

**DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMER PERSPECTIVES HOW
SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION IS PERCEIVED
AND SIGNALLED IN THE PREVAILING CONSUMER
CULTURE - AMONG GENERATION Y**

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**Author: Ville Happonen
Discipline: Corporate Environmental Management
Supervisors: Kukka-Maaria Ulvila & Marjo Siltaoja**



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

ABSTRACT

Author Ville Happonen	
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Abstract This thesis investigates Generation Y sustainable food consumers in the prevailing consumer culture and their differences in signalling and perceiving sustainability. The reasons why they engaged to a sustainable diet and the possible conflicts around it were also studied. Relevant contexts around consumer culture, possessions, identities and Generation Y regarding sustainable food consumption were presented as the theoretical framework. The focus was on Generation Y consumers in order to recognize relevant the contexts that influence their behaviour in the marketplace. Qualitative research methods were utilized as the data was gathered through nine in-depth interviews furthermore applied thematic analysis (ATA) and typologies were used in the data analysis. It was recognized that there were three different groups with different perception of sustainability affecting on food choices and signalling. The perception of sustainability and food choice was influenced by friends, family and spouses however the influence of powerful information source such as documentary films, books and university courses were mentioned important as well. Interviewees reflected experiences throughout their life that were experienced as relevant regarding sustainable food consumption. However the stage of maturity was witnessed as the most important step towards more sustainable dietary choices. Due to the different influences and perceptions about sustainable foods there were differences how willingly they would discuss about sustainability and food with others as for some food was more sensitive topic than for others. With most of the groups (2/3) sustainability transcends to other consumption choices as well. Sustainable food consumption included a powerful symbolic function regarding identity if the recipient was able to receive the preferred message. Sustainable food choices were detected producing mental and physical pleasure. The characteristics that pleasure and hedonism in consumption are important contexts for Generation Y (Purhonen et al. 2008:290) were witnessed.	
Keywords Sustainable consumption, food, consumer culture, consumer identity project, in-depth interview, sustainable consumer, Generation Y	
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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	3
CONTENTS	4
LIST OF TABLES	6
LIST OF FIGURES	6
LIST OF APPENDICES	6
1 INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 Background information and rationale for studying the topic	7
1.2 Research questions and objectives	9
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	12
2.1 Consumer culture theory (CCT)	12
2.1.1 Consumer culture	14
2.2 Signalling sustainable food consumer identity	15
2.2.1 Personal and collective identity	15
2.2.2 Signalling identities	16
2.2.3 Possessions as part of identities	16
2.2.4 Food and symbolism	18
2.2.5 Other ways of signalling identity than possessions	19
2.2.6 Differences between cultures and genders regarding objects	20
2.3 Sustainable food consumption	22
2.3.1 Ethical (Sustainable) consumer	23
2.4 Characteristics and contexts influencing Generation Y	24
3 RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA	28
3.1 In-depth interview	28
3.1.1 In-depth interviews versus focus groups	29
3.2 Data acquisition	29
3.2.1 Preparation & Implementation	31
3.3 Data analysis	32
3.3.1 Applied thematic analysis (ATA) and typologies	32
3.3.2 The process of analysing data	33
3.4 Trustworthiness of the research	34
4 RESEARCH RESULTS	36
4.1 Group 1 - Ethical consumers (A: 1-5)	36
4.1.1 Food	36
4.1.2 Feelings	37
4.1.3 Friends	37
4.1.4 Future	38
4.2 Group 2 - Natural consumers (B: 1-3)	39
4.2.1 Food	39
4.2.2 Feelings	39
4.2.3 Friends	40

4.2.4	Future	40
4.3	Group 3 - Healthy consumers (C: 1).....	42
4.3.1	Food	42
4.3.2	Feelings.....	42
4.3.3	Friends.....	43
4.3.4	Future	43
4.4	Shared traits between the groups	45
4.5	Signalling sustainable identities through food products	46
4.5.1	Group 1 - Ethical consumers	46
4.5.2	Group 2 - Natural consumers.....	47
4.5.3	Group 3 - Healthy consumers	48
4.6	Other ways of signalling sustainable identities than food products.....	49
4.6.1	Group 1 - Ethical consumers	50
4.6.2	Group 2 - Natural consumers.....	51
4.6.3	Group 3 - Healthy consumers	52
4.7	Important and contradicting contexts when engaging to sustainable consumption	53
4.7.1	Group 1 - Ethical consumers	53
4.7.2	Group 2 - Natural consumers.....	54
4.7.3	Group 3 - Healthy consumers	54
4.8	Summary regarding results, consumer culture and sustainable food consumers.....	56
5	DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION	58
5.1	Discussion	58
5.2	Limitations and future research.....	60
5.3	Conclusions.....	61
	APPENDICES.....	65
	REFERENCES.....	71

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	Characteristics of the interviewees	30
TABLE 2	Main differences between the groups	44
TABLE 3	Differences between the groups in the sustainable food identity construction 49	
TABLE 4	Differences in the other sustainability related consumption than food	52
TABLE 5	Differences between the contexts and conflicts related to food consumption 55	

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Signalling sustainable identities through objects	21
FIGURE 2	Pictures taken by Group 2 participants regarding sustainable foods.....	38
FIGURE 3	Pictures taken by Group 2 participants regarding sustainable foods.....	41
FIGURE 4	Pictures taken by Group 3 participant regarding sustainable foods.	44
FIGURE 5	The most relevant contexts influencing the perception of sustainability and signalling among Ethical consumers.....	63
FIGURE 6	The most relevant contexts influencing the perception of sustainability and signalling among Natural consumer consumers.....	63
FIGURE 7	The most relevant contexts influencing the perception of sustainability and signalling among Healthy consumers.....	64

LIST OF APPENDICES

ANNEX 1	Interview guide.....	65
ANNEX 2	Flyer for recruiting interviewees.....	67
ANNEX 3	Preliminary questions for the interviewees.....	67
ANNEX 4	Form of approval to conduct an interview.....	69

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates how sustainable consumption regarding food is perceived and signalled in the prevailing consumer culture. Research focuses on Generation Y consumers. The reasons why consumers are engaged to sustainable diet are studied as well as the possible contradictions around it. Consumer identity project perspective is considered in order to investigate if sustainable foods are important for personal and collective identity.

1.1 Background information and rationale for studying the topic

Sustainable consumption aims at satisfying the basic needs required for improved quality of life while minimizing the environmental and social impacts over the life cycle of a product (IISD, n.d.). Over the past few decades people have become more aware of the sustainability related issues regarding consumer goods. The increased awareness can be observed in Finland as well where sustainable consumption is one the most significant consumption trends (Wilska & Nyrhinen, 2013). Although the awareness towards sustainability has increased, it has not reflected on the demand of sustainable consumer goods. Sustainable consumers mostly wish to decrease their overall consumption (ibid., 2013). However food is a different context to study than other consumer goods. A person who wants to maintain a healthy diet and satisfy his/hers basic needs should not decrease eating.

Food has several environmental and social impacts. For instance Fair Trade was established in order to improve the conditions of the small scale producers in the developing countries. In addition food has a major impact on the environment as agriculture is responsible for a large share (24%) of the global greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2014). The environmental impacts of food are reflected to the household level as well. According to IPTS (2006), 20-30% of households' total environmental impacts originates from food and drink consumption. Despite the social and environmental impacts households should not decrease the consumption of food. They should, rather, prefer foods and choices that are sustainable such as engaging to sustainable diet. According to Laakso & Lettenmeier (2015) households can decrease animal source foods from their diets in order to live in more sustainable way. However some consumers might find changes in the diet and living habits too difficult to overcome if they do not have any support from friends, family or other relevant groups. According to Jobs, Sobal & Devine (2000) a person adopting a sustainable diet needs realign their self-identity and social relationships.

According to Vermeir & Verbeke (2006) sustainable food products such as organic or fair-trade products have a market share less than 1%. This indicates that there is a lack of support from the policy level to increase the availability of

sustainable food products. Nevertheless it also reveals the consumers' unwillingness to purchase sustainable foods. As the majority of the consumers do not buy sustainable foods, sustainable food consumption can be regarded as an exception from the cultural norm. This can have an influence how phenomena of sustainable food consumption is perceived and signalled in the Western cultures. For instance Romo & Donovan-Kicken (2012) found out that vegetarians created communication strategies beforehand in order to decrease others discomfort and possible conflicts around their vegetarian identity.

According to Peattie & Belz (2009) consumers who perceive themselves as sustainable are not consistent across all types of purchase and consumption contexts. This indicates that there are different perceptions about what contexts are important regarding sustainable consumer goods. Some sustainable consumer goods might also be more essential than others when signalling sustainable identity. Different perceptions about sustainability and the symbolic value of a consumer good can also influence, that how successfully and willingly consumers buy sustainable products. For instance some can perceive themselves as sustainable food consumers as they buy organic meat. However some consumers with different perception of sustainability might find organic meat consumers as unsustainable because of the ethical or environmental problems that meat production entails.

Prevailing consumer culture offers possibilities to construct preferred personal and collective identities (Thompson & Arnould, 2005). Sustainable food consumers can also construct their identities through consuming foods, which are perceived as sustainable. Grocery stores and eco stores equipped with some eco-labelled products, offers a possibility to choose products that fits for preferred sustainable identities. Some sustainable consumers might feel that these market places do not offer foods they perceive as sustainable. Belk (2013) mentions that the development of digital devices and services has enabled co-construction of individual and collective identities through internet. Therefore some consumers might also utilize digital devices in order to signal their preferred identities to the ideal audience.

The development of mobile devices, internet and IT services have made people more connected and prone to a lot of information. The enormous amount of information available has made people more aware of sustainability related issues as Vermeir & Verbeke (2006) suggest. However informed consumers do not necessarily make informed choices. According to rational choice theory informed consumers would scale between the costs and benefits of the sustainable product based on their knowledge. Peattie & Belz (2009) mentions that aforementioned rational explanations for sustainable consumption have been highly unsuccessful. Focusing on the sociological explanations such as the impact of consumer culture provides more fruitful interpretation about the topic. For instance Rajagopal (2011) concludes that purchase intentions towards fashion apparel were mostly influenced by the store and brand preferences, rather than price or other rational explanations. These sociological explanations are also relevant when research focuses on the Generation Y consumers.

Generation Y people find consumer products important for personal-image building (Parment, 2012). Therefore consumer products entail different meanings and symbols. The symbols and meanings associated with sustainable food products can be more important for Generation Y consumers rather than the price or the taste. Friends are also regarded as especially important for Generation Y people (Parment, 2012), which can also have an influence when buying consumer goods. According to Purhonen, Hoikkala & Roos (2008) social and ethical choices have become individualized for Generation Y consumers. Some consumers might point out their social and ethical considerations by consuming foods that address the right kind of concerns. Sustainable food products can be bought in order to signal sustainable identity, as well as belongingness to a group of friends who are like-minded. These aforementioned contexts as well as the estimation that Generation Y consumers will have major impact on the economy through their purchasing power (Noble, Hyatko & Phillips, 2009; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008), makes Generation Y consumers a relevant research topic.

There are many recommendations for policies and businesses regarding sustainable consumption (e.g. Laakso & Lettenmeier, 2015; Akenji, 2014; Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Sundkvist, 2005). There are as well many studies regarding consumer motivations and attitudes towards sustainable consumption (e.g. Tanner & Wölfling, 2003; Honkanen, Verplanken & Olsen, 2006; Lea E. & Worsley T, 2005; Magnusson, Arvola, Koivisto Hursti, Åberg & Sjöden, 2001). This leaves a research gap to investigate on how and why do consumers who already perceive themselves as sustainable act in the prevailing consumer culture. In addition research regarding sustainable food consumers in the Jyväskylä region is relatively low. Theoretical framework relies on consumer culture theory (CCT) with a specific aim on consumer identity projects. The main focus of the consumer identity projects is to reveal how consumer products such as foods are used for identity construction (Sherry & Belk, 2007). According to Sherry & Belk (2007) consumer identity projects can also reveal cultural contradictions and rituals around consumer goods. The amount of studies regarding consumer identity projects and sustainable food consumers is rather low. This research wishes to reveal ways how sustainable consumers perceive sustainability and how foods are used to signal sustainable behaviour in a specific context and setting.

1.2 Research questions and objectives

As mentioned in the previous chapter that there are many different contexts affecting sustainability around food, however the role of households and individuals are essential for more sustainable future. The study concentrates on the consumers who already perceive themselves as sustainable food consumers. It is also considered how sustainable consumers act in the prevailing consumer culture. The goal is to find out how does the dietary choice and different food products

construct consumer and collective identities, and what may have been some of the socio-historical or cultural contexts that have also motivated consumers to change their behaviour from the mainstream food consumption. Usually some conflicts occur when someone acts differently from the mainstream culture, in addition these conflicts and contexts are observed. In the individualized Western consumer culture many consumption choices are perceived as individual. It is researched do sustainable consumers recognize their consumption choices being influenced by social interactions or rather as an individual choice. By answering to the aforementioned issues this research could provide a deeper understanding regarding sustainable food consumers and how they act in the prevailing consumer culture.

The study will focus on people who are young adults at the moment. There are many different names for this generation however the most common seems to be the name of Generation Y about people who are born in the early 1980s to 1990s. The reason for focusing to Generation Y consumers is that it is easier to see the socio-historical events that may have influenced and shaped their worldview. Probably this makes the interpretation of the results more consistent as there are differences on how different generations act within the consumer markets.

The research will also give new perspectives in the field of sustainable food consumption, especially in the Jyväskylä region. Most of the studies done in this field are concentrating on the beliefs, motives and values sustainable food consumers have about their diet, or the drawbacks regarding sustainable food consumption providing recommendations for the policy makers and businesses. This research can help other researchers to understand the rationale behind sustainable food consumption when they are making research related to the sustainable food consumers, Generation Y and consumer culture. This research could also help companies, who want to understand contexts that consumers find important regarding sustainability and food.

As there are differences on how sustainable food consumption is perceived and signalled, especially among different generations the research problem can be presented as:

DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMER PERSPECTIVES HOW SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION IS PERCEIVED AND SIGNALLNED IN THE PREVAILING CONSUMER CULTURE – AMONG GENERATION Y CONSUMERS?

Author wishes to answer to the research problem through the sub questions that complement the research problem.

1. *How identities are signalled through sustainable food products, and what foods are perceived as sustainable?*
2. *How sustainable identity is signalled when not taking sustainable foods into account?*
3. *What contexts are perceived as important and contradicting when engaging to sustainable consumption habits?*

As the main focus of the thesis is on the consumer identity projects the sub questions are concerned with them as well. The consumer identity projects have been concerned about various different topics such as identity play, body image & self-presentation, gender performativities, symbolic distinctions, extended-self, cultural contradictions and experimental dimensions of consumption (Sherry & Belk, 2007). Author's research mostly aims at finding answers to the ways how sustainable food consumers present themselves as sustainable (self-presentation). In addition what possessions, such as foods, or certain behaviour are seen as important when constructing sustainable identities (extended-self, symbolic distinction). By finding out the contexts and conflicts Generation Y consumers find important while changing consumption patterns, there is a better understanding of how sustainable food consumption is perceived in the prevailing consumer culture.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework will revolve around Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) with the particular interest on consumer identity projects in order to understand the sustainable food consumption beyond the rational choice model but as well to see how sustainable food consumers construct and signal their sustainable identity. As CCT focuses on what are the experimental and sociocultural dimensions of consumption such as symbolism of products, ritual practices and the symbolic boundaries that structure personal and communal consumer identities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) it offers an opportunity research this phenomenon from another perspective than rational choice models. After the basics of CCT and consumer culture are presented, sustainable food consumption and sustainable food consumer are defined. The characteristics and the contexts influencing Generation Y consumers are also briefly discussed. Food and identity is a central part of this research and the relevant studies related to the research are reviewed. Basics of personal and collective identities related to consumer products and their symbolic values are being discussed as these aforementioned contexts were used as a basis for the interview questions.

2.1 Consumer culture theory (CCT)

CCT which became institutionalized and utilized in the early 1980s (Thompson et al. 2013) has been used to research many different phenomena varying from different food microcultures and their behaviour (Sirsi et al. 1996), natural health value system and their microcultural meaning (Thompson & Troester, 2002), blending of different ethnic groups in the prevailing culture (Ogden, Ogden & Schau, 2004; D'Rozario & Choudhury, 2000) to finding cultural reasons why Obama won the presidential elections (Lieb & Shah, 2010) to name a few. Aforementioned examples were offered to illustrate that CCT related research aims to discover how social behaviour, prevailing culture and its history steers people in different contexts. Arnould & Thompson (2005:868) defines CCT as "refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings". Although CCT is usually linked with qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews which are well-suited to study socio-cultural factors, it does not necessarily have to be (ibid. 2005) as quantitative and multi-method has also been utilized (Dittmar, 2008: 6).

Studies and research made by using CCT can be divided into four sections of theoretical interest that are consumer identity projects, the socio-historic patterning of consumption, marketplace cultures and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies. (Sherry & Belk, 2007). Even there are four different structures of theoretical interest it does not mean that the

research or study has to stay within these structures but they can overlap as well. There have been studies that have combined at least two of the sections such as the socio-historic patterning of consumption combined with the mass-mediated marketplace ideologies (Sherry & Belk, 2007).

