WHY BUY GREEN?

An exploration of drivers and barriers related to sustainable purchasing in the Swedish food sector

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Abstract
Sustainability has become a subject of much interest in recent years, due to the deterioration of the natural environment. In response there has been increasing public pressure on businesses to provide environmentally friendly product alternatives for consumers. However, the demand for said products is surprisingly low, which constitutes a challenge for marketers; how can the demand for sustainable products be increased? In order to answer this question, a deeper understanding of the green consumer profile is needed. As such, the purpose of this study is to:

*Increase the understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring drivers of, and barriers to, green purchasing behaviour.*

In order to fulfil this purpose within the chosen context of sustainable foods, the subsequent main research questions were formulated:

1. **What do consumers perceive to be drivers motivating them to purchase sustainable foods?**

2. **What do consumers perceive to be barriers preventing them from purchasing sustainable foods?**

The study adopts a qualitative and exploratory approach and utilizes semi-structured focus groups to accumulate empirical material. The questions for these focus groups stem from an integrative model created through synthesis of existing theory related to marketing of sustainable products, while adopting a consumer perspective.

Three focus groups were subsequently held, with a total of 12 participants. Data display and analysis was used to produce insights related to the purpose and research questions of the study. Among these, the most important insights include the lack of specific knowledge relating to the benefits of sustainable food products, and the social factors that influence consumers’ purchasing behaviour of sustainable foods. Moreover, the findings suggest that the confusion regarding the definition of sustainable foods has implications that call into question contemporary theory on the matter.

**Keywords:** sustainability, green consumption, sustainable consumption, consumer behaviour, green consumer profile, drivers, barriers, values, attitudes, behaviour, heuristics, knowledge
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1 Introduction

Throughout most of recorded history, mankind has been locked in a deadly struggle for survival with Mother Nature as the primary opponent. Our past is filled with horrors such as disease and famine, which have thinned out the human population along the way (Harari, 2017, p. 1-2). Now, in the 21st century, the tables have turned. While disease and famine still exist, they have been practically wiped off the face of the earth compared to a few hundred years ago. Vaccines and technological innovations have made it possible for us to live longer lives and produce more food than ever before, which has brought about a rapid increase in the human population (Rosling, Rosling & Rosling Rönnlund, 2018). Simultaneously, a larger portion of the population than ever before has managed to escape poverty (Rosling et al., 2018). While this is indeed a great triumph in mankind’s struggle against nature, this development has brought about completely new issues. When more people have more disposable income, it is only natural that the overall consumption of resources will increase. In fact, we as a species are now consuming resources in a way that cannot be sustained by our planet (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014, p. 1186). Since we have reached a point where we cannot continue to increase (or even maintain) our current consumption habits without running the risk of making our planet uninhabitable, it is clear that the issue of sustainable consumption has consequences for human society as a whole - if we fail to turn this development around, our species will not survive in the long term.

While the importance of solving the sustainability issues we are facing is evident from a societal perspective, our dilemma has far-reaching consequences from a business perspective as well. This stands to reason, since businesses are the entities that generally are responsible for providing the products we consume in our everyday lives. As such, it is important at this early stage to note the importance of the interplay between the main producing and consuming entities of society: businesses and consumers.

There are two main, logical approaches to mitigating the negative effects that the previously described increase in consumption has on the environment. One option is to attempt to encourage consumers to abstain from unnecessary consumption, thereby limiting the total amount of consumption and decreasing the effect on our environment. The other option is to encourage consumers to make a change in their consumption patterns so that a larger portion of their consumption consists of sustainable products that have a limited detrimental effect on the environment, compared to “standard” alternatives. We would argue that the logic behind the dynamic can in its simplest form be described by the following, mathematical function:

\[
\text{Environmental impact} = \text{Environmental impact per product} \times \text{Total number of products consumed}
\]

If plotted in a graph, as can be seen in Figure 1, Environmental impact of standard and sustainable products, sustainable products will have a flatter line than that of standard products, since the environmental impact per product is smaller for sustainable products. In the following graph, the environmental impact of sustainable products (green line) versus standard products (black line) is illustrated:
In the graph, the y-axis denotes the total negative impact consumption of products has on the environment. The x-axis denotes the total volume of products that is consumed, measured in number of units. The graph illustrates that the total environmental impact can be lowered from $E_i 2$ to $E_i 1$ either by decreasing the total amount of standard products consumed from $Pr 2$ to $Pr 1$, or by switching to sustainable products while still maintaining a consumption volume of $Pr 2$.

While both approaches are valid, this paper will focus on a shift toward increased consumption of sustainable products at the expense of standard alternatives. The reason for this is that the thesis is written from a marketing perspective, which typically involves identifying opportunities for businesses to increase their performance by manipulating demand for certain products. From that point of view, it is more intuitive to primarily focus on the route that strives to increase the demand for a certain product category at the expense of another, rather than to decrease demand for products overall.

The increasing need to address the sustainability issues we are facing has been recognized by governing entities and individuals alike, resulting in increasing pressure on businesses around the world to invest in sustainable initiatives and product development (Huang, Yang & Wang, 2014, p. 251; Katsikeas, Leonidou & Zeriti, 2016, p. 660). In fact, never before have the global markets of our world gravitated so strongly towards sustainability, pulled and pushed in this strategic direction by both external and internal forces (Lim, 2017, p. 69). As a consequence of these actions, and by awareness raised elsewhere, consumers have begun to evaluate their behaviours to contribute to a positive change in sustainable regards (Moser, 2016, p. 552). Contemporary efforts by businesses and organizations have also gradually begun to echo these aspirations and values for a sustainable future (Huang et al., 2014, p. 250). One need only turn on the television to notice this change on a practical level. Hardly a single commercial break goes by without
at least one commercial that emphasizes the sustainable aspects of some company, business idea, service, or product. Sustainability issues are one of the key concerns for the survival of our planet, and as such the matter’s importance from a holistic, societal perspective is proving more difficult to ignore by the day.

While sustainability may be seen as something that businesses are being pressured to consider, the concept is also at the root of many lucrative opportunities. Many authors, such as Huang et al. (2014, p. 250) and Katsikeas et al. (2016, p. 660), have emphasized that successful implementation of a strategy based on positioning as a sustainable brand is likely to yield a competitive advantage, something that many businesses naturally have an interest in doing. “Sustainable strategy” is a rather broad concept that may entail everything from implementing sustainable production processes and CSR, to the development of sustainable products and services, and the marketing of said services. As such, sustainability is a concept that on some level has implications for virtually all industries in all markets and can be implemented in some way into a vast number of activities within a company.

As will be outlined in chapter 1.1, the problem with sustainable consumption from a business perspective, in its simplest form, is that consumers are currently not purchasing sustainable products at the desired rate. Given that any business needs to be profitable in the long run to survive, and that there is an evident need to change the consumption patterns of society in order to preserve the environment, the lacking demand for sustainable products is an issue from both societal and business perspectives. In order to understand how to increase demand for a product category, the marketer needs to understand the factors that decide whether a consumer does or not purchase said products. As such, this paper will focus on exploring the drivers of consumers’ behaviour, more specifically their sustainable food purchasing behaviour. This knowledge can then be of benefit from the perspective of companies that wish to capitalize on a sustainable marketing strategy. In the following, we will outline the main challenges marketing practitioners and academics alike are faced with in their quest to increase demand for sustainable products.

1.1 Problem background

The main problem that inspired this thesis is the need to increase demand for sustainable products. As previously discussed, there are benefits of doing so from both a societal and a business perspective. While many companies and individuals recognize the benefits of sustainable strategies, evidence suggests that marketers are still struggling to find a way to increase the demand for sustainable products. This chapter will elaborate on this statement and provide an overview of the practical and academic issues that are hindering the progress within the area of sustainable marketing.

The first step in understanding the problem area is to understand how humans make decisions. Stern et al. (1993, p. 326) stated that humans engage in any behaviour only when the perceived benefits of doing so outweigh the perceived costs. As such, the ultimate goal for marketers of sustainable products is to make as many consumers as possible see a benefit-cost ratio for sustainable products that is better than that of standard alternatives. In order to achieve this, marketers must first understand how consumers evaluate different product alternatives.
Previous studies have suggested that price itself is an important factor when it comes to consumers deciding whether or not to buy a sustainable product (Gleim & Lawson, 2014, p. 506). This creates a competitive disadvantage for sustainable products from a price perspective, since they generally cost more than standard products and thus need to compensate for their higher price through other qualities. This is due to the development of sustainable production typically involves the implementation of complex processes that are costlier than standard alternatives (Katsikeas et al., 2016, p. 660), leading to a higher shelf-price on the final product. This can be argued to be a natural effect of companies striving to maintain profitability levels despite more expensive production costs.

In practice, this means that consumers will have to accept a price premium for sustainable products, such as organic foods (Moser 2016, p. 553). For example, organic vegetables are typically more expensive than vegetables produced with the use of pesticides. In order to accept the aforementioned price premium, the consumer’s decision to purchase a specific product cannot be based on price alone, since that would lead him or her to simply purchase the cheapest product and trust that they will receive the same value as for the organic product, but at a lesser price. Instead, the consumer must perceive the sustainable product to hold a value above that of the other alternatives, leading to a more beneficial price-value ratio and a higher willingness to pay (Moser 2016, p. 553). As such, a basic condition for the financial viability of sustainable product lines is that consumers need to perceive sustainable products to hold a value that is superior to standard products. So, if price is disqualified as a key competitive advantage for sustainable products, what may then be the motivations for consumers to choose them?

A useful starting point in trying to make sense of the situation could be to categorize motivations for green purchasing behaviour into three value dimensions: altruistic, egoistic, and biospheric (Stern et al., 1993, p. 324). Altruistic values involve concern for the human community, egoistic values include concern for the consumer’s self-interest, while biospheric values refer to concern for the natural environment, including animals (Stern et al., 1993, p. 324). While some empirical studies have shown that the altruistic dimension does not play a direct, significant role in purchasing behaviour of sustainable products, the remaining two dimensions are considered highly relevant as determinants of green purchasing behaviour (de Groot & Steg, 2008, p. 348; Lee, Kim, Kim & Choi., 2014, p. 2102). As such, one may continue reading this paper with the understanding that consumers seem to buy sustainable products for two main reasons: for personal gain and/or for the benefit of the natural environment.

In line with the finding that concern for the environment can be a motivation for green purchasing behaviour, it has been commonly assumed that an increase in environmental awareness leads to more sustainable consumption behaviour (Hines, Hungerford & Tomera, 1987; Mostafa, 2007; Sheltzer. Stackman & Moore, 1991). The logic behind this thinking is that once you become aware of such a pressing issue, you will be motivated to attempt to remedy the situation in some way. Indeed many authors, such as Akehurst, Afonso and Gonçalves (2012, p. 973), have observed that a majority of consumers state that they care about the environment, which implies a high level of awareness. The problem is that the same consumers do not seem to engage in purchasing behaviour that corresponds to their reported attitudes toward the environment (Akehurst et al., 2012, p. 973). To illustrate this example, organic foods in Germany, which is one of the most developed markets for organic food, only hold between 1% and 11% of market share.
across different food categories (Moser, 2016, p. 552). A majority of consumers do not seem to think that the benefits of sustainable products outweigh the cost of choosing them over standard alternatives. This fact is difficult to consolidate with statistics that claim that a majority of consumers consider the environment in their consumption habits. If the environment is considered important, and if sustainability is the main selling point of a product, why is the demand for sustainable products so low?

The phenomenon has been discussed in terms of an attitude-behaviour gap (McDonagh & Prothero 2014, p. 1196), whereby a consumer’s actions do not reflect his or her stated beliefs. Other authors have discussed the concept using slightly differing terminology, but retaining the same sentiment. An example of this is Gleim and Lawson (2014, p. 503), who stated that the difference between the 83% of consumers who state that they intend to act sustainably and the 16% who actually do so constitutes a “green gap” that needs to be closed. While the attitude-behaviour gap serves as a concept for explaining the discrepancies between research and practice, it is currently of limited value when it comes to guiding actual marketing efforts of businesses. In light of the mounting public pressure on businesses to engage in sustainable practices, the question is why the individual consumers themselves seem unwilling to rise to the occasion. Some authors, such as McDonagh and Prothero (2014, p. 1196), speculate that the attitude-behaviour gap occurs due to consumer values such as hedonism and fatalism, while other researchers have found that perceived price and availability are the main barriers to purchasing sustainable products (Buder, Feldmann & Hamm, 2014, p. 398). Gleim and Lawson (2014, p. 505) suggested that price, quality, convenience, and brand loyalty are the main reasons for the existence of the gap. Yet another interesting perspective is presented by Moser (2016, p. 553), where the author discusses the role of heuristics in the decision-making process. The conclusion is that researchers have struggled to find a satisfactory explanation for why exactly this gap occurs and how to bridge it, as discussed in the extensive marketing literature review by McDonagh and Prothero (2014).

Even if a literature search yields plenty of research and various theoretical perspectives, it is clear that there is no consensus among researchers on how to understand green purchasing behaviour (or lack thereof). Some authors have tried to explain purchasing behaviour and its underlying reasons in terms of linear models. One example of this is Huang et al. (2014), who found support for their hypothesis that knowledge of a green brand will lead to more positive attitudes toward the brand, which in turn leads to increased green purchase intention. The logic on which this model is built can be compared to the widely supported value-attitude-behaviour model, which was introduced by Homer and Kahle in 1988. According to this model, values influence attitudes, which in turn influence behaviour (Homer & Kahle, 1988). From a marketing perspective, the logic of the latter model goes well together with the commonly accepted belief that marketing which plays on consumer values is more likely to yield an inimitable competitive advantage (Chen & Lee, 2015, p. 197). When discussing the relationship between values and behaviour, it is interesting to recall the relevance of the value dimensions that were presented earlier in this chapter in serving as motivators of green purchasing behaviour. As such, the value-attitude-behaviour model by Homer and Kahle (1988) will play a key role in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The above-mentioned linear models suggest that it should be quite simple to create demand for sustainable products in a world where most consumers on at least some level state that they are aware of the environmental issues we as a society are facing and that
they are concerned with matters of sustainability. However, the empirical evidence suggests that there are challenges when it comes to putting the model into practice. While there already exists a niche for consumers who actively purchase sustainable products, we have yet to discover an effective way of encouraging the general public to engage more frequently in sustainable purchasing behaviour. In the words of Moser (2016, p. 552): “Identifying the drivers that positively influence consumption of organic products is of utmost importance to reach consumers beyond the niche”. This view is supported by McDonagh and Prothero (2014, p. 1196), who in their review of sustainable marketing research underlined the importance of considering ways of promoting sustainability on a broader, societal level. The authors go on to explain their view that an understanding of the individual in this context will always be relevant, and that a further exploration of individual concerns, attitudes, and behaviours as well as sustainable consumption practices are crucial (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014, p. 1196). While the authors applaud the work that during the past few decades has been done on building profiles on “the green consumer” and understanding what makes them develop environmentally conscious behaviours, it is clear that we may still be missing several pieces of the puzzle (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014, p. 1189). Other authors have supported the need for increasing our understanding of the green consumer profile in order to facilitate development of effective targeting and segmentation strategies (D’Souza et al., 2007, cited in Akehurst et al, 2012, p. 973). The “green consumer profile” is an umbrella term that has been used by several authors (e.g. Akehurst et al., 2012; D’Souza, Taghian, Lamp & Peretiatko, 2007) and entails all the knowledge we currently have about what drives the behaviour of both actual and potential consumers of sustainable products.

While many scholars seem to support the use of the linear models presented above, McDonagh and Prothero’s (2014) statements about our limited understanding of the green consumer profile are substantiated by the fact that research has yielded varying results in terms of consumers’ willingness to make good on their stated beliefs about the importance of sustainability. When reviewing existing research on the matter, it is difficult to gain a clear sense of how large the attitude-behaviour gap is or why it occurs. To further increase the confusion, Hiramatsu, Kurisu and Hanaki (2015) theorized that consumers’ reported attitudes toward sustainability issues were being overstated due to a yes-bias that occurred in most studies, whereby the consumers were being unwittingly nudged toward saying that they cared about the environment more than they actually did due to the phrasing of the survey questions. The authors conducted an extensive study in Japan and indeed found that the stated attitudes toward sustainability issues in their negative prompt survey were significantly less positive than compared to surveys with positive prompts (Hiramatsu et al., 2015, p. 14).

While these findings do not discredit the existence of an attitude-behaviour gap, they call into question whether the gap is as significant as previously thought. This could indicate that there is a risk that marketers are basing their actions on false assumptions about the degree of consumers’ awareness of, and concern for, environmental issues. If this were the case, it would have implications for the efforts made to stimulate demand for sustainable products. Perhaps, for example, more effort should be directed toward educating the target group about the benefits of sustainable practices and reinforcing sustainability as a consumer value, rather than assuming that a majority of potential customers already care about the environment? Furthermore, the study by Hiramatsu et al. (2015) serves to underline the need for researchers to question their approach to sustainability marketing from a methodological point of view. This perspective is
supported yet again by the arguments of McDonagh and Prothero (2014, p. 1188), who accuse marketing academics within the area of sustainability of being inward-looking and prone to conservatism. Moser (2016), through her decision to commence work with heuristics as a new concept within the area, also clearly signalled to need for researchers to expand their horizons. To further underline the need for a fresh take on sustainable marketing research and methodology, one may recall a quote by Kilbourne and Beckman (1998), who rather unceremoniously stated that “Research which utilises the same techniques to explore individual attitudes and behaviours, over and over again, will not provide us with any lasting solutions” (Kilbourne & Beckman, 1998, cited in McDonagh & Prothero, 2014, p. 1196). As such, it can be argued that sustainability marketing is an area that needs further study, preferably with a fresh perspective.

1.2 Research purpose
The discrepancy of previous results and the lack of imagination in the design of said research, as well as the clear opportunity for competitive advantages for firms that manage to exploit a sustainable strategy, serve to underline the importance of furthering our understanding of how consumers perceive sustainability issues and how they make subsequent purchasing decisions. It is also clear that there may be benefits to testing different methodological approaches, rather than conforming to the strong tradition of surveys with yes-prompts. As such, there is an opportunity to contribute to the existing mass of research. The overarching purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring drivers of, and barriers to, green purchasing behaviour.

In order to achieve this, the subsequent main research questions were formulated:

1. What do consumers perceive to be drivers motivating them to purchase sustainable foods?
2. What do consumers perceive to be barriers preventing them from purchasing sustainable foods?

By asking these questions in a different methodological setting than the brunt of previous research has done, the goal is to accrue a better understanding of the underlying elements which determine green purchasing behaviour. Such understanding and knowledge may help facilitate the effective promotion of sustainable products on a broader, societal level, which has benefits from both a societal and a business perspective.

1.3 Delimitations
The focus of this study primarily adopts a consumer perspective, as the scientific discrepancy which has been displayed above principally relates to consumer attitudes toward sustainable foods and the purchasing thereof. While insights derived from this exploration may relate somewhat to company strategies, it does not seek to verify or describe optimal strategies, but act instead as building blocks or points of discussion for future research wishing to take these routes.

Moreover, the study is limited to green purchasing behaviour in regard to sustainable foods. The purchase of sustainable food is the most common sustainable action, according to Moser (2016, p. 552), which increases the likelihood of respondents to have had the opportunity to form an opinion on the matter. Furthermore, there is a developed market
for sustainable food in Sweden, which decreases the risk of results being skewed by unavailability of products. The sustainable food market is most developed in Europe and North America, but transitional and emerging economies are quickly catching up (Moser, 2016, p. 552). As food is something that is consumed by everyone on the planet and the competition between standard and sustainable products is gaining traction on a global scale, this industry can be considered a highly interesting arena for contemporary research. However, due to geographical constraints this study is delimited to Sweden, and the city of Umeå, and although national diversity of respondents is to be expected, such a limitation should still be noted upon.

Furthermore, while the two terms consumption and purchasing have been noted upon earlier in this thesis as two separate concepts, for the furtherance of the study they will be used interchangeably to describe consumers’ decision to select and purchase specific products.

### 1.4 Definitions

In this chapter we will discuss definitions of some of the key concepts of this thesis. The terminology within contemporary research regarding sustainability and marketing is heterogeneous, which can cause confusion. To remedy this, we will account for our use of terminology within the scope of this thesis below. The focus will be on explaining our definitions of what we mean by sustainable products, sustainable purchasing behaviour, and the green consumer profile within the boundaries of this paper.

#### 1.4.1 Defining sustainability

There is a lot of linguistic discrepancy among researchers when discussing concepts related to environmentally friendly products, services, and practices. An example of this is the seemingly interchangeable use of the words “environmentally friendly” and “green”, commonly used to denote products that are better for the environment than standard options. Another factor that adds confusion to the discussion is that some concepts, such as “organic products” often are used interchangeably with “environmentally-friendly” or “green”, although the terms may in fact denote slightly different things. While “green” is a word commonly used to describe products that on a general level are better for the environment than standard options, “organic” specifically refers to products that have been produced without the use of artificial chemicals (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). As such, “organic products” are actually a subcategory of “green” products (Moser, 2016, p. 552).

For the sake of this study, we have chosen to adopt a linguistic approach similar to that of Huang et al. (2014). In their paper, the authors use the words “green” and “environmentally friendly” interchangeably. The authors mention that “sustainability” is a term that can be used to describe social, environmental, and economic factors, but go on to explain that they will use the word to denote products and practices that are environmentally friendly (Huang et al., 2014, pp. 250-251). On the same note, this thesis will use the word “sustainable” interchangeably with the words “green” or “environmentally friendly”.

According to the Oxford Dictionaries (2019) “environmentally friendly” is a word that can be used to describe products that do not harm the environment. For the sake of this study, we too will use this rather broad definition. As such, “sustainable products” is a concept that encompasses all products that do not harm the environment. Choosing this
broad definition allows us to include former studies that have used a multitude of words, expressions, and subconcepts to denote the products we intend, such as “green”, “organic”, “ecological”, and “eco-friendly”. To contrast sustainable products, we use the word “standard” to describe products that cannot be considered sustainable.

