Framing Sustainable Consumerism in the Retail Market

A case study of Axfood

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Abstract

The pressure on retail businesses to be a part of, or even lead, the transition into a more sustainable world is putting a lot of pressure on the wholesale market. The debate on whom the responsibility should fall on is divided between consumers, the government, and companies. Retail businesses do nevertheless play a significant role in society by shaping how and what behavior consumers have. Earlier studies in the retail and wholesale industry revolve around supplier chains, sustainable food, ecological food, and consumer behavior. This thesis is a case study of Axfood which aimed to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism. The study used frame theory to analyze the findings through a frame analysis. Three frames were found in the analysis; *sustainable consumers, change processes, and actor constellations*. The findings of the *sustainable consumerism frame* were that they viewed consumers as price oriented and not enough informed about the climate crisis. Without engagement from consumers, companies cannot create a market for sustainable consumerism. The framed solution was a need for political and systematic societal changes to create lower prices on sustainable products so that consumers can afford these products. The *change process* frame mentioned the lack of governmental support in favor of creating the necessary change. The framed solution was to create more political responsibility, taxes, and funds to create long-term change in the wholesale and retail business. The final frame was the *actor constellation* which presented a lack of engagement in the industry. Saying that one company can not create the big movement needed to change unsustainable consumerism in the retail industry. Creating a joint engagement in the industry, stakeholders, and government and having similar goals in their business plans was the presented solution. The engagement for a sustainable future is present within the retail industry but is silenced by pricing, individualism, and the fixed structures in today's society, a truly wicked problem.

Keywords: Sustainability, Retail market, Consumers, Frame Analysis, Framing, Sustainable consumerism, Change process, Actor Constellation.

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1. Introduction

This section gives a background on the subject and the world at the present time of the writing of this thesis. It also presents the problem formulation as well as the thesis aim and research questions.

1.1 Background

This thesis is written at the beginning of 2023. During this time, retail businesses in Sweden are under much scrutiny when the new year is starting with inflation, ongoing war, and financial difficulties in the world after the pandemic (Ekonomifakta, 2023). As an effect of the inflation, the policy rate has been increasing steadily since April 2022 and in May 2023 it hit 3,5% (Riksbanken, 2023). The inflation brought more than an increased policy rate, especially for consumers in the Swedish market. The effect was seen in January as the retail markets prices of food started to increase, something that the Swedish site Matpriskollen had not seen since the 1980s (Matpriskollen, 2023). During the first month of 2023, the wholesale products had increased the price by +2,1%, and that same number had increased to +3,4% in February of the same year (Matpriskollen, 2023). These numbers can be translated into a more visual understanding by addressing each percentile of increase as a 3 billion price increase burden for the consumers in the market (Matpriskollen, 2023).

When this study started in January 2023, the news was filled with this revelation of the increased food prices, and my interest was strengthened when the subject became more popular in the discourses. The discourses on retail businesses and responsibility have earlier not been that large on the big news platforms in Sweden and this generated questions of responsibility and the economic structures that rule today (Sveriges konsumenter, 2023). The discourses of how much your food will cost with the increased prices took over and this ultimately made the conventionally produced food highly demand and the ecologically produced food lost its demand (Umeå Universitet, 2023). Ecologically produced food generates biodiversity on farms, fertile soils, fresh waters, good animal welfare, no unnatural chemical pesticides, and many more positive effects on the environment (Tuck et al, 2014; Lori et al, 2017; Rundlöf et al, 2015; Motta et al, 2018).

This trend of choosing other food because of a higher price on sustainable food creates the question of why consumers do this. My though continued to wonder and ended at the retail companies and how they view this dilemma of sustainable food and consumers, especially in these times. I began investigating the wholesale businesses in Sweden and felt a need to explore how they frame sustainable consumerism and how they view their part in the change process that is needed in the climate crisis. I found claims and sayings that went against their own "words and "phrases" which piqued my interest to find the frames. Hence, this was the starting point of this thesis, where I wanted to investigate the frames and tensions in the retail business.

1.2 Problem formulation

Food production stands for around 35% of manmade greenhouse gas emissions each year (Xu et al., 2021). With the high demand for food that leaves a footprint on the environment, ecological food can be used as a substitute to create better food production. Some of the discourse on sustainable food and food production evolves around the role the retail market has in addressing these challenges (Forssell et al, 2018). The retail market has demand on it from society which drives the market to incentivize certain food and food productions (Forssell et al, 2018). The process of change that is emerging today also includes innovative technologies and infrastructures to adopt sustainable practices (Forssell et al, 2018). The debate also revolves around whom to change, whether it should be humans i.e., consumer awareness, or systematic change i.e., governmental policies (Forssell et al, 2018). The retail industry does however play a significant role in society by shaping and determining how and what behavior consumers have. The pressure on retailers to be a part of, or even lead, the transition is putting a lot of pressure on the market (Forssell et al, 2018).

This study will use a case to create an understanding of frames within the industry. The case will work as a representation of how retail businesses frame sustainability and consumers and their consumption. The chosen case for this study is Axfood. Axfood is a company consisting of multiple grocery store chains in the Swedish business sector within the food retail market. It claims to be an important factor in the retail spectrum for its credibility for sustainability and growth (Axfood 2023). Axfood was founded in 2000 and its founder wanted the company to have a strong position in Swedish society for innovative change toward a more sustainable world. As food production is in high demand (Axfood 2023), Axfood sought to

create sustainability in the whole supply chain by displaying grand goals and sustainability in all departments of the company (Axfood 2023). As of now, the company has three documents published that aim to influence everyone in society according to the company (Axfood 2023).

The purpose of this study is thus to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism in the retail and wholesale businesses. By investigating the frames that the retail business uses on sustainable consumerism, the sustainable food spectrum could better understand how companies in the retail industry work in the process of change. The research aims to contribute to the discourse on sustainable food, consumption, and the change process for businesses. The frames that the study finds could indicate the future of sustainable food and consumption by investigating what ideas and attitudes are dominant and/or being reproduced and communicated in/from the retail businesses to society.

1.3   Sustainable consumerism

In this thesis, I will use the term 'sustainable consumerism'. Sustainable consumerism bring awareness to the environmental and social impacts our behaviour has as consumers. Actions and decisions made by people can promote change and other impacts in society, such as in the market. Understanding consumption patterns, actions and choices can lead to more knowledge of the environmental footprints we consumers leave behind. Sustainable consumerism is much more than choosing sustainable food, it can also be traced into social and cultural dimentions, something that this study will touch upon in the discussion. In this specific study, the findings aim to produce an understanding for how the chosen case views consumers and sustainability.

1.4   Retail businesses

The term 'retail businesses' will be frequelty used througout this study. By using this term, it refers to the wholesale market in Sweden. This include multipe retail and wholesale stores such as Axfood (Hemköp and Willys), ICA, Coop, Lidl and other stores that sell food items. They all operate on the Swedish retail market and provides the citizens in Sweden with groceries.

1.5 Aim and research questions

This study aims to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism in the retail business. It will do so by using a case to find the frames to gain more understaning of how the retail business understands sustainable consumerism. It will investigate the tensions within the frames in the retail industry. The problematization of sustainable consumerism can generate multiple understandings of the path to a more sustainable food and retail industry.