Askegaard & Linnet (2011) have criticized some of the CCT studies lacking the socio-historic context that is seen to have a major effect to the prevailing culture such as local culture, ideological conditions, social structures and present historical conditions. They also pointed out that dimensions such as culture, society, ecology, materiality and history should be encompassed to a larger extent that can be sometimes opted out when making phenomenological research, as the consumers might not always know the socio-historic factors affecting them. Although Thompson et al. (2013) justified choices made in the CCT research and carefully pointed out that Askegaard & Linnet (2011) were generalizing that most of the CCT lacks these contexts. Despite the justifications Askegaard & Linnet (2011) pointed out the drawbacks that some of the researchers might fall as well as the importance of taking the socio-historic contexts into consideration.

Consumer identity projects are concerned about coproductive ways that consumers use to construct their sense of self through market-generated materials (Thompson & Arnould, 2005) such as food. As the identity is built through market-mediated materials, markets themselves has become the source of symbolic resources where the consumers can find ways to construct their individual and collective identities (ibid. 2005). Belk (1988) explains that possessions can be regarded as a part of extended self, implicating that different products carry meanings that are important when constructing our changing self-identity. In the Western contemporary consumer culture individual is free to choose personal way of presenting him/herself. The marketplace offers flexible ways of crafting one's identity through person-object relations that can have an impact on individual and collective identities (Joy & Li, 2012). Consumer identity project perspective seems suitable for this research as it gives a perspective how the sustainable food consumers construct their identities through food, possessions, brands and symbols. Belk (2013) has revised his theory of extended self as the technology has improved since his first publication on extended self as well as the ways of expressing the self has also changed. For example social media and smartphones are tools to take pictures and communicate with others to co-construct of self (ibid. 2013) that are important tools to be considered when conducting research concerned with products and behaviour. Socio-historic contexts and influences regarding Generation Y are taken into account in order to see how changes in the society have influenced the dietary choice.

The socio-historic influence on the consumer is investigated through events that have occurred in the Finnish society such as Parment's (2012) proposed changes in popular culture, political deregulation, internationalisation, the technological innovation and other big events and disasters (Chapter 2.4). Askegaard & Linnet (2011) pointed out that consumers might not always know what were the socio-historic contexts affecting them. It is the responsibility of the author to seek some of the obvious contexts and connecting them to the findings.

2.1.1 Consumer culture

Consumer culture related research is motivated to find out the sociocultural, experimental, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption (Dittmar, 2008). Contemporary consumer culture can be seen as a material culture where personal and collective identities are built through consumption practices (Lucy, 2011). As sustainable food products such as certified organic food cost more (FAO, n.d.) there is a dilemma that some consumers do not have an economic privilege to access these products and to the symbols they entail even if they want to. Johnston, Szabo & Rodney (2011) found out that people who cannot afford to maintain daily ethical food consumption habits found other creative ways to consume in an ethical way such as not using cars, recycling and not buying plastic bags to name a few. Johnston et al. (2011) implicated that economic inequalities in the contemporary consumer culture makes some of the consumers privileged to make choices that others cannot but would like to do.

Values, norms and meanings produced in the consumption practises are the focus of consumer culture related research (Lury, 2011). An important context that needs to be considered regarding consumption and meanings is that goods can work as a markers of social identity, or as carriers of interpersonal influence (Lury, 2011). The indication of this is that while people are giving gifts or pictures to others they do not just give the physical object and its preferences but rather the meaning that is shared between the giver and the receiver that can be important while constructing personal and collective identities. Shared and transferred meaning of a consumer good is also seen as important while consumers are buying new consumer goods. For males motorbike is not just a mean of transport to get from place A to B but rather a totem to show their working-class masculinity (Lury, 2011). McCracken (2005) offers a similar explanation about greasers and their Fords' in the 1950s United States where young men in the verge of adulthood expressed masculine features of toughness, power, independence, potency and sexuality through their cars. When somebody spat on their waxed and rebuilt car their felt offended as someone had spat on them. The images associated with the products can be said to be influenced by marketing of lifestyles and identities, however it is also due to people who receive and transform this message to fit to their personal and collective identity (Lury, 2011).

Western consumer culture is characterized by the belief that to have is to be (Lucy, 2011). Translating the previously mentioned Lucy's statement into to the context of this research it would mean that in order to be sustainable, consumer needs to have and buy sustainable products. As there are many choices and products to choose in the consumer culture the way we relate to them and prefer what to choose is organized in the terms of knowledge and imagination (Lury, 2011). This could implicate that there should be more innovative ways to be sustainable among sustainable food consumers rather than just owning sustainable possessions as Johnston et al. (2011) also found out regarding income levels and ethical eating. As the consumer has enough knowledge and imagination about sustainability (s)he might find cultivating own vegetables, or picking

up berries from the forest more sustainable compared to the expensive eco-labelled products in the grocery store that are shipped from abroad. Sustainable food consumers' knowledge and imagination differs from the mainstream as their diets, motivations and habits can be dissimilar compared to the regular food consumers.

2.2 Signalling sustainable food consumer identity

There are several different ways to signal preferred ethical identity varying from different objects to practises and narratives (Papaoikonomou, Cascon-Pereira & Ryan, 2016). Food entails powerful signals as it can be seen as an object (foods, food products), as a practise (cooking, rituals around food) and as a narrative (stories around food). That might explain why food can also tell a lot about the culture where food originates from such as Indian or Chinese food. Ethnic communities bring their ethnic foodstuffs and habits to the country they move into but are also influenced by the prevailing culture and habits (see: D'Rozario & Choudhury, 2000 and Ogden et al., 2004). Possessions such as ethnic foodstuffs can be seen as vital part for someone's self-presentation. It is recognized that it varies between cultures and genders what and why certain possessions are bought and what symbols do they entail.

2.2.1 Personal and collective identity

Identity can be briefly defined as how a person sees himself, and the relationships to the different groups (s)he feels belonging to. This means that each person has multiple identities with diverse self-representation with different interpretations about "the self" including the personal and social dimensions (Dittmar, 2008). Person can have a different identity and ways of self-representation among different groups such as with co-workers, friends and family. Groups have their own collective identities that are characterized how individuals act together within a group. Johnston (1995:42-45) identifies that language, rituals, practises or cultural artifacts, interactions, communication and feelings of belonging to a group constitutes to social identity. Vegans can be associated of being a group that maintains an animal-free diet, however within that group different subgroups and individuals who have different motivations and behaviours for maintaining their diet can be detected (Greenebaum, 2012). Sirsi et al. (1996) and Thompson & Troester (2002) found similar results when they were examining the reasoning of different diets and natural health value systems between different subgroups. Important contexts that were seen shaping the individuals view was their past experiences in life but also the beliefs and knowledge about the topic.

2.2.2 Signalling identities

Berger & Heath (2007) points out that consumer products can be used to signal desired behaviour from majorities or other social groups if the given product is relevant for the identity or the social group. They also add that even inside the social group, divergence to the group members can happen. This basically means that an individual belonging to a social group of sustainable people, would still distinguish himself from the others in order to feel unique. The conclusion supports Dittmar's (2008) argument that unique and autonomous identity is important in Western cultures despite the individual feels belongingness to a group. Papaoikonomou et al. (2016) found out that Spanish ethical consumers signal their belongingness to a group and ethical stance about a topic through narratives, practises and objects. For instance they used clothing that was simple and non-fashionable as an object to signal their distaste towards mainstream fashion and belongingness to a certain group of ethical consumers. Objects can entail many functions to signal preferred behaviour depending on the setting consumer operates in. Signalling serves purposes of indicating desired message about a subject that is important for the group and the individual, making signalling an important part of identity construction on a personal and collective level.

2.2.3 Possessions as part of identities

Lucy (2011) discusses that consumer culture is a culture where personal and collective identities are constructed through the consumption of different goods demonstrating the symbolic value that possessions entail. Lucy (2011) also points out that personal and collective views about life politics can be signalled through daily consumption choices such as what to eat or wear. Greenebaum (2012) came to the same conclusion as veganism was seen as a lifestyle choice, not just a food choice. Belk (1988) also mentioned that shared consumption symbols are vital for expressing and defining group membership. In the contemporary consumer culture the individual is not judged how well does (s)he live, instead will (s)he make the right consumption choices (Lucy, 2012). Lucy's (2012) and Belk's (1988) demonstrations indicates the meanings and the symbols that are attached to the products and possessions that are sent and received. Dittmar (2008) details this by pointing out that symbols and meanings send through products are relevant only when it has a shared reality among other people. Buying organic meat can be seen as sustainable when others share the same idea that is unlikely to be the case when vegetarians or vegans are asked that is organic meat sustainable.

Belk (1988) stated that "we are what we have" meaning that possessions that are seen to arouse emotional feelings or are otherwise important can be seen as part of extended-self. It varies between possessions how important, or extended, they are as Belk (1988:160) concludes that: "*self-extension occurs through control and mastery of an object, through creation of an object, through knowledge of an object, and through contamination via proximity and habituation to an object*". Food can be especially sensitive topic for people as they have habits, knowledge and control around it, as well as connecting topic as extended-self operates on individual, collective and national

level (ibid., 1988). Possessions represent interpersonal relationships, belongingness to a group and personal characteristics such as values and beliefs (Dittmar, 2008). Dittmar (2008) argues that people who go through burglary are more affected by the feelings that are attached to the stolen possessions rather than the stress associated by the police and insurance procedures, as the stolen possessions are seen as a violation and shrinkage of self. Similar results were also found within the older people who were able to keep their valued belongings when going to nursing homes as they were seen to cope better than the ones who were not able to take valued belongings with them (Dittmar, 2008). Possessions helped people to maintain their general sense of identity (ibid. 2008). Possessions are also important as they provide the sense of control and mastery, in addition work as symbols of personal and social identity. Dittmar (2008) saw that business students without good qualifications tended to show objects that are associated with success such as expensive watches, briefcase, and business suits more compared to the business students with better career prospects. This is called as symbolic self-completion where symbolic properties of material objects (such as clothing) is important for the ideal personal and collective identity (ibid, 2008). These examples should clarify the argument that possessions are central for our identities. Possessions can also be used to enhance ones identity or construct it closer to an ideal one, furthermore the symbols attached to the possessions can change over time.

Material objects have three different functions for consumers that are associated with the *functional-instrumental* and *symbolic-expressive* sides of a possession (Dittmar, 2008). Functional-instrumental function is concerned with the use-related issues of an object such as control and effectiveness of a possession together with emotional related issues such as regulating and enhancing mood, comfort and security. Symbolic-expressive function is interrelated with the functional-instrumental functions as well with identity-related issues such as personal qualities, values and personal history, interpersonal relationships and to the belongingness to a social category or a group (ibid,2008). When examining these functions it seems that sustainable food consumption is more concerned with the symbolic-expressive functions as food products that sustainable food consumers prefer might have a strong influence from the identity-related aspects. To conclude food for sustainable food consumers is something more than just a use-related function to get your stomach full as quickly and as cheap as possible. It is rather an emotional issue to make right choices influenced by identity-related aspects such as friends and personal history. Fischler (1988) reminds that food is central to our sense of personal and collective identity. In the prevailing consumer culture food is mostly consumed through the food products offered in the grocery stores where the symbolic-expressive function of the possession could be influencing sustainable food choices and personal and collective identity.

2.2.4 Food and symbolism

Beardsworth & Keil (1992:290) found out that vegetarianism and veganism provided a “carefully arranged message on the dinner plate”. As vegetarian or vegan meals can be identified as different especially when there are other people around, the meal itself can work as a “careful signal” about the individual’s personal opinion regarding meat consumption. Purchasing of food items was associated with sending different and meaningful messages that contain symbolic meanings, and was seen as one of the ways females construct their femininity (Cronin, McCarthy, Newcombe & McCarthy, 2014b). This sort of results may emphasize the importance of individual decision-making as a key in constructing identity however many research articles point out the importance on concentrating on the social dimension. These research articles suggest that social dimension is the key context steering the consumption choices.

Warde (1997) criticized the view of food consumption being mostly motivated by internal factors such as individualization (creating self-identity through purchases) and stylization (diets that restrict some foods such as veganism). He found that the choices regarding food consumption are more likely to be influenced by social learning from friends, family and through different groups. This means that consumers do not invent the idea of going sustainable but rather are affected by social actors. Carfagna et al. (2014) concluded that reasons for sustainable consumption are barely individual rather they are based on a collective ways of consumption. Dagevos (2005) points out that food consumption is not an isolated phenomenon rather a part of larger social context where consumers actively think and perceive information about right food related choices that are partly influenced by consumer’s world views and lifestyle beliefs. When Cronin et al. (2014) did research on how hipsters constructed their identity through food it became evident that while maintaining the collective identity of a group of hipster friends, individuals also developed their own personal identity again reinforcing Dittmar’s (2008) argument regarding unique identity. They restricted themselves from the mainstream culture through their own rituals and food choices which were appreciated and enjoyed among that group. Similarity was also found by Sneijder & Molder (2006) when they concluded that the enjoyment of food is seen as interactional achievement rather than pure psychological sensation meaning that something such as a meal becomes good when it is enjoyed or appreciated by others as well.

Bartels & Reinders (2010) found out that in the organic food context culturally shared values and ideas that varies between different countries play an important role how consumers perceive new organic food products flowing to the market. The results could be translated that the sustainable consumer is also affected by the national identity of the country he/she lives in. When Stevenson et al. (2007) was identifying barriers to healthy eating among adolescents in the UK they found out that healthy eating is absent from their data as the biggest themes in the focus group interviews were the competing pressures of eating unhealthy and losing weight. They argued that obesogenic eating patterns have become integrated in the youth culture and are seen as a norm.

As food is an essential part of collective identity there can be difficulties to change eating behaviour which was also witnessed in the Stevenson et al. (2007) where unhealthy diets were perceived as a cultural norm. When Romo & Donovan-Kicken (2012) researched how American individuals used different communication strategies to tell about their vegetarianism, the conclusion was that they wanted to minimize others' discomfort. They usually created a plan beforehand what to say in situations when they needed to tell their dietary preferences. Even these vegetarians did think that eating meat is wrong they did not judge meat eaters, as eating meat is a dominant part of American culture.

Bisogni, Connors, Devine & Sobal's (2002) studied identities related to food and found out that past experiences together with social and physical environments where the individual has lived as contexts that influence food choice. They pointed out that identity process related to eating went through several courses that were development and revision, evaluation and monitoring and enactment of identity. Several participants saw many different foods and diets related to their identities throughout their lifetime, in addition these identities usually reflected on their past eating habits or someone else's whose eating habits were seen as desirable. It varied between the participants how the identity processes were realized. The transformation of the identities also varied as some were stable and some dynamic over the life-course influenced by the life-course experiences. What Bisogni et al. (2002) study could contribute to this research is the idea that sustainable food consumers are affected by other people and groups as well as they might reflect some of their life course experiences as an important part of their identity construction regarding food choice. This might make the participants to emphasize their individual past experiences as the important context towards more sustainable diet even though the most influential context might actually be other people and groups.

To conclude consumer identity is also constructed through food consumption, in addition individuals have personal reasoning for their food choice that is presumably affected by social groups. Individuals might emphasize their personal experiences as the most influential contexts affecting food choice due to the individual characteristics of the Western cultures. Food has an important symbolic value that possesses a route to signal unique as well as collective identity especially in the Western cultures: *"Since everyone must eat, what we eat becomes a most powerful symbol of who we are."* (Fox, 2003, originally cited at Cronin et al. 2014:5).

2.2.5 Other ways of signalling identity than possessions

There are other ways of sharing and reinforcing the sense of identities than just possessions especially now in the digital world (Belk, 2013). Belk (1988) already mentioned that in addition to consumer goods collections, money, other people, pets and body parts have a link between the one's senses of self. Gift-giving, vicarious consumption, care of possessions, organ donation, product disposition and disuse were also seen as relevant regarding extended self (ibid. 1988). Due to the development of digital devices and platforms such as social media there is possibility to share pictures, videos and stay even more connected to others than

before. According to Belk (2013) the development of digital devices has enabled co-construction and reaffirmation individual and collective identities for instance through commenting and posting pictures through social media.

As the scope of the research is also to find differences how sustainable food consumption is signalled, sharing of identity through digital devices can be especially relevant. The rationale behind signalling and digital devices is that Generation Y consumers have witnessed major technological improvement in their lifetime. It is likely that they utilize digital devices to co-construct and reaffirm their identities. Nevertheless there might be differences on what platforms are used, in addition in the willingness to share identity related to a sensitive topic.

2.2.6 Differences between cultures and genders regarding objects

As pointed out in previous chapters that possessions are important for our identity and some possessions are more important than others. Askegaard & Linnet (2011) criticized some of the CCT related studies not paying enough attention to contexts such as gender and culture that seem to have an effect on the prevailing consumer culture. This chapter will present few contexts that are present in the Western consumer culture between possessions and genders.