1.4.2 Defining sustainable food products
At this point it is important to note that some products are branded with certain labels that signal that they are guaranteed to be sustainable. An example of this type of label is KRAV-märket, which is used in Sweden to show that a product is sustainable and ethically produced from both environmental, animal, and social perspectives (KRAV, 2018). It is, however, important to understand that these types of labels only are a tool to communicate the attributes of products. It is entirely possible that a product is environmentally friendly even though it does not have a label such as KRAV-märket on it. Furthermore, one should recognize that there are various factors that contribute to the effect a product has on the environment. For example, Moser (2016, p. 551) specifies that one of the environmental benefits of organic products is that they typically require lower levels of energy to produce than standard products, resulting in lower greenhouse gas emissions. However, there are other factors than mere production that relate to a product’s environmental impact. For example, some products may be organic, but need to be transported a long way by truck or ship in order to reach the market. In that instance, the transportation would naturally increase emissions and create a detrimental environmental effect that at least to some extent counterbalances the benefits of the products being organically produced. On the other hand, a locally produced good may not have been produced using sustainable methods. One anecdote that illustrates this problematic dynamic comes from the Åland islands, situated between Finland and Sweden. Onions are grown on the island, sent to the Finnish mainland for packaging, shipped back to Åland and then sold as locally produced food. While the onions are indeed locally produced, the label “locally produced” will in this instance imply that the carbon dioxide emissions related to the products are smaller than they actually are, leading to an inaccurate representation of the products’ environmental friendliness. This type of ambiguity when it comes to the sustainability of food products naturally makes it more difficult for consumers to distinguish between products that are actually beneficial for the environment and products that only claim to be so. It is not impossible that this ambiguity is a factor that decreases consumers’ motivation for paying a price premium for products that are branded as sustainable. This argument can be substantiated by the findings of do Paço and Reis (2012, p. 147) who discuss the relevance of scepticism toward green marketing messages as a barrier to green consumption.

Given that there are many factors that contribute to whether a product ultimately should be considered sustainable or not, it is important for consumers to apply critical thinking when making purchasing decisions related to sustainable products. From an academic perspective, it is important to be aware of the fact that notions of sustainability may vary between individuals and that the degree of a product’s environmental friendliness may vary depending on factors beyond mere production technique. In this thesis, we are addressing this issue by choosing the broadest possible definition of sustainable foods, thus decreasing the risk of creating a definition that is difficult to control.

1.4.3 Defining sustainable purchasing behaviour
Given our previously established definition of sustainable products, we next need to specify what is meant by “sustainable purchasing behaviour”, i.e. “green purchasing
behaviour” for the sake of this thesis, sustainable purchasing behaviour will be defined as “the act of purchasing a sustainable product in favour of a standard alternative”. Sustainable purchasing behaviour is used as a proxy for sustainable consumption, since the two activities may be, but not necessarily are, carried out by the same individual. We argue that the decision about which products ultimately will be consumed is made in the purchasing situation, thus making purchasing behaviour a more fitting variable to discuss from a marketing perspective in terms of increasing demand for sustainable products.

One could also argue that sustainable purchasing behaviour should include the act of abstaining from purchasing any product at all, since more frugal living would decrease the total amount of resources that are being consumed. However, it is difficult to specify exactly how regularly one actively abstains from purchasing something, and therefore we will leave “non-consumption” as an area of interest for future research.

Another problem related to specifying the meaning of sustainable purchasing behaviour, is that some consumers may not substitute one standard product for a matching sustainable product. The popular documentary, Cowspiracy, delivered the message that animal agriculture was responsible for a whopping 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in 2006 (LEAD, 2006, cited in Cowspiracy, n.d.). Given this, it could also be argued that sustainable purchasing behaviour should include abstaining from purchasing meat products and opting to purchase other sources of protein instead, such as different vegetables and beans. We will address this issue in the empirical data collection by allowing the participants to share their own views on sustainable food purchasing and their arguments behind their opinions.

### 1.4.4 Defining the green consumer profile

The “green consumer profile” is an umbrella term that has been used by several authors (e.g. Akehurst et al., 2012; D’Souza, Taghian, Lamp & Peretiatko, 2007) and entails all the knowledge we currently have about what drives the behaviour of both actual and potential consumers of sustainable products. Relevant knowledge includes (but is not limited to) consumer values, attitudes, intentions, purchasing behaviour, consumption behaviour, heuristics, and segmentation strategies. Any information that allows marketing practitioners to more effectively promote the sales of sustainable products, within any category, is considered part of the green consumer profile. Within this thesis, we aim to increase the knowledge of the green consumer profile within the context of sustainable foods.

Finally, it is important to note that “sustainable marketing” refers to the marketing of sustainable products. In this instance, the word “sustainable” only refers to the attributes of the products that are being marketed and not to the potential environmental impact of the marketing activities per se.

### 1.5 Thesis disposition

This section is dedicated to explaining the disposition of the thesis, for the reader’s convenience. So far, we have given the reader an introduction to the problem area, touched on the relevant theory, formulated our research questions, and defined some of the key concepts of the paper. Next, we will elaborate on the theoretical framework of the thesis and comment on the quality of the literature. At the end of the theoretical chapter we will present an integrative model that we suggest can be used to explain green purchasing behaviour. After presenting the integrative model, we will move on to the methodology of our study, where we explain our motivations for choosing a qualitative,
exploratory approach. The decision to present theory before methodology was made due to that we consider it easier to understand the methodological choices of this particular study after gaining an understanding of the relevant theory and concepts. After the methodology, we will move on the empirical section of the study, where we begin by presenting the data that was gathered. This will be followed by the analysis chapter, wherein we critically discuss the data and make interpretations of it. Finally, the conclusions will be summarized and discussed in terms of practical, societal, and theoretical implications.
2 Theoretical framework

In this chapter we will account for and discuss various theoretical concepts that, in our view, are needed to understand the green consumer profile. This includes basic concepts for consumer behaviour on a general level, as well as discussion regarding how to connect the same concepts to the marketing of sustainable foods. The overarching framework of this study is based on the established value-attitude-behaviour model by Homer and Kahle (1988). However, the three stages are elaborated upon by inviting revolving theories regarding values, attitudes and behaviour into the model. Through doing so, we aim to create a solid foundation for understanding the modern consumer and identifying relevant areas to target in the empirical section of the study.

The chapter is structured in the following manner: firstly, we will review the general process that consumers go through when a product is selected and consumed. Secondly, we will elaborate on the value-attitude-behaviour model by Homer and Kahle (1988) and explain its relevance for the study from a sustainability perspective. Thirdly, we will delve further into the various theoretical aspects of the main stages of Homer and Kahle’s model - values, attitudes, and behaviour. Finally, the introduced concepts will be discussed in a comprehensible way for the reader’s convenience, culminating in the presentation of an integrative model which acts as a foundation for this thesis.

2.1 The consumer decision-making process

The past century has seen a number of ways of describing the process a consumer goes through when selecting and consuming products. The aim of this section is not to examine all of these models in detail, but rather to provide a general understanding of the process by which a consumer makes consumption decisions. While not specifically central to the theoretical framework of this study, the following section will help the reader put the subsequently introduced theories into perspective and aid in understanding the importance of various concepts. For this end, we have chosen to present the five-step model of consumer decision-making, illustrated by us in Figure 2, The consumer-decision making process, inspired by Solomon (2019). The model was chosen due to that it is straightforward and simple to understand. As such, it is suitable as an introduction into the minds of consumers.

![Figure 2. The consumer decision-making process.](image-url)
The model describes five general stages that a consumer goes through when selecting and consuming products. The first stage is problem recognition. In this step, the consumer becomes aware of a perceived significant difference between the current state of affairs and a desired state (Solomon, 2019). In terms of food products, the problem recognition can stem from several factors. Maybe the consumer has run out of food in the fridge and simply needs to refill it. Maybe he has become bored of his current diet and wishes to experience new flavours. Maybe he is concerned that his consumption choices are impacting the environment in a negative way and wishes to change this. In any case, the problem recognition sparks the desire to actively change the current state of affairs, leading to the next stage of the model.

The next stage is information search, in which the consumer scans the environment for information that can help him make a good decision (Solomon, 2019). This information can be obtained through actively searching for it, e.g. online, or by passively receiving messages through advertising, packaging etc. At this stage it is important to note that consumers tend to spend more time and effort on searching for information when the purchase is considered important, while less important decisions are often made through the use of mental shortcuts, which we call heuristics (Solomon, 2019). Heuristics and the implications of relying on them will be further elaborated on in chapter 2.5.1.

The third step in the process consists of evaluation of alternatives that were generated in the previous step. In this step, the consumer will evaluate the different attributes of the alternatives and compare them among each other, to facilitate the choosing of a winner (Solomon, 2019). At this stage, consumer values and attitudes toward certain attributes of a product, as well as the perception regarding to which extent a product possesses an attribute, become important. These attributes can incorporate just about anything depending on the product and, indeed, the consumer himself. In the case of sustainable foods, the most relevant attributes are likely to be price, taste, environmental impact, and availability (Moser, 2016, pp. 553-554). It is important to note that some consumers may perceive certain attributes to be important, while other consumers may have completely different opinions. We will delve deeper into these intricacies while discussing values and attitudes later in the thesis.

Once the consumer has evaluated the alternatives according to his own preferences, he will rank them and select (purchase) the highest-scoring option. This is done in stage four, product choice (Solomon, 2019). Mathematically, the ranking is based on weighting the identified product attributes according to perceived importance. The fact that consumers prioritize differently in terms of attribute weights forms the basis of segmentation strategies, whereby the producer tries to target a group of potential consumers who are most likely to prefer a specific product over the other alternatives on the market. Authors such as D’Souza et al. (2007, cited in Akehurst et al, 2012, p. 973) have pointed out the need to increase our understanding of the green consumer profile in order to help marketers more effectively promote sustainable products.

The final stage of the consumer decision-making model is post-purchase evaluation (Solomon, 2019). In this stage, the consumer will critically evaluate to which extent the product managed to fulfil his needs. If the product failed to fulfil the needs of the consumer, he will be looped back to stage 1 again: problem recognition (Solomon, 2019).
Although the model by Solomon (2019) may be accused of oversimplifying a complicated process, it works wonderfully as a base for understanding the relevance of concepts such as marketing strategies, values, attitudes, and heuristics. Next, we will start outlining the more specific components of the theoretical framework of this thesis.

2.2 The value-attitude-behaviour model

In order to understand the relationship between marketing and consumer values, it is useful to rely on the established value-attitude-behaviour model that was first introduced by Homer and Kahle (1988). Simply put, the authors describe the relationship between factors as a hierarchy, ranging from the most abstract (values) to the most specific (behaviour) (Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 638). The logic of the model is that every individual has a set of values, which influence the individual’s attitudes toward different objects. These attitudes will then influence the behaviour of the individual (Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 638). Williams (1979, cited in Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 638) and Carman (1977, cited in Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 638) had previously established a link between values and consumption behaviour, but Homer and Kahle (1988) expanded the model by adding attitudes as a mediating factor, thus improving the accuracy of the hierarchy. The model has successfully been used in many pieces of marketing research, e.g. Shin, Moon, Jung and Severt (2017), who used it as a starting point in their study of the effects of environmental values and attitudes on willingness to pay for organic food menus. The study once again found support for the model, showing a link between values, attitudes, and willingness to pay (which in this instance can be considered a proxy variable for behaviour). The finer points of the individual factors in the model will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters. This model has been selected as the base of the theoretical framework of this thesis due to apparent academic acceptance of the model and its ability to explain the drivers of behaviour in a structured way, the latter being a quality that fits well with the purpose of this study. It can be viewed in Figure 3, The value-attitude-behaviour model A.

![Figure 3. The value-attitude-behaviour model A.](image)

In terms of consumer behaviour, Homer and Kahle’s (1988) hierarchy can be illustrated by a simple example: Suppose that two consumers are walking down the aisle of a supermarket. Consumer A has a set of values that primarily emphasize the importance of protecting our environment. Consumer B has a set of values that primarily emphasize the importance of being financially frugal in order to look out for himself and his family. The consumers stop at a display of organically produced tomatoes, advertised by a sign that highlights the environmentally friendly methods that were used in the production of the tomatoes. After reading the sign, consumer A will have a positive attitude toward the tomatoes, because they embody a value that is important to him. Consumer B, however, will be left unphased by the environmentally friendly message and instead focus on the price tag, which shows that the organic tomatoes are more expensive than the standard alternatives. As such, his attitude toward the organic tomatoes will be more negative than
that of consumer A. The difference in attitude will then lead to the consumers displaying different concrete behaviours, with consumer A choosing to purchase the more expensive, organic tomatoes and consumer B moving on in search of a more affordable alternative.

The model, in its simplest form, is general enough to facilitate being used as a base for understanding consumer behaviour within almost any context. However, the model was initially developed by the authors for use in a setting related to natural foods. As such, we consider it reasonable to assume that it will fit well with the purpose of this study, which is to increase our knowledge of the green consumer profile within a sustainable foods setting. Homer and Kahle (1988) tested the model by investigating the relationship between values, attitudes, and shopping behaviour of consumers of natural foods. The study found robust evidence for the proposed hypothesis and was able to establish a clear link between values, attitudes, and behaviour. Values that were used were abstract: sense of belonging, fun and enjoyment in life, warm relationships with others, self-fulfilment, being well-respected, excitement, sense of accomplishment, security, and self-respect (Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 644). These values, which could be split into internal and external values, were then tested against the respondents’ attitudes toward nutrition. The results showed that respondents who placed more importance on internal values were more likely to care about nutrition and avoiding additives, which resulted in a more positive attitude toward natural foods (Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 645). Finally, a firm link between nutritional attitudes and shopping behaviour was established, thus completing the logical chain of the hierarchy (Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 645). While the model is useful as a base for our theoretical framework due to its clarity and acceptance within marketing academia, we recognize that it can be significantly expanded by accounting for other factors. From this point on in the theoretical framework, we will start introducing concepts that can be added to the basic value-attitude-behaviour model by Homer and Kahle (1988) in order to better explain consumption behaviour in terms of sustainable foods. In this way, we aim to create a framework that allows for increasing our understanding of the green consumer profile, which is the ultimate purpose of this study. The final framework is presented in chapter 2.7.

Other authors within the realm of sustainable advertising have also utilized similar logic as Homer and Kahle (1988) to develop linear models. An example of this is Huang et al., (2014), who investigated the relationship between green brand positioning (GBP), green brand knowledge (GBK), attitudes toward green brand (AGB), and green purchase intention (GPI) in Taiwan. At this point it is important to note that Huang et al. (2014) have incorporated the concept of knowledge into the model. While the authors in this case use a fairly concrete variable (green brand knowledge) for knowledge, a plethora of other researchers (e.g. Hines et al., 1987; Mostafa, 2007; Sheltzer et al., 1991) have previously argued for the existence of a link between environmental “awareness” and environmentally friendly behaviour. Huang et al. (2014, p. 263) found that GBP positively influences GBK and that both GBP and GBK influence AGB separately. Furthermore, AGB positively influences GPI. The construction of a model that includes knowledge as a driver of attitude was not pioneered by Huang et al. (2014), who in their study freely admit that the concept had been previously developed by a number of authors including Chan (1999), Fryxell and Lo (2003), Hines et al. (1987), and Mostafa (2007). However, Huang et al. (2014) are the most recent authors to find empirical support for the link between knowledge and attitude, which is why we are choosing to present their study in this thesis. The findings can be illustrated by the following model, Figure 4,
Drivers of green purchase intention by Huang et al. (2014), where arrows denominate how the factors influence each other:

![Diagram of Drivers of Green Purchase Intention]

While the first level of Homer and Kahle’s (1988) hierarchy (i.e. values) in this instance has been substituted for green brand positioning and green brand knowledge, the findings of Huang et al. (2014) lend further support to at least the final two levels of the hierarchy proposed by Homer and Kahle (1988). The usefulness of the model for the purpose of this paper is threefold: Firstly, it provides further empirical support for the link between attitude and behaviour. Second, it showcases that concrete knowledge of an issue or brand affects consumers’ attitudes, as opposed to the model by Homer and Kahle (1988) that only lists values as an influencing factor of attitudes. This alternative perspective allows us to expand the basic value-attitude-behaviour model which serves as the foundation of our theoretical framework. Third, it shows a link between green brand positioning and green brand knowledge, which in a tangible way shows that marketers have the opportunity to affect the attitudes of consumers through communication. The relationship between the models by Homer and Kahle (1988) and Huang et al. (2014) will be further discussed in chapter 2.4.

The consistent findings presented above lend credibility to the notion that consumer values and attitudes are at the heart of marketers’ struggle to promote sustainable products on a larger scale. However, the presented literature fails to illustrate exactly how to exploit this hierarchy in the most effective way. Both pieces of research agree that attitudes directly influence the actual behaviour of consumers, but there seems to be multiple approaches to fostering positive attitudes. On the one hand, one may choose to play on consumer values. This could encompass either focusing on consumers who are already assumed to hold values that place importance on the environment, or focusing on promoting sustainability as a value on a more general level in the hope that this will cultivate a larger segment of enthusiastic pro-environmentalists. The other route would be to focus on increasing consumer knowledge of the environmental issues we are facing and how consuming green products can help mitigate these issues. While this may seem like a fairly straightforward issue, the problem is far from clear-cut. Next, we will elaborate on the factors in Homer and Kahle’s (1988) hierarchy - values, attitudes, and behaviour - in order to extend our theoretical framework and shed light on the intricacies surrounding the promotion of sustainable products.
2.3 Values
In this section we will outline what values are, how they can help us understand the green consumer profile, and how they can be grouped into subcategories, or “value dimensions”, to better understand consumer behaviour within sustainable purchasing.

Homer and Kahle established that values are the most abstract component of their hierarchy (Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 638), which can be interpreted as values being at the root of all behaviour. The authors relied on a definition by Rokeach (1973, cited in Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 638), explaining the concept in the following words: “a value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state is personally preferable to its opposite. A value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning modes of conduct or end-states along an importance continuum. Basically, he conceived of personality as a system of values”. The definition underlines the complexity of values, by showing that values can also be looked at like systems. These values within a system have complex relationships that ultimately dictate what a person does or does not do. The same definition by Rokeach (1973) has also been used by other authors within sustainable marketing literature, such as Shin et al. (2017, p. 114). The Oxford Dictionary defines values in more simple manner, describing the concept as “principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgement of what is important in life” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). The essence of both definitions is the same - values are what dictate how individuals prioritize as they go through life. While values are abstract and rarely relate to specific events, as opposed to attitudes, as discussed by Kahle (2013, cited in Shin et al., 2017, p. 114), they will have an impact on how individuals ultimately decide to feel about anything they encounter.

Taking into account Homer and Kahle’s (1988, p. 638) interpretation of value systems as the root of our personality, it is not surprising that values have been given much weight within marketing. Indeed, authors such as Chen and Lee (2015, p. 197) have emphasized that marketing strategies which target consumer values are more likely to yield an inimitable competitive advantage. This statement makes sense from a purely logical perspective, when considering the value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy by Homer and Kahle (1988). If a marketing strategy is built solely on tangible factors such as offering the best price or most high-quality product, any competitor who manages to replicate the production process is likely to have a chance of becoming a fierce competitor. If, however, marketing is built around consumer values, the situation changes. Value-based marketing relies on creating an emotional response in the consumer, meaning that this type of strategy is difficult to imitate. Thus, if we accept that values lie at the core of all decisions, it is difficult to ignore the urgency of marketers understanding consumer values and how to appeal to them. As such, we argue that in order to fulfil the purpose of this study (to increase our understanding of the green consumer profile), it is necessary to include values as a key concept in our theoretical framework.

As has been illustrated, values are a fairly broad and abstract concept. As such, it is useful for researchers and practitioners alike to divide the concept into subcategories in a meaningful way. This approach was used by Moser (2016, p. 554) and Shin et al. (2017, p. 114), who utilized a division developed by Stern, Dietz and Kalof (1993) to explain the motivations for purchasing organic foods. Stern et al. (1993) wrote a paper on environmental concern and split the concept of values into three “value dimensions” to outline the main categories of reasons for engaging in pro-environmental behaviour. These dimensions where egoistic, biospheric, and altruistic (Stern et al., 1993, p. 324). It
should be noted that there may exist other meaningful divisions, depending on the context (Stern et al., 1993, p. 326). In this paper, we have chosen to use the division proposed by Stern et al. (1993) due to its previous use in studies related to sustainable consumption and its clarity. In the following sections, the proposed three value dimensions will be explained. In Figure 5, Value dimensions, the three value dimension along with examples of factors relating to them, are illustrated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egoistic</th>
<th>Biospheric</th>
<th>Altruistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Price-value</td>
<td>• Animal welfare</td>
<td>• The golden rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Health</td>
<td>• Reduced resource consumption</td>
<td>• Protecting society from effects of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taste</td>
<td>• Reduced emission of greenhouse</td>
<td>environmental destruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hedonism</td>
<td>gases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fatalism</td>
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*Figure 5. Value dimensions.*

2.3.1 Egoistic values

Egoistic values are based on self-interest, or by asking the question “What is in it for me?”. Many researchers have argued that these values are the main motivation for human behaviour (e.g. Hardin, 1968; Olson, 1965, cited in Stern et al., 1993, p. 324). These values may act as a counterweight to other values, as the perceived cost of engaging in behaviour sparked by e.g. altruistic values may appear unacceptable from an egoistic standpoint (Stern et al., 1993, p. 325). In terms of consumption of sustainable foods, Moser (2016, p. 554) discussed that egoistic values come into play by manifesting as beliefs about the healthiness and superior taste of organic products. It is also logical that perceived price-value relationship would fall into the realm of beliefs formed by egoistic values, stemming from the individual’s desire to save money rather than invest in products that benefit the environment.

Whilst discussing egoistic values, it is also interesting to note McDonagh and Prothero’s (2014, p. 1196) speculation that hedonism and fatalism are consumer values that prevent consumers from purchasing sustainable products even when they state that they care about the environment. Hedonism can be defined as the pursuit of pleasure or self-indulgence while fatalism is defined as the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). In the context of sustainable consumption decisions, hedonism may play a role by consumers choosing to purchase products that they expect will maximize their own pleasure in the short-term, even though they are aware of the negative effects their consumption will have on the environment. As such, hedonism is a concept that embodies the egoistic value dimension in a clear-cut way. Fatalism is not as easy to label as part of the egoistic value dimension as hedonism is. However, in the context of sustainable consumption, fatalism may be manifested through the consumer’s belief that his or her actions will have little to no effect on the environment and that he/she is therefore morally excluded from having to consider factors
that pertain to the remaining value dimensions. Especially when shopping for food products that individually are less significant investments, it is reasonable to question whether consumers feel that their consumption choices are making a difference for anyone else than themselves.

