	Professional	Zoom interview	12-11-20	Direct oral

Before the focus group interviews took place, a pilot focus group interview with consumers was conducted to test the quality of the questions and to assure the right method was chosen. The pilot created a sense of the phenomenon, developed a vocabulary and prepared for the four focus group interviews. The pilot was not accounted for in the analysis, but the questions were slightly adjusted. After the pilot, the following four focus group interviews were conducted which is shown in

Table 2. These interviews served as the most essential, empirical part of this study to enable analysis and conclusions.

Wibeck (2010) states that a minimum of three focus groups are required and which should include four to six participants each to give a meaningful interaction and a varied number of inputs, which this study followed. To enhance a good discussion and broad range of perspectives, Wibeck (2010) also suggests a mix of consumers in terms of demographic factors, which was collected through a short survey before the interviews took place. The participants were therefore varying in gender, occupation, educational- and cultural background, lifestyles, interest in food and sustainability awareness, coming from different areas in Sweden and aged between 20-60.

The participants were a result of a convenience selection of the researchers' social circle and by using so-called referrals, which refers to contact recommendations. This evolved into a snowball selection, where the participants recruited others. Both Bryman (2011) and Wibeck (2010) suggest that these methods are suitable because of their easy availability, but risk creating too homogeneous groups. Wibeck (2010), however, states that intimacy and easement of exchanging information are easily achieved if the group is homogeneous. Therefore, as many of the participants knew each other, it contributed to a comfortable environment. The subject itself also included political undertones which is an argument for having homogeneous groups but where creative tensions are still allowed. Focus group interviews can, in contrast, evolve into a non-functioning group dynamic which might affect the answers. Wibeck (2010) explains that it is vital to reflect upon situations that can evolve and how the groups may function. The researchers, therefore, reflected upon potential interactions as each interviewee brought previous expectation and knowledge to the group which was estimated to affect the anticipated feeling of affinity within the group.

Lastly, the interviews needed to meet public health authorities' restrictions due to COVID-19. Two of the interviews were therefore held digitally, while the other two were held physically due to the interviewees willingness and approval to meet in person. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and the interviewees have, in the study's analytical section, been referred to by gender and age.

3.4 Content Analysis

Collecting empirical data and analysing it is often a simultaneous process (Eisenhardt, 1989). The data analysis was therefore done by listening to the recorded interviews several times, transcribing them and using a so-called thematic

content analysis. Such technique is used for categorizing data into key categories and several subcategories (Table 3) to identify patterns and linkages reflecting the aim and research questions (Given, 2008; Krippendorff, 2013; Wibeck, 2010).

Table 3. Overview of the content analysis key- and subcategories (based on Robson & McCartan, 2016:354; with minor modifications)

Key Categories	Rationality	Common Good	Individualistic	Trust	Power
Subcategories	Experiences Needs Knowledge	Collectivism Values Morals Ethics Environment	Free will Preferences Health Ignorance	Profit Moral Manipulation	Responsibility Democracy

As the study followed an abductive approach, an 'open coding' was applied. Open coding is a suitable technique when the researchers want to identify, compare and make connections between the empirical material and the chosen theories (Merriam, 1994). It is also suitable as the coded material will either strengthen or contradict (*ibid.*) understandings for consumer perceptions and attitudes towards choice editing strategies. The columns were thereby divided into two sections: key categories and subcategories to easily structure the content and assure the research questions were answered. This meant that quotes, descriptive information, recurring wordings and exemplifying situations which followed the selected theories, were systematically coded into the key- and subcategories as these would in an explorative and analytical manner show how the phenomenon could be further explained (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Merriam, 1994). The technique is applicable for finding both obvious- and 'between-the-line' wordings (Drisko & Maschi, 2015), which is why the analysis concentrated on the overall meaning and not single words.

Through the content analysis, five key themes/ categories and several subcategories were identified. The first key category was 'rationality' which was subcategorised into 'experiences', 'needs' and 'knowledge'. The second key category was 'common good' which was subcategorised into 'collectivism', 'values', 'morals', 'ethics' and 'environment'. The third key category was 'individualistic' which was subcategorised into 'free will', 'preferences', 'health' and 'ignorance'. The fourth key category was 'trust' which was subcategorised into 'profit', 'moral' and 'manipulation'. The fifth and last key category was 'power' which was subcategorised into 'responsibility' and 'democracy'. All themes helped in explaining consumer understandings of and attitudes towards choice editing, as well as why some choice restrictions received support and others aversion.

3.5 Quality Assurance

There are several aspects to reflect upon when ensuring the quality of a study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). To begin with is a qualitative study, in comparison to a quantitative one, not aimed at gaining validity, generalizability or reliability (*ibid.*). The research has instead focused on confirmability, credibility and transferability to ensure trustworthiness, which has been illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Techniques used for assuring quality of the study (based on Riege 2003:78-79; Robson & McCartan, 2016:170; with minor modifications)

design test	Examples of relevant techniques	Applied in this study
Construct Confirmability	Use several sources of evidence in data collection (triangulation) Pilot testing	Continuous literature review for multiple perspectives Individual interviews Pilot for focus group interviews to assure that the appropriate validation tool was used Focus group interviews
	Validation/ Third-party review of evidence	Interviews recorded and transcribed Transcript/ summary sent to the individual interviewees Direct oral validation to focus group participants
Credibility	Explanations through illustrations and tables Concepts and empirical findings are systematically linked	Illustrations and tables are used throughout the study The same frameworks are simultaneously applied and connected to all sources of data to enable analysis (appendix 1, 2 and 3)
Transferability	Compare empirical findings with literature in data analysis Define scope and delimitation	Abductive approach analysis constructed on theoretical framework Prearranged interview questions Specific system for coding and analysis
Methodology	Qualitative research design	Content analysis
Theory	Use multiple theories for various perspectives	Fast and Slow Thinking Perceptions 'The Functional Theory of Attitudes' Choice Editing + Paternalism
Trustworthiness	Several third-party observers in the study	Two authors interviewing and analysing data Supervisor, SLU + Beijer Institute Peer-review

The study used multiple sources of evidence to construct *confirmability*, such as literature review, individual interviews, pilot testing and focus group interviews. Confirmability refers to being able to confirm the results (Robson & McCartan,

2016), which is why all interviews were recorded, transcribed, analysed several times and validated through a written approval or via direct, oral confirmation during the interviews. To ensure *credibility,* referring to the data being believed in and trusted (Robson & McCartan, 2016), explanatory illustrations were thoroughly used. Also, identical frameworks for all interviews and simultaneously connected empirical findings to all sources of data via an abductive approach was used. The value of the results from the focus group interviews can be described in terms of *transferability* where the reader transverse the understandings to other suitable contexts (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Wibeck, 2010). Furthermore, all empirical material and analysis techniques are subjective, meaning that the researcher's choices are never neutral (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The fact that two researchers analysed the data, however, improved the *trustworthiness* (Given, 2008), as well as involving third-party observers to quality check the content and structure.

3.6 Ethical and Critical Considerations

When conducting semi-structured interviews, there are several ethical principles to reflect upon. Wibeck (2010) and Robson and McCartan (2016) highlight the importance of information, consent and confidentiality. During the interviews, all participants were therefore asked for the approval to record the interview and informed that the material would be transcribed and used for research purposes. The individual food retailers were also sent a General Data Protection Regulation form to assure their approval. All participants were told to keep all statements and information regarding the other participants closed, which Wibeck (2010) states is needed for the moderator to inform the interviewees about.

Moreover, the selection of participants can be questioned as several were close in age, but only two near 60 years old. However, as the purpose of the study was not to generalise the results to a bigger population, this was assumed to not affect the analysis. In addition to being close in age, were also some participants connected socially, which could have hindered them from expressing opposing views. Therefore, the role of being a moderator was strongly reflected upon. Both Wibeck (2010) and Robson and McCartan (2016) state that a moderator should throughout the interview show empathy and understanding but remain unbiased. There is, in other words, a potential risk that nodding, smiling or other encouraging acts would negatively affect the interview environment by showing what is socially acceptable, as such actions could make the participants repressive (Wibeck, 2010). Robson and McCartan (2016) therefore mean that the researcher needs to show self-awareness, receptivity and remain flexible throughout the process. The researchers had therefore, in advance, agreed on remaining unbiased but still encouraging all voices to be equally heard. In practical terms, every other time, one of the researchers was

the moderator and asked the interview questions. At the same time, the other researcher quietly wrote protocol with key concepts and thoughts appearing during the interview. The motivation for this constellation was to minimize talking at the same time and use the protocol to facilitate the analysis.

Lastly, Wibeck (2011) means that the physical interview environment is important to reflect upon as it should not involve too many distracting factors. As two of the interviews were conducted digitally, where the participants were in their natural, home environment, this could have been argued to make the participants more comfortable. Digital interviews are also beneficial as it is more time- and cost-effective, but not seeing each other in person can affect the interview negatively as non-verbal communication, nodding, smiles etcetera are easily missed (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This was managed by requiring all to have cameras on to enable a closer feeling of real interaction and where non-verbal cues could still be caught to some extent. There were, however, no clear distinctions in how the participants acted or behaved in comparison to the two physical interviews. This concluded that the participants had adapted to the digital environment due to the outbreak of COVID-19, meaning that focus group interviews could be equally executed regardless of its setting.

4 Literature Review and Empirical Background

The following chapter provides an overview of the continuous literature review displaying earlier studies as well as gives a broader empirical background. The section includes research regarding the emergence of ecological- and sustainability marketing, corporate social responsibility and reputation, followed by pro environmental consumers, the attitude behaviour gap, nudging and choice editing. Lastly, earlier research regarding attitudes towards paternalism is displayed.