Western culture is highly individualistic culture as it is characterized by contexts of independent form of self-control, autonomous identity that is separate from others and self-identity is defined by personal rather than collective goals (Dittmar, 2008). Culture steers on what sorts of possessions are favoured and seen as important. In highly individualistic Western countries such as US and UK mood regulation and unique identity was seen as important contexts of a possession, however in Hong Kong which values more collectivist values, found the relational and historical contexts that are linked with collective identity construction as more important (ibid. 2008). This might indicate that in Western cultures such as in Finland, the motivations to become sustainable food consumer could be related to contexts that are individualistic such as discovering a unique identity or due to health-related benefits. Although Carfagna, Dubois, Fitzmaurice, Ouimette, Schor & Willis (2014) found out that the reasons for sustainable consumption are more likely to be motivated by the collective rather than individual contexts contradicting with Dittmar's (2008) argument. This could indicate that sustainable food consumers buy sustainable foods in order to signal their belongingness to a group, or that altruistic behaviour regarding buying of green products can be perceived as a status signal as Griskevicius, Tybur & Bergh (2010) suggest.

Gender impacts on how identities are constructed through possessions and what material possessions are valued (Dittmar, 2008). Men seemed to have more of independent and self-oriented form of identity construction which is more concerned about the practical and functional concerns of possessions, however women were seen more interdependent in the identity construction as personal history, relatedness to others, symbolism and emotions played a bigger role (ibid. 2008). Thompson (1996) found similar results as he was researching about

the consumption experiences of professional working mothers engaged in “juggling” between work and family as their consumption behaviour is linked with personalized social relationships, emotional ties and historical legacy of cultural ideals. Although Dittmar (2008) mentions that gender differences are rather relative and both genders use both independent and interdependent forms of identity construction, this could implicate that men are more interested about the nutritional benefits of food as it is a practical and functional concern, in addition women more related to the symbolic concerns such as the how their friends and family prepare food. Wilska & Nyrhinen (2013) found out from their study sample that majority of sustainable consumers in the Finnish context are indeed women (89%) and they usually are highly-educated. This finding could implicate women minding more attention to the symbolic contexts than men.

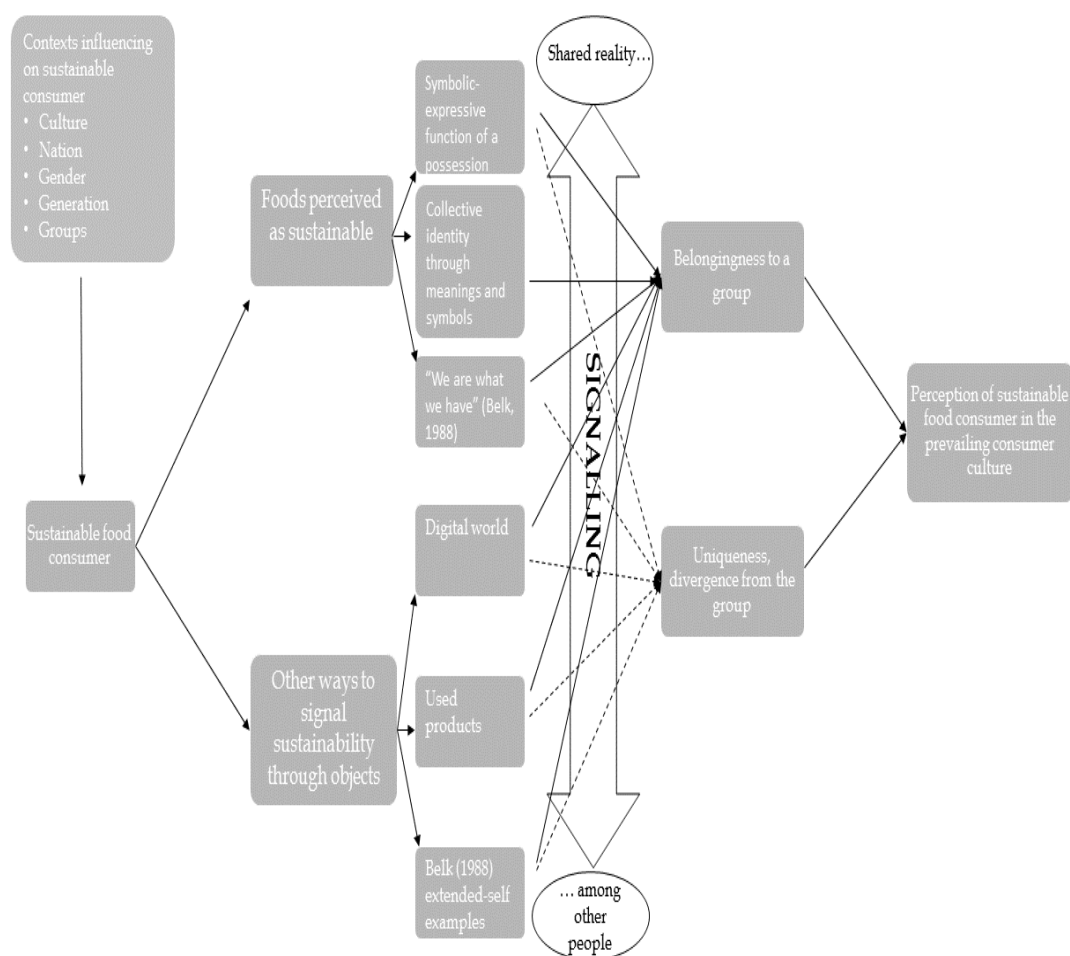


FIGURE 1 Signalling sustainable identities through objects

2.3 Sustainable food consumption

The Oslo Symposium in 1994 developed the concept of sustainable consumption as *“the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations”* IISD (n.d.). The definition is further developed in the Oslo Ministerial Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption in 1995, and in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (UNEP, 2012) although the main idea remains as in the original definition. Sustainable consumption regarding food is concerned about variety of impacts that have an impact on consumer choice, sustainable lifestyles and diets (see: FAO n.d.b). Reisch (2010:1) defines sustainable food consumption as: *“For food consumption to be sustainable it has to be safe and healthy in amount and quality; and it has to be realized through means that are economically, socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable – minimizing waste and pollution and not jeopardizing the needs of others”*. What especially needs highlighting is that sustainable food consumption is not just concerned about the environmental or ethical impacts such as the rights of the animals and employees, but also considers the impact of healthy diets on the society. 1-1,5 billion people in the world are overweight from unsustainable and unhealthy eating habits that can lead to several of different health related problems Reisch et al. (2010). 300-500 million people suffer from obesity, meanwhile 800 million people suffer from hunger (ibid. 2010). These aforementioned figures present a small glimpse of the current state of food consumption globally without taking into account environmental, cultural or ethical impacts. Finnish people are consuming a great amount of meat exceeding the weekly recommendations by 1,2 kilograms (recommendation is 300 grams per week) having an impact on the environment (Kuluttajaliitto n.d.) as well as their personal health if red meat is to be consumed (IARC, 2015).

Lorek (2009) defines that reducing meat consumption and favouring of organic and regional food products as important factors when households want to engage in more sustainable food consumption through their diets. Reisch et al. (2013) also mentions that reduction of meat and dairy products, favouring of organic fruits and vegetables and avoiding foods that are transported by air are important steps towards more sustainable food consumption behaviour in the affluent societies. Although engaging to a sustainable diet can be seen as difficult due to the lack of knowledge or motivation regarding the topic. With an external help households found engaging in a more sustainable lifestyles easier (Laakso & Lettenmeier, 2015). The difficulties engaging to a sustainable diet might implicate the current state of the consumer culture where high meat consumption, exotic foods and fast food restaurants are seen a cultural norms and in many contexts preferred.

2.3.1 Ethical (Sustainable) consumer

As there is not a clear definition of a sustainable consumer, the author will use ethical consumer as a definition for an individual who acts in more sustainable way in the market place compared to the other consumer segments. Choice is a core value in the consumer culture making consumption and consumerism as “ethical” or “moral” realms of social practise (Lucy, 2011) if consumption is guided by ethical or moral contexts in mind.

Ethical consumption started as a consumer activism already in 17th century England that transformed towards green consumerism from the early 1970s (Lucy, 2011). Green consumerism considered the environmental impacts such as the energy use and pollution on a narrow range of industries as essential (Peattie, 2010). Compared to the green consumerism, ethical consumerism takes into consideration a more holistic view as ethical consumption that can be defined as: *“practises, organizations and initiatives that address wide range of issues including working conditions, fair trade, animal welfare, human rights and environmental concerns”* (Lucy, 2011:177). Ethical consumers realize that choice is not always good thus needs to be exercised carefully as they are influenced by past experiences or strong opinions about a topic (Lucy, 2011). This could indicate that eco-labelled products such as fair trade or organic foods might not always be perceived as sustainable due to the aforementioned issues, influencing on how sustainable consumers signal their sustainable behaviour. When Grunert, Hieke & Wills, (2014) were investigating the level of motivation, the interpretation and the use of sustainability labels on food products they concluded that demographic characteristics, values and country differences influences how these sustainable food products are perceived. There are many backgrounds affecting on the use of sustainable products however the sense of self as sustainable consumer is also seen as significant context influencing the purchasing behaviour.

Peattie (2010) mentioned that consumer’s self-identity can influence the pro-environmental behaviour that inspires people with sustainable mind-set to buy or act in a more sustainable way. Consumers who have a sustainable mind-set are more likely to buy sustainable products and live more sustainable lives compared to ones who do not. The underlying reasons to make sustainable purchase might vary as Griskevicius et al. (2010) found out that consumers are more likely to make altruistic purchasing decisions when there are other people around such as in grocery store. The study implicates that that there might actually be hedonistic motives such as improved self-image to make a deed or purchase that is seen as altruistic. This means that there are different contexts and underlying reasons influencing how and why sustainable consumers signal their behaviour and identity. Griskevicius et al. (2010) saw altruistic behaviour linked to hedonistic motives across diverse cultures and historical periods.

In Finland sustainable consumption is one of the most significant ways of consumption furthermore the general attitude in Finland towards sustainable consumption has changed to be even more positive according to Wilska & Nyrhinen (2013). Miltton (2015) pointed out that in their study sample that 54% of the Finnish population find sustainability as an important context regarding

purchasing decisions. Especially highly educated women have adopted sustainable consumption, although it does not seem to reflect on the demand of sustainable products but rather as a way to decrease consumption (Wilska & Nyrhinen, 2013). Wilska & Nyrhinen (2013) described that a typical way of a young consumer to be sustainable is through product boycotts, in addition they seem to concentrate on specific ethical and ecological concerns although the overall lifestyle was not usually as consistently sustainable. Nevertheless the main difference between men and women was that women who had bought more organic and recycled products saw that handmade, ethical and ecological products are luxury as well. In their study sample there was clearly more women (89%) than men (11%) who defined themselves as sustainable consumers (ibid. 2013). This could implicate that females find it more important and interesting to engage in sustainable consumption as they might have more friends who consume in a sustainable way, or about the general differences genders have regarding possessions.

2.4 Characteristics and contexts influencing Generation Y

Consumers are becoming more aware of issues related to sustainability, such as the societal and environmental aspect of a product and its production (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Generation Y and especially young adults are important actors towards more sustainable consumption habits as they are expected to possess purchasing power that has major impact on the economy (Noble et al. 2009; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). There is not a clear consensus about when this generation starts and ends as Parment (2012) mentions that they are born approximately around 1979-1990 and Purhonen et al. (2008) points out that they are people born in the 1980s to 1990s. Purhonen et al. (2008) offers an explanation for this that there needs to be a certain level of persistence in order to fulfil the criteria for the mass generation such as baby boomers, and suggests that Generation Y is called as the generation of individual choice or Y-youth. Nevertheless this generation is witnessed having different behaviour on the consumer and labour markets compared to the earlier generations (Parment, 2012). Generation Y offers different obstacles and opportunities to marketers as they are more culturally-diverse, open-minded and better educated as previous generations, in addition they possess the ability to see through many different marketing tactics (Noble et al. 2009) since they have been seen the development of different marketing through different communication channels from television to social media. Generation Y students were seen as visual learners rather than verbal learners (Weiler, 2005), in addition their purchasing behaviour is more emotional than rational compared to baby boomers (Parment, 2012) that highlights the importance of self-expression through possessions.

Parment (2012) discusses in his book that changes in the *society, market- and social environment* has made this generation different compared to the previous generations. The author will introduce these changes briefly in order to get a small glimpse of socio-historic and cultural contexts that may also explain their behaviour to become sustainable food consumers. Purhonen et al. (2008) offers examples related to the same topics in the Finnish context. These topics in the Finnish contexts are considered as well since it is more accurate to analyse the socio-historic and cultural contexts as all of the participants in the interviews are from Finland. This is considered as important in the CCT related research as Askegaard & Linnet (2011) criticized some CCT related studies missing contexts such as the socio-historic and cultural contexts (Chapter 2.1) that should be encompassed to the larger extent. Jabs et al. (2000) found that dietary choices and practises around it are influenced by contexts varying from the culture and society where the consumers live in to different psychological contexts such as consumer identities and interactions with others. Analysing some changes that has occurred in the Western world and in the Finnish society makes the analysis of sustainable food consumption phenomena regarding Generation Y richer.

Society appreciates different set of values as societal conditions have been different than with earlier generations. Contexts such as unbroken economic growth and the end of Cold war have changed attitudes towards wars and fear, influencing how Generation Y perceive the world (Parment, 2012). This generation has witnessed information overload and scarcity of time (Parment, 2012) due to the development of internet and mobile phones making them always reachable despite the place or time. The development of satellite and cable TVs have enabled reality shows and television series such as *Sex and the City* to be aired throughout the Western countries making luxurious lifestyle desirable for Generation Y (Parment, 2012). The market-based ideology that has been endorsed throughout the Western societies leading to political deregulation and internationalisation is recognized to promote the power of citizens that influences individuality (Parment, 2012). Market-based ideology has also widened the perspectives of Generation Y about how they perceive the world as traveling is cheaper than ever before, in addition changes in the society influences on how the earlier generation raise their children from attitudes towards watching television to self-realisation of children at the young age (Parment, 2012). Purhonen et al. (2008) saw similarity in the Finnish society when some of the Generation Y people were growing up in the 1980s, as the mentality towards frugality was not a necessity anymore and there were more consumer products flowing to the market, since regulations regarding commerce started to ease. In the 1990s the traditions in Finland started to break as the depression was defeated by relying heavily on research and development and tele technologies (Purhonen et al., 2008) which the latter has had big effect on the to the social setting and how people communicate but also to the market environment where the organizations operate in.

Generation Y is more educated than previous generations however they are living in a society where efficiency and individualism are valued that impacts on consumption and competition (Purhonen et al., 2008). Consumption and in-

dividualism results in more emotional and individualistic preferences when selecting suitable consumer brands and employers (Parment, 2012). As the society has become more individualized the collective identities are not so strong and common compared to the earlier generations (Purhonen et al., 2008). The competition has an effect on the scholar and labour markets as individual has to express their personal uniqueness and competencies (ibid. 2008) making them more responsible for their own career paths than earlier generations (Parment, 2012). In Finland as in the Western societies in general, this generation has lived in the branded society crowded with commercial messages, making brands an integrated part of consumption and personal image-building related to consumer products and labour markets (Parment, 2012). As consumption has become individualized it indicates that societal and ethical choices has also become individualized. Generation Y people have to take part of this conversation and think their choices as citizens, consumers, students and professionals (Purhonen et al., 2008). Generation Y have lived in the consumer culture where there are large variety of choices to choose from that fit to their ideal identity, in addition pleasure, status and hedonism in consumption are relevant for the majority (Purhonen et al., 2008; Wilska & Nyrhinen, 2013).

Social environment refers to the social setting where the individual lives and institutions he/she interacts in that is constantly changing due to the internal and external forces (Barnett & Casper, 2001). One observation of the social environment is that more children has been raised up by single parenting in Finland which has an influence to the social and the physical environment where Generation Y grows up in (Purhonen et al., 2008: 288). Generation Y is considered as a social generation therefore working life requires people with good social abilities that had resulted in more directness in communicating in the university or in the workplace setting (Parment, 2012: 92-97). Friends are essential for this generation, since they are even more important than relationships, economic status or national identity as they offer trust that media, politics or organizations lack (Purhonen et al., 2008: 289).

Social networks used to be local, closed and offline and required some sort of formal position to join, however now as the communication devices have developed social networks are online, national or even international and more open (Parment, 2012: 99-101). The development of IT and communication devices has made Generation Y more connected to each other furthermore more open to large variety of networks and information (Purhonen et al., 2008:287). This gives an opportunity for the Generation Y individual to engage in personal branding through Facebook or LinkedIn, increasing the opportunities to join networks that might be beneficial for them (Parment, 2012:99-101). Parment (2012) talks about Facebook and LinkedIn but forgets to mention social media such as Instagram and WhatsApp that are heavily utilized for socialising and personal branding. These changes in the social environment should be visible how sustainable food consumers communicate and network with each other related to the topic of food.

Market environment refers to the actors and forces outside organization's marketing operations that affect its abilities to maintain successful relationships

with its target customers, such actors and forces can be related to the microenvironment such as customer markets, competitors and publics, or related to the macroenvironment such as political, natural, technological and cultural forces that impacts on the microenvironment (Kotler, 2013:74). Parment (2012:60) proposes four major trends and forces that are changing the market environment: information revolution, globalisation, corporate social responsibility related issues and the reach and scope of marketing.