2.3.2 Biospheric values
Biospheric values are values that concern non-human species or the biosphere (Stern et al., 1993, p. 326). The notion that this should be considered a separate value dimension originally stemmed from a discussion of whether biospheric concern originated from “the golden rule” (do to others as you would do to yourself, e.g. an altruistic value) or from adherence to a “land ethic” (Leopold, 1949, cited in Stern et al., 2017, p. 325) that focused on the biosphere as a separate entity from human beings (Stern et al., 2017, p. 325). Stern et al. (2017, p. 326) argued for a model that made a distinction between altruistic and biospheric values, and this view has since been adopted by authors such as Moser (2016) and Shin et al. (2017). In terms of sustainable consumption, this value could be expressed through a consumer’s belief that consuming a certain product will be beneficial to animals and the planet (Moser, 2016, p. 554). There have been studies that have shown that of those consumers who do choose to consume sustainable foods, almost all cite environmental protection as one of the main reasons for their decision (Zepeda & Deal, 2009 p. 700). This stands to reason, seeing as sustainable foods are objectively superior to standard alternatives in terms of biospheric impact. For example, organic farms consume up to 70% less energy than regular farms and have lower greenhouse gas emissions (Reisch et al., 2013; Lynch et al., 2011, cited in Moser, 2016, p. 554). In addition to this, studies have shown that animals on organic farms are treated better and therefore less prone to disease and illness (Reisch et al., 2013, cited in Moser, 2016). Taking into consideration the previous indications that biospheric concerns are almost universally important for consumers who already do partake in sustainable consumption and the undeniable biospheric benefits of sustainable food production, it could potentially be highly beneficial both from marketers’ and our planet’s perspective to explore ways of activating this value dimension on a larger scale within society.

2.3.3 Altruistic values
The third and final value dimension is altruistic values, also known as “social-altruistic values”. These values involve concern for the well-being of other humans and society as a whole (Stern et al., 1993, p. 326). Stern et al. (1993) actually first developed their model from Schwartz’s norm-activation theory (1968, cited in Stern et al., 1973, p. 324), which states that environmentalism can be regarded as a form of altruism, arguing that we engage in pro-environmental behaviour in order to protect other human beings from the perceived negative effects of a deteriorating environment. As such, Stern et al. (1993) saw it fit to include an altruistic value dimension in their model, although they decided to separate altruistic and biospheric values. The key distinction between the philosophies of Stern et al., (1993) and Schwartz (1968) lies in whether one believes that we protect the environment because we care for the environment per se, or whether we simply protect our biosphere because we do not wish for our fellow humans to suffer negative consequences that result from environmental destruction. Nevertheless, the biospheric and altruistic value dimensions have been considered separate entities since the work of Stern et al. (1993). Interestingly, it has since been called into question whether the altruistic dimension is relevant at all within sustainable consumption. For example, some authors argue that the altruistic dimension can be empirically distinguished, but that only the remaining two dimensions actually hold any practical relevance (de Groot & Steg,
2008; Lee et al., 2014, cited in Moser, 2016, p. 554). Indeed, Moser (2016) was so confident of the irrelevance of the altruistic value dimension that she completely left it out of her study of sustainable consumption practices in Germany. Conversely, other works have found a place for altruistic values by emphasizing the correlation between the value dimensions. For example, over the years authors such as Kim et al. (2015, cited in Shin et al., 2017, p. 115), Steg et al. (2005, cited in Shin et al., 2017, p. 118) and Shin et al. (2017, p. 117) have found that altruistic values function as a statistically significant predictor of biospheric values, which in turn has a significant effect on pro-environmental attitudes. Keeping in mind the value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy of Homer and Kahle (1988), we argue that there is reason to include the altruistic value dimension in our analysis.

2.4 Attitudes
In this section, the concept of attitudes will be introduced. The role of attitudes within the theoretical framework will be elaborated upon and their relevance for sustainable marketing practitioners will be explained. By doing so, the relevance of attitudes as a key concept in fulfilling the purpose of this study (i.e. increasing our knowledge of the green consumer profile) will become clear.

In their paper, Homer and Kahle (1988, p. 638) describe attitudes as a “midrange” component between the highly abstract values and the more specific behaviours. This is in line with a definition later used by Kahle (2013, p. 5), in which attitudes are stated to be generalisations about the functioning of our environment, expressed through predispositions to evaluate an object, concept, or symbol in a certain way. This definition highlights the difference in abstraction between attitudes and values - while values form a more general basis for our personality (Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 638), attitudes pertain to specific objects, persons, or notions (Shin et al., 2017, p. 114). As such, our previous illustration of the value-attitude-behaviour model can be elaborated on to show the following in Figure 6, The value-attitude-behaviour model B:

![Figure 6. The value-attitude-behaviour model B.](image)

A more quick and rough way of defining attitudes is offered by Bem (1970, cited in Kahle, 2013, p. 3), who simply states that attitudes are people’s “likes and dislikes”. Some authors, such as Osgood et al. (1957, cited in Kahle, 2013, p. 3) have emphasized that attitudes consist of three components: the affective dimension (good-bad), the behavioural dimension (active-passive), and the potency dimension (strong-weak). While it is useful to formally note the existence of the separate components, most researchers seem to focus primarily on the affective and potency dimensions, meaning that they simply record how respondents feel about something and to what degree. In terms of sustainable consumption, strong and positive attitudes toward the topic are theorized to correlate with positive purchasing behaviour.
As implied by the value-attitude-behaviour model, attitudes have been proven to serve as a mediating factor between values and actual behaviour (e.g. Homer & Kahle, 1988, p. 643; Shin et al., 2017, p. 117). Huang et al., (2014) also found evidence for the importance of attitudes by establishing the previously accounted for link between knowledge, attitudes, and purchase intention. The latter model can further be compared to the views of Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg (2013, p. 296-297), who argue that any consumption decision is made by gathering information, forming an opinion, and acting, albeit sometimes in a different order depending on the importance of the decision. Thus, marketing literature strongly supports the view that attitudes are a vital component of consumer behaviour both within sustainability and other areas. In light of this, we argue that the concept is necessary to include in this thesis in order to fulfil the purpose of the study. However, the perceptive reader may have noticed that there have been multiple explanations for how attitudes are formed, as briefly touched upon in chapter 2.2. Next, we will address how to consolidate the differing explanations that have been offered within the realms of this theoretical framework.

When discussing attitudes in the context of the linear models by Homer and Kahle (1988) and Huang et al. (2014) it is interesting to note that the models provide two different drivers of attitudes: Homer and Kahle (1988) show that values form attitudes, while Huang et al.’s (2014) results suggest that improved knowledge of an object leads to more positive attitudes toward it. While these explanations may seem to compete with each other, this is not necessarily the case. We will now elaborate on this statement.

Another factor that distinguishes attitudes from values, apart from the level of abstraction, is their level of stability as illustrated by the following, final elaboration on the value-attitude-behaviour model, Figure 7, The value-attitude-behaviour model C.

While values tend to be stable over time, attitudes are more prone to change (Shin et al., 2017, p. 114). This is due to that attitudes are formed by a combination of different factors. At their core, attitudes are formed by an individual’s values, but they may also be altered as a result of the individual receiving new knowledge or adapting to changes in his or her environment (Shin et al., 2017, p. 114; Kahle, 2013, p. 4-5). If we accept that attitudes stem mainly from an individual’s values, but that they may be changed over time as the individual adapts to his environment and gains new knowledge, it is possible to see the models of Homer and Kahle (1988) and Huang et al. (2014) as complementary, rather than competing. The formation of attitudes could then be illustrated by the following figure, Figure 8, Formation of attitudes.
2.5 Behaviour

The final stage of Homer and Kahle’s (1988) model is behaviour. In this section, we will outline some concepts that are relevant when trying to understand the behaviour of humans (and in particular green consumers), both in practice and within the concept of academic research. The chapter will feature sections on heuristics and bounded rationality as explanations for behaviour that go beyond those that hitherto have been provided, as well as a discussion surrounding the attitude-behaviour gap and its implications for research.

2.5.1 Heuristics and bounded rationality

Stern et al. (1993, p. 326) provided a simple explanation for why we as humans engage in any behaviour - we do so when the perceived benefits of engaging in the behaviour from our own perspective outweigh our costs of doing so. This, however, begs another question: How do humans decide how to value costs and benefits? Some explanation for this has already been offered in the sections of this thesis that cover values and attitudes. However, there are other factors than pure environmental attitude that come into play when the consumer finds himself in the purchasing situation. Moser (2016, p. 552) argued for the importance of understanding the concepts of heuristics and bounded rationality in order to reach consumers outside of the niche and encouraged further study within the area. Next, we will outline how heuristics and bounded rationality affect a consumer in the purchasing situation.

If humans were fully rational, we would make every decision only after carefully weighing the costs and benefits of the different alternatives, taking into account as many factors as possible. However, that would result in humans taking forever to make any single decision, which obviously would not be a feasible way to live a life. Instead, we accept that we have bounded rationality (Simon, 1955), meaning that we are unable to take every single relevant aspect of a decision into account. In order to reduce the effort...
associated with making a decision, we rely on heuristics, which can be described as rules of thumb, or mental shortcuts (Solomon et al., 2013, p. 364). This leads to a strategy of satisficing rather than optimizing our purchasing decisions by relying on simple selection tactics in the purchase situation, especially when there are many options (Hoyer, 1984, p. 823). In line with Stern et al.’s (1993, p. 362) argumentation about behaviour being based on perceived cost versus benefit, consumers tend to expend less effort on carefully evaluating their purchase decisions when the purchase is of little consequence. As food products generally fall into this category due to the low absolute cost of individual food items in combination with the wide array of alternatives to chose from, it stands to reason that heuristics will play a significant role in the decision between purchasing sustainable foods or standard alternatives. The relationships between consequence of purchase decision, expended effort, and reliance on heuristics in the purchase situation can be illustrated by the following graphs, in Figure 9, Relationship between heuristics and consequence of purchase decision.

![Figure 9. Relationship between heuristics and consequence of purchase decision.](image)

This perspective was adopted by Moser (2016) in an exploratory study of how heuristics impact the decision to purchase organic foods in Germany. The study was framed in relation to the three value dimensions - egoistic, biospheric, and altruistic - that were previously presented. The author argued that decisions would be based on the consumers’ beliefs about certain attributes of products, which could then be linked to the consumers’ values (Moser, 2016, p. 554). Heuristics would then be used to identify products that the consumer believed would comply with their values (Moser, 2016, p. 554). The study found heuristics to be a useful concept for explaining the variance in purchasing decisions in favour of organic foods and proved that beliefs are the underlying foundation on which heuristics are developed (Moser, 2016, p. 557). For example, a consumer may believe that organic foods are healthy and then rely on organic labels as a simple tool for choosing food products with the aim of achieving a healthy diet, without actually going through the trouble of looking at the fine print of each product to assess its healthiness. The study calls for more research into heuristics within sustainable consumption, but serves to show the usefulness of heuristics as a concept when analysing sustainable consumption practices. The study focused on consumers who already actively purchase organic foods, but provides interesting food for thought in the quest to expand our understanding of the green consumer profile.

When discussing heuristics, it is important to remember the distinction between the consumer’s beliefs about (or perceptions of) a product and the actual state of a specific
attribute. When discussing ways of overcoming the general population’s barriers to purchasing sustainable foods it is important to gain an understanding of what consumers think about different products and what the reality is. By gaining an understanding of this potential discrepancy, it is possible that some barriers could be eliminated. It has been indicated that perceived price and availability is the most prevalent barrier to purchasing sustainable foods (Buder et al., 2014, p. 398). This is interesting when considering the argument of Solomon et al. (2013, p. 365) that perceived price-quality is the most pervasive market belief. According to this author, consumers tend to assume that there is a correlation between price and quality, meaning that higher-quality goods will have a higher price and vice versa (Solomon et al., 2013, p. 365). Moser (2016, p. 554) argues that many consumers perceive organic foods to have better taste and to be healthier than standard options, as well as there being environmental benefits in the production process. This can be argued to mean that organic food products are of higher quality than other options. It is interesting to discuss what the implications of this may be in terms of heuristics. While it has been demonstrated that pro-environmental consumers look for the label “organic” as a confirmation that a food product will satisfy their needs (Thøgersen et al., 2012, cited in Moser, 2016, p. 553), it can also be argued that there is a risk that simply emphasizing that a product is organic may discourage “standard” consumers from considering it. Based on the above-mentioned price-quality relationship market belief it might be possible that standard consumers who see products labelled as organic will assume that they are too expensive for their taste and simply move on without making a rational comparison of actual price and benefits. On an opposite note, Solomon et al. (2013, p. 364-365) also argue that many consumers rely on visible cues (“product signals”) as an indicator of whether a product is suitable or not. Many organic foods are not as visually appealing as for example genetically enhanced food products, which may lead a consumer to perceive some organic food products to be of lower quality than standard options in terms of taste. As heuristics in the context of sustainable foods is a relatively poorly researched topic, we argue that it is beneficial to include the concept into this exploratory study to shed light on what role they play in the process of deciding between sustainable and standard options. By doing so, we hope to increase our understanding of the green consumer profile, which is the purpose of this study.

2.5.2 The attitude-behaviour gap

Hitherto, the emphasis of the theoretical chapter has been to demonstrate the dynamics by which attitudes influence actual behaviour. However, the correlation between attitudes and behaviour is not always perfect. The purpose of this section is to discuss why that may be.

Akehurst et al. (2012, p. 973) highlight the fact that consumers do not seem to engage in sustainable consumption to the same extent as surveys on their environmental attitudes would imply. This argument can be substantiated by the observation by Moser (2016, p. 552) that organic foods only held between 1% and 11% of market share across different food categories in Germany in 2016, despite a majority of consumers stating that they were concerned about the environment. McDonagh and Prothero (2014, p. 1196) discuss this discrepancy in terms of an attitude-behaviour gap and baffle over the fact that academics and practitioners alike have not managed to find a reasonable explanation for (or indeed, a solution to) this phenomenon.

While this thesis is primarily concerned with the attitude-behaviour gap within the context of sustainability, it should be noted upon that the concept has proven prevalent in various
settings. As early as in the 1930s, a researcher by the name of LaPiere (1934, cited in Kahle, 2013, p. 106) showed the existence of a gap between self-reported attitudes and actual behaviour. He did this in a very hands-on manner by taking oriental friends and visiting restaurants that claimed to adopt a discrimination policy. While 45% of restaurants claimed that they would not serve oriental customers, only one out of the 250 visited establishments actually refused to serve LaPiere and his companions (LaPiere, 1934, cited in Kahle, 2013, p. 106). Minard (1952, cited in Kahle, 2013, p. 106) conducted a famous study in which the behaviour of Caucasian people toward African Americans in the Pocahontas coal field was investigated. The study showed that 20% of Caucasians behaved kindly toward African Americans both in the coal field and in the village, while 20% behaved in a hostile way in both places. The remaining 60% behaved kindly in the coal field but in a hostile way in the village. The difference in the behaviour depending on the context has been widely cited as evidence of the discrepancy between attitudes and behaviours (Kahle, 2013, p. 106).

For the sake of this study and shedding light on the green consumer profile, the findings of Minard (1952) can be speculated to indicate that some of the difference between stated attitudes and behaviour can stem from a perceived pressure to report a certain attitude when encouraged to do so. For example, it is possible that the 60% of Caucasian workers who behaved in a hostile way toward African Americans only in the village did so due to pressure from the general community to engage in racial discrimination. Once in the field, separated from the rest of society, the workers may have felt free to treat their peers equally regardless of race. This view can be supported by the argument by Kahle (2013, p. 110) that social constraints play a significant role in creating a gap between attitudes and behaviour. The example provided by Minard back in 1952 can be connected to the findings by Hiramatsu et al. (2015), who hypothesized that the perceived attitude-behaviour gap was engorged by respondents in previous studies feeling pressured to report that they care about the environment due to the structure of the surveys. The authors stated that most previous studies had relied on surveys where the questions were formulated in a way that created a yes-bias, by using positive prompts in questions that were supposed to control for the consumers’ attitudes toward environmental issues in their daily consumption habits (Hiramatsu et al., 2015). When the authors conducted a large-scale survey of Japanese consumers’ attitudes toward environmental issues in their daily consumption habits and changed the format to include negative prompts instead, they found that only 41.4% stated that they were concerned with environmental issues, compared to 72.5% in positive-prompt studies (Hiramatsu et al., 2015, p. 14). Similarly, in regard to consciousness in purchasing decisions, the reported consciousness dropped from 77.3% to 58.9% when asked with negative prompts (Hiramatsu et al., 2015, p. 14).

While these results still show that a large part of the population are concerned with the environment, it is interesting to entertain the notion that academics may have overestimated the prevalence and strength of pro-environmental attitudes in the general population that marketers aim to reach. Apart from the formulation of questions creating a bias, recall the previously mentioned argument by Kahle (2013, p. 110) that humans are prone to be affected by social constraints. It is a possibility that consumers feel pressure from society to report that they hold pro-environmental attitudes even in cases when they actually do not. Another question that arises is how much consumers need to care for the environment in order for a reported pro-environmental attitude to be considered truthful. Keep in mind Stern et al.’s (1993, p. 326) argument about perceived costs and benefits. If a consumer is concerned enough with the environment to sporadically purchase
sustainable foods, even though they only make up a fraction of his consumption, should he respond positively when asked in a survey? Stern et al.’s (1993, p. 326) argument logically implies that environmental concern is a factor that is of little concrete use unless compared to other motivations of the questioned consumers. Finally, it must be noted that many studies that try to explain drivers of green purchasing behaviour do not study actual purchasing behaviour, but rather use purchase intention as a proxy. The argument for this was presented by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, cited in Shin et al., 2017, p. 114), who stated that behavioural intention is the best determinant of actual behaviour. While this approach has been widely accepted in academic literature and used in numerous studies (e.g. Huang et al., 2014; Li & Cai, 2012, cited in Shin et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2017; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999, cited in Shin et al., 2017) it is relevant to consider that there may exist an imperfection in the fit between intended and actual behaviour, which could potentially contribute to the confusion regarding the size of the attitude-behaviour gap. While the issue on how to encourage more consumers to engage regularly in sustainable consumption remains, these are questions that should be voiced when discussing the concept of the attitude-behaviour gap.

As such, there is reason to humbly question the reliability of the apparent academic consensus that consumers in general care about the environment to such a significant extent. As attitudes have been demonstrated to be an essential driver of purchasing behaviour, it would be detrimental to simply assume that reported attitudes are as positive as we believe and that the issue is a mystery whose solution lies somewhere else. Considering the previously introduced models of Homer and Kahle (1988) and Huang et al. (2014) that emphasize values and knowledge as ways of fostering more positive attitudes toward sustainable consumption, the findings of Hiramatsu et al., (2015) may indicate a need for practitioners to change their way of communicating with potential consumers. For example, environmental issues and practical benefits of sustainable products may need to be communicated in a different way than they currently are in order to improve the general population’s attitude toward sustainable products.

2.6 Literature criticism
While many contemporary articles cite similar sources and base their theoretical frameworks on similar concepts, we argue that there is a lack of articles that integrate the most important concepts into a single model. There also seems to be a lack of articles that offer concrete solutions on how to solve the problems related to sustainable marketing. To remedy this, we synthesized the knowledge gained from our literature review into an integrative framework, intended to provide a more comprehensive overview of the drivers of sustainable purchasing behaviour than what, to our knowledge, has previously been used within sustainable marketing. The model will be presented in detail in chapter 2.7.

In our model we included concepts that have been discussed both in papers dealing specifically with sustainable foods, and in papers dealing with sustainable consumption on a more general level. While we recognize that caution must be exercised when applying concepts to new markets or product groups, one must also recognize that the application of certain concepts to specific settings may simply have been overlooked. This can be evidenced by Moser (2016) who introduced heuristics, a 65 years old concept, into the realms of sustainable foods marketing.

Our proposed model relies on established core concepts such as the value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy by Homer and Kahle (1988) but integrates concepts such as the attitude-behaviour gap to illustrate the shortcomings of previous, oversimplified
explanations. In addition, the model has been extended to clearly illustrate topics that relate to one of the “core” features of Homer and Kahle’s (1988) model, i.e. the value dimensions introduced by Stern et al. (1993). Furthermore, the model includes knowledge as a relevant additional concept (as shown by Huang et al., 2014) and shows the importance of heuristics and bounded rationality. The latter concepts have been part of consumer behaviour literature since Simon introduced them in 1955, but for some reason they seem to have been neglected within sustainable marketing until Moser emphasized the need for further exploration of them in 2016. We do not presume to state that we have managed to include all possible theoretical concepts into our framework. However, we argue that we have managed to identify the concepts considered most relevant by contemporary literature.

As such, we argue that the mere formulation of our integrative model serves as a criticism of current literature within sustainable marketing. While the model is new and surely can be expanded to include more concepts, the fact that the most commonly cited models and concepts have not previously been combined into a single entity shows the need for marketing academics to take a fresh perspective to the sustainability field. We cannot make claims about the model’s explanatory power since it has yet to be empirically tested, but currently it at least serves to show the possibility of logically connecting an array of concepts that are currently being discussed as separate entities by marketing academics.

We argue that current sustainable marketing literature fails to provide convincing answers for practitioners when it comes to increasing demand for sustainable products and explaining the reasons for the current shortcomings. Current literature also fails to illustrate the connection between the core concepts that are being discussed across the board, or at the very least discusses these connections in a way that is so vague that it becomes difficult to grasp. While there has been extensive study of sustainable marketing as a topic, findings have been difficult to consolidate in their current formats, and in some cases, there have even been studies that call into question the reliability of large portions of existing research. A prime example of this is the study by Hiramatsu et al. (2015), who speculated that any study with an inherent yes-bias in the formulation of its questions is untrustworthy at least to some extent.