4.1 The Emergence of Ecological- and Sustainability Marketing

One concept emphasising the collective responsibility of retailers is the emergence of ecological marketing. The concept was firstly introduced by Fisk (1974) and is defined as a marketing concept paying attention to the ecological crisis by emphasising the importance and necessity for marketers to take responsibility and stand accountable for it. The definition advises that ecological marketing mainly concerns environmental problems and is therefore primarily concentrated on producers' responsibility to become environmentally friendly, while it is not addressing unsustainable consumer demand and behaviour (Kumar *et al.,* 2012). The concept of ecological marketing raised specific concerns regarding environmental problems such as environmental degradation with pesticides and herbicides, energy consumption and air pollution and continued drawing public attention after several environmental and food safety incidents and crises such as the mad cow disease outbreak (Belz & Peattie, 2012; Codron *et al.,* 2006). Eventually, the environment became a competitive component. This led to the growth from a small niche market with environmentally friendly products to a significant, global demand for environmentally friendly products, where key retailers spotted the chance in this trend which gave further push to the development of the market (Codron *et al.,* 2006).

A reassessment of the issue later developed to Sustainability Marketing, which according to Belz and Peattie is defined as a concept aimed at:

"building and maintaining sustainable relationships with consumers, the social environment and the natural environment" (2012:31).

This meant that sustainability marketing, in contrast to ecological marketing, also included building, planning and controlling marketing resources which, in the long-term, will meet consumers' wants and needs while taking both social and environmental aspects into account as well as meeting business objectives (Belz & Peattie, 2012). In regard to the food system, sustainability marketing has taken place in various aspects where major encouragements in promoting consumers to shift food habits from greenhouse gas insensitive products, such as meat and dairy, towards a more vegetarian diet is at place (Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015).

4.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility and Reputation

Sustainability marketing is closely connected to a business's CSR, which is a concept that has gained general popularity in the last decade among politics and business (Belz and Peattie, 2012). CSR is described as an organization's voluntary but equal responsibility to economic, social and environmental concerns (Mark-Herbert & von Schantz, 2007), and which can further enable a co-existence between consumer demand, sustainability and businesses financial goals. The Report Sustainable Consumption Facts and Trends (WBCSD, 2008) emphasised the need for businesses to take the lead in fostering and developing sustainable, circular production and consumption patterns to address the social needs without risking the planetary boundaries. It has been stated that these ambitions will be achieved through careful environmental management and will thus create an increased competitiveness for businesses operating in accordance with it (WBCSD, 2008). Studies have also shown that consumers and other stakeholders rely on food retailers CSR work as a guarantee for taking their responsibilities, since food retailers are both influencers and contributors to today's many sustainability challenges (Mark-Herbert & von Schantzs, 2007; Roberts, 2003). In combination with an increased environmental awareness and green consumerism, Olsen *et al*. (2014) and Zhang and Bloemer (2008) stated that environmental conscious consumers positively perceive a brand if there is an alignment between the consumer's values and the business's CSR.

Moreover, Roberts has explained that a business's CSR work often include ethical sourcing as it guarantees:

"that the products sourced [...] meet specific environmental and social standards" (2003:1).

Ethical sourcing thereby proves that the business is managing environmental and social concerns in their supply network while removing such that do not meet specific standards, which reduces the risk of bad reputation (Roberts, 2003). A business reputation has been stated to be utmost important as it defines key stakeholder's attitudes, perceptions, expectations and opinions and can therefore be used as a strategic advantage or be highly destructive for the business itself (*ibid.*). If businesses meet their key stakeholder's demands and changing expectations continuously, they will maintain a good reputation. It has also been stated that consumers and other stakeholders are more prone to support a business decision, for example a new product introduction, if the business already has a good reputation (Roberts, 2003).

If a business makes the decision of not offering certain products, it can be perceived as taking its environmental- and societal responsibility, but also as failing in consumer service (Rotter *et al.,* 2012) and might lead to a decrease in economic growth. Research has therefore stated that CSR is often an area of uncertainty as it is questioned how a balance between economic, social and environmental objectives can be maintained, as trade-offs will always occur (Belz & Peattie, 2012). Also, Elkington's (1998) holistic concept of The Triple Bottom Line (**TBL**), referring to an equal management between economic growth, society and the environment, has been stated to be difficult to achieve as stakeholders value interests differently. The difficulties with a shared-resources-system is also referred to the concept "The Tragedy of the Commons", implying that some users will act rationally and utility-maximizing to their self-interest, which contradicts to the common good of the collective, by destroying the shared resource (Ostorm, 2008). In contrast, it has been argued that both economic, societal and environmental objectives could- and should be taken in equal deliberation when business decisions are being made as a that would help in applying a long-term approach, create competitive advantage as well as grasping stakeholders' intentions and targets (de Oliveira Neto *et al.,* 2018).

In alignment with CSR and the difficulties in reaching an equal deliberation of the TBL, it has been demonstrated that limited political and institutional regulations benefitting sustainable consumption might inhibit businesses from favouring sustainable market solutions (Belz & Peattie, 2012). It has also been identified that consumers are often critical of business's CSR actions and demand greater transparency through reports, labelling and certifications (Belz & Peattie, 2012; Roberts, 2003). This has been stated to be challenging if the business's performance is recognized as not being fully sustainable or if the product itself is more expensive

than others. Research has therefore shown that positive preferences for a business's CSR work does not necessarily mean an expanded willingness for consumers to pay a premium price for certain products (Belz & Peattie, 2012).

4.2 Pro Environmental Consumers

Previous studies have described that today's consumers are demanding more environmentally friendly and sustainable food products as a result of an increased awareness of the negative impact some products, services and choices have (Ottman, 2011; WBCSD, 2008). In combination with the media surveillance of environmental disasters, the recognition of several environmental damages appearing were a public fact and environmentally conscious consumers eventually grew and spread to all types of market (Roberts, 2003). The emergence of the environmentally conscious consumer was motivated by consumers' environmental concerns seeking to minimize their environmental footprint (Belz & Peattie, 2012; Moraes *et al.,* 2012), leading to a so-called pro environmental behaviour (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Consumers who are possessing a pro-environmental behaviour have been discussed as the solution to environmental problems by assuming that they, through their choices, would have the power to steer the market and production towards greater sustainability (Stigzelius, 2017). In addition, Moraes *et al.* explained the concept of ethical consumption as:

"a more encompassing term, which addresses consumption as a medium for political and moral action" (2012:104).

Moraes *et al.* (2012) and Carrington *et al.* (2010) stated that ethical consumers strive to communicate their values and, via ethical consumption and buying- or boycotting a certain product, feel a duty towards the society and environment. Several researchers are in consensus that an understanding of pro-environmental and ethical consumption is based on a variety of elements (Belz & Peattie, 2012; Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Kollmuss & Agyeman*,* 2002). This includes demographic factors such as gender, education and age; external factors such as culture, economic and social status; as well as internal factors such as attitudes, intentions, values, environmental knowledge, moral and ethics, feeling of responsibility, control *etcetera* (*ibid.*). In contrast, Kalnikatie *et al.* (2013) showed that consumers base their food choices on a restricted quantity of factors often based on price and health. This is an argument based on the economic man who assumes that consumers are making economically rational purchases, but which do not take the environment into account (Lindahl, 2015).

4.2.1 Consumers Are Not Enough

Research has shown that consumers' knowledge of the environmental impact from different food products is restricted (Lea & Worsley, 2008). Aligned is thereby the often occurring Attitude-Behaviour Gap, implying that consumers' intentions to make pro-environmental and ethical choices do not always correlate with the act of actually making sustainable purchases (Kollmus *et al.,* 2002). Kollmuss *et al.* (2002) implied that there are no definitive explanations why the gap occurs due to it being a consequence of a series of internal and external factors. Belz and Peattie (2012) did, on the other hand, intend that the gap can be minimized if consumers' willingness to change their behaviour for the common good is influenced by their beliefs in whether others will do likewise. Carrington *et al.* (2010) also stated that environmentally conscious and ethical consumers need to implement a more thorough plan of how their intentions- and attitudes can be translated into an actual act, as that would positively affect- and offer retailers valuable insights and strategic direction on how to minimize the gap.

Still, consumers have been described as passive and in need of guidance from food retailers to make sustainable choices as adopting a sustainable lifestyle involves complex decision-making processes (Kahneman, 2011; Young *et al*., 2010). Stordalen and Rockström (2020) thereby stressed the importance in establishing nutritional guidelines and labels where health and sustainability is closely integrated, in order for consumers to gain awareness of products origin, nutritional value and environmental impact. However, relying on consumers' choices have been stated to not be sufficient for a sustainable transformation (Kahneman, 2011; Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Marteau, 2011; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). This is due to earlier research implying that there are limited connections between environmentally conscious consumers as a driver for major environmental improvements. Where consumers lack knowledge and information of environmental challenges and which food choices that are advantageous in a sustainable level (*ibid.*). It has, instead, become more apparent that food retailers and politicians play a vital role in impacting consumers' decisions in regard to promoting sustainable and-/ or removing unsustainable products in the overall transition towards a more sustainable food system (Gunn & Mont, 2014; Röös *et al.,* 2020; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015).

4.3 Nudging

There are several examples of Swedish food retailers using different strategies to be able to follow sustainability trends as well as fostering sustainable consumption (Lindahl & Jonell, 2020). One strategy commonly used by today's food retailer's is nudging, which is described as:

"...any aspect of the choice architecture that alters consumer's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any option or significantly changing their economic incentives." (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008:8).

Nudges have encouraged policymakers to reflect upon reducing environmental impacts by changing consumer behaviour (Marteau *et al.,* 2011). It has thereby been practiced by business actors as well as governments, in terms of being a suitable marketing and policy tool for pushing towards sustainable options and a food consumption transition (Lehner *et al.,* 2016). The study showed that there is strong evidence and effectiveness when nudges are used to influence the physical environment, for example, changing portion and package sizes. Also, the effects of influencing on the default option and changing the setting of product choice, for example exposing a certain product more than others, advocated effectiveness but where sales have been the primary goal (*ibid.*). Research has further shown that consumers are, in many cases, unaware of the outcomes of changes in how the modified options consequence their actions, because nudges primarily focus on changing non-deliberative attributes of consumer actions (*ibid.*). Nudging has also been argued to be a relevant retail strategy when targeting consumers as it can be implemented without huge costs, compared to taxes and regulations (Lindahl & Jonell, 2020).