The two research questions to be answered are;

Which different frames of sustainable consumerism are found?
and
Are there any tensions between the identified frames?

2. Literature Review

This research aims to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism and the tensions within them. The most common studies on the concepts of sustainable food, ecological food, and frames involve excessive research on consumer behavior and attitudes. Neither of these subjects in the articles are align with the purpose of this specific case study when the research aims to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism. However, the articles bring light to how consumer agency versus constitutive change is perceived and how consumers view the information in the form of campaigns and commercials.

Earlier studies have found that individuals view corporates as responsible actors in society when it comes to creating social change (Ehgartner, 2018). Consumers are influenced by commercials and societal- and political debates on the subject of sustainable food and production. According to Ehgartner (2018), there are two perspectives to take into account regarding consumer responsibility which is that 1) consumer responsibility is something that needs activation from external sources to flourish, and 2) consumer responsibility is a force that forms and shapes society and outcomes from choice, and it has effects on business activities. As a response to these perspectives, studies have been conducted on consumer education and how 'top-down' communication wants to enhance the public knowledge of sustainable food and choice. This ultimately means that habits need to change for a more 'responsible consumer' to become an active consumer (Ehgartner, 2018). This knowledge of consumers' views on retails' and companies' responsibility in society brings light to consumers' agenda concerning buying sustainable food. It fuels the question of how individuals would frame themselves and corporations when they speak of sustainable food.

Addressing retail's power of change is touched upon by Forssell (2018) in research about norms and shared rules in society. Forssell argues that these shared rules and norms need to change for society to transition into a more sustainable food system (Forssell, 2018). The retailers' engagement in the transition could be found in their willingness to offer new interpretations of well-established ideals to the consumers, such as price, quality, and healthier food (Forssell, 2018). It was also found that the retails met resistance from the industry as unwilling to change its socio-technical system following what the retail needed for their engagement to

become more affordable for the businesses (Forssell, 2018). Nonetheless, norm-shaping takes place all around as well as in the stores. Forssell (2018) argues that retailers need to continue their norm-shaping work in the stores and towards the government to create change. If this work is successful, the new ideals might improve the future of the food system. The study does however not provide direct knowledge of this as a theoretically concretized way of transitioning a society into a more sustainable system (Forssell, 2018).

The presumption that information will create an active and responsible consumer has been met with some criticism. Evans et al (2017) write about the politics and power behind the choices of consumers. Emergency campaigns etc. are filled with expressions to scare or push the consumer into the 'right' choice according to the corporate or business that sends the message. During interviews with individuals, they asked the individuals to reflect on why other individuals (aside from themselves) waste food. The meta-discussion showed that individuals believe that there are multiple forces driving people and that it is much harder to change behaviors than most think because it is a complex matter. The interviews did however express that individuals believe that other individuals care for the environment and are troubled by food waste (Evans et al, 2017). Meta discourses have a way of revealing how we view our surroundings and how it correlates with our view of ourselves (Evans et al, 2017). These earlier studies show that information and education can have a different effect than it is intended to. Expert knowledge has not guaranteed people's activation when making a decision. Further research should find out if the frames individuals have on sustainable food are constructed by society itself or if it is co-created by the discourses.

This co-responsibly that consumers possess in society to change or solve environmental problems according to Halkier (1999) creates more complications in addressing the issue of the environmental crisis. Trying to push the responsibility of choice on the consumer is a complex matter as the consumer are driven by their everyday experiences which determine the outcome of choice (Halkier, 1999). These experiences are connected to socio-cultural attributes and are not included in the environmental policies and politics revolving around the environmental crisis. Ecological modernization is a term that sees the solving of the environmental crisis as a neutralization of the conflicts between economic and ecological conflicts. If they can become neutral with each other, it can become easier to unite the work to end the environmental crisis. This research does not address how the retail market views its role in this dilemma. Modernization could be an answer but we need more information on ways of change and where to start. Some studies have been conducted on practice theories and consumer culture which showed how performative processes in one's life can be met with resistance and as a challenge (Halkier et al, 2011). The intersectionality of this subject shows how complex the

bond between consumer and behavior is and that structural and the constitutive part of oneself can bring clarity to why we speak of a subject in a certain way etc.

While these four articles include views on sustainable and ecological food, they are filled with political and behavioral research as well. After addressing their findings in these articles, one can understand that behaviors and politics are a large part of the environmental crisis. The problematization in the discourses of sustainable food does not include how companies or the retail market frame sustainability. This research wants to complement these earlier researches of political and individual change by pinpointing what the retail industry believes [frames] are the problems and solutions to the business's way to make society more sustainable. The analysis of the case frames might find interesting understandings of how these frames affect future attitudes or regulations and how they could affect the environmental crisis.

3. Theory

In this section, I will present frame theory and how it is used in this study. It will further explain three theoretical frameworks by Giddens (1979), Craig (2005), and Bourdieu (1977). These frameworks are used in the discussion to give an understanding of the frames found in the analysis.

3.1 Frame theory

Frame analysis is a qualitative research approach that can explain meaning-making by exploring how individuals frame or make sense of their experiences and world (Goffman, 1974). Framing of phenomena occurs in people's minds and is expressed through language and discourses, thus, it can be used in qualitative research such as analyzing text, language, or both (Daub, 2010). The term "framing" or "frames" will be used throughout the research. Framing and frame analysis refers to the process of constructing and communicating ideas, phenomena, and issues in a way that influences how people perceive and understand them (Entman, 1993; Van Hulst et al, 2016; Rein et al, 1996). Framing involves the choices of what information to include or exclude when speaking of a phenomenon, and how to present or speak of that information in a way that shapes public opinion and influences certain outcomes (Entman, 1993).

Frames have a tradition of revealing as both visible and salient as Westin (2019:51) explained about frames as a metaphor, "the metaphor of a frame is generative since it allows us to see how people consciously or unconsciously, set a boundary within which they can focus on what is inside as distinct from what is outside." (Westin 2019:51). The word "framing" is used as a more dynamic and political approach according to Van Hulst and Yanow (2016). It involves analyzing which different ways actors use language and discourses to shape how policy decisions are defined and interpreted. Frame analysis fosters a frame-reflective practice that can gain an understanding of more inclusive and democratic processes by addressing and recognizing the different perspectives and values that exist within society (Westin, 2019; Rein and Schöen, 1996).

Finding the frames include two steps; *diagnosing the problem* and; *presenting a solution to the problem* (Van Hulst & Yanow, 2016; Rein & Schön, 1996). As mentioned earlier, this approach shows the visible frames and metaphors, but also the hidden ones. The metaphors used to explain the problems and solutions give understanding to the hidden frames which are salient and could refer to *action biases* (Westin, 2019). Action biases are the effect of not reflecting on the actions being taken and therefore reinforcing existing power dynamics and assumptions without reflecting on the potential consequences, which can reinforce these existing dynamics and exclude marginalized people or ideas from processes (Westin, 2019). The power within the language is aligned with the understanding of phenomena which creates a neutral framing. This normalized framing is thereafter internalized, creating these action biases that act as normative opinions within some groups or institutions in society. Thus, studying these frames will presumably present an understanding of the retail businesses understanding of the world through their description of the phenomena, and how they make sense of it.