As a result, this thesis takes an exploratory approach to sustainable marketing and does not claim to take any existing research at face value. Instead, logic and critical thinking has been used to synthesize various perspectives, old and new, into an integrative model that can serve as a basis for a qualitative study. The core of our model (the value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy) is based on a concept that has been cited by various authors for over thirty years and as such can be considered trustworthy. However, we have taken to heart the discrepancy of findings within sustainable marketing and interpreted it as a need to expand the model by adding several potentially explanatory factors. In conclusion, the main tool employed in the source criticism of this study is extensive discussion of the different concepts presented and a critical examination of how they can be considered to logically fit together.

2.7 Theoretical discussion and integrative model
The theoretical framework-chapter started with an explanation of how consumers make decisions in general. Next, we started delving deeper into the specifics of different models and concepts that can be used to increase our understanding of the green consumer profile and the drivers of sustainable purchasing behaviour. The following illustrations and
sections will attempt to summarize the key points of the chapter. Subsequently, the insights will be consolidated into an integrative model that illustrates the relationships between the presented concepts, in Figure 10, *Theoretical summary.*

![Figure 10. Theoretical summary.](image)

The framework, at its core, is built around the value-attitude-behaviour model by Homer and Kahle (1988). The framework has then been adapted to consider other factors that influence attitudes, denoted as knowledge and environment. Finally, the three pillars summarize important concepts that relate to each of the basic factors in Homer and Kahle’s (1988) model. In order to create a more intuitive illustration of how the different concepts relate to each other, we have developed the following integrative model for explaining sustainable behaviour, in Figure 11, *The Adolfsson-Wickström model.*

![Figure 11. The Adolfsson-Wickström model.](image)
The model shows that personal values, consisting of three value dimensions, and knowledge as well as adaptation to the environment influence the attitude of the consumer, which in turn influences behaviour. However, behaviour is also influenced by factors such as heuristics and bounded rationality. The model displays the prevalence of the attitude-behaviour gap and its previously discussed possible foundations, while leaving room for unknown factors since the phenomenon needs further exploration. The model also concretely shows the important role of consumer perceptions and how they indirectly influence behaviour through several routes. In the model, we have chosen to name the box “perceptions of the environment”. The box is included in the model in order to highlight the fact that humans have a “filter” that prevents us from being completely objective and rational, leading to consumer behaviour being influenced by perceptions of reality rather than an actual state of affairs. The result is a model that shows the relation between the different levels of Homer and Kahle’s (1988) hierarchy, while explaining the reasons for discrepancies that arise along the way.

The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring the drivers of green purchasing behaviour, which we are doing in the context of sustainable food. In order to serve this purpose, some concepts in the previous model can be specified. Based on our theoretical framework and literature review, this yields a model that takes the following form, in Figure 12, The adapted Adolfsson-Wickström model.

![Figure 12. The adapted Adolfsson-Wickström model.](image)

The model gives specific examples of beliefs about product attributes or outcomes that may activate the three green value dimensions proposed by Stern et al. (1993). Furthermore, the concept of “knowledge” has been specified to pertain to the individual consumer’s knowledge of both environmental issues and of the benefits of choosing sustainable food products. Both this knowledge and analysis made by use of heuristics is influenced by the consumer’s perceptions of the environment. This box still holds the same meaning as in the more general version of the integrative model, as does the box denoting the attitude-behaviour gap. The attitude-box has been specified to refer to attitude toward sustainable foods, while the behaviour-box has been specified to refer to actual purchasing behaviour in regard to sustainable foods. Finally, the box for heuristics
and bounded rationality has been specified to refer to the use of heuristics in assessing the attributes of different food products in the specific purchasing situation. This distinction draws a clear line between knowledge on a more general level and the reasoning consumers actually use when in the grocery store.

The concepts introduced within the theoretical framework will serve as our starting point for exploring what barriers prevent consumers from engaging in sustainable consumption at a larger scale. In our theoretical approach, we have chosen to build our foundation around tried and trusted models within the field of sustainable marketing. However, we have also argued for synthesis of other perspectives into the veteran models and included new perspectives (such as the role of heuristics in sustainable foods consumption) into our analysis and integrated them into an integrative model of the drivers of green consumer behaviour. The result is a wide, but structured, framework that we argue will serve the exploratory nature of our endeavour well and allow us to fulfil the purpose of this study.
3 Methodology

The following chapter commences with an account of our conducted literature search. It then displays and discusses various methodological considerations that were done previous to, and throughout, the research process of this study. It delves into the research philosophy, research approach, method and design, justifying each selection after detailing the meaning of these matters. Moreover, data collection and analysis methods are displayed and discussed, as well as ethical considerations. The chapter ends with a short summary of its content.

3.1 Literature search

In order to create a foundation for the theoretical framework and select an appropriate methodological approach, we reviewed a variety of available literature. The literature was primarily sourced through Umeå University’s library database. However, printed books that had been used during the authors’ previous business education were also utilized. In the library database, combinations of the search words “sustainability”, “green consumption”, “sustainable consumption”, “consumer behaviour”, “organic food”, “drivers of consumption”, “heuristics”, “purchasing motivations”, “values”, “attitudes”, and “sustainable marketing” were used to yield a plethora of existing research within the topic at hand.

The extensive literature review by McDonagh and Prothero (2014) was used to gain an initial understanding of the state of current research within the topic of sustainable marketing. In their review, McDonagh and Prothero (2014) provide an overview and critical analysis of marketing literature within sustainability from 1998-2013. The review is an updated version of a similar work covering the years 1971-1998, resulting in a paper that effectively provides an overview of sustainable marketing research over the past four decades.

After reviewing the paper by McDonagh and Prothero (2014) and acquainting ourselves with the literature discussed within, we were able to identify challenges that marketing practitioners and academics are currently facing and form an understanding of some of the underlying issues that give rise to these challenges. This understanding functioned as a starting point in our search for further literature, and thus yielded the search words accounted for above. As the aim of this thesis was to take an exploratory approach to the topic area, we strived to keep an open, but critical mind in our literature search. We started by reviewing sustainable marketing literature within all contexts and markets in order to gain a broad understanding of concepts that could be utilized to explain the “green consumer profile”. Thereafter, we started looking at papers dealing with sustainable foods, which is the specific topic to be investigated within the boundaries of this thesis. By not directly limiting our search to purely sustainable foods, we argue that we managed to keep an open mind in our approach to the topic, leading to increased chance of providing a new perspective on marketing research.

Since sustainable marketing is a megatrend (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014, p. 1186) that is changing rapidly in its nature, we initially decided to prioritize articles that were published within the last ten years (i.e. no earlier than 2009) in order to increase the chance of gaining insights that would still be of relevance today. After discovering that many of the modern articles seemed to rely on similar concepts, such as linear models and value dimensions, we decided to extend our search to include the original sources of
these concepts. As such, papers such as Stern et al. (1993), Homer and Kahle (1988), and Simon (1955) were eventually included in our theoretical framework. While those papers may be considered old, the fact that they are still being regularly cited within contemporary research can be used as an argument of their relevance.

While the amount of available literature on the topic of sustainable consumption admittedly is too extensive to be reviewed in full, we are confident that our search yielded an understanding of the most common and explanatory concepts that can be applied to this thesis.

3.2 Research philosophy

The term research philosophy pertains to how a given study views or perceives reality and knowledge in a sense (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 108). Bryman and Bell (2012, p. 27) and Saunders et al. (2009, p. 108) argue that each subsequent step in a research process is founded in the research philosophy, as it influences both how we approach the research as well as how we understand its contributions. While practical elements are sometimes used as precursors to the chosen philosophy, most often what determines which philosophy is used is what kind of empirical material and eventual analysis is of import to the study or research. For instance, if the research aligns itself better with hard data and statistical analysis of such, or if it attempts to understand attitudes, emotions and the like. In most cases, these research philosophies are looked at from so called epistemological and ontological perspectives. An epistemological perspective deals with how one approaches knowledge, and how knowledge is treated within a given study. Ontology on the other hand deals with reality, and how the study perceives it (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119).

While several different philosophies exist, there are primarily four different ones that have been at the forefront of research for some time (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 109). These are positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. In the following section, each philosophy is detailed and discussed in relation to their epistemological and ontological standpoints.

Positivism owes much of its progress to Popper (2002) and adopts a natural sciences perspective, wherein positivistic research mirrors the structural processes often found within such research. Only that which is observable in a social reality is deemed appropriate to accrue data around and eventually analyse to bring about a generalisation which is akin to the nature of natural sciences (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 113). Positivistic research often seeks to confirm or refute hypotheses based on existing theoretical foundations, or in Popper’s perspective, seek to attain falsifiability of such hypotheses (Popper, 2002, p. 57). Moreover, positivism endeavours to remove the authors of positivistic research as much as possible from the research process. While this is impossible to attain completely, positivism argues that such estrangement or separation from the research process is vital for generalisation and replication of the conducted research (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 114). In essence, positivism adopts an independent and objective ontological perspective, and epistemologically only deems observable factors to be justifiable (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119).

Realism is also in many cases attributed to the Popperian path of rationalization, in that observability without the influence of human subjective notions is how research and reality in a sense should be approached. Saunders et al. (2009, p. 115) argue that it is
similar to positivism as it too embraces an approach similar to that of the natural sciences. However, it furthers the independence of human interference, and delves deeper into the separation of human senses to seek answers in relevant research from an ontological approach. Epistemologically it too only deems observable phenomena as appropriate, and often explains unsatisfactory contributions through the flaws of human senses (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119).

The third research philosophy is interpretivism, which is a stark contrast to Popper’s (2002) founding approaches and the subsequent approaches of realism and positivism. Instead, interpretivism owes much of its development to Berger and Luckmann (1966) who argued that approaching any given phenomenon without taking into consideration the influences which social contexts and constructions have upon such a phenomenon results in an incomplete understanding of the critical complexities which are often found within research phenomena. Interpretivism as such does not align itself with observability, but rather with what can be learned from peering into human interactions, reasons for such interactions, and the effect that these interactions have on a given phenomenon. Among the primary concepts within interpretivism is the term social actors, which is often used to explain the process through which we as humans have a role in any given situation, founded in either or own or someone else’s interpretation of that role, which leads us to act in a specific way (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 116). Moreover, whereas realism and positivism seek to exclude the researcher as much as possible from the research process, interpretivism argues for the very opposite. It is of great import for the researcher to gain as much of an understanding as possible of the human subjects and their perspectives, so as to be able to discuss and analyse the complexities which arise in these situations. In short, interpretivism considers reality a social construction and highly subjective, and knowledge pertains to subjective and social phenomena.

Finally, pragmatism is slightly different from the above-mentioned approaches, in that it argues that the primary foundation for which epistemological and ontological consideration is chosen is based in the research purpose itself. It moreover highlights the fact that in many, if not most, practical cases, adopting a single specific epistemological and ontological approach is not viable. Instead, it suggests that a research can vary in epistemological and ontological approaches, meaning that depending on the research purpose, epistemological and ontological approaches can overlap. Interpretivism and realism can be used together, as long as such usage is detailed and justified (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 109).

As argued by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 109), there is no best-in-class research philosophy, and while certain philosophies are commonly associated with a few varying research designs and strategies, there are cases wherein seemingly inappropriate philosophies are used to answer questions and understand purposes that in very few ways should work together on paper, but do in practice (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 109).

This study adopts pragmatism as its primary research philosophy, because of a couple of reasons. Recall that the purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring drivers of, and barriers to, green purchasing behaviour. Primarily, the beginning of the research design is heavily based in realism and positivism, wherein we discuss a problem that can be observable through current, theoretical and empirical material. This problem discussion led to a purpose which in itself is exploratory, something which will be detailed further below, which subsequently affects the empirical
data gathering, analysis of such empirical data, and eventual discussion. These latter elements are more aligned with interpretivism, and are founded in the fact that an increased understanding of the green consumer profile is necessary. Moreover, as has been displayed earlier in this paper, new and divergent paths of research have been argued to be necessary in the questions and answers surrounding sustainability issues, which furthers the choice of a somewhat differing philosophical consideration compared to other contemporary research.

3.3 Research approach
In any scientific endeavour, to facilitate validity, replication or simply understanding, it is crucial to outline the research approach, or in other words, to explain and justify the way that empirical material and theory relate to one another (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 24). This relationship and its nature, while a probable construct of prior choices of philosophical characteristics, impacts following methodological choices and implications for the research design and its ultimate contributions (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 124). In general, two primary schools of thought exist within contemporary research, these two being the deductive approach and the inductive approach.

The deductive research approach has its foundation in the compilation of pre-existing theoretical contributions and information, through which new assumptions are conceived and conclusively tested against to seek explanations behind relationships of such theories (Hyde, 2000, p. 83). Only theories and assumptions with a specified relevance towards the overarching phenomenon are generally accepted, that, in a way, are deduced from previous stages of the research design. This way of approach establishes a linearity that has several implications. Indeed, Bryman and Bell (2012, p. 25) argue that among the most frequently occurring perceptions of deduction concerns its linearity and the somewhat paradoxical benefit this entails, in that contemporary theory, which continuously evolves and advances, might force modification of previously accepted knowledge within scientific efforts. In a way, deduction allows assumptions that once were deemed appropriate to conform to new ideas, should such ideas present themselves, without decreasing the legitimacy of the research.

Induction on the other hand heavily implies the eventual formulation of one or several theories. It is generally concerned with the underlying foundations that social contexts and constructs have on objects of observation, and is more often than not accompanied by qualitative data. This is in comparison to deduction which generally implies quantitative data, although research which is inductive can facilitate quantitative data and vice versa (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 26). Inductive reasoning is moreover not as linear as deductive, rather emphasizing changes in the research process as well as allowing interpretation of eventual data to, in part, disregard theoretical foundations already existing in the research (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 126).

This study bears elements which indicate both deductive and inductive reasoning. As deduction is based on the notion that pre-existing knowledge is followed by theoretical assumptions, so too does this study’s problematisation see its inception in deductive reasoning, as it is a product of prior, discrepant findings. Moreover, the linearity of deduction, in combination with subsequent research design aspects, allow for the amendment or adjustment of theoretical basis should such theoretical changes occur. Given the overarching topic of this study in the form of sustainable consumption, and
behavioural aspects which are continuously better understood in contemporary research, a deductive approach facilitates such information to be retrofitted into the research.

Continuously, as depicted in the problematisation of this study, the attitude-behaviour gap is yet to be fully understood, with differing findings and discrepancies across similar research. These discrepancies, as a major building block of this study, and the problematisation that follows warrant an investigation into the underlying behavioural foundations of the phenomenon, and can as such be attributed to an inductive nature.

It should be noted upon that neither the deductive nor inductive tendencies of this study are directly concerned with the ultimate contribution this study offers. The deductive and inductive reasoning act primarily as basis for the problematisation, and in some ways the operationalization of theory into plausible data collection aspects, but the results in relation to the purpose are more directly related to the research design in chapter 3.5.

This combination of both an inductive and deductive approach might seem disorienting and perhaps disadvantageous. However, Saunders et al. (2009, p. 127) argue that not only is it a plausible course of action but also an advantageous one, and although they do not necessarily discuss the reasons for this in an extended way, we would argue for several reasons that this is indeed the case in this study. For instance, the combined approach pairs well with our specific research purpose, in which we do not seek to find one simple truth, which would have been the case with a purely deductive approach. Instead, we seek possible explanations that can be argued to be plausible, and which warrant further investigation. However, these possible explanations and observations, which stem from prior scientific examples as deduction implies, would not be possible without inductive elements. As we have argued, to seek these explanations, we believe that a better understanding of the social contexts is required, which induction emphasizes.

3.4 Research method

Research methods, most commonly divided into qualitative and quantitative methods, concern a study’s processes which relate to data collection and subsequent data analysis. Saunders et al. (2009, p. 151) consider the differences between the two in that quantitative methods pertain to numeric data, whereas qualitative methods highlight the importance of words. Quantitative methods enable statistical testing of operationalized variables, and generally relies on large sample sizes to increase generalisability, but is sometimes criticized for its disregard of social contexts (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 36). Moreover, quantitative methods are dependent on transparency in regard to data collection and ultimate analysis, as replication of a study is paramount in order to ultimately reject or accept provided hypotheses (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 36).

Qualitative methods are often utilized when a phenomenon is yet to be understood to an acceptable degree, and as such promote the deeper understanding of such a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 151). This method deals with non-numerical data, such as words, videos or pictures, accrued through data collection methods such as focus groups or interviews, and eventually analysed through various analytical methods (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 36). Belk (2017, p. 37) names focus groups as the most commonly occurring way of collecting data, and continues to argue that qualitative methods are growing in importance, specifically in regard to marketing research and advertising.
This study adopts a qualitative research method. This is due to the discrepant contemporary research outlined in the problem discussion of this study, which calls for a better understanding of the underlying issues and elements of the chosen phenomenon. The research’s dominant methodological departure in quantitative methods, as argued by Hiramatsu et al. (2015, p. 14) and McDonagh and Prothero (2014, p. 1188), might require re-evaluation, and as problematised, can be assumed to be based on flawed logic, and as such implies the need to utilize qualitative methods instead.

3.5 Research design
A research design, sometimes denoted research purpose, most often reflects the nature of a given study’s purpose, and while there are three varying classifications of such design, it is of import to note that they are not exclusive. Indeed, similar to how research questions or methodological aspects such as the approach can be dual in nature, so can the research design be founded in one or more classifications (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 138).

The three most common classifications of research designs are exploratory, descriptive and explanatory, although a fourth classification exists as an amalgam of descriptive and explanatory, aptly named descripto-explanatory (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140). According to Saunders et al (2009, p. 140), an exploratory research design is primarily used when the purpose of a given study is inquiring in nature, seeking to clarify or seek insights into the underlying nature of a specified phenomenon. They compare an exploratory research design to that of the explorers or travellers of the world, based on one or more of three varying processes: literature reviews, seeking insights through interviews with phenomenon-related experts, and gaining understanding by doing focus groups.

Exploratory designs are moreover highly related to change in the research process, and is often deemed superior when the very foundations of a study or a phenomenon are uncertain with the ultimate endeavour to shed light upon these very issues (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140). Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2009, p. 140) make a valid point in that the flexible and adaptive nature of an exploratory research design does not mean complete disregard for structure or direction, but rather that studies which utilize exploratory research designs are more prone to a wide starting foundation, ultimately growing narrower in its scope as the processes of the research continues.

Descriptive research designs on the other hand pertain to the eventual aim of describing “an accurate profile of persons, events or situations” (Robson, 2002, p. 59, cited in Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140). Often paired with exploratory or explanatory studies as continuations or precursors thereof, descriptive research designs require a relatively explicit understanding of the stated phenomenon to allow any subsequent data collection processes to yield sufficient contributions (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140).

Explanatory research designs prioritize the scrutiny of causal relationships between a number of specified variables, and is as such weighted towards quantitative data. Simply put, by highlighting a situation or issue, operationalizing it into testable, related variables, one may uncover how these variables affect each other in order to better explain the original issue (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 141). Paired with a preceding descriptive research design, this is called a descripto-explanatory research design (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140).
This study adopts an exploratory research design, as reflected in the aforementioned purpose: *To increase the understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring drivers of, and barriers to, green purchasing behaviour.* This is due to the nature of the problematisation and its content, displaying a lack in the understanding of the specified phenomenon. An exploratory design furthermore pairs well with previous methodological considerations, such as the qualitative methodological departure.

### 3.6 Data collection methods

Scientific endeavours have numerous different ways of collecting the necessary data or empirical material that is required to further the study or research in question. Some of these are more associated towards a specific methodological research approach, as has been discussed before such as inductive and deductive, or general research method in regard to quantitative and qualitative methods (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 296). Due to prior considerations within this study in regard to these methodological departures, we will only display and discuss options which can relate to these previous choices. As such, quantitative data collection methods are excluded from here on out.

For qualitative methods, the primary means of collection of empirical data is reliant on interviews, and social constructions thereof. The essence of an interview lies in the interaction between two or more people, through which one seeks to accumulate empirical material related to the research questions of a study. Saunders et al. (2009, p. 318) highlight three distinct variations or types of interviews in structured, semi-structured, and unstructured or in-depth interviews.

Structured interviews are somewhat similar to quantitative methods, in the way they are constructed. They typically include a questionnaire with theoretically operationalized questions, with predetermined answers to choose from for the participant. Such data is later on usually utilized in statistical endeavours, as the social interaction within the structured interview is seldom enough to analyse through more quantitative analysis methods.

Semi-structured interviews lessen the formality of an interview compared to structured interviews. These interviews usually have certain questions operationalized from a theoretical foundation, but other questions may simply be based in overarching themes that are discussed or may be the construct of the interviewer’s expertise during the interview. Indeed, some predetermined questions may even be excluded from the interview depending on contextual differences between interviews. The empirical material gathered from semi-structured interviews is usually analysed through qualitative methods.

Unstructured interviews completely exclude the structural integrity of interviews, and are as such in distinct contrast to the structured variation. These generally do not have any predetermined questions, but rather rely on the interviewer’s expertise to facilitate answers from the interviewee to explore in-depth themes of import to the scientific endeavour. Similar to semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews are also generally analysed by opting for qualitative analytical tools.

The above-mentioned types of interviews, specifically semi-structured and unstructured, are generally associated with matters which pertain to the research question of a study as
well. In exploratory studies, such as this one, Saunders et al. (2009, p. 324) argue that these two kinds of interviews are perfectly suited, as they allow for better eventual understanding of the issues at hand. This is due to the fact that exploratory studies generally seek answers to attitudes, behaviours and other contexts with social complexities. They allow probing of questions that might not have been previously intended, but that increase the chances of further understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

Furthermore, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are highly preferable when the empirical material that is being searched for relates to a trio of circumstances (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008; Jankowicz 2005, cited in Saunders et al., 2009, p. 324): when the amount of necessary questions is large; when these questions are highly complex and promote probing; and when the order in which the questions are asked may need to change throughout a process.

Another aspect of interviews that is important in a general manner, but also in regard to this thesis, is the concept of group interviews or focus groups. As Saunders et al. (2009, p. 343) put it, focus groups are similar to semi-structured or unstructured interviews with the primary difference being the number of participants. In a focus group, a normal number of interviewees is around 4-12, the exact number a construct of matters such as the expertise of the interviewer, the participants themselves and the topic at hand. Belk (2017, p. 37) continues on the subject of focus groups, stating that focus groups is the most commonly occurring method of data collection in qualitative endeavours. Furthermore, on the topic of the number of focus groups required to establish reliability and quality of the empirical material, Bryman and Bell (2012, p. 505) consider saturation as the only measure of such. This means that the exact number of focus groups is irrelevant, and that once answers across focus groups are repetitive, appropriate results have probably been reached.