In contrast, studies argued that law, regulations and financial measures such as taxes or subsidies do not include nudging since it should not affect the consumers free choice (Hansen, 2016; Lehner *et al.,* 2016). Reisch and Sunstein (2016) implied that the public attitude will only be supportive towards nudging if it is promoting deliberation and consumers are still able to possess their freedom of choice. They expressed that the act of support is highly personal by exemplifying that the more empathetic a person is, the more likely he or she is to support nudging, versus a consumeristic person who is more likely to reject such marketing influence. Support and approval of nudging is more likely to be present if it concerns one's eating patterns and health, where the person behind the nudge is a person of trust, legitimacy and authority, preferably the government. This means that the approval is completely determined by the aim of the nudge and that it is implemented based on good intentions that are aligned with the public interest and not manipulative in any way - otherwise will the nudge only get the opposite effect (Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Reisch & Sunstein, 2016).

An example of nudging is Hemköps bonus system, being part of the Axfood family (Axfood, n/d), which was met with both encouragement and criticism (Onsäter, 2020). The system is providing a higher bonus to those purchasing vegetarian products, compared to those purchasing meat. The initiative was based on inspiring

and nudging consumers into more environmentally friendly choices, rather than stop selling meat entirely as that would risk losing consumers (Dahlberg, 2020). Hemköps Press Officer, Simone Margulies, emphasised consumers responsibility towards a sustainable food transition by expressing that the:

"...biggest challenge in terms of climate is to take care of food production and food consumption and we will not be able to do that ourselves, we need to involve the consumer" (Dahlberg, 2020).

On the other hand, research has stated it being difficult to involve consumers too much as they lack knowledge, information and do not always make rational choices that correlate with their intentions (Kahneman, 2011; Kollmus *et al.,* 2002; Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Marteau, 2011; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). Several researchers have also collectively criticized using nudging alone as a method for changing consumer's diets as it will, without complementary regulations, take too long to obtain a global sustainable food consumption pattern (Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Marteaur, *et al.,* 2011; Stigzelius, 2017). Lindahl and Jonell (2020) stated that nudging can potentially inhibit support for effective but more costly measures by indicating environmental problems can be managed without major costs. Nudging has therefore been stated to only cause short-term, superficial improvements (Alberto & Salazar, 2012).

4.4 Choice Editing

In contrast to nudging, research has argued that decision makers and key market actors should not wait for consumers to change attitudes to make well-informed decisions but work to immediately create conditions enabling sustainable consumption (Stigzelius, 2017). A limited amount of researcher have, however controversially, discussed so-called choice editing strategies which remove options connected to environmental, social, health or ethical concerns while improving the supply of sustainable products, but has been argued to interfere with consumers' freedom of making choice for themselves (Gunn, 2011; Lindahl & Jonell, 2020). Research has demonstrated that food retailers claim that consumer demand predetermines supply and the reason for not using choice editing strategies is due to the fear of losing consumers (Dahlberg, 2020; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). However, Lindahl and Jonell (2020) meant that a cross-industry agreement could have the capacity to develop joint restrictions on retailers' supply, whereas the competitive risks of losing consumers could be minimized. Roberts (2003) also highlighted that the idea of businesses working individualistically makes no sense as joint actions, universal codes and influence on the supply network would simultaneously and effectively change the system.

However, losing consumers have been shown only being an argument for food retailers to justify their actions by the assumption that consumers are informed and obtain knowledge to choose the right product based on environmental, socio-economical and ethical aspects better than a third party would (Thaler & Sunstein, 2003; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). Studies have also shown that choice-editing may be difficult to explain for retailers who compete in the market primarily based on price as focus lies within consumption and economic growth (Lehner *et al.,* 2013). Instead, it is more common for food retailers to broaden their selection of high-quality and for example expensive meat products as a strategy for increasing a sustainable supply without removals (Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015).

However, choice editing as a strategy has not been commonly put in practice by food retailers, as there are only a few examples of such complete supply-changes. One example is the Swedish food retailer Willys, which is part of the Axfood family (Axfood, n/d), that has marked 120 stores with Bra Miljöval. This is the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation's own eco-label, which is implying that the stores must have a large supply of eco-labelled and organic goods, as well as has stopped selling some products that are bad from an environmental point of view, for example endangered seafood (Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, 2014). Many of the Swedish food retailers have also chosen to only sell organic bananas, stopped selling giant prawns for a limited period as well as removed chlorine (Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Rotter *et al.,* 2012).

Moreover, one example of a cross-industry collaboration among Swedish food actors, which reinforces the ideas of working together without competitive risks argued by Lindahl and Jonell (2020) and Roberts (2003), is Sustainable Supply Chain for Food. The initiative began in 2015 as several leading food actors were missing a forum to jointly discuss and collaborate throughout the chain and its challenges without discussing markets- or prices. The initiative is led by WWF and is, as of today, consisting of 15 actors within the food chain. The idea is that no single actor can alone solve all sustainability issues, but can when in wide collaboration with other actors, reach the solutions required for a sustainable transition within the whole food industry (Sustainable Supply Chain for Food, 2019). The initiative states that one solution for creating a sustainable food system lies in changing what food retailers are offering and Sustainable Supply Chain for Food, has therefore developed an internal document called Sustainable Products. The document serves as guidance for creating a sustainable supply and provides measures for 'lifting the bottom' and 'growing the top', meaning to remove products with negative impact and increase what is already good (*ibid.*).

4.5 Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Limitations

As there seemed to be a knowledge gap of choice editing strategies, there is also limited research focusing on consumers' attitudes and perceptions towards food retailer's limitation policies and other public sustainability regulations affecting consumers free will. However, Alfnes' study (2017), which investigated attitudes towards retailers only selling sustainable seafood, showed that consumers are positive towards regulations and retail policies ensuring only sustainable seafood being sold. Additionally, Gunn and Mont's study showed that choice editing policies only meet the public's demand of what is acceptable, implying that:

"74 per cent of consumers agree that if fish like cod is endangered, it shouldn't be available to buy in supermarkets" (2014:468).

Acceptance towards policy instruments have therefore been stated to be a key aspect when implementing such measures (Röös *et al.,* 2020). This is due to it being an important principle in a democratic society as well as the difficulties in introducing such measures if their public opinion contradicts with it (*ibid.*). Furthermore, as long as food retailers show consumers transparency of why something has been removed it was implied that choice editing strategies will be effective and accepted (Gunn & Mont, 2014).

Research moreover showed that this was due to consumers interpreting the act as moral, ethical and a guarantee of a business's CSR profiling, and consumers are likely to support such businesses as they want to be associated with it (Alfnes, 2017; Roberts, 2003). On the other hand, Alfnes' study (2017) implied that consumers are used to high product variety and are comfortable when choosing stores, stating that sustainability store policies can also be met with less support. However, Roberts study (2003) stated that consumers have distinguishing interests in products and will therefore have different perceptions of the business's reputation. Roberts (2003) also implied that consumers are more likely to base their perception and attitudes towards a business based on their CSR-work, including for example responsibility for society and environmental impacts, rather than financial achievements.

Moreover, there is some research on choice editing done through paternalistic regulations. A study by Dieterle (2019) stated that paternalistic regulations are not justified nor supported if the purpose is to alter consumer behaviour and lifestyle, especially regarding consumers' health as not everyone shares what good health is. This was exemplified by stating that consumers thought it was unjustified to ban sodas, as it is up to each consumer to choose freely what- and how much sugary beverages to drink. On the other hand, authorities' regulations concerning how

"food is grown, processed, marketed, and sold" were justified as these practices could otherwise cause harm to consumers and the overall well-being (Dieterle, 2019:10). Well-being was in this matter stated to be a wider concept than health, implying that consumers need to shift their individual preferences to a wider context where social- and environmental issues are considered, which was why limiting food choices to some extent was encouraged (*ibid.*). Wald (2004) meant that the key to public health is connected to collective actions related to community trusting in its value, not changing the individual choices. Another study explored the acceptance of choice editing regarding health aspects in the United States, Australia, Canada, Mexico and the UK, where the results indicated proportional low acceptance level towards choice editing compared to subsidizing healthy food alternatives (Kwon *et al*, 2019).

Several studies however claimed that the overall modern political and philosophical debate regarding paternalism policies is viewed as highly controversial (Rebonato, 2014; Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010; Thompson, 2013). It has been stated that non-voluntary adjustment of behaviour is bad social engineering and manipulation, which may be detrimental to a democratic society (Brennan *et al.,* 2014). If a policy consists of paternalistic measures, it was therefore stated to be of importance to offer extensive justifications on why interference with personal liberty was executed (Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010). Lastly, Stordalen and Rockström (2020) stated that a huge institutional change is demanded referring to policies, laws and business operations which enable food that is both healthy and sustainable, as well as being affordable and available. This institutional change could, for example, include marketing-changes where food retailers are no longer allowed to promote unhealthy food products to young consumers (*ibid.*).

5 Empirical Findings and Analysis

This chapter addresses the research questions stated in chapter one by describing fundamental themes found in the empirical results, which were analysed according to the theories and conceptual framework described in chapter two. Focus has continuously lied on exploring what consumer perceptions and attitudes that were expressed and why, whilst including some supporting- or contradicting statements from the food retailers and WWF.

5.1 Focus Group Data

As mentioned in the methodological chapter, a short survey was conducted in order to gain background information about the focus groups participants. This is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Background information from the focus group survey

Food Preferences	Eat everything 7 participants	Flexiterian 7 participants	Vegan 2 participants	
How often do you consume meat?	**4-6 times/week** 2 participants	**2-3 times/ week** 3 participants	**1-3 times/ month** 6 participants	**Never/ Rarely** 5 participants
How often do you buy eco-labelled products if it is available?	**Very often** 2 participants	**Often** 12 participants	**Occasionally** 2 participants	**Never/ Rarely** 0 participants
Would you consider changing your food choices for the sake of the environment?	**Yes** 14 participants	**No** 0 participants	**Don't know/ no opinion** 2 participants	
Would you consider changing your food choices for the sake of your health?	**Yes** 15 participants	**No** 0 participants	**Don't know/ no opinion** 1 participant	

Table 5 shows that the participants possessed relatively much knowledge and personal engagement regarding health- and sustainability aspects. For example, half of the participants were flexitarians and two were vegans. This was also demonstrated as several of the participants seldomly or never consumed meat. The environmental awareness was explicitly shown as a majority purchased eco-labelled products when available. Lastly, almost all would consider changing their food choices for the sake of both the environment as well as their health.