As already mentioned in the previous paragraphs the development of internet and IT devices has improved communication between people but as well made them more prone to large amounts of information. These changes have created different set of attitudes among consumers increasing consumer power. Consumers are able to read and give peer reviews about a product they have bought or are planning to buy (Parment, 2012) directing the customer service serve online as well. The access to information, the worldwide consumerism and environmentalism has made companies more prone to take greater responsibility for the social and environmental related concerns through corporate social responsibility related business models (Parment 2012). Globalisation has made companies to compete in a global market that has resulted in more efficiency that again has resulted in cheaper furniture, clothing, travelling and electronics (Parment, 2012). The trend regarding leisure trips aboard is still increasing in Finland (Tilastokeskus, 2016) despite the poor economic growth suggesting that travelling is still relatively cheap in the global markets. As the price of tangibles such as electronics has been decreasing, the price of intangibles has been increasing leading to emphasize the importance of customer value and service that products should entail (Parment, 2012). This is also called as customer value-based pricing where the product is designed to deliver desired value at target price (Kotler, 2013). iPhone is a clear example of a successful value-based pricing which has worked at least with the previous models where people pay for the tangible object but also for the intangible brand and value. The marketing has also increased in every single sector as a consequence public, private and not-for-profit organisations also compete in the global market for the customers or the members in order to keep their operations running that was unlikely the case with previous generations (Parment, 2012). These forces has also effected in Finland as the regulations towards commerce started to ease during the 1980s and there were more consumer products flowing to the Finnish market. Possibly these four major trends in the market environment has influenced Generation Y to demand more value and service also regarding food increasing the demand for quality food products.

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA

3.1 In-depth interview

Qualitative research methods were utilized as the main concern was to find sustainable food consumers' experiences and thoughts in in-depth face-to-face interview setting. Open and in-depth conversations are seen to reveal issues that may otherwise left unnoticed (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). Personal interviews are seen as an effective way in creating cultural talk that assists in understanding phenomena from a specific cultural and social context as Moisander & Valtonen (2006) suggest. A large quantity of CCT research is done through qualitative research methods, making them a suitable choice for this research as the influence of consumer culture can be researched through stories, experiences and conversations that the individual may find important.

Usually in-depth interviewing is used in order to get deeper information, knowledge and understanding than pursued in surveys, informal interviewing or focus groups (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Deeper information such as lived experiences, individual's self, values and cultural knowledge can be obtained through in-depth interviews (ibid, 2001) that are also seen as relevant contexts regarding food choice (Chapter 2.2.4). McCracken (1988) points out that in-depth interviewing (he calls it the long interview) offers a possibility to see and experience the world as the participants experience it. In-depth interviewing is seen suitable for research questions regarding for instance what kind of multiple perspectives there are for a phenomena (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Studies regarding food choice and diets is a complex field open for multiple perspectives on a same phenomenon, in addition findings regarding this thesis confirms the multiple perspectives around food.

Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2008) sees that ability to symbolise the world, as one of the most important features that characterises human beings, especially now when there are more visual and cultural images such as adverts, products and brands than ever before (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). In consumer identity project related research the impact of symbolism through products is seen as important part of constructing individual and collective identities. In-depth interviewing suits well to address these contexts as there can be multiple perspectives on what foods are perceived as sustainable.

Author aims for emic, emphatic subjective understanding of the phenomena and the individual that fulfils some of the characteristics regarding phenomenological qualitative research. Despite the phenomenological stance some methods which are not characterized with the phenomenological data analysis, such as counting the code frequencies and conducting word searches, were used in order to focus on answering to the research questions from the data, making the analysis closer to the applied thematic analysis rather than completely phenomenological analysis. Gubrium & Holstein (2001, 109-110) points out that in-

depth interviews tend to involve greater expression of interviewer's self than do other ways of interviews. The author wishes to decrease this interpretative influence through applied thematic data analysis and typologies.

3.1.1 In-depth interviews versus focus groups

In CCT related research different qualitative and quantitative methods have been utilized, however the main research methods that has been applied are different forms of interviewing. The difficulty was to choose whether to use focus groups or in depth interviews as both seemed somehow suitable to answer to my research questions. The main concern in focus group sessions is that all of the participants might not feel talking about their personal issues such as motivations towards their dietary choices, or their worldviews among random people. When implementing in depth interview it is possible to get people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, experiences, in addition it gives an opportunity to gain insight how people interpret and see the world (Milena et al. n.d.). By having in depth interviews the groups influence to the individual is also eliminated (Az-zara, 2010), that may otherwise decrease the credibility of the results. The focus group interviews would fit better than in-depth interviews if author had been motivated to find out collective views and meanings about a topic (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). As the author was concerned about individuals self, lived experiences, perspectives and decisions and how they are linked with their consumer identities, in-depth interviews were seen as a setting that enabled the individual to discuss about these issues (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).

The author is interested about sustainable food products and brands, sustainable food diets and about food discussion in general. When conducting in depth interviews factors such as these are seen to increase the mutual trust and the sense of cooperative self-disclosure (also called as strict reciprocity) as the author might share informant's views, ideas and reflections about the topic (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). By only concentrating on the Generation Y consumers it also increases the reciprocity as the author is from the same generation.

3.2 Data acquisition

Data acquisition started in the end of January 2016 and lasted till mid-February 2016. There were nine in-depth interview sessions that lasted from 55 minutes to 155 minutes, the average length being approximately 90 minutes. Every single interview was recorded by using digital voice recorder, after the interviewees gave permission for that. Nine in-depth interviews were seen as sufficient to answer to the research questions, and a certain saturation point was reached as the same themes raised from the conversations. As there is not a scientific consensus on how many in-depth interview sessions should be conducted (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001:113-114), author followed McCracken's (1988:37) suggestion, who has

also done research regarding consumer culture, that researcher with business background needs about eight interviews to gain knowledge about marketing and business questions.

The interviewees were Generation Y people who perceive themselves as sustainable food consumers. This thesis focuses on the aforementioned generation in order to link their typical characteristics, furthermore the socio-historic contexts that might explain their behaviour in the consumer culture. Another reason to target people from Generation Y is that they might perceive different sustainable foods and products important for their sustainable identities, compared to the people from older generations who have been sustainable food consumers for decades and made their choice towards more sustainable diet in a totally different consumer culture. For instance older people picked up more foods from the forest compared to the younger people (Tilastokeskus, 2009) that points just one of the few out the differences between generations and food.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of the interviewees

Characteristic	Participants (n)
Age (years)	
18-24	7
25-29	2
Gender	
Male	2
Female	7
Marital Status	
Single	2
Domestic partnership	4
In a relationship but living apart	3
Size of the household	
One adult	5
Two adults	4
Education	
Upper secondary school	7
Master's degree	2
Diet	
Omnivorous	5
Vegan	1
Pesco-lacto-ovo vegetarian	3

3.2.1 Preparation & Implementation

First author started to familiarize himself to the topic of food, identities and consumer culture in order to create an interview guide (see: ANNEX 1) that complements research questions and could be followed during interviews. Gubrium & Holstein (2001) point out that the type and amount of questions in the interview guide needs careful planning in order to complement the research problem and questions. They also suggest that two or three questions should be asked in the beginning of interview in order to “break the ice”, after that several transitions questions that may explain the purposes of the interviewing and the use of digital recorder, and finally five to eight questions that address the research questions in depth (ibid., 2001). Author conducted one practise session with a friend to test out the interview guide. This session was seen as helpful as it helped to decrease some jargon that was initially a small problem with the interview questions. After all the interviews had been conducted author realized that even more time could have been used on breaking the ice questions since with some interviewees it took quite a lot of time to open up about the topic. If there had been more time, another interview session could have been conducted with some of the interviewees in order to test credibility and the level of saturation of the data.

It was quickly realized that only Finnish participants would be recruited for this research due to the cultural differences there would be between different countries. Interviewees were recruited by posting up flyers (see: ANNEX 2) all over the Jyväskylä University campus area, in addition one flyer was posted in the eco-store Ekolo in Jyväskylä. Due to this seven of the interviewees were students of the Jyväskylä University. People who perceive themselves as sustainable food consumers were only invited to the interviews that was tested by a small conversation through emails or text messages. Between all the interview participants there was a possibility to win one 25 euro gift card to the eco store Ekolo in order to get participants interested and motivated about the research. Interviewees were asked to bring photos regarding how they perceive sustainable food consumption, and they discussed the meanings and ideas that the photos had near the end of the interview sessions. Moisander & Valtonen (2006) see that describing photos and pictures interviewees have taken themselves provide a specific explanation of the social or cultural phenomenon. Majority of the participants took the pictures by themselves, and some used pictures found from the internet.

Most of the interviews were held in the Jyväskylä University premises in order to have a silent and neutral place without major distractions. One interview was conducted in cafeteria as the interviewee found it more comfortable. Before the voice recorder was put on author used few minutes for small talk and general questions regarding food. After the small discussions purpose of the research and the interview were explained, in addition the possible ethical considerations around it. After the research was discussed in detail interviewees were asked to fill out their preliminary information (ANNEX 3) and sign the document that allows the data produced in the interview to be used as a basis for this research (ANNEX 4). Appendices 3 and 4 were copied, modified to fit to this research and

transformed to Finnish language from the McCracken (1988:67-69) book "The Long Interview". During the interviews author followed the interview guide in order to address all the contexts relevant for the research questions. Interview guide was semi-structured with open-ended questions that all the necessary topics regarding research questions would be discussed, although with two participants the interviews resembled more of open discussion as they reflected quite surprising and contradicting contexts regarding food. However with some interviewees probes such as "Could you tell more about that?", "That is interesting could you elaborate even further?" or "Sorry but what do you exactly mean by that?" were asked many times in order to get deeper replies. McCracken (1988) talks about that interviewer should not be engaged in active listening where interviewer's interpretations guide the answers but rather ask questions where the interviewee looks the topic in question from a deeper perspective and (s)he is given room to elaborate reply. Author wished to have as neutral tone as possible and probes were asked in order that active listening would not be a problem.

3.3 Data analysis

Data was analysed mostly by using applied thematic analysis (ATA) however some tips regarding analysis of in-depth interviews were also gathered from the McCracken's (1988) book "the Long Interview". Near the end of the data analysis it was discovered that there are certain patterns that existed within the data between the groups. A typology was used in order to present the differences (TABLE 2). QDA Miner 4.1.28 is a qualitative data analysis software that assisted in the data analysis that was mostly used because there were tutorials on the internet, in addition there was a 30 day free trial.

3.3.1 Applied thematic analysis (ATA) and typologies

The analysis was inductive meaning that the patterns, themes and answers to the research questions were gathered from the data. This is also suitable for applied thematic analysis as ATA is an "*inductive analysis of qualitative data, which can involve multiple analytic techniques*" (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012:1-2). ATA is seen to compromise bit of everything from Grounded Theory to phenomenology (ibid. 2012), especially the flexibility with the analytical tools was important regarding the research results.

A typology was conducted as the data revealed that there are different types of sustainable food consumers who perceive sustainability differently. Typology can be defined as: "... a device for organizing qualitative data for analysis by means of categorizing events or people into qualitatively different ideal types that are abstractions distilled from empirical evidence." (Schwandt, 2007:303). Author conducted an analyst constructed typology as there were obvious differences found between the groups that the interviewees did not witness or pointed out during the interviews (ibid. 2007). The typologies were used to answer to the research questions.

3.3.2 The process of analysing data

The data analysis started when the data was transcribed word by word. Author started writing the transcripts right after the interviews in order to remember the important thoughts and ideas that came up during the interview session. With the first interviews author tried to find how the data linked with the existing scientific articles or books regarding foods and sustainability, however as the data analysis progressed these contradicting or connecting contexts were compared between different interviewees as McCracken (1988) suggest. Usually the transcripts were finished a day or two after the interview sessions depending on the length of the interview. In the end there were 142 pages of transcripts with the line spacing of 1,5.

After the transcripts were finished author read them again and found certain themes arising from the data which were relevant regarding research questions. Some supplementary and relevant themes to the research questions were witnessed in the beginning but left out later on. Author found out that in the beginning it is difficult to know the significance of the themes as the data is not yet coded. As themes started to become clear the data (transcripts) was placed in a qualitative data analysis software called QDAMiner as it offered an opportunity to code text that was related to the themes, as well as the opportunity to use variety of different analytical tools. According to Harding (2015) coding helps to achieve the aims of thematic analysis such as examining commonality, differences and relationships. Codes were selected due to them being relevant to the research questions or the interviewees emphasized some context as important. Codes were placed under the themes such as a theme could be "Characteristics of food as a sustainable possession" and codes under it would be "Eco-labelled foods", "Finnish foods", "Plant-based diet" etc. Codes were either words, synonyms or a sentences to describe the idea behind the code for instance "organic food" was placed under the code of "eco-labelled foods". Some of these initial codes and themes were left out if they were just mentioned few times by a minority of the interviewees and not emphasized as important or relevant for the research.

After the codes and themes were in place QDA Miner offered variety of different analytical tools to present the data where quantification was used. Guest et al. (2012) points out that quantification of qualitative data is a tool that helps in finding out certain patterns and meanings from the data. One essential analytical tool was cluster analysis which structured the data according to the case similarities, and presented it in the form of dendrogram and 2D maps. These forms of data presentation together with word searches helped the author to create typologies regarding different sustainable food consumers. Individuals were placed in the groups according on the code frequencies and similarities, however the contexts that interviewees emphasized as important in the interviews had an impact as well. Guest et al. (2012:137) points out that "*code frequencies provide an important overview of the data landscape, whether or not you choose to report the findings numerically*". Code frequencies worked as a basis for the cluster analysis however number of

cases also helped out to point out certain patterns from the text such as the importance of Finnish foods as every single case (interviewee) found it as sustainable. The clearest distinction between the clusters were when there were three of them.

When the clusters (groups) were discovered they were compared to each other in order that their characteristics, similarities and differences regarding this thesis were discovered. Food, feelings, friends and future were used to point out the characteristics, similarities and differences between the groups as the interview guide (ANNEX 1) had questions regarding these contexts. It was discovered that there were obvious differences between the groups regarding these themes. Coding that was done earlier helped the author to jump back and forth in data in order to ensure that the themes and codes were correct in relation to the groups and assisted in creating typology. Guest et al (2012) talks about data reduction methods. One essential method to reduce data in the analysis phase was through focusing only on answering to the research questions. Typologies were used as a basis to find answers to the research questions. Data analysis software QDA-Miner assisted to find out answers to the research questions as it helped to focus on a specific group of participants. Furthermore it helped to discover how often a certain group has discussed about the themes relevant to the research questions.

3.4 Trustworthiness of the research

Author uses Guba & Lincoln's proposed trustworthiness of the data in order to judge the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). *Credibility* refers to the idea that there can be multiple truths about a social phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). It is researcher's responsibility to choose whether it is acceptable to others as well (Bryman, 2012). Author could have increased the credibility through respondent validation that was not conducted due to the problems regarding interpretation of the results by the participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) and time. Nevertheless some parts of the results support the existing literature about sustainable food consumers, food and identities.

Transferability refers whether the results can be transferred to other social contexts as well (Bryman, 2012). The research was conducted in the Jyväskylä, in addition mostly consisted of university students which decreases the overall transferability. Few interviewees also mentioned that in bigger cities such as in Helsinki there is a better offering of sustainable foods such as in grocery stores and restaurants, meaning that the study made in Helsinki could have resulted in different results. Bryman (2012) pointed out that transferability can be increased through thick description where there is given details about the culture where the research has been made. Author has included some cultural contexts that has influenced Generation Y consumers in Finland and Western cultures.

Dependability refers that records of the research process should be accessible for the external "auditors" (Bryman, 2012). All the data sets except the audio

recordings were offered to the thesis supervisors. Supervisors were also commenting and observing the research as the progress was reported step by step. Audio recording were not offered to the supervisors that the identity of the interviewees would not be jeopardized, however the audio recordings are stored for five years if some conflicts arise. Readers can see the pictures that the participants themselves provided to the research and citations from the transcripts in order to increase the dependability.

Confirmability is concerned about the author's influence of personal values and the theoretical predispositions that (s)he has regarding the research and findings – a confirmability that (s)he has acted in good faith (Bryman, 2012). Two thesis supervisors are the only external people who can confirm the results to be valid. Author tried to increase confirmability by writing the results part first in order not to be too affected by the theoretical inclinations. While conducting the interviews and analysing the data author tried to be unbiased however acknowledges that some pre-reading while formulating a research topic and interview guide might have influenced on the data analysis phase (see Chapter 3.3.2).

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

As the results were being analysed it became evident that there are three different groups emphasizing different issues as important regarding sustainable food consumption. As the groups have different motivations, shopping routines and interpretation of sustainable consumption, the groups are called by the names that was the biggest and reoccurring theme during the interviews. First the author will introduce the main characteristics of the groups, then what is common between all the groups, after that the research questions are being answered and differences between the groups emphasized through tables.

The main characteristics of the groups will be presented by going through *foods* they feel as sustainable and what sort of *feelings* does they evoke as this is seen to point out the identity construction, signalling through food and the cultural acceptance of their consumption choices. *Friends* are important for the collective and personal identity construction, in addition to see how different consumption choices are accepted among friends and family in the contemporary consumption culture. By finding out the how does the participants feel about the *future* is the overall situation how do they see the consumer culture evolving to a more sustainable one regarding food. This is done in order to point out the obvious differences between the groups, and to clarify the research answers.

4.1 Group 1 - Ethical consumers (A: 1-5)

Group 1 is called as ethical consumers as their behaviour fulfils the definition of ethical consumers (see Chapter 2.3.1).