This study opted for semi-structured focus groups due to a number of factors. Firstly, semi-structured interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the green consumer profile, whilst simultaneously facilitating probing for questions and answers which may arise during the focus groups themselves. Moreover, this option was highly suited due to the complexity and size of this study’s theoretical chapter, as proposed by Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) and Jankowicz (2005), cited in Saunders et al. (2009, p. 324). Thirdly, as has been discussed in prior parts of this study, much remains unknown regarding the green consumer profile, and having semi-structured focus groups allows for exploration of the social complexities that surround this phenomenon. Moreover, this choice is as much a construct of the above, as it is a construct of prior methodological departures. Semi-structured focus groups align well with the exploratory design, the qualitative nature as well as the philosophical aspects. Finally, some of the questions, despite the author’s best attempts, due to the nature of them, might be somewhat difficult to answer on a one-to-one basis. As such, focus groups offer a respite in that more people are able to jump in and answer, which could act as an argument as to why we favoured focus-groups over one-on-one interviews.

3.7 Sampling methods
In any given study, sampling is of great importance. The way that research chooses its sampling is as much a construct of prior considerations in the research, as it is a decision dependant on the resources which are available. In general, when discussing the semantics
of sampling, there are three concepts which Saunders et al. (2009, p. 210) highlight: population, sample, and element. Elements are the individual people or whichever subject that is to be observed or in some other way empirically investigated. Population in a sense refers to all the elements summed up, and a sample is, for lack of a better term, a smaller sample of this population. What connects these three concepts in practical terms is the phenomenon that is under scrutiny.

The reason why sampling is important is among other things due to practical necessities. Whether we want to or not, it is near impossible to collect data from an entire population, due to possible budget restrictions and/or time restrictions. What this means, is that the reason for which the eventual sample is selected, becomes even more important. However, while the importance is great, depending on a study’s research question or other scientific considerations, one may opt for one of two different overarching sampling techniques (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 212).

Probability sampling is the first one, which is heavily associated with quantitative studies and statistical approaches. It is linear in nature, wherein the researchers first choose a sampling frame that stems from the research questions, selects the sample size, select sub-sampling techniques, and consider the implications that the sample has toward the general population (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 214). In relation to this study, probability sampling, even without delving into and discussing the sub-sampling techniques, can be considered to be unsuitable. As prior decisions have been made regarding data collection methods, in this case semi-structured focus groups, probability sampling will henceforth no longer be discussed as its nature is inherently not suited for more qualitative studies (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 213).

Non-probability sampling on the other hand is not random. It is the process of subjectively judging which elements or which type of sample is most appropriate to answer a selected research question. This brings with it however some important considerations, some of which might be ambiguous in nature (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 233). For instance, sample sizes have no inherent rules in non-probability sampling, and are more a construct of prior considerations. For instance, in this study, these considerations are dependent on the data collection method, of semi-structured focus groups. Moreover, the sample sizes can be attributed to the research question and purpose, and the subjective judgement that follows.

Furthermore, non-probability sampling consists of several sub-sampling techniques, four of which are detailed below.

Quota sampling is perhaps the sub-technique in which one may find most similarities to probability sampling, except for the fact that is still non-random. It entails basing your sample around a quota of a population, which in turn is based on pre-selected quota specifications. Generally, quota sampling infers a high probability of a generalisable sample and population, but is dependent on a larger sample size to achieve this.

Purposive sampling is based in the subjective judgement of the researchers in their efforts to seek answers to their research questions, and is generally based around very small sample sizes. It is important to note that the empirical material gathered from such a sample is generally not considered to be generalisable, and is therefore more prominent in exploratory scenarios where the primary endeavour is to seek new insights from which new theories could possibly be speculated upon. Purposive sampling is moreover divided
into three categories: deviant sampling, maximum variation sampling, and critical case sampling (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 239).

Deviant sampling refers to sampling wherein the researchers purposefully selects the sample with the intention that each element is highly unusual or unique, so that the information gathered through social interaction with these elements will yield more novel insights and knowledge which has not previously been noted upon. Deviant sampling is usually prefaced by arguing for that such unique knowledge is paramount in understanding the phenomenon at hand. Maximum variation sampling on the other hand is founded in the notion that each element or participant is immensely different from any other element, so as to find themes and patterns which might be attributed to different elements within the same sample or population. On the opposite spectra of maximum variation sampling is homogeneous sampling, which in short means that element difference is as small as possible, making it reasonable to study a phenomenon at great depth at the cost of decreasing the probability that completely new insights of greater themes can be attained. Critical case sampling is perhaps even more depth centric, in that elements are selected to understand a phenomenon in each individual case or element, and from thereon draw logical inferences from these observations. Finally, contrasting critical case sampling, is typical case sampling which is utilized to illustrate representative elements. This way, the observations made, and the empirical material gathered can be somewhat more generalisable, but this type of sampling is more an attribute of a study to help the readers of said study understand the sample selection better.

Snowball sampling is the process through which the researchers subjectively find one or two appropriate elements of a sample, and then let those elements find more elements, based on predetermined criteria. The new-found elements then do the same thing until a large enough sample has been produced. This is a helpful sampling technique when the researchers might not know the eventual elements or participants personally, but the downside is that bias and other social complications might skew the empirical material.

Convenience sampling is a sampling technique that entails the usage of elements which are most convenient for the researchers to both locate and subsequently get together. This technique is utilized until a sample size large enough for the current resources has been found. Saunders et al. (2009, p. 241) argue that it is among the most widespread technique used in contemporary research, but the downsides of biases and little generalisation capabilities need to be addressed in such cases.

Due to the purpose of this study, to increase the understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring drivers of, and barriers to, green purchasing behaviour, we opted for a mix between convenience sampling and purposive sampling. While the location of each element or participant is attributed to convenience sampling, the nature of the participants is more akin to purposive, in that each participant is selected due to their relationship with sustainable foods.

3.8 Practical methodology
To collect the empirical data for this study, we will conduct semi-structured focus groups. The participants will be invited through social media. All participants will be in the age of 20-30 years, and all will currently be students. As students generally live in their own households and therefore have control over their daily consumption habits, a sample which predominantly is constructed of students should ensure that all participants can
contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way. However, a number of people which have recently graduated will also be invited, but the same restrictions apply to these participants as well. Although we expect a diversity among participants in terms of nationality, all participants will have lived in Sweden long enough to be acquainted with the products offered in the local grocery stores.

The participants will be split into focus groups, consisting of four to six people per group. Due to the authors’ limited experience with conducting focus group interviews, and the complexity of the issue to be discussed, we have chosen to organize relatively small groups. It is the authors’ expectation that groups of four to six people will be enough to stimulate discussion, as has been argued by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 343), while still being an easily manageable group size. Three sessions will initially be scheduled, allowing for the possibility that further sessions will be scheduled if saturation is not achieved within the first three. As such, the initial sample will consist of 12-18 individual participants. During each session, 9 main questions will be scheduled, with the possibility to ask probing questions when needed. The questions will be designed to cover all key concepts of the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2.7. The sessions will be approximately 1.5-2 hours long, which should allow time to discuss all questions, while being short enough to reduce the risk of participants losing interest towards the end of the session. The sessions will be recorded using audio software and the main points will be summarized in writing at a later time. Each participant will then receive a copy of the summary, allowing them to give feedback on our interpretation of the discussion. The participants’ age, gender, nationality and how long they have been in Sweden if applicable, will be recorded, but anonymity will be ensured in the publication of the findings.

3.8.1 Operationalization

An operationalization is the “translation of concepts into tangible indicators of their existence” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 597). In other words, an operationalization is a display of thought into concrete examples, originating with theoretical departures and finalizing with empirical measurements. Moreover, an operationalization is important for a couple of major reasons. Firstly, this process ensures or at least seeks to ensure that the empirical data which is collected through whatever chosen method, in our case semi-structured focus groups, is relevant to the study’s theoretical departures, which in itself is a reflection of the study’s research question and purpose. As such, a good operationalization clearly defines and displays this process. Secondly, this ensures also that the conclusions that are eventually drawn from the empirical material is reliable and generalisable (which are concepts that will be delved into in chapter 3.10). Thirdly, while not a major function in this study, an operationalization is a critical element in cases which require a way to be repeated, such as heavily quantitative studies. We still choose to argue that repeatability is somewhat important for this study, not primarily for the sake of repeatability itself, but for authenticity reasons which again will be discussed in chapter 3.10 in form of the previously mentioned reliability and generalisability.

Bryman and Bell (2012, p. 161) argue that there is no perfect way to display an operationalization. Usually however, an operationalization presents the major theoretical departures which are then clearly defined under what is called a conceptual definition. If there are sub-concepts, these too are given their place in the operationalization, and are likewise conceptually defined. Next, an empirical definition is added if that is deemed necessary, and this definition is more a reflection of what the theoretical concept is
utilized for and to which extent. Finally, the operationalization presents questions which are a reflection of the previous empirical definition. What follows is this study’s operationalization, in Table 1, Operationalization. To enquire more of the questions themselves, please refer to Appendix 1, Interview Guide.

It should be noted that many empirical definitions include concepts that are not in the first column. This does not mean that these concepts are excluded from that question, rather that they are plausible consequences of the discussion and its departure. Moreover, the final question pertaining to marketing insights is devoid of any conceptual definition, since it was not relevant in the theoretical chapter. We do deem the question interesting however in regard to our purpose, which is why we included it.
**Concept** | **Conceptual definition** | **Empirical definition** | **Question**
---|---|---|---
**Knowledge of environment** | The knowledge that each individual possesses regarding environmental issues and benefits of sustainable food products. | Concerns the knowledge which each individual possesses on environmental issues, which we argue is a determinant of attitudes towards sustainable foods, and is affected by the individual’s perceptions of the environment. | Q1

**Behaviour** | The actions we as individuals make in conjunction with the environment around us, through perceiving the benefits of any action to outweigh the cost of that same action (Stern et al, 1993, p. 326). | Concerns the participants’ current purchase behaviour in regard to sustainable foods, and is affected by participants’ attitudes and heuristics, but also possibly distorted due to a possible attitude-behaviour gap. | Q2

**Attitudes** | Generalizations about the functioning of our environment, expressed through predispositions to evaluate an object, concept, or symbol in a certain way (Kahle, 2013, p. 5). | Concerns participants’ current feelings towards sustainable foods, which we argue to be a precursor to behaviour and a construct of both values and knowledge. | Q3

**Attitude-behaviour gap** | The reported gap between consumers’ attitudes and actual behaviour, wherein the two do not correlate (McDonagh & Prothero 2014, p. 1196). | Concerns matters such as social pressure, response biases and other unknown causes to the reported gap between attitudes and actual behaviour. | Q4

Table 1, Operationalization.
| Values | “Principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgement of what is important in life” (Oxford Dictionary, 2019). | Includes possible notions on health, taste, hedonism, fatalism, environmental aspects, and more, and other values among the egoistic, biospheric and altruistic dimensions, which may in turn affect participants’ attitudes, and ultimate reasons for purchasing, or not purchasing, sustainable foods. | Q5 |
| Values | Utilized to concretely bridge and analyse the process which we have suggested in form of our integrative model, from values to actual behaviour. | Probing questions concern whether or not the participants focus on social, individual or global values. | |
| Values | | | |
| Attitudes | Generalizations about the functioning of our environment, expressed through predispositions to evaluate an object, concept, or symbol in a certain way (Kahle, 2013, p. 5). | Concerns participants’ current feelings towards sustainable foods, which we argue to be a precursor to behaviour and a construct of both values and knowledge. | Q5 |
| Attitudes | Utilized in relation to Q5 as well, since attitudes is part of the bridge that leads to purchasing behaviour. | | |
| Attitudes | | | |
| Perceptions of environment | Perceptions, whether true or false, affect how individuals ultimately behave in ways that are not truly objective nor rational. Can be considered to be each individuals’ reflection of reality. | Concerns the participants’ perceptions of the environment, which may not be a perfect reflection of reality. | Q5 |
| Perceptions of environment | Used to gauge the differences between participants’ perceived reality and the actual reality, as well as gain insight into the relation between perceptions and knowledge. | | |
| Perceptions of environment | | | |
| Perceptions of environment | Perceptions, whether true or false, affect how individuals ultimately behave in ways that are not truly objective nor rational. Can be considered to be each individuals’ reflection of reality. | Concerns the participants’ perceptions of the environment, which may not be a perfect reflection of reality. | Q6 |
| Perceptions of environment | Utilized to empirically assess the prevalence of fatalism, or whether or not other dimensions surrounding values and attitudes relate to eventual purchase behaviour. | | |
| Perceptions of environment | | | |
| Fatalism | The belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable (Oxford Dictionary, 2019). | Concerns how invested, if at all, the participants are in sustainable foods, and their view on reality to some extent. | Q6 |
| Fatalism | | | |
| Knowledge of environment | The knowledge that each individual possesses regarding environmental issues and benefits of sustainable food products. | Concerns the knowledge which each individual possesses on environmental issues, which we argue is a determinant of attitudes towards sustainable foods, and is affected by the individual’s perceptions of the environment. | Q7 |
| Heuristics | Rules of thumb, or mental shortcuts which we as individuals rely on when making decisions (Solomon et al., 2013, p. 364). Heavily associated with bounded rationality, in that individuals are unable or unwilling to assess every aspect of a decision. | Concerns the decision-making processes of the participants, and through which means they decide to purchase a specific product. | Q8 |
| Marketing insights | More concretely aligned with current marketing efforts, to seek insights and understanding or possible foundations for future research to develop. | Utilized to gain an understanding on what can be improved in terms of product display, marketing etc., as well as to understand if there are differences between non-sustainable products and sustainable products in this decision-making process. | Q9 |
3.8.2 Interview guide
An interview guide, while not a complete requirement for qualitative endeavours, does help immensely in the efforts of collecting the necessary data. This is especially true in cases such as ours, in which the moderators have little experience in managing focus groups (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 473). In short, an interview guide is constructed in such a way that it holds all the major questions or points of discussion that the moderators wish to bring up during the focus group, in hopes that the present participants will argue for their respective answers and discuss amongst themselves as much as possible. As a general note, these discussion points or questions included in the interview guide are dependent on the preselected type of interview which is being held. For instance, in structured interviews or focus groups, there would be a plethora of different questions, each with concrete sub-questions and even possible answers (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 470). In our case, semi-structured focus groups, only the major questions have been written down, so as to allow the moderator to probe for answers with questions that may arise during the focus groups themselves.

Considering the above, we created an interview guide which we deemed fit to produce answers which could eventually be valuable to answer our research question. Each question aligns with at least one theoretical departure discussed in chapter 2, covering all the theoretical principles which are included in our suggested integrative model displayed in chapter 2.7. Further discussion and arguments surrounding these questions were presented in the chapter just prior to this one, operationalization. This interview guide can be found in Appendix 1, Interview guide.

3.9 Ethical considerations
"The avoidance of harm (non-maleficence) can be seen as the cornerstone of the ethical issues that confront those who undertake research" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 186). Indeed, that which is so eloquently put into words by the authors, is of great import to any given study. Without proper consideration of the ethical aspects of one’s research, one might cause harm on not only individual levels, but even globally in some cases. Maleficence can come in many forms however, begging the inclusion of two important questions. One, in which ways may the given research affect any possible participants in any negative way, and two, what can we as moderators and researchers do to prevent these mishappenings?

In relation to this study, we can identify a couple of elements which may cause some sort of harm to the respondents. Ultimately however, we must also be able to justify and come to terms with the fact that no matter how much effort we put in, some harm may still come. At this point, we must ask ourselves, is the research still justifiable? Until that point however, we will start with identifying the elements which may prove harmful in any way during the discourse of this research to the participants of the study. As we identify them, we will also describe the measures taken to prevent any kind of harm in relation to each element.

Saunders et al. (2009, p. 185) suggest possible privacy issues of participants as one of these elements. Indeed, through convenience and time-restrictions we as researchers reached out to our participants as a group, notifying all those within said group of the request we put on them. This means that approximately 12 people and their possible cooperation with us as researchers is no longer completely private to us and the individual
participant. However, due to the sampling techniques utilized, all of the asked participants knew many of each other, which we believe might decrease the need to be private. We did moreover assure each possible participant that the focus group to which they had been invited will be private to the extent that only the people attending each focus group will ever hear what is being said by who, and that no names will ever be published by us as authors in our work. One could argue that this is still not private, however we intend to make it known in the very beginning of the focus groups that if some participant does not want to respond to a question or discussion point that that is a perfectly viable option. The participants were also informed that if they wish, any of their opinions which they voice during the focus group can be removed from the summary of the focus group found in this study. A summary of the focus group that each participant attends will moreover be sent to that individual, at which point the participants can review the content and comment on any discrepancies. Ultimately, this is as much privacy as we are capable of offering to the participants, and knowing this before the focus groups themselves each possible participant has been notified that they are able to simply reject our invitation and do not participate in any focus group if they so wish.

Another element which Saunders et al. (2009, p. 185) consider is possible deception of participants. This includes instances in which we as moderators purposely lie or deceive the participants in any way for the betterment of the given study. Insofar, in no case have we lied or deceived them in any way, nor held back any information regarding the purpose of these focus groups. We have not shared with them the actual questions however, which one could consider deception to a certain extent, but again, the participants reserve the right to refuse answering any possible questions if they so wish. We do believe however that due to the selective sampling, in which most participants within the focus groups are well acquainted with each other prior to the focus groups, as well as well acquainted with the authors of this study and the moderators during the focus groups, that feelings of deception in some case would have been brought up before the focus groups. Nonetheless, we as authors have assessed the questions and feel that no questions should be intrusive or triggering in any shape or form during the focus groups, but should any participant feel uncomfortable in any way they have been informed that they are allowed to leave at any point during a focus group with no repercussions whatsoever.

Moreover, there might be individuals which we asked to participate which may feel some psychological pressure to not attend or to attend, causing not only stress but also anxiety. We assured each and every possible participant to attending this focus group is completely voluntary, and feel that very little could have otherwise been done to remove this element of stress. Anxiety we also feel that the selective sampling techniques help with, in that each possible participant is comfortable around each other, and should have no issues with both speaking their minds and respecting each other’s opinions.

Finally, while this is no element presented by Saunders et al. (2009), we felt it appropriate to put it into text. The main focus of this study is sustainability, and we are aware that some people are much more invested in this on both individual scales as well as societal and global. We do believe however, that with the measures we have taken through the selective sampling, that no issues should arise from any such investment and personal significance, but it is nonetheless, important to note. On par with this, throughout the course of the focus groups, we as moderators or the participants of the focus groups, might have affected each other’s knowledge of the subject, and perhaps even changed previous opinions or notions. One could argue that this is immoral or unethical, but it is also, in
our opinion, unavoidable. That being said, none of the topics which we discuss during these focus groups are false insofar as knowledge and science have currently pushed those topics. As such, if explanations or similar matters do occur, these are grounded in mostly accepted knowledge, and should cause no harm.

Other things that can be considered is how this research and its focus groups may affect participants lives, family-relations or work-related situations, as well as any possible societal or global harm. It should be noted upon here however that no participant is forced to believe anything we as moderators say during the focus groups, whether their reluctance to believe us is based in theological differences or otherwise. Moreover, any findings or suggestions made by this study have no harmful intent on society or the world. That being said, there might be individuals or factions which do not agree with our view that sustainable foods need to be purchased more, and that non-sustainable products should be purchased and consumed less. While we as researchers may recognize that opinion, we also reserve the right to disagree with it, and justify this research nonetheless.

Ultimately, we as authors believe that primarily, the instances in which any harm may be caused to one or more participants is small due to the non-aggressive subject which is being explored. Secondly, in cases wherein psychological and physical injury may occur, we have taken the precautions that we are able to take, to still justify and argue for the continuance of this study.

3.10 Method of analysis

Qualitative data analysis is founded in words and the meaning of them in the context in which they are said (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 482). Actual procedures of qualitative analysis are plenty, and according to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 482) there is no right or wrong way to this process. Instead, it is up to the researchers to choose that which aligns itself most with the purpose of a study. In this regard, the analysis of our empirical material is based in as much induction as it is in deduction, as we introduced in previous methodological chapters. This is strengthened by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 502), which discuss that such a mix is oftentimes required to properly analyse empirically gathered material.

In this study, we adopted a variation of a form of analysis called data display and analysis, originating from the work of Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Saunders et al., 2009, p. 503). This procedure is argued by them to consist of three steps: data reduction, data display, and ultimately drawing conclusions. To elaborate on this, data reduction is the process through which all the accumulated empirical material is summarized into material that is less complicated to read and understand. Data display is the second step, and is the process of visualizing the summarized data into either illustrative networks or matrixes. The point of this is to display the relationships between the different collections of nodes or themes of the data. Finally, based on these relationships, one should attempt to draw conclusions or suggestions in relation to the research purpose and questions.

Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Saunders et al., 2009, p. 505) state that there is no exact structure to follow apart from these three pillars, and Saunders et al. (2009, p. 505) comment on this, saying that researchers should use this as a way of finding the most appropriate structure for their own research. Bearing this in mind, we adjusted this form of analysis to one that we deemed more appropriate for this study. Data reduction was followed, which resulted in the summary of our focus groups in chapter 4 Empirical
Material, but the extent to which the second step, data display, seemed to reduce the empirical material was deemed inappropriate in relation to the exploratory nature of this study. As such, we took to the suggested pillars as guidelines, as was argued by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 505), instead of concrete rules. While this suggested that the time consumed on analysis would be greater than if we followed the procedure to a point, we would argue that this is worth it. In short, this variation facilitates more material to be analysed, which is more important if put in relation to the purpose of this study, which concerns the betterment of our understanding of the green consumer profile.

It is however important to note upon the drawbacks of this type of analysis. As with most qualitative analysis, the risks of author subjectivity is apparent, and the variation of analysis which we have chosen is no exempt from this. Indeed, due to its malleable structure, one could argue that the risk of subjectivity is increased in this case, compared to other methods of analysis which offer a more rigid structure and framework. We would argue that this is true, but would weigh the possible flexibility in analysis as more important in this exploratory endeavour than the benefits that would be gained from other analytical methods.