5.2 Rationality Does Not Reflect Decision-Making

The participants acknowledged their lack of rationality and therefore had positive attitudes towards food retailers influencing consumers' decision-making by offering fewer but more sustainable options. This is aligned with Kahneman's (2011) first, intuitive and automatically steered system, as the participants explained automatically going to the food stores being nearest, most convenient and where they found it easy to orientate without further reflection. It was stated that price, the supply and hunger were intuitively steered, as the participants automatically chose what was cheap and available based on taste preference, whilst not reflecting on further differences between similar products. Moreover, the participants expressed neither having the energy, knowledge, nor the time to take health- and environmental issues into consideration, leading to the first, intuitive system easily dominating consumers decision-making (Kahneman, 2011).

The second, intentional and conscious system (Kahneman, 2011) was exemplified as the participants expressed that they reflected upon their moral right to purchase certain products they wanted, and intentionally bought quality- and eco-labelled coffee and grapes for example. Also, campaigns and bonus systems made the participants more conscious and analytical, as disadvantages and advantages in regard to price and quality were reflected upon before making a decision. Kahneman's second system (2011) was further demonstrated as the participants argued that the supply to some extent is consumer-driven, meaning that they knew they influenced the supply by actively deciding to buy a product or not.

Kahneman (2011) further suggests that consumers often believe their decision-making is based on the second, consciously steered system, which is however rarely the case. This was exemplified as the participants implied that they wanted to make conscious choices, but still do not always follow their intentions as life is hectic, full of temptations and they do not possess all the information needed, which leads them to make fast, automatic choices. An example of irrationalness was when a participant stated that he wanted to make rational, good choices but where he knew

his decision-makings were not always following his intentions, and explicitly stated that:

"*Yellow kiwi is my favourite fruit but it grows in New Zealand. If the food retailers removed it from their stores, I would be happy even though I bought it. Because if it is not there, then I cannot buy it.*" (pers. com., male 31 yo, 2020)

This exemplifies that the participant possessed information regarding the origin and the environmental effects due to the fruit being transported, which could be assumed leading him to make conscious choices. This is however not the case as the fruit is still available in store and thereby bought as the participant is unable to resist temptations such as taste. This demonstrates that consumers rationality is often lacking, leading to decisions being automatic and intuitive (Kahneman, 2011). Other participants were also conscious regarding certain products' negative health- and environmental impacts and understood that it came with a moral dilemma when making decisions. However, despite their awareness, they still struggled not to buy the product because it is often both cheaper and sometimes comes with a better taste compared to healthier and more environmentally friendly alternatives.

Due to consumers' not being able to always make what is assumed to be the best choice in regards to the environment and public health, the participants stated that they neither trusted the judgment of other consumers nor themselves to make rational choices. It was thereby ascertained that consumers alone will not be enough to lead the shift towards a sustainable food transition, which argues for food retailers to provide less but only sustainable alternatives as that would enable consumers to make optimal choices. As the participants acknowledged their irrationalness, they expressed a desire towards food retailers making these decisions for them by eliminating certain products. It was thereafter demonstrated that all participants embraced the idea of continuing shopping their food in the same store if it had removed all health- and environmentally damaging products even if it came with increased prices, as a majority valued time and good alternatives more than money. This confirms the general acceptance towards food retailers applying choice editing strategies to a greater extent.

5.2.1 Expectations and Needs Determining Decision-Making

It was demonstrated that potential supply limitations are perceived individually, as the participants had different food preferences. Perceptions refers to one's previous expectations, needs and values, and determines one's decision making (Subramaniam *et al.,* 2014; Williams, 2014). This was demonstrated as the participants shared the experience of food retailers having a standard supply of everything they needed. Therefore, their perceptions of food retailers were based

on what they had experienced being able to buy before, which determined their decision of continuing to go to that store. This enhanced the positive perception of food retailers offering what consumers are looking for.

However, if the supply would be limited, it was shown that it would interfere with some participants' experiences, needs and values. This was expressed as one participant wanted to eat meat every day as he was experiencing having a need for it, and therefore thought it should be offered. Choice editing might therefore be perceived negatively and cause consumers to go to another store where their experiences, needs and values are met and upheld. In contrast, neither the flexitarians nor the vegans shared the same need for consuming meat. They were instead basing their decision makings- and perception of food retailers in regard to experiencing a broad vegetarian supply as they had greater needs and values reflecting such choices. Subramaniam *et al.* (2014) and Williams (2014) simply state that consumers being exposed to the same stimulus can result in different perceptions and decisions as it is an individual process. It was therefore concluded that perceptions towards food retailers eliminating products are individually determined, as products and choice restrictions affect each consumer differently.

5.2.2 Knowledge Can Increase Rationality and Support Towards Choice Editing

Consumers who were knowledgeable regarding products that have a bad influence regarding the environment or health aspects also showed increased acceptance towards food retailers removing them. Except analysing consumers' often irrational decision-makings and their perceptions being based on experiences and needs, it was also needed to analyse consumer attitudes and reasonings about different types of choice editing strategies in connection to Katz (1960) Functional Theory of Attitude.

The first attitude function, knowledge (Katz, 1960), was exemplified as some participants had knowledge- and were aware that some kind of sourcing had taken place before a product ended up in store, but that it was difficult to acknowledge what the stores had refused beforehand. Some participants experienced having knowledge of what is bad for their health and the environment, which were based on personal interest, lifestyle, own research and education. The participants gave examples of yellow kiwis and avocados being bad for the environment due to long transports, as well as bananas being sprayed with pesticides. Having this knowledge helped them make conscious decisions as it was based on what they already knew about a product (Katz, 1960), which could be assumed reinforced Kahneman's (2011) system two: the intentional, conscious one. It was therefore concluded that consumers who possessed accurate knowledge of specific products and their

negative impact on health and the environment, also understood and showed positive attitudes towards food retailers eliminating such products. This would simply minimize the risk of less knowledgeable- or knowledgable but irrational consumers to buy them.

In addition, one participant believed there was a lack of knowledge regarding what healthy food is but stated that nutritious food does not have to be more expensive if one receives the right information. As an example, some participants experienced sugar to be complicated since they had difficulties with understanding how much sugar a product contains. This is aligned with Dickson-Spillmann (2011) and Lusks (2019) statement: that knowledge often includes misconceptions about nutrition and what "healthy" food is. It was therefore concluded that it might be consumers' lack of knowledge and understanding of why something needs to be removed that is disturbing their view on how the world should be maintained, and therefore negative attitudes towards elimination are expressed. This reinforces the importance of having the right information and knowledge before making a decision, as it could otherwise increase the risk of making bad choices.

In contrast, increased rational choices based on knowledge could be made if more science-based facts were provided beforehand. Onel and Mukherjee (2016) in fact imply that consumers' attitudes towards scientific facts have a direct influence on their knowledge regarding the environment. However, it might be unfair to put responsibility on individual consumers to find this information by themselves. According to the participants, food retailers must therefore provide this science-based information on why something needs to be removed and advice on what to purchase instead in a visible manner. Several participants moreover required QR-codes showing a product's journey, transparency as well as information, communication and education from independent experts to decrease potential profit interests from food retailers. Hence, it was concluded that such information would increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of why an elimination was executed and create positive attitudes towards food retailers applying choice editing strategies.

5.3 A Collectivistic Responsibility for The Planet

Attitudes towards food retailers editing the supply to only offering environmentally friendly alternatives involved acceptance and support. Positive attitudes are likely to appear if consumers follow Katz's (1960) second attitude function, the utilitarian one. The attitude function implies that consumers establish positive- or negative attitudes focused on how much happiness or discomfort something can offer (*ibid.*). This became apparent during the interviews as the participants thought choice

editing was an efficient, even fantastic, strategy to assure environmentally friendly choices. The participants expressed a desire towards having less but only sustainable, environmentally friendly alternatives since it would ease everyone's lives as it is difficult to make the best choices in regards to the environment. The participants simply stated that eliminations would be:

"*great if it is for environmental reasons. The earth would feel better and people too.*" (pers. com., female 57 yo, 2020).

"*I understand that the supply needs to be regulated for the common good and in order to not destroy the planet.*" (pers. com., male 30 yo, 2020)

In other words, is the collective mindset clearly connected to utilitarian attitudes, as they are expressed through what is assumed to give the greatest well-being for all (Katz, 1960). However, the expressed acceptance was also due to participants experiencing the environment as abstract where degradation due to personal choices is not directly visible here and now, but where one wants to do good for the planet and its people. The utilitarian perspective could therefore be assumed to be grounded on respect towards how individual actions affect others and the environment, even if it is difficult to grasp. Its maintenance must therefore involve collective responsibility.

Amongst the utilitarian attitudes, it was argued that a nutritious supply should be available for all, regardless of socio-economic class. In conjunction with Kahneman's (2011) first, automatic system, it means that consumers' decision-making of what is giving the greatest well-being is not always followed. Not only unhealthy- but also unsustainable products are sometimes cheaper than healthy, sustainable options, which could be an argument for saving money as that would create more well-being for one family. In contrast can other consumers easily prioritize and make conscious choices towards sustainable products without limiting the expense of something else. For that reason, it is difficult to explain what greatest well-being for all means as it will always involve distinguishing views.

What the participant implied was that keeping bad alternatives would only lead to dissatisfying ripple effects. For example, as food retailers are selling tobacco, products with added sugar and non-environmental options, they are causing less well-being, since it leads to increased societal costs, health issues and environmental degradation. The statement of causing negative environmental impacts as well as public health- and societal issues reinforces both Steinhart *et al*. (2013) and Yoo's (2020) explanation on consumers perceiving environmental benefits and healthy food as utilitarian aspects. This implies that eliminations and joint actions would contribute to a greater well-being, regardless individual-,

societal or planetary level and shape moral values on what should be offered and bought.