3.2 Frame analysis in this research

As this study wants to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism, frame analysis will be used to find these frames. These frames will be used to explore the retail businesses that operate today in the Swedish market.

Finding the problem formulations and the presented solutions is very relevant for my study as these frames will give me the possibility to explore how the frames help or hinder retail businesses to work towards sustainability. The frames will thus be used as a tool to create an understanding of the problems and solutions to find meaningful understandings to be discussed. An important aspect of this study is also how the frames create tensions regarding one another and how these tensions can be understood together, despite their different character. By drawing attention to the tensions found, the frames will reveal definitions of their understandings. The frames' relevance could help future studies explore more frames or continue to examine the findings of this study in other contexts to explain other phenomena in a different light.

3.3 The use of tensions

The term tensions is a central part of this thesis. Discourses can be analysed from what is being said, as well as what is not being said. When using frame anslysis, I will find a specific frame, and within this frame, I can find tensions. Tensions can identify conflicting perspectives and understandings that operate within these frames. Conflicting ideas and understandings creates social dynamics that can shape our social interactions and choices. The tensions found in this study highlights the contradictions in the frames, informing the retail market about these tensions with hope that focus might be put upon solving or mitigate these conflicting ideas.

3.4 Agency

In sociologist Anthony Giddens's book from 1979, Giddens examines the relationships between agency and structures in social theory. He says that our social actions are not determined by the structures but are instead shaped by the individual's choice of action. For this, he uses the phrase "duality of structures" to explain that structures are both enabling and constraining our actions (Giddens, 1979).

He further argues that we as individuals have the power and ability to act according to our intentions, as well as against our predetermined structures. Even so, these structures come with limitations and possibilities for our own choice and how we choose to act. He further explores the idea of how our society is in constant tension between forces such as right-winged and left-winged political values (ibid, 1984). These tensions are necessary for our society to create a moving and active landscape where change can emerge. The actions of one individual could therefore create change by going against the societal structures and instead acting upon one own values. Agency refers to the capacity within individuals to act according to their beliefs of the world and make choices in line with these values and intentions (ibid, 1984). The power within each individual is based on their values and understanding of the world. In contrast to structures, the agency is the will or forced to act according to the own values instead of the social constructions from the outside world (ibid, 1984). In this study, Giddens's theory of agency will be used in the discussion to help explain how consumers' choices can be determined by societal structures as well as their actions. The second research question

investigates the tensions from the frames and this is where agency as a concept can be discussed. Agency and sustainable consumerism could have a relationship in need of exploration and it will therefore be used in the discussion.

3.5 Shaping public discourses

In Craig's article "How We Talk about How We Talk: Communication Theory in the Public Interest" from 2005, he discusses the essential role communication theory has, and the importance of its inclusion when discussing public issues and challenges in society. He suggests that the use of accessible language and relatable content can create a stronger relevance to create the aspiring outcome for communication strategies. Instead of promoting the pre-existing discourses, one should include other perspectives and engage in the public interests (Craig, 2005). This is a necessity to change the public discourses and the decisions making. Effective communicative initiatives are promoting the relevant issues, which can create an impact on public discourses (ibid, 2005). By observing how we talk about how we talk, we can create an understanding of communications strategies' reliability when being concretized. Metadiscourse can help to detect topics that are not being said. The second research question wants to find the tensions in the frames and these tensions are, before being found, hidden inside the frames. By bringing the tensions forward, the frames can be further discussed.

3.6 Habitus

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu explores the space between social structures and individual agency (Bourdieu 1977). He says that individuals are not acting out of their individualism but are rather shaped by their social structures. He further presents the understanding of habitus as our internally constructed social structures that function as an unconscious guiding hand. This guiding hand shapes our actions and perceptions of the world as well as how we understand the circumstances around us (Bourdieu, 1977).

We as humans are reproducing these perceptions of the world and they are different depending on our capital such as, for example, social classes in society. Social class is determining which habitus you will reflect in your social structures in the world. These different social contexts can be argued to be leading to different values and behaviors in each individual. These different values as behaviors are therefore reinforcing the complex existing inequalities and values in the individuals

(ibid, 1977). He ultimately asks us to understand this interplay between individuals' actions and identities and how they are shaped by the capital one inherits.

Habitus will be used to explain world views and structures from consumers. Choice and actions are recurrent throughout the research and habitus has a way of describing these actions in a very explicit way when discussing behavior. The tensions from the frames are lifted and exposed for review where habitus could help explain why these tensions exist.

4. Methodology

In this section, I will present my choice of method and research design. I will introduce my case and do an ethical consideration as well as discuss and motivate why I chose the specific method to review my findings.

This research is conducted within the field of environmental communication and will use a qualitative method. This type of method is common within the field of Environmental communication and aims to give the research a more in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2018). The research aims to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism. The study will thus use a frame analysis to investigate how retail businesses speak of this subject with the purpose to find and explore the frames used. Framing and frame analysis refers to the process of constructing and communicating ideas, phenomena, and issues in a way that influences how people perceive and understand them (Entman, 1993; Van Hulst et al, 2016; Rein et al, 1996).

In this study, Axfood will serve as a case to create a g of the retail industry. Axfood was chosen because they aim of being the leader for sustainability in the retail business and wholesales in Sweden, as well as being a large actor who plays a significant part in the retail and food industry. More retail businesses in Sweden could as well claim to be the leaders in sustainability such as ICA, Coop, or Lidl. The company has however been standing on the front line and working towards sustainability for a long time and has a mainstream understanding of the climate crisis and what actions that must be taken to hinder it. Axfood was founded in the year 2000 and has approximately 12 000 employees. These employees work in many different parts of the company, it can be in stores as staff, at the headquarter, or in warehouses. Within the Axfood group are grocery store chains such as Hemkop, Willys, Handlarn, and Tempo (Axfood, 2023). Wholesales are through Snabbgross and their support company Dagab which is responsible for the whole group's product development and purchases of groceries. Besides the grocery stores, Axfood is also part of Middagsfrid, Urban Deli, and part-owner of Apohem, Eurocash, City Gross, and Mathem. The company is recognized for its long prevalence in the Swedish market with high growth and multiple stores (Axfood, 2023). By establishing themselves early as a growing sustainable company,

investors sought to keep investing and believing in its cause (Axfood, 2023). Axfood did, however, understand that for them to be sustainable in the production chain, laws and regulations also needed to change. This made them start lobbying their agenda to continue to work on becoming more sustainable. The lobbying can now be found in their documents that speak of what individuals, the government, and society needs to do to continue to change into a more sustainable country (Mat 2030).