3.11 Data quality
In any given study, data quality is highly important to consider. In relation to semi-structured interviews and focus groups, Saunders et al. (2009, p. 326) argue for primarily two different criteria to be considered: reliability and generalisability.

Reliability concerns the issues stemming from standardization, or in other terms, whether or not different researchers would reach similar results if the same research was conducted (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008; Silverman, 2007, cited in Saunders et al., 2009, p. 326). Saunders et al. (2009, p. 328), in relation to this, argue the point that reliability, while important in qualitative research, faces issues. Qualitative research, as we have discussed earlier, is context-dependant, and focuses primarily on the situation in which any given observations are placed. In this way, reaching full reliability, or full replicative ability, would not be attainable without sacrificing the flexibility and complexity of qualitative research. What this means however is that as much reliability as possible should be attempted to attain, without sacrificing desired flexibility. By continuously documenting the ways in which we have approached this study and its purpose, by displaying research philosophy, method, design and more, we would argue that we have reached this point of reliability. As such, in future endeavours in which other researchers would attempt to replicate this study, we have accounted for each instance in which this study could deviate from other studies, and have as such provided as much understanding of our study as possible.

If reliability is concerned with the ways in which we account for the various research approaches within this study, generalisability on the other hand relates to the findings of our study. In other terms, how general or how applicable are the findings which we find to other contexts, situations or environments? The importance of this criterion is founded in the theoretical propositions, and the ability for researchers to accept the findings as foundations for future research (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 335). While we agree with Saunders et al. (2009, p. 335), in that generalisability is important, we would furthermore argue that the context in which this generalisability is applicable is far more important. In short, we do not say that the findings of this research are generalisable to a greater extent than within the context of our focus groups. We do however suggest that this might be
the case, and prompt future research to investigate the scope of this generalisability. This being said, we have treated generalisability in a similar way as we have reliability. By continuously documenting the ways in which we have accumulated our empirical material, and accounting for the context of our focus groups as much as possible, bearing in mind our ethical considerations, we would argue that we have attained the point of generalisability that is best suited for this exploratory study.

3.12 Methodological summary
This chapter has delved into the methodological departures through which this study is being conducted, and the argumentations behind each of these departures. To summarize these choices, we opted for a research philosophy founded in the concept of pragmatism, with a research approach that combines both deductive and inductive reasoning. We chose to conduct a qualitative research method, with an exploratory research design. We opted to collect data through semi-structured focus groups, basing the sampling of these focus groups on a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques.

Three focus groups with 4-6 participants in each was planned, with questions that had been operationalized from the theoretical departures into empirical measurements, conducted with the aid of an interview guide that served both as an aid to the moderators as well as an element of repeatability.

Ethical considerations were made as exhaustive as possible, and data quality that relied on reliability and generalisability were displayed. Finally, the method through which we will analyse the empirical material was discussed and argued for.
4 Empirical material

The following chapter accounts for the details surrounding the conducted focus groups and empirical considerations. Moreover, it displays a summary of the gathered empirical material, collected from three focus groups. This part’s structure is based around the operationalized questions and their order as previously shown. This structure was deemed most appropriate to as objectively as possible be able to analyse the content in the correct contexts.

As a note, the data reduction of the individual focus groups yielded transcriptions that are highly similar to the empirical summary that follows. For this reason, the summarised transcriptions of the individual focus groups have not been included as appendices in this study.

4.1 Convenience sampling implementation and implications

The decision to use social media, more specifically Facebook, for sampling purposes was made due to the low financial cost of this approach. Due to social networks within the master’s program in business administration at Umeå University, we considered ourselves to have access to a sufficiently large pool of potential participants to conduct our study without necessitating financial expenditures related to distribution of invitations. We then invited 31 participants who we knew to be students at Umeå University to sign up for focus groups, for which we had suggested four preliminary dates and times. The specific number of contacted individuals was determined and limited by accessibility, since we were not able to find a way of getting in touch with all students at the university. This is in part due to data security regulations, which limit the availability of contact information. In connection to the invitation, the participants received a written message explaining that the theme of the focus groups would be what makes them purchase (or not purchase) sustainable food products as well as criteria for eligibility as a participant. The only criterion was that all participants must regularly purchase foods themselves, since it would not be meaningful to ask about the food purchasing habits of individuals who only consume food that someone else has chosen. However, it was stressed that no prior knowledge of the topic area was needed, since participant expertise would not be necessary for the study and the perception that one had to be knowledgeable about the topic of the focus groups could potentially have deterred some participants. Furthermore, the participants were informed that the focus groups would take no longer than 2 hours each, that the sessions would be recorded, that anonymity would be ensured and that the gathered data would be used for the purpose of this study. However, the participants were not informed of the actual questions to be discussed beforehand, since this could have increased the risk of the participants preparing answers for the focus group, rather than providing genuine input.

The 31 invitations yielded 12 responses, resulting in a response rate of 39%. We chose not to regard current level of sustainable purchasing as an obstacle to participation, with the motivation that a sample consisting of a wider spectrum of purchasing habits would be more likely to stimulate discussion. As such, there was no reason to disqualify any of the 12 respondents from participation in the study. The 12 participants were then sorted into three focus groups with four participants each. The decision to use the minimum number of participants per focus group was made due to the authors’ lack of experience with moderating group discussions. The sample could also have been divided into e.g. two groups of six, but we felt that this would have increased the risk of lack of time
becoming an issue, thus preventing sufficiently thorough discussion of each question. After dividing the participants into the three focus groups, the groups were contacted separately through social media in order to specify a time and date of data collection that would be convenient for each participant.

While each participant in the sample did not personally know every other participant, every participant knew at least one other person in each focus group. Each participant had also had at least some prior contact with at least one of the authors. This is a result of our convenience sampling method, whereby the brunt of the invited participants attended the Business Administration program at Umeå University. Our selection process may have several implications for the quality of the data. First, the sample can be argued to be fairly homogenous in terms of age and level of education. As a consequence of the international nature of the university program, respondents of varying nationalities were included in the sample. This limits the homogeneity of the sample to some extent, but instead increases the likelihood of yielding different perspectives during a focus group discussion. While a homogenous sample may limit the generalizability of conclusions drawn from the data, it may also increase the likelihood of reaching saturation within the available time. This, we argue, is a trade-off that is reasonable due to the exploratory nature of this study and the constraints of time and other resources that are inherent in most master theses. Second, samples that consist of people who know each other may naturally affect the opinions that are voiced during a focus group session. It is possible that participants would not feel comfortable speaking their true minds in front of people that they know, which would limit the usefulness of the collected data. However, many people also feel more comfortable with actively contributing to discussions with familiar faces rather than strangers. It is impossible to say exactly how the social ties within this sample affects the collected data, and so it can only be noted that we are aware of the potential implications of our approach. In order to decrease the risk of participants avoiding to give honest responses, we decided to include an opening statement at the beginning of each focus group, where we explicitly stated that there can be no right or wrong answers, and that the aim of the session is to have an open and honest discussion, devoid of any judgement. Furthermore, the questions in the interview guide were designed in a way that did not imply that any particular purchasing behaviour or opinion might be preferable to others. As such, we argue that adequate steps to limit the potential negative aspects of the chosen sample were taken.

4.2 Focus group description and empirical considerations
Three focus groups were ultimately conducted, with four participants in each, for a total of 12 different participants. As was planned, these participants were invited through social media. The first focus group took 1hr 37min, the second took 1hr 33min, and the final focus group took 1hr 59min, for a total material of 5hrs 9 min. All of this material was recorded vocally, with only sound and no video, through a software called Audacity. When summarizing the material, we primarily used material that was, in our subjective opinion, related to the question at hand or topics that in other ways related to the material written in this thesis. As such, not all that was said during the focus groups can be found in the summary. This follows the principles presented by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 486) surrounding data sampling. We opted for this approach, in contrast to classic transcription, due to the relaxed atmosphere cultivated during the focus groups. Classic transcription would only have produced incoherent sentences voiced by the participants, which would have yielded little in the way of analysable material.
Due to what we attribute to our inexperience of focus groups, despite having had the questions looked at by the supervisor of this thesis, we had to change one question after the second focus group. This was question 5, which was, after focus group 2, split into two separate questions. While it worked fine during the first focus group, it performed poorly during the second, which prompted us to commit to this change. This change was successful and the discussion surrounding the topic of this question was improved between the focus group that we noticed the issue, and the focus group in which we applied the solution.

As has been mentioned, we accumulated 12 total participants. Their ages ranged from 20 years old to 29 years old, between 4 female participants and 8 male participants. Of these 12 participants, 4 were native Swedish, 3 come from other European countries, 3 come from African countries, and one participant did not disclose nationality. Each of the non-native participants have lived in Sweden for a minimum of 17 months. In the end, we would argue that saturation was met after the third focus group, as very few new insights were drawn from this focus group that had not been mentioned in earlier focus groups as well. We do realize that even more focus groups could perhaps have improved the subsequent analysis, but we felt content with the material that had been gathered after the first three. We furthermore felt that more focus groups would have reduced our time to analyse, which we gathered as more important at the time of writing.

4.3 Empirical summary

**Question 1:** What do you consider to be sustainable foods?

Across all three focus groups, there were many different opinions and notions that surrounded this question. In the first focus group, Participant 4 considered it something that is environmentally friendly, that was not contributing to global warming, greenhouse gases, so anything not to do with cattle. More or less naturally grown or produced. Participant 1 said that the first thing that sprang to her head is vegan, but agrees with what Participant 1 says, continuing the sentiment saying that it’s also when everything has been ethically produced, including considerations of animal rights. Participant 2 brings in people as well to the conversation, in terms of fair wages. Participant 3 agrees, and thinks of vegan food, but also considers organic and ethically produced foods. He also mentions that red meats are not sustainable in his view.

At this point, the moderators probed the participants, as many had mentioned that they do not consider meat to be a sustainable food, if this goes for all meat? For example there are also organic meat products out there, but would you still consider these product sustainable, because they are by definition meat products? Participant 1 considered that it is possible to produce meat and be a meat eater but still be sustainably conscious, and thinks that as long as the meat is produced in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way, red meat is acceptable. Although she doesn’t know how easy this is to put into practice. Participant 3 agrees but emphasizes that the volume of our meat consumption is relevant in this issue.

The moderators, intrigued by where the discussion was headed, probed further, asking if the participants could explain if they had a line where they would draw the amount for this behaviour. Participant 2 stated that he thinks that people consume more meat than is necessary, and suggests that meat should perhaps be only consumed during special
occasions such as Christmas or other celebratory events, but not daily or even weekly. Participant 4 suggested that producers should be responsible for limiting meat production but recognizes that this is problematic due to that it is businesses we’re talking about. Participant 1 thinks it's unnecessary to eat meat every day. She admits that she is no expert in nutrition but thinks that people could limit their meat consumption to twice a week without experiencing negative health effects.

A final probing question for question 1 was asked by the moderators at this point, asking when it comes to other food sources such as grains or greens how would you in those cases make the distinction between sustainable foods and not sustainable or standard alternatives? Participant 2 said that one should consider the natural growing seasons of fruits and vegetables and avoid foods that cannot be locally produced during the particular seasons you’re in. Participant 4 pointed out that there can be negative environmental effects such as tillage of land related to greens. Participant 3 also mentioned issues surrounding chemicals that are used in the production of certain greens.

For the second focus group, Participant 4 considered sustainable foods in terms of locally grown, vegetarian foods and vegetables. Participant 3 agreed, stating that sustainable food is locally grown and produced in a fair way. Participant 2 however didn’t think that sustainable foods have to be naturally produced, for example, she would consider GMOs to be sustainable. Participant 1 moreover emphasized the overall impact of production and transportation to market of products, stating more or less that he considers any product sustainable if you could continue producing it in perpetuity without causing damage to the environment, regardless of whether that product is naturally produced. Participant 2 commented that some foods, such as rice, automatically should be disqualified as sustainable foods in Sweden due to that they need to be transported from faraway countries, after having been given an example such as this one from Participant 1.

At this point, the moderators probed why some of the participants argued why they think vegetables are considered sustainable foods, to which Participant 4 stated that he thinks that vegetables consume less resources the produce compared to meat. Not much else was discussed in relation to this question during the second focus group.

For the third focus group, Participant 1 considered sustainable foods to be something that gives more than it takes, specifically considering environmental aspects. He continued to say that plasticlly packaged food does not appear to be environmentally friendly, and also mentions meat which has been produced in non-fair ways for the animals. Participant 4 agreed, and adds that biodiversity is a factor that should also be considered. He also argued that the environmental impact of specific food products should be put in relation to nutritional value. He mentioned that lettuce takes less resources to produce than meat, but that meat contains significantly more nutrients than lettuce. Therefore it is unfair to only consider the environmental impact of the product. Participant 2 considered sustainable foods to have two explicit factors; the producing factor, and the consuming factor. The producing factor she says concerns if it adds to or reduces the environment, whereas the consuming factor concerns how a sustainable food affects the environment after consumption. Participant 1 continued by stating that he moreover considers sustainable foods in a production way as well, saying that sustainability is reached by not reducing biodiversity of the ecosystem. He mentioned palm oil as an example of a product that claims to be produced in a sustainable way due to that palm oil trees are being
replanted as they are cut down, but that much of other parts of the rainforest is simultaneously being cut down but replaced not by their own species, but by palm oil trees. Participant 4 seemed to agree with this sentiment. Participant 3 said that he has a critical view of sustainable foods, that mostly involves the process of production and the transportation of these products. He mentioned that he can have a organic food and eat it in Italy, which he would consider to be sustainable, but if he were to eat the same product in Sweden, then it would not be considered sustainable in his opinion. In short, his view of sustainable foods is food that he can pick up locally, and that has been produced locally, and that has been produced in a way that can be continued in perpetuity.

**Question 2:** How often do you purchase what you consider to be sustainable foods?

In the *first focus group*, Participant 1 considered herself to make more efforts nowadays to choose eco-friendly or sustainable foods over standard foods, but does not avoid standard foods if there is a particular product that she wants. Participant 4 highlighted problems with identifying products that are actually sustainable compared to products that only market themselves as sustainable. He tries to do other things such as limit his use of plastic instead. Participant 3 agreed, stating that he considers his choices in store but does not plan weekly for the food that he consumes to be sustainable. He purchases what he wants in the moment, but does put in a bit more effort than he previously did. Participant 2 stated that he tries to purchase more products that are either regional or are labelled as sustainable, and that he tries to completely avoid products that contain palm oil.

The participants were probed if they could give an estimate of the percentage of the number of products that you purchase that you would consider sustainable, to which Participant 1 said about 60% sustainable products and 40% standard, but seemed somewhat unsure about her answer. Participant 2 argued for an even 50/50 split, which Participant 3 also voiced. Participant 4 rarely purchases sustainable products, unless they’re products which he specifically knows he enjoys better than its standard alternative, putting his ratio at about 20% sustainable products.

In the *second focus group*, Participant 1 and Participant 2 mentioned that they live together, and state that they are more or less vegetarians. Due to this at least Participant 2 considered that they purchase among 80% sustainable foods. Participant 1 added that the portion of explicitly sustainably labelled foods is lower than that. This is due to the price premium in their opinion. Participant 4 however says that he doesn’t really care about the environment when purchasing, but does in his opinion eat quite sustainably, saying that these products are often cheaper to him. He estimated that 60% of his food consumption is sustainable. Participant 3 stated that she eats a lot of meat, but that this meat has been hunted and processed by members of her own family, which she considers sustainable. However, when she shops for food in store the price premium discourages her from purchasing sustainable foods, as she is, in her own words, a poor student. If she had to estimate, she would say about 35% of her consumption is sustainable but wishes it was more.

For this question in the *third focus group*, Participant 4 said that about 90% of the time, he purchases food that he considers sustainable. He adds that he is keeping a low-carb diet, consisting of largely meat, butter and vegetables. Participant 2 said that she purchases sustainable foods when she has the money for it, but can’t put an exact number
on it. Participant 1 broke his sustainable foods down into categories instead, saying that eggs and meats he primarily purchases as Swedish or locally produced. In other food categories he is more lenient with purchasing standard options. He went on to explain that he invests the extra money into sustainable food categories that he believes are most important. Participant 3 agreed, saying that he tries to actively choose sustainable foods when it comes to fresh products, but that he is more lenient when it comes to packaged products such as cereal. He also mentioned that with some products, he continues to purchase simply because he can find no other alternative that offers the same taste, such as Nutella.

**Question 3: What are your feelings about sustainable foods?**

In the *first focus group*, Participant 3 immediately voiced a pressure from family and friends, stating that he feels that more people are becoming aware of sustainability issues, and that he feels bad if he purchases something that is not sustainable. In the end however he considers this pressure a good thing for the long-term, but that the pressure is something he both has to endure and get more used to. Participant 4 agreed with Participant 3’s statements, and mentions that this pressure seems to be higher in Sweden than certain other cultures. Participant 1 also feels a societal pressure and basically agrees with the aforementioned statements. She moreover feels that there is some kind of elitist stigma surrounding sustainable foods, in that she feels that she is being judged whenever she does not purchase sustainable foods.

Here the moderators probed the participants, questioning whether the stigma that they had mentioned gives them more negative feelings toward sustainable foods. Participant 1 denied this but says that she feels that people tend to get put into boxes depending on their consumption choices leading to preconceptions about who a person is. She mentioned that once she turned vegan as a test and felt the stigma originate from people around her, in that she was expected now to make certain choices all the time simply based on one choice of food consumption. She has no negative feelings towards sustainable foods themselves, but rather about the way people make her feel about sustainable foods. Participant 2 mentioned that, in his view, the word vegan has some negative connotations due to hardcore vegan individuals that force their agenda on people. His immediate instinct when seeing vegan food is to avoid it due to this perceived stigma or perception. He thinks that society should try to move the connotations of veganism from the hardcore notions to a more acceptable view. This was also followed up upon by the moderators, which asked if these alleged hardcore vegans were people that the participant in question knows personally and had discussed these matters with, or if it was more a societal or internet-based matter. Participant 2 elaborated, stating that he’s never actually had a vegan walk up to him and accuse him of bad behaviour, but that it is more a thing that he’s read on the internet which has shaped his opinions of matters. Participant 1 said that she’s had this type of interaction or experience with a vegan who lectured her how bad certain foods are due to the way they are produced, and that she should stop buying these foods. However, this actually made her think about her consumption and investigate more into the treatment of animals and the production of foods. In the end, she went vegan for a month and learned some new things. Participant 1 revisited the idea that there is pressure to be completely vegan if you call yourself vegan, and that it would be better if a more balanced approach was accepted. She would prefer a scenario where one can make vegan consumption choices most of the time (but not always) without people trying to put a label on it.
In the second focus group, Participant 4 stated that he feels negatively about sustainable foods, since he believes that products that are branded as sustainable generally are of lesser quality and quantity than their standard counterparts for more money. He furthermore stated that products that are labelled as eco-friendly or sustainable try to compensate for something else. Participant 2 feels that sustainable foods are important, primarily for environmental reasons. She also stated that she feels bad that her family eats a lot of meat even though she does not. Furthermore, she does not like products which are labelled as ecological, and would prefer what she calls “conventional farming”. She believes that GMOs are the future and that marketing of explicitly ecological foods tends to be fake branding. Participant 1 stated that he feels personally good when purchasing sustainable foods. Participant 3 also mentioned the word “limiting” to this question, in that she becomes frustrated because she feels that she should purchase more sustainable foods, but due to a price premium she is unable to.

At this point, Participant 1, 2, and 3 engaged in a discussion about how it is difficult to make decisions when there are many different options. The conversation continued with Participant 3 going into the topic of humans being habit animals, stating that once we find a product that we like we tend to stick to it, rather than trying out different options. The question for the second focus group concluded with Participant 1 stating that his emotions depend on the category of sustainable foods, continuing with saying that he feels only positive feelings about KRAV-märkt foods for instance, because that is, in his words, only about human sustainability.

For the third focus group, Participant 2 said that when she has the funds to purchase sustainable foods and actually does it, she feels proud and responsible, generally positive and also that she is contributing to something to the environment. She continued after being probed about her feelings when she would not have the necessary funds, that she would not feel guilty about purchasing standard options instead. Participant 1 considered it from both a personal view and a global view. Personally, he feels good when he purchases sustainable foods. However, he feels that it doesn’t really matter from a global perspective. He moreover mentions the word “pressured” when discussing purchasing sustainable foods. He continues to discuss that he feels that the world could severely limit its consumption of food in general, mentioning the amount of unnecessary snacks being consumed every day. Participant 2 probed Participant 1, saying that he mentioned “doing his part” earlier in the discussion, to which Participant 1 agreed that he feels that it is a duty in some way to do as much as possible with his actions to limit humanity’s detrimental effect on the global ecosystem which is home to other animals and forms of life. He mentions a sense of frustration related to the feeling that he is contributing to a sustainable consumption but that others are not. Participant 3 also stated that he is frustrated, but tries to convert this frustration into motivation instead. He went on to say that he is trying to set a good example for the people close to him, in the hopes that small impacts can have a big impact eventually. He furthermore feels that it is important to support local food producers as this will make it possible to achieve a shift toward local and sustainable food production in the long term. Participant 4 stated that his motivations for purchasing sustainable foods mainly are that he considers them to be healthier. As such, he does not have any strong feelings specifically towards sustainable foods but rather toward healthy foods. It is just a coincidence that most of his consumption is what he would consider sustainable, due to his lifestyle choices. Participant 1 continued the discussion by saying that it is difficult to assess the sustainability of products sometimes.
due to their process of production, taking bananas as an example. He mentioned that the ecological bananas that we see in the store seem unnaturally perfect visually, which to him suggests that the ugly bananas have been filtered out even though they are perfectly edible. He questioned whether this practice is sustainable. Participant 4 agreed with this sentiment, although using a different example of his own. When probed the participants agree that there is confusion regarding what is considered to be sustainable products.

**Question 4:** Studies show that consumers generally state that they are concerned with the environment, but that their actual purchasing behaviour does not correspond with these statements. Why do you think that may be the case?