4.1.1 Food

Consumers belonging to the Group 1 are interested about the wide variety of impacts regarding food. They take into consideration the impact of food on animals, environment and people furthermore prefer plant-based diets: "A1: *In my opinion it (sustainable food consumption) means that you take something else into account than just your selfish needs. For me it means that environment and animals should be taken into account*". This group prefers products with eco-labels and seasonal food products as they seem to take into account the variety of different impacts of food: "A2: *... everyday choices are also important that you should buy organic or... fair trade or something like this.. I think that is sustainable*". They rather signal altruism rather than hedonism in their consumption as for example the possible health related of plant-based diets are not thought of "A3: *I don't really pay attention to the health benefits of food...*" and most of them (3/5) even reported challenges in getting enough nutrients from their plant-based diets but still wish to maintain and improve their diets "A2: *I believe that I'm moving towards a diet which contains even less foods from animal products..*". Origin of the food

is important if they are planning to eat fish or other animal products but regarding the vegetables or other plant-based protein it is not seen as important. The only omnivore and male in this group (A4) who mostly eats plant-based diet commented on a picture he had taken from a place he used to work for a while last summer. The place was a traditional farm which also had a small-scale sheep barn “A4: I could have eaten lamb there with a good conscience because I have seen that they are being taken good care of, and how they are being taken good care of...”

4.1.2 Feelings

Group 1 reported more negative feelings such as irritation, frustration, anxiety and disgust compared to the other groups “A4: sometimes I get somehow frustrated or get a small feeling of frustration or rage when you see and hear some completely indifferent stories.. Luckily I’m really good at calmly... They are those personal things that when you read some really stupid opinion and it awakens some feelings of irritation. But luckily I can talk with those kind of people...”

One of the reasons why this group faces more negative feelings compared to the other groups is that they have been exposed on powerful information which has effected on their consumption habits. Documentary films and books about large-scale animal food production, or about the state of Earth are reported on being important: “A5: There must have been some external stimulus that have made me think about things. In my opinion I have watched some documentary about food production... I think it was Food Inc.”. This group also has or had pets in the past which they also seem state as one of the reason they do not wish to eat meat: “A5: I have really been fond of animals and I was interested in horse riding when I went to 1st grade... There is some kind of... I do not know could I say exploitation (of animals) but anyway there concrete example of a relationship between a human and an animal.”

Positive feelings derive from the right consumption choices regarding food that they have made “A4: I feel that ethical and sustainable choices in life are good for the mental health, it feels like that yes... Doing good deeds ... gives good spirit and strength to life”, and if they have been able to motivate others to think differently or to try out plant-based meals: “A1: I have one friend who eats a lot of red meat, I mean every day. I find it marvellous that when we make food together (with the meat eater) and make for example vegetable soup or something, I find it really great (that the meat eater deals it positively)”.

4.1.3 Friends

This group does not seem to have so many like-minded friends who consume in a similar manner, and those who consume in a similar manner are from the inner circle of an individual such as spouse or member of family such as sibling. “A5: I believe I am a little bit of black sheep. I do not have many friends who are vegetarians. My sister is a vegan, and was a vegetarian a long time before turning into vegan.” Only one member from this group pointed out on having many vegetarians and vegans as friends from university where she studies.

4.1.4 Future

The state of our planet and sustainable food consumption is seen in a bit more pessimistic way compared to other groups: “A3: I see it (future and sustainable food consumption globally) problematic, really problematic ... It is one of the most significant causes for environmental impacts which is closely related to the human and animal welfare. It is really a tangle when you try to feed everyone.” They see the change difficult but inevitable: “A1: There has to happen something because we do not have a lot of time to do something which could really have an effect.”

They also saw there is room for improvement in personal food choices and saw that they will change them even further in future meaning that they are still not satisfied with their current consumption habits.



FIGURE 2 Pictures taken by Group 2 participants regarding sustainable foods

From the pictures that Group 1 contributed to the research it became evident that eco-labelled, Finnish, plant-based and seasonal food were perceived as sustainable. The animal food product called JärkiSärki, a can of smoked roach seasoned with organic garlic, points out that origin of the food is important if animal source

foods are to be eaten. These kinds of food products are used to signal sustainable behaviour in the grocery store and in home.

4.2 Group 2 – Natural consumers (B: 1-3)

Group 2 is called as natural consumers as they wish to consume foods that are perceived as natural. Therefore they find picking up berries, fishing and seasonal foods as sustainable. As they associate nature and food closely together, they find environmental impacts as the major concern regarding food. Family is mentioned as having major influence on their perception regarding sustainable food consumption.

4.2.1 Food

Members belonging to Group 2 were mostly interested about the environmental impacts of food consumption: *“B1: it is better for the environment when you sometimes eat it (plant-based meals)”*. The aforementioned citation by B1 also expresses the general opinion they have about plant-based meals, that they prefer it and find it positive however still consume meat sometimes. They found that decreasing consumption and waste as the major theme around sustainable consumption, so they prefer foods that are hand-picked such as berries and mushrooms: *“B2: ...one of those who like to pick (berries and mushroom) to my own stock... Now that I have so much in stock it is marvellous to start doing everything from them. It feels like I have produced everything by myself, and gotten all the benefit from it.”* Origin of the food was also found as important that reflects why they prefer foods that are hand-picked, local or seasonal: *“B3: I am lucky as all the meat I eat comes from my parents so it is hunted or fished. Because of that I do not buy meat or fish from grocery store. Well sometimes I buy Baltic herring. And then of course all the vegetables and things like that I follow what is on season.”*

It was found as important to make sure that they use all the foodstuffs before they go out of date, in addition two even reported receiving out-of-date foodstuffs from their friends that they consume *“B2: my friends know that I do not throw a lot of for example dry foodstuffs away. When they go out-of-date then they donate them for me, when they do not want to use them.”* This group did not find organic or fair trade labels to be relevant for them even though they were seen as helpful and they raised mixed feelings: *“B3: It makes consumption easier if it (a product) has received some environmental certificate. For example I buy organic eggs but otherwise I do not find it as really important.”* Another member mentioned that she will not buy organic eggs as the only difference between them and regular eggs is that there is a window in a barn reinforcing the image of mixed perceptions they have about eco-labels.

4.2.2 Feelings

They were relatively positive about their consumption choices, found joy in their consumption choices, and they even saw that they might have motivated others to consume in a similar manner *“B3: ...it is marvellous to make root juices and such. And*

how they make you feel. Maybe because of that other people get positively motivated by that.” This group was the most active in sharing pictures about the foods they have picked or made. They found this sort of activity as “sharing the good vibe” as their friends usually commented positively about the pictures and contributed replies to them as well “B1: I mostly share pictures in WhatsApp to my friends, to my sister or someone. “Look I found so much mushrooms or something else...”.”

They pointed out that most of their information regarding their consumption choices comes from lived experiences, university courses and news articles that has raised awareness especially regarding decreased consumption and waste “B2: My friend kept a presentation about food loss, and I have followed the amount of my own and my parents food waste so maybe.. Well when I used to work in the grocery store it was shocking to throw so many out-of-date foodstuffs away”

Negative feelings were not often reported by this group. Nevertheless in some situations they felt the feeling of irritation. This irritation was usually due to the choices others consumers make such as buying unnecessary stuff.

4.2.3 Friends

They have quite many like-minded friends who consume in a similar manner and also report that they have had an influence on their parents as well as been influenced by their parents: “B1: Many of my friends and family mainly live in a similar manner. It is nice. There are only few friends who would be living somehow... Completely differently”. As mentioned under the “Feelings” heading they share pictures in the Social Media such as Instagram and WhatsApp about their food they make or have picked from the forest that indicates that their behaviour is positively accepted by their friends and family. They feel that is relatively easy to talk about their sustainable choices with nearly anyone “B1: I can talk about it (sustainable food consumption) with nearly anyone”

4.2.4 Future

They felt relatively good about their consumption choices and did not see that they would have to change them even further “B2: At the moment I do not feel like I should concentrate on something specific nor that I want to improve something. I feel somehow satisfied (about her consumption choices)”. The situation about the future and sustainable consumption raised up mixed feelings as B1 found the change to be difficult, B2 was optimistic about the change and B3 saw the change as inevitable however found it difficult to be optimistic about the change because of the challenges it entails.



FIGURE 3 Pictures taken by Group 2 participants regarding sustainable foods.

From the pictures that Group 2 contributed to the research it became evident that hand-picked foods from the forest such as berries and mushrooms perceived as sustainable. Hand-picked foods also are linked with the other qualities that they perceive as sustainable such as foods which are on season, local or from Finland. The picture of a pie described well that all the food products that are going out-of-date are utilized in order to decrease waste formation. They signal their sustainable identity through social media such as WhatsApp and Instagram, in addition saw discussions about food and sustainability with the friends and family important as well.

4.3 Group 3 – Healthy consumers (C: 1)

Group 3 is called healthy consumers as the interviewee in this group emphasized the possible health benefits from the sustainable diet. He also finds active and healthy lifestyle important in general.

4.3.1 Food

A person belonging to this group was mostly interested about the health benefits that sustainably produced foods have, and found healthy foods good for the society as well: *“C1: For you it is (sustainable food consumption) a good thing, and it is sustainable choice to eat well as you do not cause any risks for the society that you would turn ill”*. He also mentioned environmental impacts as another theme that he found important regarding food: *“C1: As we eat food on a daily basis, and we consume it all the time, our actions really impacts the environment. It is one of the biggest things the food, it is really... It (food choices) can really have a huge effect in my opinion...”* Ethical issues related to workforce were mentioned once however that theme did not appeared as the interview progressed making it less relevant theme compared health and environmental issues. He also preferred eco-labelled products but mostly because of its possible health benefits: *“C1: There are many things that have on impact to me for example, a livestock raised in the meadow contains really good fatty acids and the fatty acid composition in the meat is optimal compared to the mass-produced meat”*. He also admitted that hedonistic values somehow guides his food consumption as he wants to be in best shape physically and mentally but also emphasized that: *“C1: I like to eat organic and food that is a little bit better in the sense that the taste is completely different. I cannot deny that it is one of the motives to buy organic...”* It can be summarized that a person belonging to this group prefers local, organic and seasonal foods due to its lower environmental impacts, better nutrient qualities and taste.

4.3.2 Feelings

Feelings regarding food was rather positive and he did not really find any negative issues related to food consumption: *“C1: I don't really have any negative feelings that I find within myself. Some people might comment something that “Are you really going buy that Chinese cabbage, we rather eat chips now””*. He finds that sustainable choices gives a sense of good feeling: *“C1: In a way I get a good feeling inside when I am able to eat according to the sustainable development and so...”* He tries to make the right choices regarding food on a daily basis however does not get bad feelings if some choices are not aligned with his values: *“C1: I try to make the good choices where I am able to. I do not get really get bad conscience about my consumption choices. Yes, sometimes I eat food from McDonalds if I have to. I do not get any bad feelings because of that. Mostly I just laugh at it and think “Oh hell, I went to McDonalds again...””*. Motivating others to think about their diet and seeing that they are changing their food consumption habits is also contributing positive feelings around food. He seeks the information regarding sustainability and food

from documentary films, internet and books. He has watched many documentaries and pursued information from the internet regarding climate change and environment. He could not remember how he was motivated at the first place to seek information and be interested about the environmental issues.

Negative feelings related to sustainability and food are related to people who disconnect themselves from the food and do not think what they eat. He rather sees that they should acknowledge that the choices really matter regarding your health and the environment.

4.3.3 Friends

He did not report on having many friends who consume in similar manner: *“C1: Right now I cannot recall anyone who is (consuming in a similar manner as he is)... I have spoken to many people about it and enlightened them through my blog.”* Although he pointed out that his ex-roommate was a crucial motivator towards more healthy and sustainable diet: *“C1: My roommate, ex-roommate has made think about this issue (health-based diet) a lot more”*. Most of his friends consume in a different manner but his friends know that he consumes differently, and sometimes they try to provoke him through social media: *“C1: Somebody sends a picture on WhatsApp and asks that how does this look? When I say something about it they might comment that “You fucking environmentalist hippie!” and things like that. It is the most negative feedback I get.”*

4.3.4 Future

He has a rather positive view about the future and sustainable food consumption and sees the change for better possible: *“C1: Well... I think the things are going to a right direction as this fitness boom has made people think more about food from their own point-of-view. In this enlightened contemporary society people are interested in going even further in their thoughts “Ok I feel fine but how does this effect to other in the long run”. I feel that we are going to a right direction...”* He also sees that he will try out new diets in the future and feels motivated to improve his choices little by little in the future.

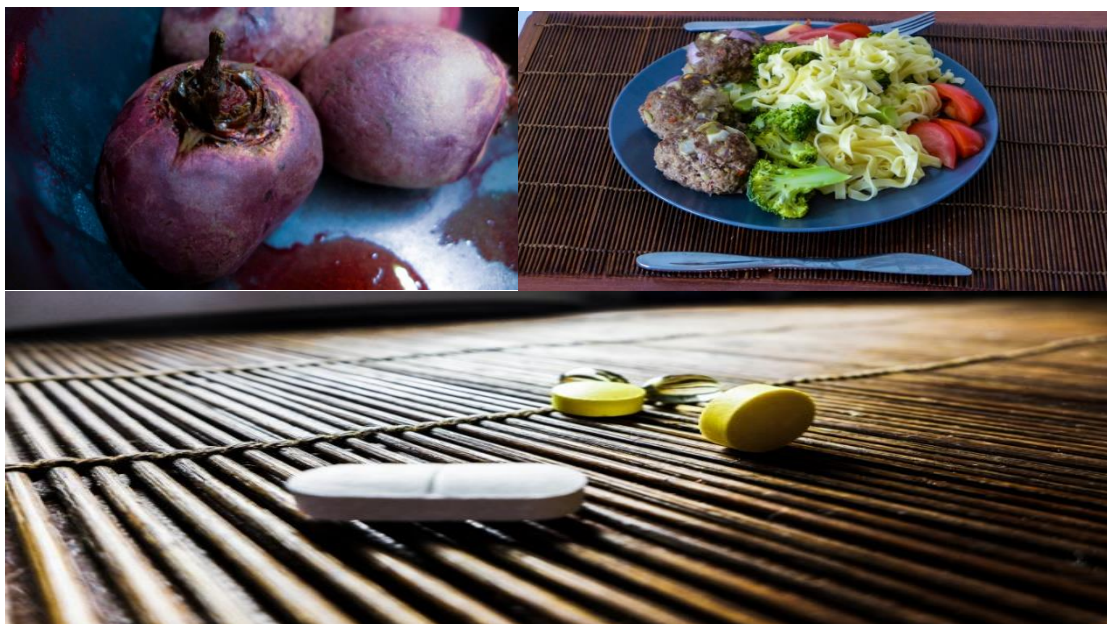


FIGURE 4 Pictures taken by Group 3 participant regarding sustainable foods.

The picture of the Finnish beetroot that is seasonal food, furthermore the meal containing local and organic meat summarizes the preferences that the participant perceives as sustainable as well as healthy with better nutrient qualities and taste. The participant saw that eating vitamins on a daily basis as a way for sustainable and healthy diet as we live in a culture where convenient foods are utilized too much. He experienced that convenient foods lack the essential nutrients that are needed in order to stay in a good mental and physical shape. The participant mostly signals sustainable behaviour through social media such as WhatsApp. Signalling is also done while doing groceries or at placing food products at home that are perceived as sustainable such as organic foods. He has also written articles about sustainability and healthy foods in his blog.

TABLE 2 Main differences between the groups

	Group 1 (Ethical Consumers)	Group 2 (Natural consumers)	Group 3 (Healthy consumers)
Motivation	Environmental, social and concerns regarding animals.	Mostly environmental concerns.	Mostly health related benefits however some environmental concerns.
Feelings	More negative feelings regarding food compared to others.	Positive feelings regarding food.	Positive feelings regarding food.
Friends	Not so many like-minded friends - mostly spouses or siblings.	Many like-minded friends.	Only few friends who consume in a similar manner.

Personal self and future	-Sees room for improvement in personal consumption choices. -Rather pessimistic about the future and change regarding sustainable food consumption.	-Satisfied with current consumption choices. -Mixed feelings about the future and change regarding sustainable food consumption.	-Satisfied with current consumption choices however open to try out new diets. -Positive about future and change regarding sustainable food consumption.
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4.4 Shared traits between the groups

All of the groups preferred *foods produced in Finland* and wanted to support the cause through their groceries. Finnish food was found as sustainable since it was environmentally and socially a better option compared to imported goods: "A4: For example if I had to choose between a food product which is organic and produced faraway versus to a product which is produced in Finland and it is not an organic one, then I would choose the non-organic one which is produced in Finland". Small companies related to food such as restaurants, eco-shops and food producers were seen as sustainable in addition their offerings were trusted to be sustainable. It was seen that organisations which are too big might not be so reliable regarding sustainability: "A3: It bothers me that for example Alpro who does a lot of these soy-products that is it some multinational and where does the soy come from? If it is a bigger firm then I always start to think that is there the whole... Or would the sustainability had to be somehow sacrificed that the organization had been able to grow to a big one" that might be the reason why all of the participants found it difficult to name a brand that was seen as sustainable. Only exception was that big grocery stores, and supermarkets were the preferred choice to do the grocery shopping as they were seen to have more sustainable food products compared to the smaller grocery stores (with the exception of eco-shops). *Cooking is appreciated and meals prepared by them* is also a good way to share their sustainable identity as it might start conversations around the issue.