For this study, I chose to use two documents and one group interview. The choice of combining a group interview, documents, and frame theory, the research allows the analysis to get an in-depth examination of the collective view of individuals' behavior and the structures around the concept that aims to create the change. The study started to examine the documents published on the company's website to see which could give the most formulations to my research- and analytical questions. The documents chosen were Mat 2030 and Axfoods sustainability program 2022. Mat 2030 is a document produced to propose a sustainable food strategy for Sweden. The proposals are directed towards Swedish authorities and politics as well as the retail business and the market overall. The second source of information was the Axfoods sustainability program 2022 which is an internal government document that is supposed to guide the company's work. It entails information on their internal goals also the Sustainable development goals (SDG) and the Swedish environmental goals. It presents their policy of work and also their 42 points of goals. The third text to analyze was the transcribed group interview with three employees working with sustainability at Axfood. By starting to analyze the texts, - questions, and blanks appeared and the interview gave me a necessary way of filling in these blanks with answers to their perception of the subject. With a group setting of three colleagues within the same field, the interview intended to explore the group's understanding of the problems and solutions regarding sustainable consumerism. I started the interview with an explanation of my Master's thesis and its purpose which followed with verbal consent that I could use the recording for my study (Robson, 2002). I continued by informing them that the recording will be deleted when the study is finished and that they will be anonymous. I wanted to give them anonymity so that they can speak in confidentiality about the subject and feel free to express themselves (Robson, 2002). The interview was easy going and the employees had no trouble explaining their stance on sustainability, their role as an actor, or the struggles in the industry. Some were more outspoken and reached a consensus on the answers to the questions whereas some gave rather radical responses which the group was a bit more cautious to agree on. At the end of the interview, I told them to contact me if they wanted to withdraw from the study or had any questions about my study.

Starting to manage the texts, I read through them several times to seek answers to the analytical questions. I did this by extracting quotes from the text that was aligned with the aim of the study. To organize the findings, the point of departure was to categorize the findings into three columns, "*topic*", "*problem*" and "*solution*" to find answers to the analytical questions. The quotes outlined metaphors and narratives that explained the problems they sought to resolve by making statements that were logical according to them. After many rounds of analysis, I gained enough results and quotes to create solid results to be analyzed further by using the analytical questions as the guiding principles. The analytical questions to guide the analysis were therefore, *"What are the problems with individuals' consumerism according to the retail sector?"* and *"What solutions does the retail sector provide for the problems in the documents and interview?"*. Entman (1993) says that frames show the definition of the problem as well as ways of changing the cause by providing us with information to propose solutions. Van Hulst and Yanow (2016) also say that the frames within organizations can be static and hard to change because the frames are deeply inveterate in the organizational identity. As a result of this, organizations' willingness to stick with an understanding of a problem and solution could hinder progress when the frames are a core part of the organization's identity (Van Hulst et al, 2016). I, therefore, believe that frame theory is the method needed to answer the research questions because the analysis could present how businesses frame these topics.

These findings from the analysis are presented in the next section of this research. I found three frame topics from the analysis; "*sustainable consumers", "change processes*" and "*actor constellation*". These frames could be derived from what Van Hulst and Yanow (2016) say about how frames work as a product of our ideas of specific phenomena, which lead us to act upon them as we engage in discourses or other communicative ways. Meaning that these three frames were always there in the texts, and emerged and became visible as I analyzed what was said between the lines. Our actions are derived from how we understand the problem and the frames give us an understanding of how to remedy it according to our subconscious mind (Daub, 2010). "*Sustainable consumers*" gave me an understanding of how retail businesses view consumers and their part in problems and solutions, both how they speak of consumers and sustainability, and what is silent in their discussion of the topic. "*Change processes*" showed how the company viewed the problems and solutions to change in the retail industry and how they understand their mean of change, and how to find a remedy for them. "*Actor constellation*" complements the other frames by framing their own part in the problems and solutions. It gives an understanding of how they view their power and what solutions they view as the most important ones.

4.1 Research Bias

This section will bring attention to reflexivity and how I, as a researcher, position myself in my study. As Prowse (2010) wrote about being clear and explicit about one's philosophical views, this research will also reflect on mine, the researchers' standpoints when handling the material, and how my philosophical views can play a part in the result.

As a student in the Environmental Communication and Management program, I have a pre-understandings of the social and economic structures in society and their pedigree. This meant that I had to reflect and question my own assumption of the subject of sustainable consumerism as this study prolonged. In the fall of 2022, I was an intern at Hemkop (in their sustainability department), which is a part of the Axfood group. During this time, my interest in the retail industry grew and I viewed Axfoods' work as impressive and in the front line of other grocery stores. The time there also made me question the industry and created many questions about sustainability in this sector of our society and how they work to create change, especially when they depend on growth. Coming into this research, I had to let these presumptions go and work in an objective manner. I do, however, understand that the months spent with the company affected me and I want to be sincere with this when writing this thesis. With this, I want to emphasize that I have always tried to be transparent with my findings when discussing them with the aim of creating credible results.

5. Results

In this section, I will present the result of my findings. I will thus answer the first research question, RQ1 [*which different frames of sustainable consumerism are found?*] and present findings to RQ2. A summary of the frames is presented in heading 5.4 *Summary of the findings* at the end of this chapter.

5.1 Framing Sustainable Consumerism

The problem framing of sustainability and consumerism is displayed in how they speak of consumers. The understanding presented by consumers is consistent throughout the documents. They mention consumers as price-oriented several times, hence they do not buy enough ecological food because there is a price difference between conventional and ecologically produced food.

"We notice that consumers increasingly steer towards low prices and campaigns, which disadvantages sustainability-labelled goods, which usually have a slightly higher price." (Axfood, Mat 2030:5)

They problematize this further that when consumers are price oriented and when there is a competitive market between the retail stores, the price comes first. This means that when consumers choose unsustainable products, the pricing will continue to be low on these products. As consumers create the market, they are also responsible for the prices. They state that even if they as a company want to create sustainable consumerism, they are pushed back by consumers because Axfood can not work long-term on sustainable campaigns, etc, but has to have short-term campaigns trying to nudge consumers to try and change their ways of eating and consuming food.

"[xx…] it is important to take this with you as well, that the customer makes demands. But then it's like oh no, no caged chicken eggs, etc. There aren't that many people who care about it [sustainable food] enough, for it to become a powerful consumer force of change. It's not that the customers say but "god you don't have any organic …" They don't turn and twist all the goods. As a company, you have to take care of that for the customers." (interviewee 2)

They frame the solution for consumers' actions by addressing political and systematic societal changes. They point out that sustainable labelled food is more expensive and sees this as a main issue for the low-priced goods to be chosen by consumers. Thus, Axfood does not see the agency as a solution to this problem, but rather as a systematic change to cut the prices for a specific product. This is also mentioned as that change comes by working together and creating more knowledge and innovations.

"Together with innovation and development, consumers' understanding of Swedish added value is crucial for competitive Swedish food production." (Axfood Mat 2030:5)

They also address the solution by bringing up their part in creating sustainable change. They work on creating in-house goods and solutions for consumers to buy and eat to create long-term change. They acknowledge their part in the change process as well as agency and systematic change.

"We have our own department that works with own brand products, it is also important not only to push prices. It is part of being able to supply the market with good and sustainable products." (interviewee 2)

This also implies that they have low trust in consumers to make sustainable choices and that they work in the background, changing the core rather than behavior.