In the first focus group, Participant 2 opened the discussion by suggesting that the attitude behaviour gap may occur because sustainable foods tend to be more expensive, to which Participant 1 agreed but also suggested that the problem may lie in knowledge and education about what is sustainable. She suggests that just because a product is labelled as sustainable it doesn't really say anything about how sustainable that the product is in reality. She also suggests that availability may sometimes be an issue. In conclusion she thinks that people may care about the environment but not know how to act on it. Participant 3 stated that even though he feels like he knows how to make sustainable choices he's so set in his old habits that it is hard for him to change his behaviour in the purchasing situations. He again mentioned that he does not plan his shopping trips and that this may be a reason why his old habits tend to take over when he is in the store. He also mentioned that he does think about the prices since he is a student and price therefore is the more important factor for him. Participant 1 agreed that planning is an important part of switching to more sustainable purchasing habits, referring to her experiences of going vegan and states that it took a lot of planning because it was a completely different way of eating and preparing her food and that it therefore takes a lot of effort. She suggests that busy people don't have the time needed to make the effort it takes to plan for example vegan meals and that this may be a reason for why more people didn't buy sustainable foods.

As a follow-up question, the respondents were asked whether they think it's more difficult to put together their regular shopping cart consisting of sustainable products rather than standard products. The group as a whole agreed that it is in fact more difficult at least in instances where a shift toward more sustainable foods means that the entire menu is going to change

To continue the discussion, the moderators suggested that there are in fact many foods that have an exactly similar corresponding product that is more sustainable or at least is branded as more sustainable. The moderators asked if the participants feel that it's difficult to find these corresponding products because of a general lack of availability, or if is it something else in the purchasing decision or purchasing situation which makes it difficult. Participant 2 answered, saying that he feels that the labelling of sustainable foods often is not clear enough to capture his attention quickly, and once more emphasizes the importance of price. Participant 1 mentioned that sustainable and unsustainable alternatives often tend to be next to each other. She said that she feels like this layout makes the different options blend together and suggests that the price difference between standard and sustainable products may be of more importance in a situation where the products are directly adjacent to each other. She speculated that this issue could be solved by a store layout that has all sustainable products completely separated from the standard products.
alternatives. She then pointed out that she thinks that people who get more used to purchasing sustainable foods also gradually will become more okay with paying a price premium. She further pointed out that the price difference in her mind actually isn’t that great between sustainable and standard products. Participant 2 agreed, saying that it is a question about breaking the habit of buying standard products instead of sustainable ones. He suggested that consumers need to get used to looking at other options than those that they regularly purchase.

Participant 3 stated that there seems to be a lot of sustainable options in the stores according to him. In his case, the problem is that he has not had the courage to try new products. When asked to specify what he meant by this statement he said that he has noticed the media advertising new brands that for example provide alternative protein sources. His perception of these new products has been that they are pricier and that they still might not taste as good as the standard options. Therefore, he chooses to continue purchasing his regular products. He mentions the word attitudes and uses the expression “waste of money”. Participant 4 also agreed. Food such as tofu or other vegan or vegetarian alternatives can be seen in the lights that they don't have any taste in his opinion. He continues stating that these alternatives are in fact still sustainable.

The moderators restated the question and suggested a summary of the discussion, in that many participants feel that there is a need to create a sense of urgency. But the participants themselves did not necessarily agree that there is a lack of urgency, but rather that there is a lack of incentives. Participant 2 delved deeper into this response saying that there is often, as has been previously discussed, a label on many of these products but there is no real knowledge about what these labels actually mean and he argued that some sort of motivation or incentive is required. He went on and mentioned an example provided by the moderators in form of cookies on the table saying that he would really enjoy if there was a table or some sort of display on the package explaining what the purchasing of this product actually means for the environment. He discussed this in global terms. Participant 3 agreed with Participant 2 saying that an urgency would make him feel more pressured in a negative way and that brands or similar things should put their focus on incentives and motivations instead of a negative pressure. He mentioned that these matters could change his own consumption patterns or at least speculates that this could be the case. His argument continued, saying that this pressure that he feels is horrible for his consumption patterns, that if there is too much pressure on him he will most likely not even touch the product. At least he wants the option to consider the options for himself without any external pressure. Participant 1 agreed and continued saying that it would be better if there was encouragement in some form or another by making sustainable options easier, or for making the choices themselves easier to make. She continued by stating that companies could change their business models to better facilitate the ease of choosing these options, and also mentions in-store options such as putting more sustainable food on better display than they are currently.

At this point in the first focus group, Participant 2 mentioned a rather contradictory situation in Germany where products that may be labelled as sustainable have plastic packaging which he considers to be a contradiction to sustainable ways. The moderators probed how the participants feel when they experience these contradictory situations. Participant 4 feels that it defeats the whole purpose of sustainability and all the other participants think that it becomes really confusing as to what sustainability even means anymore. The same participant continued with an example from his life in France

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mentioning local markets, and states that these are in his opinion very sustainable and their way of providing and selling the foods that are available, which he really likes. The conversation continued with Participant 3 that also experienced these kinds of markets and really believes in them. In his own opinion, they are more sustainable, pushing on the word “local”, but he does mention that these local markets are often way more expensive than their commercialized counterparts.

The moderators now probed about the aforementioned incentives, and whether the participants consider these incentives from local, global or societal perspectives. Participant 2 would like to see a combination, and feels that often times the few global impacts one can see are very abstract, but wouldn't mind seeing for instance reduced carbon footprint or similar elements for local or regional farmers. Participant 1 responded to this by saying that such a scheme probably would work best to target people who already have an environmentally friendly mindset. In her view, the best way to reach standard consumers would be through a price incentive. Participant 4 pointed out that it is very difficult to produce sustainable products at the same speed or cost as standard options. However he did agree that marketers should aim to change the mindset of consumers first, referring to dismantling the stigma that was mentioned earlier in the discussion. Participant 3 mentioned that the debate climate surrounding sustainable and vegan foods is currently very polarizing and that he does not wish to take part in that discussion. He went on to say that he wishes that he could say that his incentives for purchasing sustainable foods were related to a societal perspective but in the end his incentives are for the most part personal.

In the second focus group, Participant 1 brought up internal and external attitudes, suggesting that it may be socially beneficial to state that you care about the environment more than you actually do. Participant 3 compared this to self-identity and image, basically agreeing with Participant 1 but in different terms. Participant 2 continued the discussion, stating that she feels that it is difficult to take that step to purchase and consume more sustainable foods without people around you who do it already. Participant 4 thinks that people do care about the environment, but that they are more motivated to take active action in environmental issues that they feel they can actually impact. He brought up an example between global warming, which he considers to be too big an issue to grasp, compared to the protection of a local lake which he considers to be more attainable. Participant 1 brought up the concept of money again, saying that even though we might wish to be more sustainable, if you can’t afford it then obviously there will be differences between attitudes and behaviour.

Here the moderators probed the participants, asking if everyone agreed if price is the most important barrier holding them back, to which all the participants discuss price and quality and oftentimes the relation between these two barriers. Participant 2 also mentioned familiarity with a product. Participant 3 brings up her habits again, saying that it is difficult for her to break her purchasing patterns. She also mentioned that she does not always check prices, but that she feels that she knows that certain brands or products are within her price range.

Interested in one of the participants earlier responses, in which Participant 4 stated that he felt that quality is worse for sustainable products, the moderators probed this participant, asking the participant makes this distinction of the quality of a sustainable versus a standard product. Participant 4 said he doesn’t really have any criteria in mind
when making this distinction, but does it more on an assumption basis. He feels that standard products are not limited by environmentally friendly production methods, meaning that they can focus more on keeping costs low and quality high. He makes this assumption all the time, and believes it to be true.

Finally, the moderators asked the participants how often they compared prices, to which Participant 3 and 4 said only when they buy unfamiliar or new products.

In the third focus group, Participant 1 and 2 considered the social aspects, that people do not wish to be blamed for making unsustainable choices, and also mentioned that there is some social prestige of saying that you purchase sustainable foods, and a need to be accepted. Participant 3 agreed with the other two participants, but also mentioned an aspect of knowledge. He explained this by saying that people including himself may have a general knowledge of sustainability but that they have no idea what the exact environmental effect of different products are. Participant 1 said that in his view many people feel good when they purchase sustainable foods, but that they do not prioritize in a way that makes it economically feasible to do so regularly. He mentioned an example in which consumers spend too much money at the bar and then decide that they are unable to purchase sustainable foods, because they are too expensive. In his view people generally care about the environment, but do not consider sustainable purchasing a necessary expense, but rather a luxury. In his view, this is due to lacking knowledge of environmental issues. Participant 2 agreed with all the other participants, and added that her perception is that people in general are unaware of how urgent the situation is from an environmental perspective. Participant 4 considered the issue from a psychological perspective, in that people tend to overvalue certain sustainable foods, which makes them feel like they are sustainable, even though the majority of their purchases might be unsustainable. He speculated that this surplus in value might stem from price differences, or an added emotional closeness to certain products. He mentioned studies that have shown that humans tend to overvalue their positive actions compared to their negative ones, and speculates that this may apply to our perceptions of our own purchasing habits.

Question 5: What are your reasons for purchasing sustainable foods, and what are barriers that prevent you from doing so more regularly?

For the first focus group, Participant 1 said that her reasons are the environment and reducing her carbon footprint and health reasons. She feels that a more plant-based diet is healthier and more sustainable. Participant 2 agreed that the discussion regarding the health issues related to red meats have made him change his consumption habits. He also mentioned societal pressure to act in favour of the environment and states that he wants to make more decisions that are good for the environment, that are beneficial for the future. When probed about the last statement he said that he wants to make decisions that do not put too much strain on the environment.

When probed about barriers Participant 3 mentioned price and stated that it is still difficult to discern which products are actually good for the environment and which ones are only trying to capitalize on the sustainability trend through labelling. He also stated that availability is an issue in smaller stores. Participant 4 stated that he does not think that price should be an issue when it comes to something as important as protecting the environment but admits that price sometimes is an issue for him as a student.
Participant 2 revisited the example of the supposedly environmentally friendly cucumbers that are wrapped in plastic. He mentioned that a recurring problem for sustainable products is that it is difficult to know why these products should be considered more sustainable than the other alternatives in the store.

When probed about how regularly participants price check, Participants 1 and 2 stated that they generally check all the prices of products they purchase while Participant 4 stated that he checks most of the prices of products. Participant 3 stated that he did not have anything to add. All participants agreed that they had some tolerance for a price premium for sustainable products but that the cumulative effect of purchasing sustainable products would be quite large price wise.

For the second focus group, the participants felt that this question had already been covered in the previous question, and referred to their answers there.

For the third focus group, Participant 3 stated that he does it for taste and health reasons, but also because he wishes to help local endeavours such as farmers because he considers this to be the only path to long-term sustainable consumption. Participant 4 mentioned that his original interest in sustainability began with his concern about the environment, but that nowadays his primary reason for purchasing sustainable foods concerns health. After being probed whether this concerns all categories of sustainable foods, Participant 4 agreed, but specifically relates the question to locally grown foods, in that their biome is more suited for him. Participant 1 does not care about the health benefits, but more for his interest in food in general. He mentioned that he is very influenced by well-accomplished chefs, who recommend the use of sustainable foods as ingredients. He perceives sustainable foods to have superior taste and quality, and mentions that he associates them with a feeling of being close to nature which is a good thing. Participant 2 agreed with the health, taste and quality but adds that she mainly purchases sustainable foods for occasions which in her opinion call for nicer meals and occasions which she considers to be special. Participant 4 added to his reasons that purchasing sustainable foods in his view might affect the demand for certain products, which in his opinion is something good. He said that he at least shows his interest. At this point, the participants were probed if they could rank their motivations in order of importance. Participant 1 said that his motivations in all forms stem from a sense of well-being whenever he perceives himself to engage in purchasing and consumption of food products that, in his mind, bring him closer to nature. Participant 2 said that she would rate health and taste reasons as the main motivations, and that the feeling of pride and happiness she gets from contributing to the environment is a by-product from the purchase itself, and not a motivation for it. She also mentioned that her knowledge of sustainability has recently increased, which has led to her being more caring about which products she chooses.

For barriers in the third focus group, Participant 4 stated that availability is an issue for him, in that some products do not offer sustainable alternatives in his view. Participant 2 sees a barrier in the many strategies of differentiation that companies have adopted. With more and more products saying they are sustainable, it becomes, in her opinion, difficult to assess how sustainable some of these products are in relation to their competitors. In a way, she has begun doubting for example ecological branding. Participant 3 first mentioned his habits as a barrier, and then goes on to mention knowledge as a barrier, and also agreeing with the sentiments regarding availability and accessibility. He continued, stating that he has an issue with the prices of sustainable foods when in
supermarkets for instance. Participant 1 mainly discussed availability, but also mentions price and knowledge. Participant 4 continued his previous discussion, stating that if for instance restaurants would more explicitly mention which dishes were ecological or sustainable, he would be happy to pay a price premium for it instead of standard options. He mentioned that the need to be pragmatic sometimes causes him to purchase standard foods in favour of sustainable options.

**Question 6: Do you feel that you as an individual have an impact on the environment in your food purchasing decisions?**

In the *first focus group*, Participant 1 said that she believes that she can have an impact on the environment through her personal behaviour and emphasizes that in her view she and everyone else in the room are educated enough to understand their personal impact on the environment. Participant 2 also recognized that he has an impact on the environment. However, he puts his personal impact in relation to the price premium he will have to pay for a sustainable product. For example, if a sustainable product is a lot more expensive than standard option, he will begin to question whether the positive environmental impact of choosing a sustainable product really is high enough to warrant the large price difference. Participant 3 stated that he does not feel like the concrete environmental impact his personal behaviour has directly on the environment is very large, but that his behaviour has the power to influence people around him. In that way, his environmentally friendly behaviour will have a positive social impact. He used the expression “to lead by example” to illustrate what he means by his statements. He mentioned that he himself has been affected by the behaviour of his friends. He moreover feels that seeing his friends behave in an environmentally friendly way is more concrete than only seeing a media encourage people to behave sustainably and that he is more affected by the actions of people around him than by media. Participant 2 pointed out that there are other aspects to sustainable foods than simply purchasing, for example you can also be more sustainable by trying to limit your food waste. The group generally agrees with the previously made statements.

Participant 1 entered the discussion and pointed out that sustainable foods may bring some issues from a food waste perspective. First, she again mentions that in order to limit food waste you need to plan your meals and that this may be more difficult for a sustainable diet than for a standard one. Next, she mentions that sustainable foods tend to have a shorter expiration date than standard options which means that the risk of you having to throw food out instead of eating it is higher for environmentally friendly foods than for standard alternatives.

In the *second focus group*, Participant 4 believes he has a local impact, but feels powerless in global questions. “I can buy whatever, and it won’t make a change”. Participant 1 stated that he used to feel hopeless, but now feels satisfaction in knowing that he is doing what he can, and doesn’t seem to consider it on a local or global scale. Rather, it is more a question of feeling good for himself and being in control of that decision. He also believes that more people should see it like this, in order to actually be motivated to make a change. Participant 2 believes that the effect she has is both environmental to a small extent, but that the more real impact is on her social circle. She has the power to make other people behave more environmentally conscious. Participant 4 disagreed wholeheartedly, believing that no matter what you do you will have no impact. In his view, sustainable branding is only a way of allowing people to pay slightly more and feel better about
themselves instead of making changes in their lives that truly matter for the environment. Participant 3 feels overwhelmed by the amount of changes she would have to make in her life to truly consider herself sustainable, and feels that this is highly discouraging.

For the third focus group, Participant 1 said that he can make a personal impact, but that that is where his impact ends. Globally, there is little to be done in his opinion because no matter how much he does, as he believes that other people are not doing enough of the same things. Participant 4 believes he has an impact, an brings up his previous example of increasing demand of sustainable products. Participant 2 believes she has an impact, although she does not expect to see an impact anytime soon, but rather in 10 to 20 years. Participant 3 also thinks he has an impact, but mentioned that it feels difficult to grasp due to the context in which we all live.

**Question 7:** Do you feel that you have sufficient knowledge of sustainable foods to make accurate assessments of the benefits of different products?

In the first focus group, Participant 1 stated that she’s primarily aware of the health impacts of sustainable foods, as opposed to the environmental. She is aware that there are environmental impacts, but says that she does not know the extent of these. Participant 2 continued with that his knowledge is more of a vague awareness rather than concrete knowledge. He feels that such information is generally difficult to find and that it would take a active effort to research and to memorize. At this point Participant 1 asked the group if all of this knowledge is actually necessary, which Participant 3 agreed upon. Participant 4 disagreed, saying that the details are important and gives an example of his own life. The example was his realization that the meat industry contributes to global warming more than the entire transportation sector combined. In his view, having specific knowledge about the environmental impact of certain products motivates at least him to “do that extra step”. Participant 2 agreed that further knowledge would act as an incentive to him personally to motivate him to purchase more sustainable foods.

Here, the moderators probed the participants in whether they feel that this information or knowledge is made readily available for the average consumer in a way that they can grasp, to which all the participants feel that the information is available, but that it takes an effort to find it.

Participant 3 brought up the media battle in Finland, saying that he feels that many articles discuss or display that farmers are doing better, as a response to claims of sustainability issues from other media outlets. He stated that this media debate is causing confusion as to whether it really is unsustainable or not to engage in certain purchasing behaviours, and even asks himself that maybe it is okay to still continue purchasing standard foods because it seems that the involved parties are still improving in environmental terms.

When probed if the participants trust in the knowledge they have, or the sources from which the knowledge originated from, Participant 1 stated that she does have some source critique. She generally trusts the information released by environmental groups which she deems to have some sort of authenticity and to some extent the information given to her by peers that she feels are “clued up” on the topic of sustainability. She continued however saying that she tends to double-check the information given to her by these peers. She does not however trust newspaper articles, even though the information within them definitely draws her attention. Participant 4 brought up certain environmentally
associated certificates, using them as an example to see whether or not a product is sustainable. However, he doesn’t think we know so much about certifications and approval parties, and that there is little information about them. He would like to see some sort of system to overlook these kinds of things.

The moderators summarize the discussion saying that people have a general knowledge, but that the participants feel that more detailed knowledge would help increased sustainable purchasing behaviour. The group generally agreed, with a comment that it may also be necessary for consumers to have some sort of initial incentive to be concerned with sustainability issues if they are to value this more detailed information.

In the second focus group, Participant 1 started the conversation by stating that he feels that the limited space available on the products constitutes a challenge for the company pushing to sell the product. He also pointed out that QR codes could solve this issue, but that it is difficult for consumers to take in a lot of new information while grocery shopping due to the high number of decisions that has to be made in a short space of time. Participant 4 however does feel that quite a lot of information about the sustainable elements about a product is displayed quite well through other marketing efforts like commercials.

After a small shift in the discussion towards the actual question, Participant 1 considers himself to have a general knowledge which he also feels is sufficient. He went on to say that he is aware that there is more knowledge to be found, and suggests that this knowledge is quite easy to find but that an active decision about this has to be made. Participant 4 agreed, saying that he can recognize certificates such as KRAV and make the assessment that it is sustainable in some way. He did however admit that he’s not sure what KRAV stands for, and if he wanted to find out he says that doing so shouldn’t be problematic.

Again Participant 4 displayed that he possesses some knowledge about certificates such as KRAV and Fairtrade, but that he doesn’t know the exact details. This is in his opinion enough. Participant 1 pointed out that it is difficult to compare products that have sustainable labels with standard products. He stated that a specific standard product may not be that much worse than a sustainably branded product but that it is impossible to make an easy evaluation, feeling that more knowledge would be required to do this.

Here the moderators revisit a previous discussion, and probes how the participants make the assessments about how a product is sustainable or not and if you have the knowledge to make this assessment. Participant 2 said that she only looks at the carbon dioxide footprint of a product to determine this. She goes on to say that she has actively looked this up for different products, which is why she is aware of the differences between products. Participant 3 feels that it is a very time-consuming task to look up how sustainable a product is, because the sustainability of a product to her is based on the entirety of the product supply chain. She goes on to say that she feels suspicious of any marketing act that states that a product really is sustainable, due to her previous knowledge of greenwashing.

The moderators follow up, asking if the participants’ ability to distinguish between environmentally friendly products and standard products increase their motivation to purchase sustainable products, to which Participant 1 definitely agrees, stating that he
does not want to spend extra money on something that he’s not sure about. Participant 3 however said that she is more affected by marketing efforts such as free samples of products, that might make her purchase the product in the future. She says that product design and similar aspects do not affect her.

In the third focus group, Participant 1 stated that he feels that it is very difficult to make this assessment between specific products within the same category. He mentions coffee as an example, saying that many of the packages have different labels and graphics, making it difficult to identify which option is truly the most sustainable. However, for different categories, this choice is easier in his opinion. Participant 2 stated that she does not have the necessary knowledge to assess the sustainability of products, and adds that she is wary of purchasing products that are branded as sustainable. She often assumes that this is a marketing trick and in fact she actively stays away from these types of products in many cases. Participant 3 thinks that he as a general knowledge that allows him to make a sustainable choice, but finds it difficult to utilize this knowledge in the purchasing situation due to the number of variables that need to be into account. This does on occasion, he says, depend on the prominence of certain variables. For instance, when choosing between a plastically encased product or one without, he perceives to know which is more sustainable. Participant 4 said that he has the knowledge to make a sustainable choice in most situations, but admits that his knowledge does not always allow him to make the most sustainable choice. Also, in contrast to Participant 2, Participant 4 trusts in the system to make sure that products that are marketed as sustainable, are in fact so. At this point, the participants were probed how they decide which product is more sustainable when the products have different sustainable attributes. Participant 4 always prefers foods that are produced within Sweden, with local foods being his primary choice. Organic foods come second, yet if a product is both produced in Sweden and is organic, he sees it as a good thing. Participant 3 generally prefers local foods but also recognizes that organic products sometimes may be better depending on the production circumstances. Participant 4 added that it is difficult to compare different sustainability aspects of products. For example, he mentions that he has heard that cucumbers wrapped in plastic have a much longer expiration time which is more sustainable from a food waste perspective. However, the plastic can also be considered bad for the environment. It is difficult even for consumers who are knowledgeable about environmental issues to truly compare these two aspects of the use of plastic and in the end it comes down to which matter you value the most.

Participant 1 added that he generally makes more sustainable purchasing decisions when he is shopping online because that situation makes it easier to look up information about the products and make assessments about their sustainability.