5.3.1 A Value Driven Responsibility

The utilitarian attitudes often go hand in hand with values, as they are fostered within one's identity of caring for the planet and those living on it. The collectivistic, utilitarian attitudes can therefore, especially when discussing moral values on what should be offered and not, be linked to Katz's (1960) third attitude function; the value-expressive one. This attitude function connects to consumers identity, personal values, morals and reflects their decision making (*ibid.*). For example, the participants were asked whether they thought it was a consumer's right to purchase which food they wanted. The participants were battling with their answers as they implied it being a civil right, but that it comes with a moral question as we are all part of a common society. The participants exemplified this by stating that if one knows that a product is bad for the environment, one should consider if it is morally correct to purchase it.

Others were strictly against the assumption that they have the right to purchase what they wanted, as they identified themselves as conscious, knowledgeable consumers in regard to what is bad for the environment. This was further aligned with them expressing value-driven attitudes towards animal-welfare, minimizing the carbon footprint and environmental sustainability and therefore did not consume meat for example. Purchases of such products would therefore contradict with their identity and moral values (Katz, 1960). The value-driven attitudes were specifically shown as the participants expressed a desire for limiting the supply to only include MSC-labelled fish and other eco-labelled products, which the participants implied often buying if it was available. One participant even stated that:

"In an ideal world, that is definitely what the supply should look like." (pers. com., female 57 yo, 2020)

The participants therefore expressed a desire towards food retailers offering more eco-labelled products as that was something they valued and they wanted to identify themselves with being a sustainable consumer, as such a supply was assumed to be beneficial on various levels. This reinforces Steinhart *et al.* (2013) explanation on environmental benefits being utilitarian as well as Katz (1960) statement on positive attitudes being created when well-being for all is strived for.

5.4 My Body, My Choice

Not all participants shared a utilitarian perspective regarding public health. They simply expressed not caring about others unhealthy eating habits as they thought health was an individual choice. They argued that it would be strange if food retailers interfered with individuals who wanted to destroy their own bodies, implying that the decision should therefore not lie in the hands of food retailers. The attitude can be referred to as the fourth attitude function; the ego-defensive one, where consumers often possess knowledge of something being bad but justify actions by ignorance or criticism of others (Cocolas *et al.*, 2020; Katz, 1960). This was exemplified as the participants understood that tobacco, sugar and processed meat were bad for their health but ignored facts by claiming their civil right to freely decide, purchase- and consume it as, for example:

"*It is man's free choice to eat unhealthily if he wants to.*" (pers. com., male 30 yo, 2020)

This goes in line with the participants constantly mentioning that they valued their health, but not in terms of 'being healthy' but rather to freely choose when to be 'unhealthy'. Particularly males expressed aversion by the thought of food retailers limiting health damaging products as they thought it would be fundamentally wrong to limit consumer's freedom of choice, and that their individual comfort and unhealthy habits were more valuable than saving the world. Being ego-defensive in this matter could be explained as health, in contrast to the environment, is experienced as something more tangible as one can easily see the consequences of unhealthy consumption, for example gaining weight. This implies that consumers, in a more direct way, believe that they are conscious enough to make such decisions themselves. Simply, if food retailers would limit the supply, it would only cause them discomfort (Katz, 1960) and interfere with individual liberty and responsibility for making their own decisions.

Additionally, several males continuously brought up food retailers' economic objectives as a defence mechanism for purchasing unhealthy food, implying that they are only a product of society. This could be argued as being signs of ignorance which may be a consequence of previous experiences, accustomed needs (Subramaniam *et al.*, 2014; Williams, 2014) and lack of knowledge, (Cocolas *et al.*, 2020) which determined their attitude towards elimination as negative. They have always consumed a certain item, they think they need it and they don't have the accurate knowledge of what to consume instead to ease their subjective needs. This contradicts Steinhart *et al.* (2013) explanation on environmental benefits and Yoo's (2020) statement on eating healthy as utilitarian aspects as not all consumers seem to value such collectivism or utilitarian standpoint. The fact that unhealthy products

could cause public health issues and societal costs was acknowledged but was argued that it would not affect others than oneself. Lastly, as most aversion was expressed by males, in comparison to all females agreeing on sacrificing individual rights for a greater good, it was concluded that male consumers were expressing more ego-defensive attitudes.

5.4.1 Justifying Supply

Being ego-defensive is also applicable to the food retailers, as they justify their supply by stating it being consumers' demand steering it. The food retailers stated that they do not want to decide what consumers are allowed to eat and not, and agreed that there was a concern towards upsetting and losing consumers if they limited the supply (pers. com., Axelsson; Bylund; Domeij, 2020). Incentives to make sustainable and healthy choices enjoyable and easily accessed such as nudging is therefore more frequently used, rather than complete removals (*ibid.*).

This does not necessarily mean that food retailers ignore facts or are criticizing others but could be interpreted as disregarding their influential power to foster a sustainable transition when covering 86 percent of the food sector (Adamsson *et al.,* 2018). Being ego-defensive in this context may therefore have severe effects as food retailers thereby force an even more competitive, capitalistic market. Having a product portfolio management that is dominantly steered towards financial benefits and not towards increased public health and global sustainability will only push the transition in the wrong direction. However, Axelsson, Bylund and Domeij (pers. com., 2020) stated that several sourcing routines are executed before a product ends up in stores, but these choices are not always visible or communicated to the consumers. Further communication on food retailers' choices is, again, required to enhance consumer understanding and knowledge.

5.5 Lack of Trust and Moral

Even if the participants showed strong support for choice editing aiming to reduce the negative environmental impact from food consumption, some repeatedly emphasized that food retailers are influencing consumers' choice in an unethical way to meet economic interests. They thought that potential elimination would only be made to control and steer consumers to purchase more of other products. Selling only healthy- and sustainable products was therefore perceived to be done out of financial reasons as it would increase prices, leading to economic gain for food retailers but exclude some consumers. It was thereby stated that support towards- and trust within food retailer's choice editing strategies would only happen if it was executed without profit interests, but that this will never happen as:

"We are living in a capitalistic society where the market is driven by revenue."
(pers. com., male 25 yo, 2020).

"Food retailers are deluding and manipulating consumers [but] if they embraced their power and worked together, they could create real change [...] but until that happens [...], I will have no confidence in food retailers." (pers. com., male 31 yo, 2020)

According to Barnhill (2014), this is what explains manipulation, as food retailers are intentionally influencing consumers' purchases to meet economic self-interests, which several of the consumers experienced. Also, as food retailers' product portfolio management is built upon strategic choices to meet business objectives (Costanza, *et al.,* 2000), it was expressed that making good choices for consumers was only deluding. The participants therefore said that they would not trust the reasons for why food retailers made choice restrictions, as it is a market mechanism governing where false marketing and greenwashing are obvious. Experiencing manipulation and lack of trust could therefore lie within food retailers spurring sales through unhealthy, unsustainable products, meaning that even if knowledge of what is bad is withheld, it is still sold due to economic growth being top priority.

The participants underlined that it would be great if food retailers took more responsibility as they possess a considerable power to affect both consumers and the authorities, but that it is not their responsibility to take a moral stand regarding individual health aspects. Furthermore, the participants implied that financial objectives and morals are not perceived to go together, which negatively impacted their trustworthiness towards food retailer's choice editing strategies. Thereby, it is questionable whether food retailers should be able to execute moral paternalism to encourage consumers' moral compass (Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010), when they are not perceived as moral actors themselves. As moral paternalism implies that actions that are morally wrong should be restricted (Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010), it could be argued that both non-environmentally friendly and unhealthy products should be removed as they are not morally defensible to sell while deluding consumers and destroying our common planet and public health. This means that food retailers in general must raise the threshold and jointly be responsible for removing bad products.

However, it may be difficult for food retailers to morally motivate why for example tobacco should be removed, while continuing selling sugar. On the other hand, one example that both consumers and food retailers agreed was morally wrong to sell was when a person behind a specific brand was being *"a sleazebag"* (pers. com., female 29 yo, 2020). Therefore, choice editing could be a moral act if it is jointly

executed and there is a mutual opinion supporting this decision, even if it may interfere with consumers free will. However, it implies that moral is subjective and thereby problematic as it may be morally right to remove what is being dangerous or inappropriate, but morally wrong to limit consumers freedom. This shows that there is an uncertainty in how far food retailers can take choice editing.

5.6 With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

When asking the interviewed consumers, the food retailers and WWF where the burden of responsibility to push a sustainable transition lied, all stated it being a shared responsibility. According to Thaler and Sunstein (2003), paternalism has great potential for both private actors as well as authorities to steer consumers decision-making, particularly when it is performed jointly by both actors. However, it is needed to reflect upon who has power in this context, where the WWF representative argued that:

"Big power factors are food retailers, public food and restaurants [...]. They have great responsibility and this is where a lot of the development needs to take place." (pers. com., Richert, 2020)

Food retailers specifically encompass huge power and thereby great responsibility, since there are only a small group of dominating actors deciding which foods end up on the shelves. This means that food retailers' brave and collective efforts in editing the supply could result in accelerating changes to a sustainable food system and consumption. Becoming stewards of the transformation points at a so-called wide paternalism, where regulations or limits could be executed by several actors (Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010).

5.6.1 The Authorities as a Trusted Editor

The participants experienced confusion in making optimal choices whilst perceiving food retailers as unethical profit-seekers. Therefore, they stated that food retailers have the least responsibility to push for a sustainable transition. Instead, it was argued that responsibility, trust and power to make choice editing measures lied within the authorities, as authorities are able to push legislation through taxes and subsidies, compared to consumers or food retailers. This meant that the participants encouraged a so-called narrow paternalism, implying that it is solely the authorities who should be able to limit individuals' freedom of choice, by for example legal coercion (Dworkin, 1972; Thompson, 2013). The participants highlighted the importance of these legislations and regulations to focus on providing less but only good alternatives, as that would achieve greatest

transformation and eliminate difficulties in making rational decisions. Such acts are thereby described as libertarian paternalism (Thaler & Sunstein, 2003). Also, Rebonato (2014:359) suggested that such paternalism would overcome the unavoidable cognitive biases by steering consumer towards:

"choices that she herself would make if she had [...] unlimited time and information, and the analytic abilities of a rational decision-maker."