"We control them subconsciously by lowering the minimum requirements to buy more sustainably. Without them [the customers] knowing about it. We should work on that even more. It is they [consumers] who are responsible for choosing sustainably, and we must offer them sustainable alternatives." (interviewee 1)

Communication is also mentioned as a means of behavioral change when consumers decide on their purchases. Axfood wants to endeavor themselves to use communicative paths to ensure that consumers have the right information to make sustainable decisions. Hence, they view consumers as not having enough knowledge to make these decisions and therefore want to educate them with information about the products. They want to fill the claimed knowledge gap and make consumers care and become more interested. Knowing that consumers are price-oriented, they still mean to inform consumers to make more sustainable choices to sell more sustainable food. They want to create a higher demand for sustainable goods even though it is a struggle with references to how they frame consumers.

"Invest in increasing demand for organic and other sustainable products, among other things by highlighting them in campaigns and communication." *(Axfood Mat2030:29)*

They mean to use their communication as a tool to send information to the consumers, to change the demand from low-price products into sustainably labelled products. They do however speak of them being in a competitive market where the retail stores all want to gain the most customers and growth. This competition is not favoring the demand for sustainable products but is rather pushing the prices down for unsustainable goods.

"We are a business-driven company. We could have other prices, but then the competition comes in and we have to increase sales and get customers into the stores. It is also market-based pricing, which means that when price and customer surveys are conducted, customers choose standard products [not sustainable]." (interviewee 3)

Even so, they want to engage the consumers and guide them by lowering the price of campaigns, promoting sustainable products, and communicating about them. This solution calls for them as a company to make the right incentives for consumers, which they pointed out as being price-oriented. They do however continue to make claims that consumers need to be educated and informed to make better decisions whereas they as a company can create the right incentives for consumers. This perspective is also questioned by Axfood because they problematize the solution for sustainable consumerism by giving information and education.

"[xx]. there is so much information that you are exposed to all the time. Studies show that it is not more information that consumers need, they cannot absorb more information. You have to adapt to the right choice, you have to get a feeling and understanding of a sustainability label to know what it stands for, for example. It should come more naturally." (interviewee 1).

The solution is therefore not directly offered to this problem because they disclaim their agenda. It does however strengthen the understanding of how they want to be viewed in the discourses of sustainable consumerism. The information they put out to their customers will be seen as them making an incentive for them to make a different decision. Their engagement might attract some consumers in some stores, and some consumers who want to choose sustainable products. Their information could therefore be a campaign to showcase their engagement with the environment.

5.2 Framing Change Processes

The problem framing of change processes can be found in how they speak of incentives, or the lack of them. Incentives are viewed by Axfood as a means to create change but they do not get recognition of this from consumers or politicians. They frame the problem as even if Axfood would create incentives for people to buy more sustainable food, consumers would still choose to go after the lowest price. They, therefore, reject their part in creating the incentives that are most likely to make people choose sustainably produced food.

"Today, Swedish consumers who want to eat more sustainably are not encouraged by any price incentives. On the contrary, it is often more expensive to buy sustainability-labelled food. "(Axfood Mat 2030:12)

This formulation offers an understanding that the change can not be left to the consumers because the market is not creating the right incentives for consumers to act on the instinct, to choose the lowest price.

"It [the climate crisis] is not solved with political sanctions, there is the competitive situation that creates a very wrong pricing. A structural flaw in the entire industry." (interviewee 3)

Instead, they frame the solution to create incentives for farmers and other producers in the chain to cut prices for consumers. They present multiple suggestions for how to create incentives for farmers to be more inclined to farm ecological and sustainable food. The incentives differ from receiving funds from the government to cutting taxes on certain means to reduce their costs.

"[xx].. green tax exchange where a tax is introduced on fossil fuels and the employer contribution is reduced." (Axfood, Mat 2030:23)

"Tax-exempt all solar electricity that is produced on and used within one's property, regardless of size." (Axfood, Mat 2030:23)

"Benefit biodiversity by providing financial compensation to agriculture for ecosystem services.. [xx]"(Axfood, Mat 2030:27)

Moreover, they view constitutive responsibility as an exercise to change. Tax and other compensation are mentioned as a solution for the farmers of being able to produce the necessary sustainable food to have a more sustainable production. Axfood is therefore creating the understanding that their responsibility is as a bystander that use their voice to change governmental constitutions and policies rather than the industry on their own.

"[xx]..far too much responsibility is placed on agriculture, trade, and consumers when it comes to changing to more sustainable food production and consumption. Greater political responsibility and powerful measures are now required to bring about a comprehensive change that quickly takes effect." (Axfood, mat2030:12)

By shifting the responsibility to politicians rather than pointing to the complex economical structure that the market is built on, they wish to create long-term change that could be implemented at a fast pace.

"But we also do it [influence politics] to bring about a faster change, and a broad and massive change. It is usually a more efficient way to go if politics helps and introduces incentives so that it is not so expensive with sustainable food, e.g. Then some kind of action from politics is needed." (interviewee 2)

Political responsibility is put forward as the most important course of action to create more sustainable consumerism in the long term. They argue that the agency of consumers is not to be counted on as creating a sustainable change. This calls for production and trade as well and they want to see the responsibility lifted from these actors in society and instead see a political change. It is however contractionary because they mention consumers and how they try to create incentives for them to make other decisions than before.

"For example, on Garant's (Axfoods own branded goods) milk packages and in social media, information has been spread about how, for example, organic production is important for biological diversity." (Axfood Mat 2030:29).

The incentives for consumers are not aligned with the incentives for producers etc and other actors in the supply chain. Incentives for producers involve systematic change, and it is understood by Axfood that these incentives are more likely to create the change they advocate for. The incentives for consumers are arguably more silent, hence they frame incentives for consumers as uncalled for as they focus on lobbying instead. Their low trust for consumers can also be understood by how they push money into farmers' production but are not changing prices for

consumers. The price reductions they implement are mainly on campaigns for a time that is lifted after the campaign has reached its end time. These findings of how they frame incentives give an understanding of how they view their part in this and what they can achieve.

5.3 Framing Actor Constellations

Axfood problematizes the lack of actions from the actors in the industry in almost all sections of the food industry. Axfood does however say that they, themselves, as actors in the climate crisis are the engaged and straightforward actors.

"We do a lot. We participate in various collaborations, and networks at various levels and are involved in discourses on sustainability. We are collaborating with our suppliers and industry peers and competitors in some cases where we can collaborate." (interviewee 2)

They do however problematize their role and the whole industry. They frame themselves as serious and the once who do the work even though it is not the most profitable or demanding one. They do also state that they as the only actor cannot create this change alone, but need cooperation from all parts of society.

"It [being a serious actor] doesn't just apply to us at Axfood, it should apply to everyone who gets involved in sustainability issues. The vast majority do not really understand the seriousness of the climate crisis. That's a bigger question. It's a societal issue! Politicians have a responsibility in e.g., education and taxes. We're stuck and I think you can go on a rant if you think you have the whole solution. You shouldn't do that." (interviewee 2)

The proposed solution to the issue is to act on a long-term solution that involves other stakeholders and governmental steering. As mentioned earlier in the result, they want to change the structure and frame themselves as not being able to do this alone. They frame other actors in the industry as uncommitted to the crises and frame themselves as an actor that is making the long-term changes necessary to tackle the crisis. They speak of consumers as being rather powerless as well as unwillingly to be a part of the change because of many factors. Therefore, there is an understanding that consumers are not included as an actor that can create change, and do therefore refer to other actors in the industry, such as other retail stores, and their uninterest in the matter of creating change.