All of the groups have *faced conflicts regarding price* and sustainable food products: "B2: Sometimes I admire my friends who have more money as some of the environmental products are more expensive and they have the opportunity to buy them." "A1: I was supposed to try veganism but it does not work out with my student budget nor do I have a job so I cannot try it out."

All of the members *reflect experiences throughout their lifetime* such as past experiences that have shaped and been important in their choice of becoming a sustainable food consumer. Childhood and experiences during the teenage years were mentioned by the interviewees however the most important step towards sustainable food consumption was seen the stage of maturation. Maturation was usually linked with moving away from their parents place, moving together with a spouse or as a personal mental growth: "B1: You can have a bigger effect on the sustainability as you do your own shopping compared while you lived with your parents." "A1: As I moved to live by myself, and I was responsible for my own groceries it became somehow easier"

Almost everyone had some relatives or friends in their inner circle who consume in a sustainable way. Some of the friends and relatives were seen as being motivated by their actions and conversations. Nonetheless it was also seen that parents or siblings worked as a motivation to start thinking about sustainability related issues in food:

“A5: My sister is a vegan, and long before that she was a vegetarian. I must have been influenced by her to some extent.” “B2: When I started to date my boyfriend I saw that he prefers Finnish food products, and at the time I was paying more attention to the prices and healthiness. Because of that I have started to pay more attention to that aspect as well”

Sustainable identity is mostly shared through conversations with others. Thoughts and opinions regarding food and sustainability are usually discussed with the like-minded people from the same generation:

“Interviewer: In what situations do you feel that you would like to keep it more personal and in what situations you can talk about the topic?”

C1: Well I have to say that with older people such as 20 to 30 years older than me. Or maybe 30 years older than me. With those people the situation is like no no no...”

4.5 Signalling sustainable identities through food products

The results will be presented by pointing out the contexts that are valued between different groups. As mentioned in the previous chapters there are certain differences between the groups. The differences regarding research questions will be presented in a table at the end of the chapter. The main focus is on the contexts that were seen as insightful regarding the research as well as important and different characteristics between the groups.

The shared traits regarding sustainable food between the groups were that Finnish food products were appreciated and small companies linked to food such as restaurants, eco-shops and small food producers were linked with sustainability.

4.5.1 Group 1 – Ethical consumers

This group takes into consideration variety of issues related to food consumption such as the environmental and ethical concerns regarding people and animals. They take these aforementioned issues into account by eating mostly a plant-based diet on a daily basis although there was only one vegan in the group. Another context that was seen as important were seasonal and eco-labelled products. Plant-based diet was also seen as important part of identity as it has evoked conversations regarding their choices in restaurants or school cafeterias. Majority (4/5) perceived that while buying plant-based foods from the grocery store it might send some symbolic meanings to the other consumers about their sustainable identity: *“A4: When I am putting foods in the counter and there are root vegetables, cabbage, lentils and horse beans and others.. Then you might think that this looks a bit different than with others on the counter. It might arouse somebody’s attention”*

They were also quite strict in their dietary choices and values furthermore did not slip “back to their old habits” as it was seen as creating negative feelings from the personal point of view as well as from the others by negative commenting. Local foods were not emphasized in a similar manner compared to other groups that might be due to plant-based diet mostly consists of imported foodstuffs such as plant-based proteins.

Participants were advised to bring pictures related to sustainable food consumption to the interview. Most of them (3/5) had pictures about eco-labelled food products that are important contexts around sustainability and food for them. Eco-labelled products contain symbolic values making them relevant regarding identity construction while selecting food products from the grocery store, especially when there are other like-minded people or friends around:

*“A3: These eco-labels. They are not brands, or they are brands in some sense... Organic certificates, fair trade certificates. I have thought that if I would meet someone at the grocery store should I pick up those organic products to the top of the shopping bag, and put the Fazer toast bread to the bottom *laughs*. So yes...”*

Interviewer: So you feel that you are sending some sort of message while you are picking up products at the grocery store?

A3: Yeah... Yes if I would meet someone familiar...”

When members of this group needed so use animal products they preferred the ones that have either information about its origin or eco-labelled products such as MSC certified fish or organic milk products that takes into consideration the animal well-being and that the species are not endangered. An interviewee who ate fish perceived Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certificate more important than certificates of organic or fair trade as she acknowledged the global problems regarding fish consumption such as overfishing. Nevertheless she still perceived plant-based organic and fair trade products as sustainable.

4.5.2 Group 2 – Natural consumers

Main motivation towards sustainable consumption is the need for decreased consumption. Food products did not play such a big part in their identity construction although food in non-productized form was seen as sustainable. Local and seasonal products were seen as important due to lower emissions on the environment as well as the positive impact it has on Finnish society. Food products with eco-labels were not important part of identity construction as they were not valued a lot by themselves or by their friends.

Only one person from this group pointed out that she might be sending a message through the shopping done in the grocery store as most of her groceries consisted from fruits and vegetables. Two others did not see as much symbolic value in their shopping behaviour: *“B2: Not really... I make my own choices regarding groceries, and I do not really care how others perceive me”.*

One of the most important context regarding sustainable food identity was that they found out picking up berries, mushrooms, eggs or fishing as important. One of the members of this group pointed out how well this issue is appreciated among other people as well, and a good way to find friends and start conversation related to the topic:

“Interviewer: How has the person close to you formed a picture of you as sustainable? Is it because you have talked about it or shared pictures as you pick up foodstuffs from the forest and take sustainability related issues into account or how?”

B2: Yes! Well when I was working as a cleaner during the summer there were a lot of workmates around me all the time. I asked that how many goes to the nature to pick up mushrooms, and I was surprised to find out that only a minority. And those who pick them were like “Oh that is so wonderful to pick up them as you can make a lot great food from them”. It is like the people will know that “Oh you pick mushrooms as well, you want to go pick up mushrooms with me or my friends?” It is the best option as you gather them by yourself so you know where they are from, and you can use everything by yourself”

People usually shared pictures about picked-up these foodstuff through social media such as WhatsApp or Instagram. They received positive comments regarding the pictures they shared as they seemed to have quite many like-minded friends who appreciate similar consumption choices. This was one of the major differences compared to other groups as a way to signal sustainable behaviour.

4.5.3 Group 3 – Healthy consumers

Food products that are healthy and good for the environment were perceived as sustainable. Nevertheless healthiness and good taste were the dominating themes while making consumption choices:

“Interviewer: ...do you prefer seasonal foods or buy those that are healthy?”

C1: It is more influenced by the need of my body (healthiness). In a way you buy some seasonal foods as an extra treat”

Local, organic and seasonal foods were preferred due to them having better taste and nutrient qualities as well as lower environmental impacts. It was a bit contradicting to find out that one member from Group 1 found that healthiness and sustainability is difficult to integrate however Group 3 found it working well together that also indicates the differences how sustainable food consumption is perceived between groups.

He perceived that some symbolic signals are being sent while buying groceries especially when the products are placed on the counter since majority of his groceries included fruits and vegetables. In his home he had a lot of different nutrients, and organic honey and organic virgin coconut oil that was also seen to send a picture about healthy and sustainable diet and identity.

As he pointed out that there were not many friends who consumed or thought in a similar manner regarding food, there is a possibility that most of the people classified as healthy consumers do not consume in a similar manner. Nevertheless he found that there was room for improvement and felt open to change consumption choices in the future.

TABLE 3 Differences between the groups in the sustainable food identity construction

Group 1 (Ethical consumers)	Group 2 (Natural consumers)	Group 3 (Healthy consumers)
Environmental and ethical concerns regarding people and animals.	Mostly interested about the environmental impacts.	Mostly interested about the possible health benefits and better taste regarding sustainable foods.
Seasonal foods and products with eco-labels are preferred.	Local and seasonal products are preferred. Eco-labels <i>are not seen as</i> important compared to other groups.	Local, organic and seasonal foods are preferred due to their lower environmental impacts, better nutrient qualities and taste.
Plant-based diet is preferred. More strictness in personal diet compared to other groups.	Plant-based diet is perceived as positive and preferred although everyone is an omnivore.	Healthy diet is seen as a part of active lifestyle.
Origin of food important if animal products are consumed (milk, eggs, and fish).	Origin of the food important if animal based products are consumed (meat, milk, eggs, and fish).	Origin of the food is important.
Few (2/5) reported boycotting against big organizations at some point on their life (Nestle).	Being part of food production important: -Picking up berries and mushrooms from the forest -Fishing -Picking up eggs -Eating meat hunted by friends, relatives or parents.	

4.6 Other ways of signalling sustainable identities than food products

Previous chapter revealed that it varied between the groups what foods and food products were perceived as sustainable. Groceries and foods were not the only way sustainable food consumers signal their sustainable identity rather it was seen extending to other consumption choices as well in most of the groups. All of the groups perceived that the most powerful way to express their identity was through face-to-face conversations followed by symbolic presentation of products, in addition sharing their sustainable identity through social media was seen as important for some.

4.6.1 Group 1 – Ethical consumers

Decreasing consumption regarding food, clothing, furniture, cosmetics, electricity and water were mentioned as being relevant contexts regarding sustainable consumption. Flea markets and websites such as tori.fi (a free market place online where individuals can sell their belongings) were sometimes utilized when there was a need for new furniture or clothing. Items and the interior design they had in their home was also an important way to express identity, and the majority (4/5) mentioned this during the interview. One participant (A3) who had a pet concluded this well:

“Interviewer: Is it possible to get a picture from your home that you have thought of sustainability related issues there? Do you have any used items or can someone even get that sort of (sustainable) image of your home?”

A3: I think that you might since we have pretty much old furniture and... It is not some sort of Bling-Bling home. Our home is more related to the hippies and retro items, well not exactly like that but more towards to that direction. And then... We have quite a lot of plants there I do not know is that some sort of message to someone [Do you have herbs there or just regular plants?]. Mostly just house-plants. And then there is not so clean all the time as there might be all sort of packages here and there... And then we have a dog which is this sort of rescue dog so you can see that he is a mongrel, and we have to tell our guests that he is this sort of rescue dog which is a little shy... So that might tell someone something as well...”

The citation wishes to conclude the importance of home as a way of identity expression. It was also interesting to see that her sustainable identity and ethical concerns regarding animals also played a vital part while she having the dog as it was a rescue dog. She mentioned that she would not have a dog which is not an adopted such as a rescue dog is.

Social media was not seen as an important tool to express identity compared to the other groups that can be due to avoidance of conflicts with people who don't not understand the viewpoints they have about sustainability:

“Interviewer: Do you tell others about your consumption choices or do you rather keep it as a personal issue? With who can you talk for example about sustainable food consumption without it being arising some opinions?”

A1: I usually tell people about it but it varies that who I talk to. It would be really nice to be open and talk to everyone but there are those who do not even believe in climate change, deforestation or anything”.

One participant wrote a blog about his lifestyle choices and sustainability related themes, in addition one participant had made only a few posts in Facebook planning to motivate her friends to try out plant-based diets. The utilization of social media as a way to show out sustainable identity was not common within the group.

Two participants also had a profession in the field of sustainability and saw that also as a way other people perceive them. One participant even said that

after finishing his master's degree, he changed his career plans and became a wilderness guide as it suited better to his goals in life. There was a clear pursue for the desired identity.

To conclude most of the participants saw that their home equipped with used household items and clothing is another way of symbolise sustainable lifestyles. They did not utilize social media a lot and carefully chose who to talk to about sustainability related issues. Overall it was seen that their consumption choices were relatively personal, not expressed to others a lot meaning that symbolic value of sustainable products were relatively low. Furthermore only the people who perceived sustainability in a similar manner can understand the symbolic value the products entail.

4.6.2 Group 2 - Natural consumers

Decreasing consumption was a major theme in sustainable identity construction. Decreased buying of food products together with utilizing flea markets for clothing, dishes and furniture were perceived as sustainable. Their homes were decorated with used and old household items. They mentioned that their sustainable identity can be recognized through their possessions such as used household items or clothing.

Flea markets were being utilized the most by this group meaning that visiting flea markets and the products bought from there such as clothing and furniture have an important symbolic value. They reported that they do not buy nearly anything as new:

“Interviewer: Mm. You mentioned a little about clothing but can sustainable food consumption be seen from your other consumption choices or in your lifestyle?”

B3: Well it can be seen in a way that I try to buy everything as used or almost everything, and in a way I will try to use them till the end, or fix them if they get broken. So yes it can be seen...”

Another member (B2) also mentioned that she sometimes feels shocked when she sees items on the dumpster that could be used, and usually goes to see items that her friends are planning to get rid of. Her friends donated some foodstuffs to her if they were going out-of-date that indicates her friends perceiving her as paying attention to the environmental aspects of food.

Social media was seen as a tool to share sustainable identity as well as reinforce their personal and collective identity however it seemed to revolve around food not surpassing to point out other consumption choices such as posting pictures from used clothing or furniture. This might indicate that food was perceived as a more powerful way to start discussion and to express identity compared to the purchases done in the flea markets, or the received items from their friends as these things were not mentioned to be shared among friends.

All of the members also studied in a field where they went through sustainability related issues although one pointed out that she will quit studying in

the field as she received too much negative and heavy information about a topic that is close to her.

4.6.3 Group 3 - Healthy consumers

Decreased consumption was not mentioned at all during the interview that implicates this context not being nearly as important compared to the Group 1 or Group 2. When the author asked that can the sustainable lifestyle be seen in other choices than food there was not any clear response given due to its being quite a new issue to him.

Social media was used as tool to share sustainable and healthy identity however it just mostly revolved around sustainable food or health related topics. To conclude it was not visible in other consumption choices than food, meaning that food had the most powerful symbolic value for him regarding sustainability. Although he pointed out that these sustainability related issues are relatively new to him that can be the reason why it has not surpassed from food to other consumption choices as well.

TABLE 4 Differences in the other sustainability related consumption than food

Group 1 (Ethical consumers)	Group 2 (Natural consumers)	Group 3 (Healthy consumers)
Decreasing consumption was seen a part of sustainable consumption.	Decreasing consumption was the major theme in sustainable identity creation.	Decreasing consumption is not mentioned.
Social media were utilized to some extent (blog and Facebook).	Social media was perceived as a tool to signal sustainable behaviour and reinforce identity (WhatsApp groups, Instagram).	Social media was perceived as a tool to share sustainable and healthy identity (Blog and WhatsApp groups).
Flea Markets and used products were utilized to some extent (clothing and furniture). (4/5)	Flea Markets were being utilized the most among by this group.	Sustainability did not transcend to other consumption choices than food.
Profession in the field of sustainability. (2/5)	Used products (can be food from friends which is near the "best before"-date, clothing, furniture). (3/3)	
	University studies related to the sustainability related issues.	

4.7 Important and contradicting contexts when engaging to sustainable consumption

Previous chapters pointed out the ways sustainable food consumers build their identities through different products and behaviour. This chapter focuses on answering questions regarding important or contradicting contexts when sustainable food consumers engaged to their consumption habits.

Sustainable food consumption was perceived as a part of growing up, and as a way to take responsibility for personal shopping behaviour and its impacts on yourself and to others. All of the group members reflected their past experiences from early childhood to the stage of maturity that had an influence to their consumption behaviour. These past experiences usually involved animals, nature, family, friends and exposure on new information from different sources that seemed to vary between the groups.

4.7.1 Group 1 - Ethical consumers

Everyone reported on being exposed to powerful information related to the state of the Earth, or food production during the stage of maturity. Most of them (3/5) who reported being an animal lover, since the early childhood and had been involved with animals either as pets or as a hobby, said that documentary films that were related to the mass-meat production or to state of our world as an important context towards more sustainable consumption choices. Documentary films such as *Cowspiracy*, *Earthlings*, *Food Inc.*, *Inconvenient Truth*, *Racing Extinction* and were mentioned as the ones that made them think more and to make radical steps related to animal rights. The rest (2/5) received powerful information that was seen as relevant regarding sustainability from reading books to attending university courses related to the topic. By being exposed to a powerful information source might explain why they had more negative feelings related to the food consumption compared to other groups, furthermore why they saw that they still see room for improvement related to their consumption choices.

Although they saw their choice towards more sustainable diet as personal choice they still mentioned that friends, siblings or spouses who consume in a similar manner as an important step towards sustainable diet and supportive to continue their sustainable diet. They can reflect each other consumption choices and possibly change them even further:

“Interviewer: Do you have many friends or people close to you who consume in a similar manner?”

A3: Well my boyfriend is a vegan as well and we live together. We have thought that we feed each other's extremist thoughts about food and it (food choices) might go even further as there is no factor that would balance it to another direction. And my little sister... and my big sister as well has turned to vegan all of a sudden. I do not know is this all my little sister's influence or where that does that originates from...”

The reason why they might mention the inner circle people being important is that they do not have so many like-minded friends who share the same thoughts related to food or consume in a similar manner. It is easier to talk about this topic with people who are closest to them as they found food to be sensitive topic to talk about.

They found that there is enough of sustainable food products in the grocery stores however saw that in Jyväskylä there is not enough restaurants compared to the bigger cities such as Helsinki. The most fascinating conflict situation what two of the participants reported was related to their grandparents. One participant was a vegetarian at the time (now vegan) who found eating meat as disgusting and wrong, another participant was an omnivore who mostly followed a plant-based diet and disliked the mass-produced meat and found many problems regarding that. The only occasion both of them ate mass-produced meat was when they were visiting their grandparents as they saw they will not understand their ethical considerations, in addition they did not wanted to hurt their grandparents feelings.