Libertarian paternalism could be argued to be the golden mean, as the supply is simply limited to the optimal options whilst individual's rights to choose freely from a completely healthy- and sustainable supply retains. However, some argued that too extensive choice editing strategies could be perceived as communistic, dictatorial and totalitarian. However, the reason for trusting authorities in deciding upon what to remove and not, laid in the presumption that such decisions would be subject to a democratic process, in other words individuals' votes. This reinforces that Sweden is built upon democratic principles where the well-being of the society is prioritized and a voting population's opinion is translated into fundamental, societal rules. Having authorities deciding on the supply would also avoid market competitions or profit interests. This may be the reason for food retailers agreeing that there is a need for political decisions in supporting sustainable production to change current supply to more sustainable options (pers. com., Axelsson; Bylund; Domeij, 2020).

Lastly, eliminations executed by authorities would likely be based on scientific evidence, which increases trust and legitimacy for them as they want to achieve improvements with reasonable driving forces. This was confirmed by the participants, as they did not believe that food retailers would make investigations themselves regarding which products are good for the environment or good for one's health. Therefore, scientific investigations and facts executed- and performed by independent experts would educate the population and prepare them towards showing acceptance and positive attitudes for constructive legislation. This supports Onel and Mukherjee (2016) statement that consumers' attitudes towards scientific facts have a direct influence on their knowledge regarding the environment. Increased knowledge could thereby mobilize consumer power in forming a joint opinion supporting certain eliminations, which would encourage politicians to push through stricter regulations regarding the supply.

6 Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of how the results and analysis of this study is related to other empirical studies, whilst also addressing the two research questions stated in Chapter one. The research questions were however deeply intertwined and have therefore been discussed in conjunction. Lastly, several additional points appeared during the analysis, which has also been considered and discussed further.

6.1 Too Soft Strategies

It has not gone unnoticed that society is facing significant challenges in transforming to a sustainable food system. According to Willet *et al.* (2019) and Schill *et al.* (2019) healthy food from sustainable food systems must be available in a more accessible manner to foster sustainable consumption. Food consumption however seems to be continuously impacted by food retailers relatively soft strategies, such as nudging consumers towards the right decision (Hansen, 2016; Lehner *et al.*, 2013) and using ecological- or sustainability marketing to meet the wants and needs of consumers, whilst also taking social, environmental and business objectives into account (Belz & Peattie, 2012; Fisk, 1974). Yet, these strategies could be argued to not be enough as they do not make any direct decision for consumers, hence leading to consumers still making irrational, unsustainable choices. Food retailers also seem unwilling of making direct decisions for consumers, since previous research and the analysis of this study have implied that such decisions could lead to a potential loss of consumers (Dahlberg, 2020; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). Nudging and sustainability marketing have therefore failed to address unsustainable consumer demand and behaviour to a greater extent (Kumar *et al.,* 2012), as food retailers fear of losing consumers seem to decide their strategies and supply.

Moreover, strategies aiming to decrease the negative impact from food consumption seem to rely too heavily on consumers' knowledge, awareness and responsibility to make rational decisions. The analysis however confirmed earlier

studies, suggesting that consumers' decision-makings and food consumptions are to a large extent performed out of habits and based on an automatic, unreflective, irrational thinking scheme (Kahneman, 2011; Lehner *et al.,* 2014; Young *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, it confirmed that adopting a sustainable lifestyle involves various complex decision-making processes (*ibid.*), but where neither self-control nor enough knowledge to account for sustainability or health concerns is possessed, even if the motivation to make good choices is present. According to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), this is what constitutes the attitude-behaviour gap. The result of this work suggests that, due to consumers' irrationalness, they neither trusted themselves in making rational choices, nor the judgment of other consumers. In general, this made the participants prone to express positive attitudes, perceptions and acceptance towards food retailers taking rational decisions for them, as they are unable to do so themselves, by limiting the supply to only healthy- and sustainable options.

According to Ottman (2017), consumers' increased knowledge regarding the effects of unsustainable consumption are leading to a demand of sustainable alternatives. The analysis confirmed this statement, as those being most knowledgeable regarding unsustainable products expressed positive attitudes towards choice editing and in being offered only sustainable products. In contrast, as stated by Lea and Worsley (2008), consumers' knowledge of the environmental impact from different food products is restricted. However, the analysis showed that general knowledge regarding environmental impacts from food consumption was possessed. What on the other hand was restricted was their assumed behaviour being aligned with their knowledge and intentions. This simply shows that irrationality can remain even if one possesses the right information, which strengthened the statement from Stordalen and Rockström (2020) that guiding consumers towards healthy and sustainability food options and creating awareness regarding the nutritional value and sustainability aspect is of importance.

6.2 A Radical Strategy

Still, earlier research and the analysis of this study argue that relying on consumers choice is not enough and that nudging and sustainability marketing are "too soft" strategies as they without complementary regulations, will only lead to short term improvement but are not accelerate the urgent need for global change (Alberto & Salazar, 2012; Lindahl & Jonell, 2020; Marteaur *et al.,* 2011; Stigzelius, 2017). More radical regulations such as choice editing would steer consumers towards a sustainable transition (Gunn & Mont, 2014), which was generally encouraged by the participants. However, the analysis involved varieties in the expressed attitudes, perceptions and reasons for showing support or aversion when comparing between

the environment and health. This confirms Williams (2014) and Subramaniam *et al.* (2014) statement that attitudes, perceptions and decisions are individually determined and sometimes inconsistent as choice restrictions affect each consumer differently.

6.2.1 The Environment Fosters Acceptance

According to Belz and Peattie (2012), Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) and Moraes *et al.* (2012), it is argued that consumers who care for the environment and seek to minimize their environmental impact also execute a pro environmental behaviour. The analysis could not confirm if any specific behaviour was performed as the study did not investigate actual purchasing acts. However, it was confirmed that consumers showed support and acceptance towards food retailers limiting the supply to only environmentally friendly options as that would preserve the environment. According to Ottman (2017), Roberts (2003) and WBCSD (2008), environmental conscious consumers are highly present and demand sustainable products. This confirms that the reason for demonstrating a positive attitude towards choice editing is due to consumers identifying the environmental issues as a tragedy of the common (Ostrom, 2008) and which demands a collective, utilitarian responsibility. Bailey *et al.* (2016), Olsen *et al.* (2014), Roberts (2003) and Zhang and Bloemer (2008) stated that environmentally conscious consumers are likely to develop positive attitudes and perceptions towards a business if there is an alignment between the consumers values and the business's responsible work, rather than the attitudes being based on the business's financial achievements. This further supports positive consumer attitudes occurring when non-environmentally friendly products are eliminated.

Moreover, as stated by Carrington *et al.* (2010) and Moraes *et al.* (2012), environmental conscious consumers are often combined with an ethical perspective as they feel a duty towards society, the environment, and are prone to buying- or boycotting a certain product based on their values. The analysis confirmed that consumers tend to communicate their values through their decision-making. For example, the consumers in this study bought MSC-labelled fish, eco-labelled grapes and quality coffee as that would reinforce their identity as an ethical, pro-environmental consumer. Therefore, in regard to both earlier studies and this study's analysis, it was concluded that attitudes towards food retailers choice restrictions aiming to reduce the negative environmental impact from food consumption- and instead only offer an environmentally friendly supply was highly supportive.

Worth mentioning- and comparing is that, even if choice editing is assumed to be far more radical than nudging, Reisch and Sunstein (2016) stated that the public

attitude will only be supportive towards nudging if consumers are still able to possess their freedom of choice. The analysis of this study however demonstrated that ethical and emphatic consumers caring for the planet still showed acceptance towards food retailers limiting the supply, even if such acts have been stated to interfere with consumers freedom of choice (Dworkin, 1972; Gunn & Mont, 2014; Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010).

6.2.2 Individual Health Fosters Aversion Towards Choice Editing

Alfnes (2017) argued that consumers might not be willing to give up supply variety, change store or support products being removed. This study confirmed Alfnes research in some aspects, as choice editing strategies concerning one's individual health were met with negative attitudes and aversion. Dieterle (2019) stated that paternalistic regulations are not supported if the purpose is to alter consumers lifestyle regarding health, as perceptions of health varieties between consumers. This was due to health being perceived as something that each person should- and could decide upon themselves, as health concerns are more tangible than environmental concerns. As exemplified by Dieterle (2019), consumers thought it was unjustified to ban sugary beverages, which was also indicated in this study as the participants expressed it being their civil right to freely purchase- and consume tobacco, products with added sugar and processed meat if they wanted to. Clearly, both this study and Dieterle (2019) showed that consumers want to freely choose what, when- and how much unhealthy products to indulge and if food retailers were taking this decision it would rather be experienced as an insult of one's body, identity and freedom of choice.

Additionally, the analysis showed that negative attitudes would occur if consumers did not understand or were properly informed about the purpose for the elimination. This supported Thomas and Buckmaster (2010) statement, implying that a policy consisting of paternalistic measures must offer extensive justifications on why interference with personal liberty was executed. According to Gunn and Mont (2014), choice editing strategies will only be effective and successful as long as food retailers show consumers transparency of why something has been removed. In companionship, also Röös *et al.* (2020) implied that acceptance towards policy instruments is key, as it will be difficult to implement them if the public opinion contradicts (Röös *et al.*, 2020). If an elimination was successful or accepted or not is difficult to confirm as no actual elimination was made for this study, but the statement can be confirmed as the analysis showed strong disapproval towards unhealthy removals which could assume such choice editing not being successful or accepted.

In contrast, it could be argued that ethical consumers would show further approval towards eliminations if information was given, which for example the more knowledgeable and pro environmental consumers in this study confirmed being the case. This is due to Moraes *et al.* (2012) and Carrington *et al.* (2010) stating that an ethical consumer aims to communicate their values through their consumption, which could be argued is a motive for wanting information of what caused an elimination as they feel obligated towards their society to be informed on scientific grounds regarding environmental and health issues.