"But then we wouldn't get the customers with us [by increasing pricing]. So, it is a trade-off that is the big dilemma and problem in-retail companies where the shareholders want profit and wages." (interviewee 3)

The framing of this retail conflict is described as money sanctioned and the sustainability aspects are not prioritized enough, according to Axfood. To change the conflict, Axfood frames the solution as that there is a complex structural problem that leads to the high pricing of sustainable food. Even if the retail businesses are being framed as having the opportunity to create this change, they also speak of the competition between the businesses and how that affects their means of change. The competition is creating a greater divide between their goals and the outcome and is framed as a big problem in the industry that is hindering them.

" [xx].. it's that some goods we make money on and others not. It is not only solved with political sanctions but there is a competitive situation that creates very wrong pricing. A structural flaw in the entire industry. " (interviewee 3)

" [xx].. it is not the whole solution [politics]. In my world, we would have very low margins on sustainable products and high margins on non-durable, unhealthy products. That's what everyone should think, but nobody in the industry thinks that way because it's competition, unfortunately." (interviewee 3)

The concern for how the competition in the retail business is affecting sustainability goals is notable. The hoped solution to this problem is to neutralize the market concerning sustainable food with the hope that sustainable consumerism would become greater and more inclusive to everyone, as mentioned earlier that pricing is one of the proposed problems with sustainable food.

Moreover, they mention governance as a large factor in creating the actions, to create the long-term change they often mention. They frame the actions of politicians as weak but necessary as well as inadequate for the change they propose to occur. To actualize their proposed outcome, the actions must come from incentives mainly created by politicians. Actions of actors other than themselves in society are therefore very outlined and concretized. The findings of their actions to change revolve mainly around them integrating the sustainability goals into their business plan. One of the solutions they present is to integrate sustainability into their business.

"Sustainability issues are integrated into the business work to create commitment throughout the organization" (Axfoods sustainability program, 2022:3)

Their engagement in the sustainability matter can also be understood in how they view the problem of meat production and consumption, and how they act upon it. They state multiple times that the meat industry is damaging the planet and that they have created actions against this. The main solutions presented are incentives on tax, to make the pricing cheaper on sustainable goods. This is something they claim that they can not create because they do not regulate the tax. They do however have goals integrated into the business which entails that all aspects of the supply chain should include a sustainable aspect. They problematize their engagement as they argue that a joint engagement is needed from the retail business, as well as support from the government to be able to create the sustainable change they imply. By bringing sustainability to light in their external and internal planning, the solution is understood as being the leader and taking action, even if the incentives from other actors are weak and discouraging.

"*The more you dig and learn about this area [the climate crisis], it feels like we should run even faster, even though we run fast already. I can't talk about a real change, because then the whole system has to fundamentally change. Then Axfood is a big player in small Sweden and then many parts need to be involved.*" (interviewee 2)

5.4 Summary of the findings

This section presents the summarized findings from the analysis. It gives an overview of the frame topic and its problem and solution framing.

Frame topic	Problem framing	Solution framing
Sustainable consumerism	Consumers are price oriented and not enough informed. Without the engagement from consumers, companies cannot create a market for sustainable consumerism.	Make it easier for consumers to make the sustainable choices by addressing political and systematic societal changes.
Change processes	There is not enough governmental support for the actors in the supply chain for retail businesses to cut prices for consumers on sustainable goods.	Political responsibility and funds are important to create long-term change in the retail businesses.
Actor constellation	There is a lack of action or engagement from other retail businesses to take action against the climate crisis.	Engage the whole industry, stakeholders and government in a long-term plan to make the market focus on sustainable food and goods as well as integrating sustainability into their business plans.

Table 1. An overview of the findings from the analysis

6. Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the results and answer RQ2 *[Are there any tensions between the identified frame?].* The tension found in the analysis is displayed in Table 2. There are tensions in the perception of actors, sustainability, and ability to change. This section will focus on these tensions and reflect on their meanings. This section will also address the limitations of the study and give suggestions for future research.

6.1 Summary of the tensions found in the analysis

Frame topic	Tension 1		Tension 2
Sustainable consumerism	Business-driven company	⇄	Want to create pro-environmental actions
Explanation	The companies are driven by their ravenous and need profit to grow.		They do not eg. Want to cut prices to make consumers buy more sustainable food because of the economic structures, competition, etc, even though their ambition is pro-environmental
Change processes	Creating change	⇄	Focus on politics
Explanation	They want to educate and inform the consumers to make them make better choices when buying food.		Low trust in consumers and the market structures creates a focus on political changes instead of changes in the consumers.
Actor constellation	Educate consumers	⇄	Focus on other actors
Explanation	They have an internalized view that they can create change but is also framing themselves as a lone fighter for the environment.		They say that they need assistance from the government and other stakeholders in order to create the change they communicate is necessary.

Table 2. An overview of the tensions found in the analysis.

The tensions emerged as the analysis started a new cycle as research question 2 was about to be answered. I viewed the summarized frames and saw which ones were creating tensions as they operated in the same space.

6.1.1 Creating Sustainable consumerism

The result shows tensions in the retail businesses' approach toward sustainable consumerism. Axfood frames itself as part of an industry with structural defects and emphasizes the need for other actors' engagement to create change in the long term. However, they show little engagement towards the consumer as an actor who can be involved in changing sustainable consumerism. Axfood views individuals as uneducated in the sustainability field and price-oriented beings, steered by socio-economic structures, and therefore choose to focus on other actors to create change. Axfood claims that they need other actors' engagement to create change in the long term. The problem with this framing lies in what actions they see that they can take as a company. Hence, they frame the problem as a phenomenon out of their hands as long as they do not get other actors with them. One actor that Axfood shows little or no engagement in is the consumer. The consumer is not seen as the actor that can become involved to change sustainable consumerism without the businesses' support, hence, the industry needs to educate and inform the consumer to make other choices. This also shows that the industry has not completely given up trust in consumers but is not valuing them as the main contributor to change in the present time.

Agency refers to actions from individuals or groups in society (Harrington, 2005). These actions are related to structures in society and Harrington (2005) argues that these actions can work as a development for structures in society. Our actions are shaped by the structures, but they can also create change through individuals' choices each day. Literature on agency and structures give an understanding of how individuals can create change through their choices. Axfood has an underlying understanding of the individuals and chooses to ignore most of their work towards individual actions and rather focus on other actors with institutional legitimacy. Giddens (1979) argued that some parts of society should not be put into individuals' hands and sympathized with individuals as being too interactive with the outside world. There are some structures that individuals do not create in society such as institutional realities (ibid, 1979). Operational, functioning systems in society are needed to create change and to uphold a society according to Giddens (1979). Individuals could therefore be argued as a lesser powerful actors when it comes to action and change because they are too influenced by the cultural and structural realities that might not align with the realities of sustainable change from other scholars.