4.7.2 Group 2 - Natural consumers

Everyone was studying in the field related to the environment and sustainability and naturally mentioned being effected by the courses or presentations kept by friends. Although one participant mentioned that she wants to change her field of study because all the negative information she receives. As this group is mostly interested about the environmental impacts of the food they seemed to reflect early childhood experiences that happened in the nature such as picking berries and mushrooms. Two interviewees have lived in the countryside that might influence the positive image they have towards meat consumption as they have personally seen that animals had been taken good care of.

They saw that their parents and friends have had a major influence in their consumption choices, and did not indicate the decision to consume in a sustainable way being so personal compared to Group 1. They also had many friends who consume in similar manner that may explain why they had more positive feelings regarding their consumption such as acceptance from friends and relatives. Furthermore they did not mention any conflicts they have faced after talking about their consumption choices. They felt open to talk about the topic with nearly anyone. Only conflicts they have faced were related to the prices of the sustainable foods as they found eco-labelled products too expensive.

4.7.3 Group 3 - Healthy consumers

He was interested in health and environmental related topics although the emphasis was on the health related topics. He is open for new information related to both of the topics furthermore sees improvement in the area of food and information. Documentary films, books and internet are favoured as the main source of information; in addition documentary films that dealt with environmental topics were perceived as interesting.

It became obvious that environmental related concerns derive from the teenager years and he mentioned on being interested on natural sciences since the secondary school. Childhood experiences were not mentioned as affecting to the environmental aspects as his parents were not keen on sustainable consumption related matters. Although he did not have many friends who consumed in a similar manner he still saw that his friend had a major influence on him towards health-based diet. Aforementioned friend seemed to be an important motivator for him to take the environmental aspects into consideration as well regarding consumption. His friend only obeyed a health-based diet, and the difference between their food consumption choices was that he took the climate change related issues into account as well.

Only conflicts he had faced were related to the prices of the organic products. He was able to buy organic foods even more when he was working however now as he studies he cannot buy the preferred foodstuffs. The disability to buy organic food products did not arouse any negative feelings as he saw that he tries to make the best decisions regarding groceries whenever he is able to.

TABLE 5 Differences between the contexts and conflicts related to food consumption

Group 1 (Ethical consumers)	Group 2 (Natural consumers)	Group 3 (Healthy consumers)
Exposure on powerful information related to the state of the Earth, or food production during the stage of maturity (documents, books, and internet).	Exposure on information through university courses during the stage of maturity.	Interest in health and environmental related topics – was open for new information and sees improvement in the area of food and information (internet, books, documents).
Pets or experiences in the nature in the early childhood – more empathy related to meat consumption and nature.	Experiences on food production since early childhood – picking up berries, mushrooms or living in the countryside. – Origin of the food becomes important.	Sustainability concerns derive from teenager years and the interest on natural sciences from secondary school. Interest in health related topics from hobbies related to sports.
Perceived the change towards sustainable diet more of a personal choice compared to other groups.	Family and friends mentioned as having a major influence.	Friend mentioned as having a major influence towards health based diet.

Less like-minded friends who consume in a similar manner – more negative feelings compared to other groups. Food is a sensitive issue to talk about to others.	More like-minded friends who consume in a similar manner – the most positive feelings compared to others.	Did not have many friends who consumed in a similar manner.
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Price not such a big conflict compared to other groups.	Conflicts with price (eco-labelled products expensive).	Conflicts with price – while working it was easier to buy organic products.
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Grandparents and food conflicts (2/5).

4.8 Summary regarding results, consumer culture and sustainable food consumers

Sustainable food consumers can be perceived as alternative shoppers who value different things related to sustainability – endorsing alternative choices. It seems that sustainable food consumers want to behave differently than others in the prevailing consumer culture however everyone do not wish to be perceived as different. Nevertheless differences in signalling were evident between the groups and partly done in order to indicate belongingness to a group that holds a certain perception about sustainability. Products with eco-labels were seen as a healthier option or as a way to support a good cause. Buying eco-labelled products poses feelings of positivity, as for someone who is not a sustainable food consumer cheap prices and sense of a good deal might pose the feelings of positivity. Nevertheless it seemed that many have faced conflicts between prices and eco-labelled products that might be the reason why some have used different ways to signal sustainable behaviour rather than just buying commodities in the marketplace. This might also be a reason why everyone struggled when asked that what brands they prefer as sustainable. Nevertheless small companies related to food were seen as more sustainable than others as they have not “sold out” themselves.

They dislike the throw-away society that they see occurring in the prevailing consumer culture, and prefer second-hand stores such as flea markets or internet based services such as tori.fi to search for clothing and furniture. Some even go far as asking their friends to donate out-of-date foodstuffs for them that they can utilize them. Buying new possessions does not bring joy to these consumers rather the positive feelings originates from motivating others to consume in a sustainable way, or by having a closer connection to food through cooking, picking up berries and fishing. Everyone is not satisfied how these consumers act in the marketplace and almost everyone reported on being called by names such

as “ituhippi” or “viherpiipertäjä” that are negative Finnish words associated with environmentalism. It is interesting to see that consuming in a sustainable way evokes these associations although it needs to be clarified that these names were usually called by their friends as part of joke or in a friendly manner. Nevertheless the association between the sustainable consumption and being called by names is evident that might explain why some people feel discussion about sustainability and food difficult and not always worth investing any time and interest in.

At least there is one thing that most of the consumers consuming food in the prevailing consumer culture and sustainable consumers have in common is that Finnish food products are preferred and they have a relatively good image. Perhaps Finnish food producers can promote sustainability even further to motivate even the regular food consumers to start thinking about their everyday food choices even further. Nonetheless at the moment it seems that sustainable food consumers are consuming differently than most of the consumers in the prevailing consumer culture with its deficiencies on prices, environmental-, ethical- and health-related issues.

5 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

The goal was to find out how do different food products and other sustainable possessions construct consumer and collective identities in relation to sustainable food consumption, furthermore what may have been some of the socio-historical or cultural factors that have also motivated consumers to change their behaviour from the mainstream food consumption. It varied between the groups what food products were seen as sustainable although there were some similarities between the groups. Sustainability transcended in the other consumption choices than food in the majority of the groups suggesting that sustainability is a lifestyle choice. There was variation between the groups regarding what has influenced them to change towards more sustainable food consumption habits as they reflected experiences throughout their lifetime. Many reflected that in the verge of maturity they have been influenced by someone, or been exposed to powerful information such as documentary movies, books or university courses related to sustainability.

As with Greenebaum's (2012) research regarding authenticity and veganism it was discovered that regarding sustainable consumers there are different groups who differentiate themselves from the others by creating own identity of doing things right. The sustainable food behaviour is signalled and identity constructed through different set of actions and behaviour such as through market-mediated materials as Thompson & Arnould (2005) pointed out regarding consumer identity projects; however non-productized form of food such as self-picked berries were also perceived as important for sustainable identity. The foods that are regarded as sustainable are dependent on the underlying motivations and perceptions they have about sustainability. Personal or collective perception of sustainability is influencing food choices.

Different perceptions of sustainability can be due to Sirsi et al's (1996) conclusion that individual, social and belief system differences have an effect on why we reason some behaviour as right. Gender differences are noticeable for instance both males in the study sample eat meat and have rational explanation for their meat consumption, whereas females have more emotional concerns about how the animals are being treated and seemed to reflect their personal interactions with animals throughout their lifespan that influences on food choices as Dittmar (2008) suggested. Food has a symbolic function to express and define group membership as Belk (1988) suggested regarding possessions, however the symbol has to be perceived as sustainable by others as well for appropriate signalling as Dittmar (2008) mentioned. Group 1 participant concludes aforementioned statement well regarding symbolic function of sustainable food and signalling: "A3: *I have thought that if I would meet someone (she knows) at the grocery store should I pick up those*

*organic products to the top of the shopping bag, and put the Fazer toast bread to the bottom *laughs*."*

Majority of sustainable food consumers have different ways to signal their sustainable behaviour through other than food related possessions such as used clothing or furniture and face-to-face conversations. It was surprising to discover that Group 1 and Group 3 can signal their sustainable behaviour through foods located in the grocery stores through eco-labelled or plant-based foods. Group 2 uses different strategies of signalling as foods in non-productized form such as picking berries or fishing are seen as more important than eco-labelled products. Belk (2013) talks about co-construction of self in the digital world where he states that friends are used for affirmation seeking where they help to reaffirm each other's sense of self through posting pictures and commenting. Reaffirmation assists in the construction of collective sense of self where there is a shared perception on what is perceived as sustainable. Group 2 used specifically co-constructing of self through WhatsApp groups and Instagram postings. Similar behaviour was also found within Group 3 through posting blog articles and WhatsApp discussions, however surprisingly this was less common among Group 1 participants possibly due to not having many friends who are perceived as sustainable in addition they felt discussions about the sustainability more sensitive compared to other groups. Fischer (1988) concluded that food is central for our personal and collective identities. Behaviour regarding food and altruism such as consumption of sustainable foods needs to be signalled, especially when there are other people around as Griskevicius et al. (2010) pointed out. Nevertheless the actual need to signal may be due to the characteristics that Generation Y consumers in Western societies possess. This generation finds consumer products as important for personal image-building (Parment, 2012), in addition societal and ethical choices have become individualized and sustainable food consumers take part into this conversation by consuming and signalling through "right" foods (Carfagna et al., 2014; Purhonen et al., 2008). Wilska & Nyrhinen (2013) also found out in their study sample regarding sustainable consumers that older generations do not wish to signal their sustainable behaviour reinforcing the differences regarding signalling between the generations.

It was difficult to determine the actual turning point when the participants started to consume food in a sustainable way as they seemed to reflect experiences throughout their lifetime regarding food and sustainability. Nevertheless changes in the physical and social environment such as moving away from their parents, having new friends in a new physical environment is influencing on food choices as Bisogni et al. (2002) proposed. It was interesting to notice that despite the individualistic Western consumer culture all of the groups admitted that family and friends have influenced their consumption habits reinforcing the Carfagna et al.'s (2014) argument regarding sustainable consumption and collectivism as well as the statement that friends are especially important for this generation (Purhonen et al., 2008). Parment's (2012) proposed changes in the society, market and social environment are influencing Generation Y sustainable food consumers for instance the development of IT and communication devices has

made consumers more connected and prone to information that is seen to influence food choices and identities. Pleasure and hedonism in consumption is important for Generation Y as Purhonen et al. (2008) discussed that may also be one of the motivating contexts to keep sustainable consumers on track as sustainable deeds seem to create positive feelings and pleasure.

5.2 Limitations and future research

Due to the qualitative preferences of the research the findings cannot be generalized to whole Finland thus being tied to a certain place, time and context. Study was conducted in Jyväskylä between January and February 2016 which may have affected to the research results. The rationale behind this is that during the summer there are more seasonal Finnish foods in the market, however during the winter the supply is lower. This may have influenced participants' perception regarding sustainable foods.

Despite the lack of generalizability the findings points out important contexts that sustainable food consumers perceive as important while constructing or maintaining sustainable identity. Author wishes for contextual understanding of a phenomenon rather than generalization to the relevant population (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative research has also been blamed for lacking in transparency regarding the implementation of the research (Bryman, 2012). Author wishes that Chapter 3 decreases problems related to the research method. The transparency and the generalization could have been increased by applying multiple research methods (triangulation) (Bryman, 2012) such as conducting focus group sessions or by through observational research in the grocery store setting.

Sustainable consumption can be considered from several different theoretical perspectives such as through rational, psychological and sociological considerations as Peattie & Belz (2009) suggests. As this research is mostly focusing on the sociological perspective, the rational and psychological perspectives are not taken into consideration that could have provided different viewpoints and results. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) also provides different contexts to research the phenomenon of sustainable food consumption (Chapter 2.1). The author chose to research the phenomena through consumer identity projects due to personal interest about the topic.

One fruitful future research topic would be by conducting an observational research that aims to point out sustainable food consumer signalling behaviour in the grocery store setting more accurately, not just relying experiences mentioned by the participants. Future research could be conducted around different regions and cities in Finland in order to get more extensive image on how sustainable food identities are constructed and signalled. Participants in this research already pointed out that in Helsinki region there are more sustainable food products and restaurants compared to Jyväskylä that could mean differences in signalling and in the perception sustainable foods. It would be interesting to research how the Generation Y consumers signal their sustainable food

behaviour in small villages where there are not lot of sustainable food products in the grocery store. Wilska & Nyrhinen (2013) pointed out that older generations are more consistent in their sustainable choices but choose not to signal their behaviour. This position offers an interesting research topic to compare different generations and differences in their signalling behaviour regarding sustainability.

5.3 Conclusions

At first it might seem that all the sustainable food consumers have similar food habits and shared understanding of sustainable food consumption, however when going more in-depth there are clear differences between groups, individuals and in their behaviour. Past experiences and other people influence towards sustainable behaviour, especially social interactions were seen to have an influence on dietary choice. Due to this there are different ways of signalling sustainable behaviour depending on what societal or ethical contexts fit for their personal and collective identity.

The most significant differences include how these people perceive and define sustainable food consumption as one group might not perceive another as sustainable. Ethical consumers (Group 1) have a holistic view to the sustainable consumption and they wish to address variety of issues regarding food from social to environmental concerns. They buy eco-labelled products and eat plant-based meals in order to tackle the problems they find in food consumption on a global and national level. Natural consumers (Group 2) sees problems regarding environment and food consumption. They are partly seen as relying on traditions that they have learned from their family regarding food. However they have taken the sustainability aspect further than their families have. They find Finnish, seasonal and especially non-productized form of food such as picking berries and mushrooms from the forest as sustainable. They wish to decrease consumption regarding food and other commodities preferring flea markets as an ideal marketplace to buy commodities. Healthy consumers (Group 3) sees being mentally and physically in a decent shape good for the society, furthermore acknowledges the environmental impacts that foods entail. He perceives organic and seasonal foods as sustainable due to the nutrient qualities that enables him to stay in good mental and physical shape as well as the lower environmental impacts they involve. Differences between the groups indicate that there are many interpretations on what is perceived as sustainable that influences how sustainability is signalled to others.

Despite the differences there are contexts that all of the groups find sustainable. Finnish, seasonal, local and plant-based foods, in addition small scale food companies or producers are perceived as sustainable. When sustainable food consumers choose products with the aforementioned preferences in the grocery stores, the other groups may understand the sustainable signal they are wittingly, or unwittingly sending. Fischler (1988) stated that food is central for our

personal and collective identity, and Papaoikonomou et al. (2016) pointed out ethical consumers use several different ways to communicate group's collective identity from objects such as foods to different practises. Sustainable food consumption is a powerful signal connecting food and behaviour perceived as altruistic together if the message is received and understood by the recipient. The signal is sent in order to indicate their perception of sustainability that is shared among that group associated with collective and self-identity.

In the prevailing consumer culture individuals are free to choose personal ways of presenting themselves. Therefore foods and food products are important tools to construct sustainable identity. By consuming sustainable foods, the sustainable consumer can present him/herself as sustainable if the other person is able to translate the symbolic message in a correct way. Nevertheless it seems that some sustainable consumers heavily prefer sustainable foods that are not to be found from the market places. They present themselves as sustainable through social media and conversations as they do not consume foods (such as eco-labelled food products) where the symbolic message of sustainability is more obvious. It varies between the groups that which foods are used to construct and signal preferred identity. Foods perceived as sustainable, are important tools for constructing and maintaining a sustainable identity. Thus an essential part of extended-self.

There are clearly some cultural contradictions regarding sustainable food consumption. Sustainable food products from the market places are perceived as too expensive. There are also difficulties when engaging to a conversation regarding sustainability when there are older or not like-minded people around. In addition sustainable food consumers are sometimes stigmatized and being called by names. That may also point out the current state of sustainable food consumption in the prevailing consumer culture. It may also explain why older generations do not wish to signal their sustainable behaviour. Nevertheless Generation Y consumers want to express their personal uniqueness (Purhonen et al. 2008:290), in addition they are more prone to information than earlier generations (Parment, 2012). That may indicate more perceptions regarding sustainable food consumption in the future. It is fascinating to see how the next generation perceives and signals sustainable food behaviour. There is a possibility that sustainable food behaviour becomes a cultural norm whereas unsustainable food consumption becomes stigmatized.