Although negative attitudes were expressed in regard to unhealthy eliminations, they slightly shifted when acknowledging that the overall well-being must be prioritized. According to Dieterle (2019 and Wald (2004) do regulations concerning food industry practices and the overall well-being of the people, in contrast to individual health, include a broader and more supportive perspective. The analysis supported this statement, as positive attitudes towards choice editing occurred when acknowledging that a nutritious supply should be available for all, regardless of socio-economic class. According to Kwon *et al* (2019), consumers are not as supportive towards choice editing as to subsidizing healthy food. This strengthens the result that consumers are restrictive towards having their freedom of choice limited in regard to health, but still emphasize that healthy food should be everyone's right to access.

The more supportive perspective also arose when talking about public health issues and societal costs, since unhealthy products could cause damage for the whole society. According to Wald (2004), consumers must shift their individual preferences to consider social- and environmental issues in a wider context. Wald (2004) argued that the key to public health is connected to collective action related to community trust in its value. This strengthened why choice editing was to some extent was encouraged, as the study showed a resistance towards keeping bad alternatives as it would only lead to dissatisfying ripple effects in terms of health issues and societal costs. Belz and Peattie (2012) argued that the attitude-behaviour gap can decrease if consumers have a motivation to do good for the common well-being and society. As actual behaviours were not investigated, this cannot be confirmed but was still assumed to support Belz and Peatties research to some extent (*ibid.*).

6.2.3 The Reasons for Using Choice Editing is Questioned

Research has demonstrated that food retailers claim that consumer demand predetermines supply and the reason for not using choice editing or store policies is due to the fear of losing consumers who are seeking product variety (Alfnes, 2017; Dahlberg, 2020; Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015), as consumers would simply not

support it. The analysis showed that, when choice editing was perceived negatively, it was stated that it caused them discomfort and determined that they would go to other stores where experiences, needs and values would be met and upheld. The decision of not offering certain products may, according to Rotter *et al.* (2012) be perceived as taking environmental- and societal responsibility but can also be perceived as failing in consumer service, leading to a decreased economic growth. According to Belz and Peattie (2012), limited political and institutional regulations benefitting sustainable consumption can still inhibit businesses from favouring sustainable market solutions. The study and earlier research confirmed this, as failing in consumer service, risk of losing consumers and financial objectives due to a limited supply was stated to be an argument for not using choice editing strategies.

On the other hand, it is questionable from which perspective the sustainable market solutions should be looked upon. According to Belz and Peattie (2012) and Elkington (1998), it has been argued that CSR and The Triple Bottom Line is an area of uncertainty as a balance between economic, social and environmental objectives are difficult to maintain as different interests always occur. Hence, the study showed that the negative attitudes and perceptions towards choice editing strategies concerning one's individual health laid in a non-existing trust towards food retailers, as food retailers are influencing consumers' choice in an immoral way to meet economic interests. Due to a constant market mechanism, the study therefore showed a distrust towards the reasons for why food retailers made choice restrictions and would rather perceive it as manipulation to purchase more. Therefore, the study emphasised the controversial debate regarding paternalism (Rebonato, 2014; Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010; Thompson, 2013), as the non-voluntary adjustment is acknowledged as bad social engineering and manipulation, which may be detrimental to a democratic society (Brennan *et al.*, 2014, Röös *et al.,* 2020).

In combination with studies showing that consumers demand more environmentally friendly and sustainable food products because of an increased awareness (Ottman, 2017; WBCSD, 2008), it also seems to confirm that what is valued is distinguishing between stakeholders as food retailers themselves value what is profitable. In contrast, de Oliveira Neto *et al.* (2018) argued that economic, social and environmental objectives must be equally deliberated, as it would meet long-term achievements, create competitive advantage and include several stakeholders' values. This reinforces that a shift from the economically dominated focus must occur, as profit alone will not solve the significant challenges in transforming to a sustainable food system.

6.4 An Intertwined Power System

Sustainable development within planetary boundaries requires collaboration between consumers, food retailers and authorities as they are deeply intertwined and depend on one another. To begin with, earlier research and the analysis concluded that consumer-power is important as they are able to influence the supply (Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). This simply means that, as consumers are shifting food preferences or form joint opinions regardless it matters, other actors such as food retailers and authorities also must shift to meet demand. This confirms Tjärnemo and Södahl's (2015) statement that, in order to enable a transition towards sustainability, it is crucial that all actors take measures. Also, as stated by Lindahl and Jonell (2020), Marteau (2011) and Tjärnemo and Södahl (2015), the connection between pro-environmental consumers and long-term sustainability is very restricted which, in conjunction with consumers constant irrationalness strengthens the need for food actors to take action (Gordon *et al.*, 2017) as well as the authorities.

According to Folke *et al*. (2019), there are only a few TNC possessing a considerable force in both hindering or fostering sustainable development. Food retailers are a vital player as they possess the ability to maintain values related to the environment and health, which influence consumers to believe they have the right to purchase what they want. The massive influence could argue for food retailers needing to take increased choice editing measures, regardless consumers' level of acceptance- or aversion towards it - as they simply hold the power to change the norms regarding what is morally right to sell- and purchase. This could confirm that direct policy instruments need to be taken by food retailers and other actors within the food industry (Röös *et al.,* 2020). This could further contribute to an increased CSR as the food retailers take responsibility for society and the planet. It encompasses the importance of further developing the collaboration within the Sustainable Supply Chain for Food and the internal document Sustainable Products, as it would guarantee consumers that the supply is approved which gives the highest result enabling a long-term, sustainable food system. The study also showed an increased trust in food retailers as the participants expressed that food retailers' primary ambition must be to jointly enable a conscious, sustainable supply.

However, the initiative could potentially bring a united agreement on what must be phased out (Sustainable Supply Chain for Food, 2019). This is strengthened as the major Swedish food retailers are covering 86 percent of the food sector (Adamsson *et al.,* 2018), which further argued by Clapp (2016) have resulted in a small group of retailers possessing power to dictate guidelines on both suppliers side as well as the consumers side. Therefore, food retailers set the baseline for what is accepted or not accepted by society to purchase even if the products will compromise the

ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Furthermore, the study showed that it was assumed that consumers contain a civil right, based on the assumption that the products available were giving them the right to purchase it. As the analysis confirmed, consumers' acknowledgement of food retailers' power to influence makes it questionable why no further choice editing measures are at place as unhealthy- and unsustainable products are still offered to a great extent while being at the base of this intertwined system.

Earlier research has shown that food retailers need to bring their collective responsibility and stand accountable for an unsustainable supply in order to meet societal needs without compromising the planetary boundaries, as they possess considerable power to change the food system (WBCSD, 2008). However, the analysis showed varied support in choice editing strategies but were still in agreement that food retailers lack legitimacy and trust due to primarily economic objectives and their ability to join forces. Therefore, it is argued that the authorities need to step in and regulate food retailers supply, but this contradicts Tjärnemo and Södahl (2015) and Gordon *et al.* (2017) belief on mobilized, private actors becoming stewards of the sustainable transition. However, the reason for trusting authorities in deciding upon what to remove and not, laid in the presumption that such decisions would be subject to a democratic process, which reinforces Röös *et al.* (2020) statement on acceptance towards policy instruments being key in a democratic society.

Choice editing being executed by the authorities and not the food retailers need to be compared to nudging. According to Lindahl and Jonell (2020) and Reisch and Sunstein (2016), the public acceptance level towards nudging strategies is often higher if it is implemented by a trustworthy authority. It could therefore be assumed that the same principle applies to choice editing. The results in this study showed support for retail led choice editings in regard to the environment, but encouraged choice editing measures regarding health- and the overall well being from authorities as such would be made out of good intentions and not necessarily financial aims. Stated by both Dieterle (2019) and Wald (2004), choice editing is justified and often supported when the purpose is to enhance the public well-being, which the study confirmed. There was also a clear acceptance towards libertarian paternalistic measures were less, but only good options are available. This further confirms that supportive attitudes are more commonly fostered when no economic objectives are present but the overall good is strived for - which the study believed the authorities would.

According to Stordalen and Rockström (2020), a significant institutional change is required in assigning regulations and policies to provide healthy and sustainable food. This further confirms the analysis, stating that governmental legislation is

necessary. However, it has been implied that the system is deeply intertwined where all actors are dependent- and affect one another, it is still questioned whether consumers have the right to purchase what one desires- as well as the food retailers selling what is morally wrong. Conclusively, to ensure food security and nutrition in an economic-, social and environmentally friendly way where the needs of future generations are not compromised, it is necessary for all actors within the food system to bring their collective responsibility and act.

7 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to describe consumer understandings of and attitudes towards retail led in-store choice restrictions aiming to reduce the negative environmental and health impacts from food consumption. This was assumed to provide insights regarding where the perceived burden of responsibility lied and in what ways food retailers were a leverage point for shaping sustainable consumption. This last chapter reconnects to the aim and compiles the key findings. Lastly, suggestions for future research are presented.

7.1 Diverse Consumer Attitudes Require Choice Editing Measures from Multiple Actors

Choice editing is not an easy strategy for food retailers to apply as it has been stated to interfere with consumers freedom of choice. In comparison, nudging and sustainability marketing has been argued to be too soft strategies to steer consumer's often irrational decision-making. Therefore, choice editing has been discussed as a radical strategy to ensure consumers make optimal choices, where diverse attitudes exist. Firstly, food retailer's choice editing strategies aiming to reduce the negative environmental impacts from food consumption was highly encouraged. Together with a utilitarian, value driven approach, it was acknowledged that collectivistic efforts and joint responsibility for maintaining a livable planet is essential where less, but only environmentally friendly alternatives, should be offered. This determined that retail led choice editings in regard to the environment received consumer support and acceptance.

Secondly, consumer attitudes towards retail led choice restrictions aiming to reduce negative health impacts from food consumption met great disapprovals. Health is individualistically determined and should not be food retailers' decisions to make as they are perceived to influence consumers in an unethical way to meet economic interests. Additionally, food retailers making health-related decisions for

consumers through retail led choice editings would be perceived as an insult towards consumers' liberty and identity, which determined that restrictions in this matter were met with aversion.