To compare these statements of consumers, Erthgartner (2018) says that consumers do need influences from other external forces to change their ideas and attitudes. For individuals to activate and start to change attitudes, a force must come from the surrounding world (Erthgartner, 2018). Positively to this, Axfood is trying to further consumers' gap of knowledge on the sustainability spectrum. The dominant ideas of sustainable food and consumerism that Axfood reproduce through their communication work as a force to make these ideas flourish. Despite the vast research on consumerism and its pros and cons, Axfood chooses to focus on both sides of its communication instead of choosing one. They have some focus on consumers and more focus on changing the institutions and governmental support, a tactic that could be the subject of future research.

Furthermore, Sweden has a high percentage of middle-class members where 65% of the population is middle class and 20% are lower-income members (OECD, 2019). Axfood mention that consumers are price oriented and see how their customers go more for a lower price than sustainable products which are more often more expensive. Evidently, consumers in Sweden's middle-class choose products depending on their income. Bourdieu (1979) speaks of the concept of habitus, that individuals act according to the social significance of the action where culture precedence the individuals' knowledge and understanding of the world. Individuals are therefore steered by the structures and organize their actions according to how the world is understood by its realities (Bourdieu, 1977). For example, Axfood views individuals as price-oriented beings that are conditioned by their belief of the world and therefore choose to go for the cheapest price because they may lack belief in the system, the market, or the future of the environment. Notably is that the habitus is derived from the socio-economical structures and is applied to where someone identifies themselves as being a part of. Individuals objectify themselves as being a part of a specific economic class and act according to how cultural appropriation is practiced (Bourdieu, 1979). This can be displayed when individuals display their choices or ways, in which their social structures are shown (Bourdieu, 1979). The complexity of individuals and choice includes cultural, individual, and socio-economical meanings. The results show that Axfood chooses to focus on other actors to create change instead of consumers concerning their lack of making sustainable choices. Viewing the literature on the subject of agency and structure, one can understand how and why Axfood frames individuals in this manner. They claim that the industry needs long-term structures and by only focusing on habitus, they would lose institutional and structural change. The similarities in these theoretical approaches of individuals give an understanding of the tension found in the result. The ones responsible for their business are understood as uneducated and uninterested in their work and they are therefore trying to change the structure

behind the curtain. Axfood chooses to be the actor who changes the core of products to sustainable options in pursuit of becoming the leader in sustainability, with or without their customers. The information gap is too wide to fill and with consumers who are already full of cultural and socio-economical habitus, change within an individual takes time. Time was something that was mentioned as a problem regarding the economic structure of society.

6.1.2 Change Processes and Politics

The result implies that while Axfood recognizes the importance of incentives and governmental support in creating change, they do not believe that consumers or politicians see their struggle to create the change they propose. Axfood says that even if they create incentives for people to buy sustainable food, consumers will still choose the lowest price. Therefore, they propose creating incentives for farmers and producers to reduce prices for consumers instead. Axfood sees itself as a leader in creating change and argues that despite their engagement, equal responsibility should fall on politicians to create comprehensive and quick solutions. They do acknowledge the importance of educating consumers about sustainability but ultimately believe that systemic changes and political action are necessary for long-term change. Halkier (1999) argues that co-responsibility in society is a complicated mission that rarely meets the proposed outcome. This is because politics and consumers are driving each other and forming one another by how one acts. If consumers continue to buy unsustainable food, the politics do not have the willpower or means to change this structure (Evans et al, 2017). So, if retail businesses would change their structures to make more consumers buy more sustainable food, politics could get appeals to change structures to make the products more appealing to consumers in society by for example lowering the price of sustainable products. The frames show that Axfood understands that consumers run the market with their choices and actions when buying food, yet, they do not create incentives for consumers to choose or act in accordance with their business goals to create sustainable consumerism. Even with the presented solution, which is to lower prices on sustainable food, they still act according to the economic structures that create a climate that hinders the progress for sustainable consumerism. Instead, they seek changes in the structures within the system of the society for a constitutional change.

As of now, retail business act according to these economic structures because the economic climate is expecting growth. With these fixed structures, Axfood chooses to socially integrate with the market and politicians and expects these actions to create a passive change of attitudes. Creating a shared meaning of the issue could help to generate more engagement in the climate issue.

6.1.3 Sustainable Consumerism and Societal Structures

The tensions of the framing of sustainability in the result revolve around the role of businesses in environmental sustainability and communication. There is a conflict between the commitment to environmental issues and the business interests of companies like Axfood. The result highlights the tension between the need for businesses to position themselves as environmentally friendly for ravenous stakeholders while also fulfilling their financial goals. The result also highlights the tension between the public sphere and corporate communication. The result shows that Axfood has a high commitment to environmental issues and the conflicts surrounding them. By integrating goals into the business plan and lobbying for their cause, their engagement is seen and understood by the external viewer according to how they want. This phenomenon is common in environmental communication, as a means to show their attitudes toward the environment from a business perspective (Pezzullo, 2018). Their framing of sustainability is a way to position themselves as environmentally inclined for the common idea of the solution to the crisis. By reaching out to the public to show the problems we are facing and present possible solutions, the pressure could address constitutional governments (Brulle, 2010). Axfood as a business also has a social movement where they want to have the legitimacy of being an actor with the problem formulation and the solutions. One way of establishing this legitimacy is their communication as they show their attitudes through their communication. Thus, they are simultaneously making statements about their sustainability work, framing themselves as being a sustainable company. Their actions should therefore, according to them, create a stronger business and contribute to the SDGs. Their metadiscourse on actors and sustainability is, as Craig (2005) says, a talk about talk and how they frame the conversation on what and how something should be done. Modern society gives cultural currency to our actions depending on our position in society and communication plays a big role in the public sphere (Craig, 2005). It is the way a business chooses to communicate in the sphere that can determine the future attitudes that could emerge. It could, for example, be an agenda that silence or show important issues and ultimately decide what is being outed into the sphere (Foust et al, 2009). Dominant ideologies on sustainability are clearly shown in the result of how they define the problems, their attitudes to causes, and how they frame their solutions.

The goal to strengthen the growth of the business and at the same time contribute to the external and internal goals on sustainability creates tension when they have proclaimed that their part in creating the change is limited. Change is framed as something others create rather than something that Axfood creates. The offered solution to this problem is to lobby for change towards politicians and other institutional actors with power. Axfood can therefore continue its market plan to

gain profit, and at the same time work on campaigns, information, and lobbying towards consumers and politicians, and increase their growth. Hence, the solution is to lay the problem of creating sustainable consumerism on other stakeholders and they can continue to work internally to change and at the same time grow as a business. This is a wicked problem because the sustainability department has a strong understanding of what is needed to be done, to slow the climate crisis, but is challenged by economic structures. As the economic structures demand growth, change from within is something that the industry is accepting even if they want to create faster change. They do however make a statement of a solution that they have ownership over, by contributing with funds to the farmers to create an incentive to change how the farmers produce a certain product. The high ambition and willingness to create change are hindered by the economic structures but this does not slow the sustainability work in the retail industry. They have an understanding of the problem and the solution but are not willing to take accountability for the solutions, where they could create more change if they would step away from some of the economic structures and act according to their values.