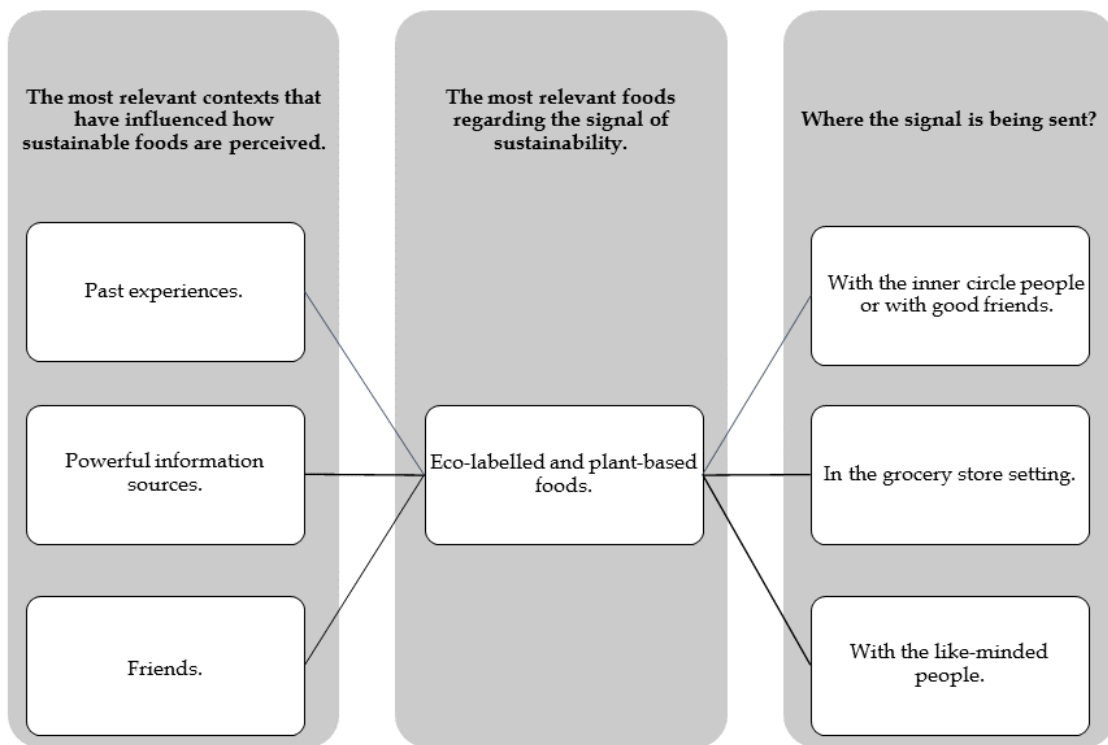


FIGURE 5 The most relevant contexts influencing the perception of sustainability and signalling among Ethical consumers.

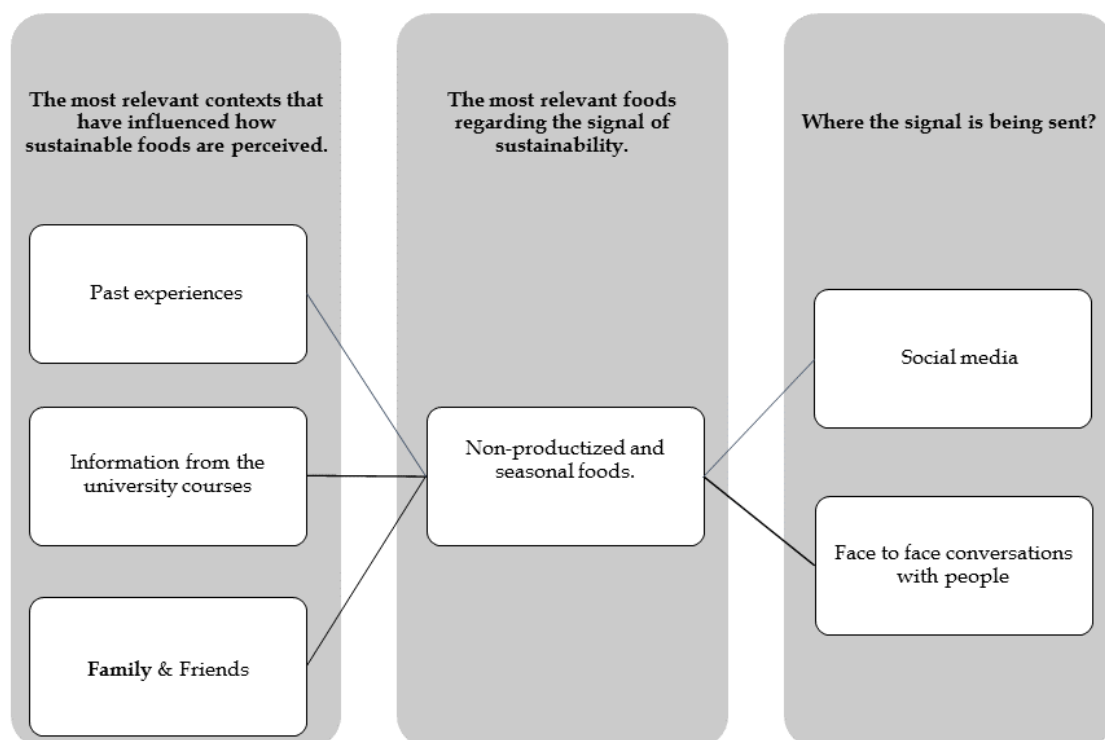


FIGURE 6 The most relevant contexts influencing the perception of sustainability and signalling among Natural consumer consumers.

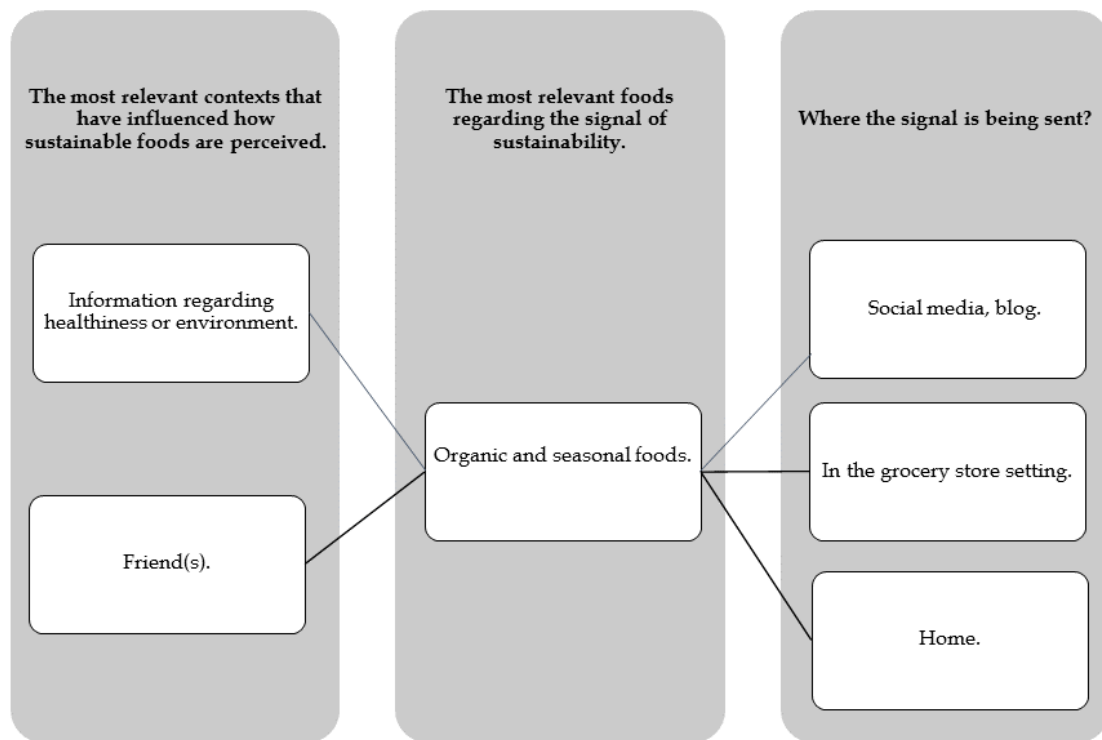


FIGURE 7 The most relevant contexts influencing the perception of sustainability and signalling among Healthy consumers.

APPENDICES

ANNEX 1 Interview guide

SYVÄHAASTATTELU KYSYMYKSET

“It is best for the interviewer to begin with an actual protocol of questions: usually two or three introductory icebreakers to get the ball rolling; several transition questions, which may again explain the purposes of the interviewing project or elicit permission from the respondent to use a tape recorder; and then perhaps five to eight main or key questions that address the heart or essence of the research question(s)” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002)

Haastattelun kulku:

1) Pientä small talkia alkuun (Sää, opiskelut, mones vuosikurssi, kouluruoka, ajankohtaiset aiheet mahdollisesti ruokakeskusteluun liittyen). Yritä saada haastateltavan luottamus.

2) Kerro tutkimuksen tarkoitus “Haastatella vastuullisia ruuankuluttajia ja heidän näkemyksiään ruuasta ja kuluttamisesta sekä siihen liittyviä dilemmoja. Pyrin myös saamaan selville keinoja millä tavoin vastuullisen ruuankuluttajan identiteetti rakentuu”, “Teen gradua tästä aiheesta, koska koen ruokakeskustelun mielenkiintoisena ja paljon mielipiteitä herättävänä. Varsinkin nyt tuntuu, että ruuasta puhutaan niin paljon, että kommentteja löytyy aiheesta kuin aiheesta puolesta ja vastaan oli kyseessä sitten kovat ja pehmeät rasvat, tai maito ja maidottomuus. Oli myös mielenkiintoista huomata että Pariisin ilmastokokouksessa puhuttiin myös ruokavaliosta ja sen vaikutuksesta maailmaan.”

Ensimmäinen transition question: -> Seuraatko itse ruokakeskustelua eri medioiden kautta? (blogit, some, artikkelit, dokkarit..?). Anna “eettisyyslomake” ja kysy lupaa nauhoittaa haastattelu kun on vastannut tähän.

3) Icebreaker and transition questions:

Mitä mieltä olet kouluruuasta? Kiinnitetäänkö siinä vastuullisuuteen huomiota? Mites ravintoloissa?

Otetaanko kaupoissa vastuulliset ruuankuluttajat hyvin huomioon ?

Oletko jo nuoresta asti ottanut vastuullisuuden ruuankulutukseen huomioon, vai onko se tullut tietoiseksi asiaksi vasta lähiaikoina?

Onko ystäväpiirissäsi paljon jotka kuluttavat samaan tyyliin kuin sinä ?

Onko henkilökohtaisen ruokavalion ylläpito mielestäsi helppoa vai vaikeaa ?

Pääkysymykset:

Muista probing "Voisitko kertoa lisää tuosta? Voisitko täsmentää?"

Kuvaile omaa ruuankulutustasi / Mitä mieltä olet vastuullisesta ruuankulutuksesta? (Jos haastateltavia pyydetään ottamaan noin viisi kuvaa vastuullisesta ruuankulutuksesta todennäköisesti tässä onärkevin kohta käydä ne läpi?)

Kuinka vastuullinen ruuan kulutus näkyy elämäntyylyssäsi / tyyliässäsi elää?

Mitkä asiat ovat olleet mielestäsi tärkeitä, jotka ovat muokanneet kulutusvalintojasi / arvojasi ? (tarkastele yksilön valinta vs. ryhmän vaikutus ; jos alkaa puhumaan eläinten hyvinvoinnista, lähituotannosta tai reilusta tuotantohinnoista yritä selvittää miksi juuri esimerkiksi eläinten hyvinvointi on tärkeää ja mistä se eläinten arvostus on peräisin).

Jatkokysymys: Entä onko asioita jotka vieläkin muokkaavat sinun kulutusvalintoja entisestään? Toivottavasti tässä tulisi käytyä hieman sosio-historiallisia tekijöitä läpi.

Ask experience/behaviour questions before opinion/feeling questions (Patton 1987:115)It is useful to ask questions about experience or behaviour before asking questions about opinions or feelings as this helps establish a context for the informants to express the latter. For example, asking "What happened?" before "How do you feel now?" Patton, M. Q. (1987) How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation. California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Minkälaisia tunteita henkilökohtainen ruuan kulutus herättää sinussa? (ahdistus, toiveikkaus, terveellisyys, viha, ilo?) Entäs muiden ihmisten ruuan kulutus? (mahdolliset ristiriidat perheen, ystävien tai muiden ryhmien välillä). Tässä olisi hyvä kohta "probing" kysymyksille eli "Miksi se herättää tällaisia tunteita? Voitko kertoa hieman lisää?"

Mitä mieltä olet vastuullisista kuluttajista, jotka kuluttavat vastuullisesti mutta sallivat lipsahduksia jos tilanne sitä vaatii? (esimerkiksi illanistujaisissa kavereiden kanssa, tai kun palaa vanhempien luo, juhlatilaisuudet)

Jotkut ihmiset kokevat leimautuvansa, kun he kertovat kulutusvalinnoistaan, ja jotkut taas ei. Mitä mieltä olet tästä?

Miten läheiset ihmiset kuvailisivat sinun kulutusvalintojasi?

Kerrotko muille ihmisille kulutusvalinnoistasi, vai pyritkö pitämään sen henkilökohtaisena asiana? Kenen kanssa voit puhua avoimesti näistä asioista?

Millä tavalla näet tulevaisuuden ja vastuullisen ruuankulutuksen?

Millä tavalla näet Suomen ja vastuullisen ruuankulutuksen?

ANNEX 2 Flyer for recruiting interviewees

HEI VASTUULLINEN RUUANKULUTTAJA!

Nimeni on Ville Happonen, ja olen tekemässä pro gradu -**tutkielmaa** Jyväskylän Kauppakorkeakoululle (Corporate Environmental Management) **vastuullisista ruuankuluttajista**. Olen itse hyvin kiinnostunut tästä aiheesta, seuran ruokakeskustelua aktiivisesti, ja haluan ymmärtää tätä ilmiötä vieläkin syvemmin.

Jos olet alle 35-vuotias, ja koet että haluat jakaa ajatuksiasi ruuankulutukseen ja vastuullisuuteen liittyen, olet hakemani henkilö. Haastattelutapana toimii **syvähaastattelu**, joten annan sinulle paljon tilaa puhua omista ajatuksistasi ja kokemuksistasi. Parhaimmillaan haastattelu voi laajentaa ja selventää molempien käsityksiä aiheesta, sekä auttaa ymmärtämään tätä ilmiötä syvemmin.

Toiveenani olisi myös, että saisit otettua **muutaman kuvan, jotka jollain tavalla mielestäsi kuvaavat vastuullista ruuankulutusta ja toisit ne haastatteluun jossain muodossa (esim. tulostettuna tai kännykässä).**

Kaikkien haastateltavien kesken arvotaan **25 euron arvoinen lahjakortti Ekokauppa Ekoloon**. Haastateltavia tulee todennäköisesti olemaan alle kymmenen, joten **mahdollisuutesi voittaa ovat hyvät!**

Jos kiinnostuit, ota minuun yhteyttä niin kerron lisää!

ville.happonen@gmail.com

045 275 9337

ANNEX 3 Preliminary questions for the interviewees

PRELIMINAARISET KYSYMYKSET TUTKIMUKSEEN LIITTYEN

Päivämäärä:

Paikka:

Aika:

Haastateltavan nimi:

Sukupuoli:

Ikä:

- a) 18-24
- b) 25-29
- c) 30-34

Syntymäpaikkakunta:

Parisuhdetilanne:

- a) Sinkku
- b) Avoliitossa
- c) Avioliitossa
- d) Parisuhteessa eri talouksissa

Kotitalouden koko:

- a) Yksi aikuinen
- b) Kaksi aikuista
- c) Yksi aikuinen ja yksi lapsi
- d) Kaksi aikuista ja yli kaksi lasta
- f) Asun vanhempieni luona

Korkein koulutus:

- a) Perusaste
- b) Yleissivistävä lukiokoulutus
- c) Ammatillinen koulutus
- d) Alempi korkeakoulu
- e) Ylempi korkeakoulu
- f) Tutkijakoulutus

ANNEX 4 Form of approval to conduct an interview

SUOSTUMUSLOMAKE HAASTATTELUUN

Hei, nimeni on Ville Happonen. Olen tekemässä pro gradu -tutkielmaa Jyväskylän Kauppakorkeakoululle. Jos sinulle tulee mitä tahansa kysymyksiä tutkimukseen liittyen, voit ottaa minuun yhteyttä puhelimitse (045 275 9337) tai sähköpostitse ville.happonen@gmail.com. Jos et halua ottaa minuun suoraan yhteyttä, niin työtäni ohjaa Marjo Siltaoja.

Ensinnäkin haluan kiittää halukkuudestasi osallistua tähän tutkimukseen, sinun osallistumistasi arvostetaan paljon. Ennen kuin aloitamme haastattelun, haluaisin vakuuttaa, että sinulla haastateltavana on useita oikeuksia tähän haastatteluun liittyen:

- 1) Osallistumisesi tähän haastatteluun on täysin vapaaehtoista.
- 2) Saat kieltäytyä vastaamasta milloin tahansa.
- 3) Saat lähteä haastattelutilanteesta milloin tahansa.
- 4) Tämä haastattelu on luottamuksellinen ja pidetään salassa. Pelkästään minulla ja ohjaajallani on pääsy tähän materiaaliin.
- 5) Katkelmia tästä haastattelusta saatetaan käyttää tutkielmassani, mutta ei missään tilanteessa sinun nimeäsi tai tunnistettavia piirteitäsi sisällytetä lopulliseen tutkielmaan.

Olisin kiitollinen, jos allekirjoittaisit tämän lomakkeen näyttääksesi, että olet lukenut tämän sisällön.

(allekirjoitus ja nimenselvennys)

lostettu) (tu-

(päivämäärä)

Jos haluat osallistua Ekokauppa Ekolon 25 euron arvoisen lahjakortin arvontaan, jätä puhelinnumerosi tai sähköpostiosoitteesi alle. Yhteystietoja käytetään ainoastaan arvonnän voittajan yhteydenottoon.

Puhelinnumero

tai

sähköposti:

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