Instead, choice editing measures regarding health and the overall well-being must be performed by the authorities as that would shape moral values on what should be offered in store. However, encouraging overall well-being through paternalistic measures will only be supported, legitimate and trusted by the public if executed by authorities where reasonable, non-profitable driving forces and a democratic principle is still at the foundation. Due to diverse consumer attitudes towards retail led in-store choice restrictions, it was stated that food retailers alone cannot bear the responsibility- or be the only leverage point for shaping sustainable consumption as governmental measures are also needed.

7.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Identifying consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards retail led choice editing strategies is not a simple task, since previous research regarding paternalism and choice editing have not been extensively researched. However, since the conclusions of this study is founded on a narrow group of consumers, it could therefore assist as a pilot study intended for future research.

The focus group interviews can for example be used to obtain a frame of reference for developing surveys for future quantitative studies, which would scale up the number of participants, as well as demographics factors such as age-span, geographical spread, and enabling information regarding political position, socio-economic background, cultural cognition worldviews and income. For example, it would be interesting to see if consumers with varying incomes would have the same perceptions. The study focused on consumer perspectives in terms of identifying perceptions and attitudes, but not their actual behaviour. Future research could therefore use a combination of methods, for example using observations of consumer actions to verify their rational-/ irrationalness when making decisions, to gather an increased understanding of the phenomenon could be included. To further explain and measure consumer attitudes, 'The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion' and 'The ABC model of attitudes' could be theoretically used, but which however were not included in this study.

The conclusions and lessons learned from this narrow research have been suggested as being of use for studying the same topic within a more significant field where, for example, proposed potential and perceived obstacles could be tested to prove their existence. This study did not investigate choice editing from a retail

perspective and therefore future research could focus on defining motivations for change as well as drivers and barriers for an increased mobilization among food retailers to enable sustainable food consumption. Another suggestion, to also cover the governmental perspective, would be to interview politicians to gain knowledge about what political measures and regulations that would be possible to implement-and gain public support on both national and international level.

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Personal Communication

Axelsson, Anders
Head of Sustainability, ICA
Zoom interview, (09-10-20)

Bylund, Anneli
Senior Sustainability Strategist, Coop
Zoom interview, (08-10-20)

Domeij, Åsa
Head of Sustainability, Axfood
Phone interview, (23-10-20)

Richert, Anna
Senior Expert in Sustainable Food, WWF
Zoom interview, (09-10-20)

Acknowledgements

Appendix 1. Interview Guide Food Retailers

1. Background
- Tell us about yourself: name, education, position, tasks.
- How and why did you end up on x?

2. General question about food retailers and supply
- Who controls/ determines the supply? The state, the food retailers or the consumers?

3. Specific questions regarding strategies
- What determines which supply that is offered at your store?
- Do you have examples of 'choices' that have already been made before a product ends up on the shelves?
- Nudging is a systematic marketing strategy to help consumers in the right direction.
    - How do you work with it?
    - Is that the right strategy?
    - What has been the effect? Consumer perception?
- With the environment and health in mind, more drastic measures might be needed. What do you think about completely eliminating products with a negative impact - in other words; decide for the consumers?
    - What is the reason for this not being applied even more?
- What can stay and what is removed? Who decides this? Whose responsibility is it?
- If a product is eliminated, there is a risk that consumers go to a competitor. This could be avoided if there was a cross-industry agreement (e.g. Sustainable Food Chain) where all retailers jointly removed unsustainable/ unhealthy products.
    - Is this something that would be possible?
    - Why has it not already been implemented? What barriers are there?
    - How is this discussed within the Sustainable Food Chain? Is there a vision?
    - Should food retailers invest more in nudging and/ or elimination of unsustainable products?
    - What are the right methods and strategies for achieving a sustainable food system? Who should be responsible/ be the decision-maker?

4. Specific questions regarding consumer perceptions and attitudes
- Axfood, ICA, Coop and other food retailers must keep up with the development towards a sustainable food system and therefore innovate their supply. How do you know that consumers are ready for a new product or a change in supply?
- What is your experience of consumers' attitudes towards food retailers limiting the supply by removing unsustainable/ unhealthy products? E.g. tiger prawns, Paolo Roberto's products etc.
    - Aversion? Support?
    - How do you measure this reaction externally?

Concluding/ summing up
- As awareness and the demand for environmentally friendly and healthy products increases, the consumer should logically choose such products. However, consumers' intentions are not always followed by actual actions.
    - What are common attributes that attract a specific supply?
    - How can this gap be reduced to help consumers make better choices?

Appendix 2. Interview Guide WWF

1. Background
- Tell us about yourself: name, education, position, tasks.
- How and why did you end up on x?

2. General questions regarding Sustainable Supply Chain for Food (Hållbar Livsmedelskedja)
- Tell us about the Sustainable Food Chain.
- How do you work with the roadmap 2030 and 'Sustainable Products'?
  - What is it, what are the goals, the time frame and how is the follow-up done?
- What are the most important issues and how are these prioritized?
- What obstacles and opportunities can you identify within the Sustainable Food Chain?
- Within the Sustainable Food Chain, measures that food retailers can make are discussed e.g. 'lifting the bottom' and 'growing the top'. What does this mean and how does it work?

3. Specific questions regarding strategies
- Who bears the overall responsibility for the transition towards a sustainable food system? The food retailers, the authorities or the consumers?
- We have discussed strategies with various food retailers, e.g nudging and choice editing. What do you think about these methods?
  - What is the reason for this not being applied even more?
  - Given the guidance towards Sustainable Products, would it work to completely eliminate unsustainable/ unhealthy products?
- If a product is eliminated, there is a risk that consumers go to a competitor. This could be avoided if there was a cross-industry agreement (e.g. Sustainable Food Chain) where all retailers jointly removed unsustainable/ unhealthy products.
  - Is this something that would be possible?
  - Why has it not already been implemented? What are the barriers?
  - How is this discussed within the Sustainable Food Chain? Is there a vision?
  - Should food retailers invest more in nudging and/ or elimination of unsustainable products?
  - What are the right methods and strategies for achieving a sustainable food system? Who should be responsible/ be the decision-maker?

4. Specific questions regarding consumer perceptions and attitudes
- What are your experiences of consumers' knowledge and attitude towards sustainability?
- As awareness and the demand for environmentally friendly and healthy products increases, the consumer should logically choose such products. However, consumers' intentions are not always followed by actual actions.
  - How can this gap be reduced to help consumers make better choices?

Concluding/ summing up
- Measures and goals are formulated for food retailers but consumption patterns are not included. Why?
- How do we get consumers involved / change their attitudes?
- What is the next necessary step towards a sustainable food system?

Appendix 3. Interview Guide Focus Groups

Introduction
- What determines which food retailer and store you go to today?
- Do you feel that you have the right versus the opportunity to buy which food you want?
- Are you aware of food retailers already editing the supply? If so, how?

- In your opinion, who is responsible for the transition towards a less environmentally damaging- and a healthier food system? The state, food retailers or you consumers?
- What are your attitudes and perceptions towards a food retailer (which is a private sector dependent on economic growth) being allowed to control your freedom to buy the products you want to promote health or the environment?
- Would it differ if it was the Swedish state that made that decision? E.g by introducing taxes or regulating which banned certain products? Why?
- Would you sacrifice your individual freedom of choice to achieve a common societal benefit? Why / why not?
- What could food retailers or the state do to increase your trust and acceptance in using choice editing as a strategy to guide consumers food choices?

Fast and Slow Thinking

Perceptions

Functional Theory of Attitudes

Impacting Consumer Choices

Paternalism

- What is your attitude towards food retailers limiting your freedom of choice by editing the supply?
- How does elimination of products affect your perception of food retailers? Is it perceived as an act of responsibility or should they do more?
- What do you think about the following statements?
  - *Eliminating tobacco?*
  - *Eliminating products with added sugar, e.g flavored yogurt?*
  - *Eliminating processed meat products?*
  - *Only sell eco-labelled food, e.g. eco-labelled fish?*
  - *Only seasonal supply?*
- What determines that some eliminations receive consumer support and acceptance, while others are met with aversion? For example, is your attitude towards eliminating products concerning your own health different from eliminating non-environmental friendly products? Why?
- To what extent would you be willing to continue shopping in a store if they chose to eliminate the most harmful products?
- Based on the previous question, would you still be willing to shop in that store if it meant an increased financial consequence for you as an individual?

Figure 7. Interview guide for the semi-structured focus group interviews (inspired by Vlasov, 2015; with modifications by the authors).

Appendix 4. Survey Guide

- **Name and Age:**
- **Gender**:
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary
- **You live in a…**
  - City with more than 300,000 inhabitants
  - City with 300,000 - 100,000 inhabitants
  - City less than 100,000 inhabitants
  - In rural areas
  - Other
- **Do you have post-secondary education? If so, what level and field of study?**
- **Occupation?**
  - Studying
  - Working
  - Job-seeker
  - Other
- **Which store (s) do you usually shop in?**
  - ICA
  - Hemköp
  - Coop
  - Lidl
  - Online store
  - Other
- **Do you have any food preferences?**
  - Eat everything
  - Flexitarian (a person who mainly eats vegetarian but sometimes eats meat or fish)
  - Vegan
  - Other
- **How healthy do you think your eating habits are?**
  - Not at all - 1 to 5 - a lot
- **How sustainability-conscious do you consider yourself to be regarding your food consumption?**
  - Not at all - 1 to 5 - a lot
- **How often do you buy eco-labelled alternatives if it is available?**
  - Rarely/Never
  - Occasionally
  - Often
  - Very often/ always
- **How often do you consume red meat?**
  - 1-3 times/ month
  - 2-3 times/ week
  - 4/6 times/ week
  - Once or more times a day
- **Would you consider changing your food choices for the sake of the environment?**
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know/ Have no opinion
- **Would you consider changing your food choices for the sake of your health?**
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know/ Have no opinion