6.2 Limitations and Future Studies

In this section, I present the limitations and suggested future research.

The strengths of my study are the new meaningful insights gathered and the generation of new ideas and understandings of the subject. With frame analysis, I was able to view the phenomena of sustainable consumerism from different perspectives. The choice of using this method of analysis gave my study useful and concrete results that can otherwise be hidden. The tensions found gave its understanding of the phenomena and also the struggles that come with these tensions. The material used came directly from Axfood, and the use of a primary source gives the study credibility for not using other secondary sources.

My study has some limitations. This study does not include a market aspect when studying the frames. By not including the economic aspects in the study, it could miss some important attributes of the frames. Hence, this research only focuses on the frames to understand how the case understands sustainability from an environmental communication point of view. By doing so, other aspects of the broad spectrum of institutional, systematical governance, for example, are lost. Additionally, as the study is conducted inside the environmental communication and management program, it is not expected to grasp the whole spectrum, whereas this study could generate further research in other fields of education to explore the structures in which retail businesses operate.

Also, this research does not include and study several other retail businesses in Sweden. Thus, other retail businesses' perspectives are not included. The study does however make assumptions about the industry. It does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of the sustainability challenges in the food industry, beyond framing them as structural and complex issues related to competition, pricing, and governance. The reason for this is because of time and lack of it when conducting the study. This master thesis did not have enough time to include all the retail businesses, even though more research in this field is welcomed. The other companies also have sustainability reports and guiding documents that could be studied and analyzed to gain knowledge of how the other retail businesses' attitudes are toward sustainability. Further research could also examine greenwashing of communication such as campaigns or information that they try to reproduce towards the customers. Finally, as with any other master's thesis, I could not include all perspectives or actors to convey these limiting factors. I do instead want the limitations to be viewed as gaps and openings for future research and ideas.

Moreover, the interviewees from Axfood presented their ideas which could represent their ideas which sometimes could go against the company's values. This could question the answers from the interviewees but I argue that the answers represent the sustainability department in the company and they represent the common idea in the department and their views of the future responsibilities they have. The ideas are therefore a representation of their worldview of what must be done and are projecting this into the business to align with their values of a sustainable world.

7. Conclusion

The pressure on retail businesses to be a part of, or even lead, the transition into a more sustainable world is putting a lot of pressure on the wholesale market. The debate on whom the responsibility should fall on is divided between consumers, the government, and companies. Retail businesses do nevertheless play a significant role in society by shaping how and what behavior consumers have. This study aimed to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism. To identify these frames, I chose Axfood as a case to represent the retail businesses in the Swedish market. In order to identify these frames, I used frame analysis to find the problem- and solutions framing of the case and found three frames in the analysis method; *sustainable consumers, change processes, and actor constellations*. The findings of the *sustainable consumerism frame* were that they viewed consumers as price oriented and not enough informed about the climate crisis. Without engagement from consumers, companies cannot create a market for sustainable consumerism. The framed solution was a need for political and systematic societal changes to create lower prices on sustainable products so that consumers can afford these products. The *change process* frame mentioned the lack of governmental support in favor of creating the necessary change. The framed solution was to create more political responsibility, taxes, and funds to create long-term change in the wholesale and retail business. The final frame was the *actor constellation* which presented the lack of engagement in the industry. Saying that one company can not create the big movement needed to change consumerism in the industry. Creating a joint engagement in the industry, stakeholders, and government and having similar goals in their business plans was the solution. My discussion found that communication strategies used by businesses can shape public opinion and ultimately determine future attitudes toward sustainability. Societal structures and attitudes create tension in these frames which makes the question of responsibility hard to determine. My discussion highlights the tension between dominant ideologies on sustainability and the need to find effective solutions to environmental problems. The thesis gave me an understanding of how retail business wants to change, but is faced with governmental and societal structures that are difficult to change due to the dominant ideologies and cultural structures that are common today. I found that the engagement for a sustainable future is present, but is silenced by pricing, individualism, and the fixed structures in today's society, a truly wicked problem.

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10. Appendix 1 Interview Guide

Start

What is your role in Axfood?

Why did you want to work at Axfood?

With what words would you use to describe Axfood?

Body

How would you describe Axfood's role on the retail market in sustainability?

How would you describe sustainability?

What actions do you take in order to create sustainable change?

What actions do you take in order to influence different parts of society?

Why have you chosen to focus on these parts?

What part do you focus mostly on [to create change]? Why?

What is your perception of consumers today?

Are there any incentives that are making consumers make better choices in your stores?

Is it your responsibility to educate/inform them?

How do you think consumers receive the information (you put out in the stores)?

What stands in the way for consumers to be more sustainable when grocery shopping?

What more can you do to make people make decisions according to your values?

Do you think consumers or systematic change is the most suitable way of creating change in the retail business?

Why can't you as a business change the prices to be more attractive to consumers? Ie for longer period of times.

Do you think your part in creating sustainable consumerism could be greater?

What could you do differently to reach them?

Why don't you do incentives like the one you described?

Popular science summary

This thesis is written at the beginning of 2023. During this time, retail businesses in Sweden are under much scrutiny when the new year is starting with inflation, an ongoing war in Ukraine, and financial difficulties in the world after the pandemic. The environment and climate crisis are therefore not on everyone's lips, but the circumstances created an interest in me to explore the retail industry. The pressure on retail businesses to be a part of, or even lead, the transition into a more sustainable world is putting a lot of pressure on the wholesale market.

The study's purpose was to identify different frames of sustainable consumerism in the retail industry by using a case. This meant two things, I used frame analysis to find the frames, and I used a case to create s about the retail business. Frame analysis is a method that analyses someone's understanding of the world. Another aspect of frame theory is that you can find the visible and hidden frames, meaning that you can use frame analysis to focus on what is being said, and what is not being said and examine why. The case used was Axfood because they have been establishing themselves as pro-environmentalists since the early 00s. They act as a frontline movement in the industry and work towards consumers, stakeholders, and the government seeking change and more integrated sustainability incentives in the industry.

I found three frames from the analysis: *sustainable consumers, change processes, and actor constellations*. The findings of the *sustainable consumerism frame* were that they viewed consumers as price oriented and not enough informed about the climate crisis. Without engagement from consumers, companies cannot create a market for sustainable consumerism. The framed solution was a need for political and systematic societal changes to create lower prices on sustainable products so that consumers can afford these products. The *change process* frame mentioned the lack of governmental support in favor of creating the necessary change. The framed solution was to create more political responsibility, taxes, and funds to create long-term change in the wholesale and retail business. The final frame was the *actor constellation* which presented the lack of engagement in the industry. One company can not create the big movement needed to change consumerism in the industry. Creating a joint engagement in the industry, stakeholders, and government and having similar goals in their business plans was the solution.

These findings can be used to explore more of the relationship between sustainability, consumers, and the retail industry. Understanding more on this subject is important in order for our society to understand how to create change, both as individuals and as a business. Future research could continue using frame theory in research of the retail industry and explore other companies, economic structures, and change processes in relation to time. As well as greenwashing, progress in relation to goals, and lobbying.

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