**Question 8:** Considering all foods, not just sustainable ones, what information do you look for before deciding to purchase a specific product?

In the first focus group, the participants voiced that the best-before dates are primarily what they look for, even though they would like to say that they actually look at the exact content to see if it is sustainable or not. Here the moderators probed in how the participants make the distinction between standard and sustainable products, to which Participant 3 stated that price is the most common distinction, to which most participants seem to agree. Eventually the discussion reaches a point wherein participant 3 mentioned that the physical appearance of the product needs to look “good”. He mentions that
sustainable vegetables sometimes are disqualified from his shopping cart due to the fact that they do not look appealing. When probed about what “good” means, he first says the word “fresh”, and continued saying that he has specific ideas of what different vegetables should look like, but struggles to say the exact words for this. In his words instead, he assumes that he has some attitudes that define this, for example which colour a tomato should be to look “good”.

When probed how participants decide which product is more sustainable, Participant 2 brought up his issues with palm oil once more, saying that he disregards product that has palm oil in it, and often find himself looking at products that explicitly say that there is no palm oil within. Participant 1 says that she looks for the country of origin, stating that if the product is more local then she would prefer that over another. Participant 4 once again brought up the issue of the knowledge, saying that it is difficult to define sustainable products, making it difficult to compare the level of sustainability between two products. Participant 3 agreed with participant 1, preferring locally grown or produced products if there are any locally produced products.

When probed if participants prefer a “local” labelling on products, or if it is not labelled, if the participants still check the country of origin, Participant 3 said that he, at least in Finland, he is aware of a few brands that he considers to be suppliers of sustainable foods, meaning that he doesn’t need to check as much. In Sweden however, he only occasionally checks the country of origin if the product is not clearly branded as locally produced. He summarized, saying when products have clearly labelled where it is from, this affects him quite a bit.

In the second focus group, Participant 1 said he first looks at price, and then looks at things such as design and/or brand to make an assessment of the quality of the product. Participant 4 agreed that price is the first matter which he looks at, followed by quantity and quality of the product. Participant 3 brought up her habits again, going for the same products as she usually purchases without considering the price that much because she is aware of it already. Sometimes she assesses the looks of product and might choose a better-looking product over another. “I’m just picking the one that speaks to me at the moment, which is usually the one that I stand the closest to” (Participant 3). Participant 4 completely agreed with this statement. Participant 2 agreed wholeheartedly, but said that she is also very much influenced by social media such as bloggers. If a product is endorsed by a blogger that she likes, she would most likely purchase the product at least once. She goes on to say that she usually purchases products that are on discount. Lastly, she says that if she is really struggling between two products, then she looks at the ingredients and often picks the product with the fewest chemicals. Participant 1 stated at this point that he also actively evaluated and compared different products at one point and that he since then considers himself to have the necessary knowledge.

When probed about which factors the participants look for when assessing the quality of a product, Participant 1 spoke of vegetables, saying that if possible, he both looks and touches the products, and makes his assessment based on how they feel. If it is a new product he also looks at the brand and the design of the product, but goes on to say that for him, price is the biggest aspect of quality. Participant 2 disagreed about the design aspect, saying it does not change her view of a product. Participant 3 however said that the design matters for her. Participant 4 continued saying that name brands are the biggest indicator of quality for him. Participant 3 brought up what she considers to be an issue,
in the fact that in her view, many companies attempt to differentiate themselves through producing sustainable foods, and putting a sustainable element on the exterior of the product, but not differentiating the taste of the product. In this way she argues that no extra value is added in the purchase of this product for her.

When probed about which factors on a product the participants look for in distinguishing between sustainable and standard products, Participant 4 stated that he looks for KRAV, to which most participants seem to agree. Other symbols or certificates are also used to make this distinction among the group. Participant 1 stated that colours and pictures that he associates with nature is also used to make this distinction. Participant 4 also emphasized the materials that are used for packaging, mentioning paper and earthly tones. Participant 3 continued on this point, ultimately saying that packaging that avoids unnecessary use of chemicals and that allows the consumer to see the product in her mind serves as a cue for sustainability.

The participants were at this point probed about whether they always consider broadly recognized labels such as KRAV as the most environmentally friendly alternative. After some discussion, Participant 1 and Participant 3 both stated that they don’t necessarily take for granted that KRAV labelled products are the most sustainable option. Participant 3 mentioned the example of strawberries purchased at markets during the summer. While these strawberries are not always branded as sustainable, she feels that they still are even more sustainable than their KRAV-labelled counterparts, based on her knowledge of the way these strawberries are sourced. Participant 1 brought up country of origin as a deciding factor, stating that he is more likely to choose a Swedish product without sustainable labelling, over imported products with sustainable labels. Participant 2 agreed with this sentiment.

In the third focus group, Participant 1 said that he mainly purchases the same products that he always buys. Participant 4 primarily looks at price per volume, as well as nutritional value since he has previously said that this is highly important to his way of life. Participant 3 mentioned the force of habit, but also states that he actively looks for eco-friendly products. After that he considers price. Participant 1 admitted that certain aspects of life has increased his purchasing budget, which has meant that he now finds himself switching out previous standard options for more sustainable foods in his purchasing behaviour. This is mainly true for product categories in which he considers sustainability to be related to higher quality. Participant 2 considers price important, but whenever she has money to spend she actively looks for sustainable options due to her previously stated reasons. In her view, she is not limited by force of habit because she likes to try different things. Participant 1 once again mentioned that sustainability is more important to him in certain categories such as meat products, leading him to sometimes willingly sacrifice the quality of products in other less important categories.

At this point, the participants were probed if they look for or generally notice labels that emphasize sustainability aspects of products, to which Participant 2 said yes, although it depends on whether the occasion calls for sustainable products. Participant 1 said that he does notice labels, but mainly looks for certain labels. For instance, he has noticed that some products try to imply sustainability although the factors that are emphasized actually in his mind do not necessarily make the product sustainable. He mentions grass fed beef as an example of this. He moreover states that he uses these labels as an invite to look more closely upon the products to see exactly how sustainable the product in question
might be. Participant 3 looks for labels or certificates, and has a certain trust towards them. He moreover stated in cases which a product only has verified certificates without any, in his opinion, superfluous ecological branding, he feels very positively toward the product.

**Question 9:** Do you feel that current marketing efforts are making you buy more sustainable food products?

In the *first focus group*, Participant 2 introduce advertising campaigns in Germany, that aim to showcase products’ local origins by making advertisements with real local produces, putting a face on the product in a way. He does sometimes question whether this is a marketing effort based in reality or not, but he still likes it. He stated that this definitely encourages him to purchase locally grown foods. Participant 3 has the same experience, although with advertisements from Finland.

The participants were probed about why they think these matters affect them, to which Participant 2 mentioned that these advertisements form a personal connection, which feels more trusting and less like a business-to-customer relationship. Participants 3 and 4 agrees on this point. Participant 1 however, questioned the “faces” in the advertisements. The discussion continues more into the values of trust and transparency, and the participants seem to agree that the Nordic countries tend to be characterized by these values, but also mentions that business face a pressure to be transparent. Participant 1 however neither agreed or disagreed, but rather reflects that her consumption decisions are driven by her own personal opinions on sustainability, but also states that she has little to no experience of the aforementioned advertisements. As such, she’s more affected by marketing messages on the products themselves. When probed about whether marketing efforts would be more effective, if they were explicitly knowledge related, Participant 1 agrees, saying that this would positively affect her purchasing decisions and also that this kind of marketing efforts would be more sustainable.

The participants were probed on how they think that current marketing efforts could be improved, to which all Participants quickly discussed how things surrounding sustainability has changed in the past 5-10 years, saying that they have seen a positive change, although there is still much to do. Participant 4 pointed out that he does not necessarily watch tv, and brings up the different channels of promoting sustainable behaviour in general. He stated that channels such as Instagram could be used more frequently by marketers to promote sustainable foods. Participant 1 brought up the fact that channels such as Facebook could be used to promote these matters to an older segment of consumers, seeing as they in her opinion grew up eating more meat and being less caring about the environment. She does raise a point in that this kind of marketing efforts would likely be more effective in Sweden and European countries, more than African countries. Participant 4 once again brings up the importance of knowledge of sustainable issues, and suggest that marketers should find ways of educating the population that are more fun. He mentions an example of bubble gum wrappers that have small educative facts printed on the inside. This concluded the first focus group.

In the *second focus group*, Participant 1 considers discounts as a good way of making him purchase a sustainable product, but is unsure whether other marketing efforts affect him. Participant 3 agreed, but also states that she doesn’t continue to purchase the previously discounted sustainable product when it is no longer discounted because it does not provide
her with any greater value. Participant 4 said that no marketing efforts affect him, but continues saying that he does indeed purchase more sustainable products due to the fact that, in his view, a larger portion of the food available in stores today is sustainable. After being probed by the group, Participant 4 admitted that he is susceptible to discounts, but like Participant 3 would most likely not continue purchasing that product after discounts are gone.

The moderators probe the participants, asking if they do not consider the fact that a product is sustainable to be an extra value, to which Participant 4 says no. In fact, he believes it to be negative. Participant 3 says that there is no extra value from this today, but that this might change in the future. Participant 2 agrees with Participant 1’s first statements, but also says that the primary factor for her is the carbon dioxide footprint of the product. Finally, the participants discuss ways to improve current marketing efforts, wherein Participant 2 mentions Max as an example, discussing the way they, in her opinion, reformed the exterior of the company to be all green, and suggests that more businesses could do this. Participant 1 continues talking about how supermarkets have for him changed the way that he both purchases and ultimately consumes food, in that he now eats more greens rather than meat, and suggests that this might be something to consider. Participant 4 stated again that he does not like sustainable labelling, and if he is to be impacted by marketing efforts, they should be emphasizing the quality of the product rather than its sustainable attributes. Participant 1 agreed that quality should be emphasized more, while Participant 2 advocated for the health benefits to be displayed more. Participant 1 then goes on to say that stores should offer more samples. This concluded the second focus group.

For the third focus group, Participant 1 said that he is not affected by classic marketing efforts, but rather by figures who he considers to be authorities on food. He mentions a series on Netflix in which highly accomplished chefs share their view of foods. Participant 2 feels that marketing efforts which directly emphasize sustainability only affect her positively in cases in which she is already buying the product. If she is not buying that specific product, she feels negatively because her perception is that the marketers are trying to trick her. In short, advertisements are unlikely to increase her purchasing of sustainable foods. She does mention that word of mouth can sometimes affect her positively.

At this point, Participant 1 continued saying that he is positively affected by advertisements if they provide in depth information about how the food is produced, and why it should be considered sustainable, as opposed to advertisements that simply show “a cow on a green field”. Participant 2 seemed to agree with this sentiment. Participant 3 does not think that he purchases more sustainable foods due to marketing that he is exposed to. He does admit a scepticism towards business practices, in that he does not believe in everything that he sees or hears. Participant 4 says that marketing of sustainable foods mainly affects him through its ability to make him aware of sustainable options that he did not previously know about. However, it does not change his attitude toward sustainable foods. Participant 1 at this point mentioned that price discounts would make him purchase a specific sustainable product, but only as long as the discount is offered.

The participants were then probed about ways that the current marketing efforts could be improved. Participant 1 quickly stated that counter-marketing could be a way to improve the popularity of sustainable foods compared to standard options. He mentions cigarettes
and the way they advertise diseases related to smoking on the packages. He suggests that this principle could perhaps be applied to foods by emphasizing the negative effects of products that are not produced in a sustainable way. He moreover stated that this would definitely make him buy more sustainable options. Participant 2 mentioned her scepticism towards classic sustainable marketing, and revisits the previously discussed idea of advertisements which provide more in depth information about why the product is sustainable and the processes through which the products are produced. Participant 4 admitted that he does get affected by authority figures that make public statements about the sustainability of products, to which Participant 2 agreed. Participant 3 agreed with both that counter-marketing and marketing which brings up the processes of creating products would be preferable over contemporary marketing. He advocated for marketing showing the truth of things, saying that this would work more for him at least.

Nearing the end of the focus group, after hearing all the question again, Participant 2 brought up the notion that she would like companies to not only emphasize the sustainability of specific products, but also the sustainability of the organization as a whole. Participant 1 mentions that ICA actually has a mobile app that shows how sustainable your purchasing habits are, but gives no further details into the app. None of the other participants had heard of this app before. This concluded the third focus group.
5 Analysis

The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring drivers of, and barriers to, green purchasing behaviour. The two main research questions were “What do consumers perceive to be drivers motivating them to purchase sustainable foods?” and “What do consumers perceive to be barriers preventing them from purchasing sustainable foods?”. With this in mind, in this chapter, we will analyse the findings in our data. The analysis will focus on identifying possible drivers and barriers to green purchasing behaviour, as well as other potentially interesting insights relating to the green consumer profile. The chapter will be structured according to the model presented in the theoretical framework, as opposed to following a chronological order based on the questions from the semi-structured focus groups. This is due to that the discussion in the focus groups at times touched on topics that were originally planned to be introduced at a later point in the session, as well as the fact that the interview, due to the complexity of some questions, were not structured in the same order as the flow of the integrative model might suggest. For the reader’s convenience, we will display the model one more time, Figure 13, The adapted Adolfsson-Wickström model.

![Figure 13. The adapted Adolfsson-Wickström model.](image)

Furthermore, it is important to note that some conclusions drawn might pertain to several of the key concepts of the model, leading to certain amounts of overlap between topics in the chapter. The purpose of a qualitative and exploratory study such as this one is to identify concepts that could be interesting from the standpoint of further research and as such one must remember that there may be a possibility to interpret findings in different ways. We do however draw conclusions which are applicable in the context of this study. In the following, we will analyse the data in accordance with our own understanding of the subject area.

5.1 Knowledge

We will begin our analysis with the concept of knowledge, which was first and foremost discussed under questions 1 and 7, with the former question accounting for the participants’ understanding of the meaning of sustainable foods and the latter accounting for their ability to evaluate the benefits of sustainable food products. Recall that
knowledge, in our integrative model, is listed as a driver of attitudes, meaning that the concept holds an important place as a potential driver of sustainable purchasing behaviour. This relationship was previously elaborated on in chapter 2.4. In the following, we will argue for the lack of specific knowledge about the benefits of sustainable foods being a barrier to increased purchasing of environmentally friendly food products.

One of the main findings of our focus groups stemmed from a slightly surprising source, namely question 1 - *What do you consider to be “sustainable foods”?* The question was mostly intended to serve as a way of making sure that all participants had a shared understanding of the topic to be discussed and was thought to be a relatively simple question, but in fact it led to rather in-depth discussions in all focus groups. The discussion showed that participants either had trouble defining what sustainable foods were, or that they had differing opinions on the matter. Factors such as area of origin (locally produced foods), method of production (organic and eco-friendly foods versus GMOs and foods produced with pesticides), consideration of biodiversity, ethical use of labour (Fairtrade), and ethical treatment of animals were used as definitions for sustainable foods. Furthermore, most participants were of the clear view that sustainable purchasing habits to a large extent includes abstaining from meats and choosing vegetarian options instead. Even in this camp there was a split between the views of participants, with some stating that any kind of meat should be avoided, and others putting the main emphasis on avoiding red meats. Others yet considered all organic or locally produced meats to be sustainable. Several participants originally stated that they mainly purchase sustainable foods, but when probed it became clear that their personal definition of sustainable foods did not necessarily compel them to purchase for example an ecological vegetable in favour of a standard vegetable. Instead, the mere fact that they were purchasing a vegetable in favour of a meat product would in their mind count as a sustainable food purchase.

This view seemed to be generally accepted among all participants, which coloured the discussions moving forward. It was also brought up that it is not only the product itself that matters in the participants’ distinction between sustainable foods and standard options, but also the use of packaging. For example, one participant questioned whether an ecological cucumber wrapped in plastic should be considered sustainable, a question that the group agreed to be problematic. The differing definitions of sustainable foods sparked a discussion about the difficulty of determining whether a product is sustainable or not, and the problems with comparing food products that are sustainable in different ways. In another focus group, one participant stated that the plastic wrapping on cucumbers is sustainable from the perspective that it significantly prolongs the time to expiration of the food product, but that he is unsure whether that outweighs the negative effects of plastic consumption. In his mind, the evaluation of a product’s sustainability often comes down to a personal preference regarding which sustainability aspects to prioritize. The same participant further suggested that it is unfair to simply look at the environmental impact of producing a food product, but that it should be regarded in relation to the product’s nutritional value. As an example he mentioned that the production of lettuce consumes less resources than the production of meat, but that he perceives meat to have significantly more nutritional value. This is how he justifies his consumption of meat from an environmental perspective. From an academic perspective, it was interesting to note how much the definition of sustainable foods differed between individuals, since this may be of relevance to studies that aim to draw conclusions about the sustainability-related motivations of consumers in purchasing decisions.
When further asked about their understanding of how to value different sustainable traits of products, most participants admitted that they had a limited understanding of the topic. Most participants considered themselves to have a general understanding of the environmental impact of sustainable and standard foods and the labels and certificates pertaining to them, but most participants across all focus groups admitted freely that they lacked specific knowledge. Many participants further agreed that they would feel more motivated to purchase sustainable foods if they had more detailed knowledge of the sustainability benefits of different products, an opinion that was voiced and supported in all focus groups. While some consumers still stated that they feel that it is enough to have a general knowledge of sustainability issues, it would be interesting from both an academic and a practical perspective to further investigate how the possession or lack of more specific knowledge of the environmental impact of different food products affect the consumers’ purchasing decisions. It was also stated several times in the focus groups that the limited knowledge of the exact meaning of different sustainability labels could be perceived as off-putting, due to a lack of trust in that the product would actually be beneficial to the environment, as opposed to merely being a marketing trick.

The lasting impression from the focus groups was that most participants had some knowledge about the benefits of sustainable foods, but that most of them where only knowledgeable about a few of the relevant concepts. For example, one participant was mainly concerned with avoiding a specific ingredient (palm oil) but did not feel he knew very much about the carbon footprint of products in general. Another participant felt that he knew that it is better to have a largely vegetarian diet, but did not know much about evaluating standard versus sustainably produced greens. Most participants also voiced the opinion that they perceived sustainable foods to have health benefits, although that is a statement that may not necessarily be true for all types of sustainable foods.

An interesting take that was voiced on the concept of knowledge as a driver of sustainable purchasing behaviour was that relevant knowledge may not only include knowing about the sustainability or health benefits of certain foods. Instead, it was suggested that one barrier for purchasing sustainable foods is a lack of knowledge of how to integrate sustainable foods into one’s diet. While only true in cases where sustainable consumption is interpreted as switching to completely different food categories (such as turning vegan or vegetarian), this may be an interesting aspect to account for in the future. If a consumer does not feel that they know how to plan meals consisting of sustainable foods, it stands to reason that they will not purchase sustainable foods to as large an extent as they otherwise might.

The differing definitions of sustainability and the perceived difficulty of comparing the sustainability of different options is highly interesting from an academic perspective. In our view, the focus groups implied not only that the knowledge level of consumers in many cases is not sufficient to truly motivate them to spend additional money on sustainable products, but also that it is impractical to treat sustainable products as one category. Instead, it would be more useful to split “sustainable purchasing behaviour of foods” into several different subcategories, that are considered to have different drivers and relevant knowledge sets. For example, consumers who feel strongly about purchasing locally produced foods may do so for mainly other reasons than consumers who express their sustainability by abstaining from meat. Another interesting and highly illustrative example from our focus group includes a participant who is very concerned about the
environment and therefore prefers a mainly vegetarian diet, but who feels strongly against ecologically produced foods due to her belief that GMOs are a more sustainable method of production from a holistic perspective. If we accept that sustainable consumption cannot be considered a single, homogenic entity, we may also need to accept that environmental awareness or knowledge on a general level is not enough to truly motivate the masses to change their consumption habits on a larger scale. In our study this is implied by the fact that all participants considered themselves to be knowledgeable about environmental issues on a general level, but that few of them had significant knowledge about the environmental benefits of different kinds of sustainable food options available.

How can this problem be solved? Most participants agreed that the necessary knowledge is most likely available, but only if you actively search for it. This constitutes an issue, as even many participants who stated that they prefer to purchase sustainable foods found it time-consuming to look up this type of information and emphasized that doing so would require a motivation that they doubted most average consumers have. It was also agreed by the participants that it is difficult to remember all the information one finds in the event of an active search. During the discussion it became clear that many of the participants who had actively searched for information at some point had trouble remembering most of it. We interpret this as a sign that the knowledge that is available is difficult to digest for the average consumer, suggesting that the knowledge should be made available in more pedagogical ways. One suggestion for solving this issue could be for marketers to make efforts to provide more specific knowledge about sustainable foods through channels that are normally reserved for more general messages about sustainable products or environmental problems, thus eliminating the need for the consumer to actively look for the necessary information themselves, as well as being a simple way of providing repetition of the information. Seeing as we already established that knowledge may need to be specific to certain types of sustainable food categories, one must also consider which knowledge is most relevant in each situation. One participant suggested that carbon dioxide footprint of products should be available on all product packages. This would in our view go a long way toward facilitating easier comparison of products and giving the consumer a better sense of what different sustainability claims actually mean in practice. Another participant suggested that marketers of sustainable products need to make it more fun to learn about environmental impact of different products, in order to motivate consumers to learn more. One practical example of such teaching that this participant remembered was candy wrappers that had facts printed on the inside. While candy wrappers may not be the solution to the global environmental crisis that we are facing, we argue that the idea that marketers of sustainable products need to start a campaign to educate the consumers on the world on the finer points of sustainable consumption is worth considering.

5.2 Values
In our integrative model, values was the other concept (apart from knowledge) argued to be a driver of attitudes. This was discussed in chapter 2.3 and 2.4. Based on Stern et al.’s (1993) division of values into three dimensions (altruistic, biospheric, and egoistic) we explored which values were expressed through the participants’ behaviour and opinions. At a first glance, the discussion did not yield any surprises that would call into question previous research. All value dimensions were expressed, although not every participant seemed to value each dimension equally.
Several participants expressed that they feel positively about foods that are produced using ethical labour, which can be interpreted as care for other human beings. Altruistic values involve concern for the well-being of other humans and society as a whole (Stern et al., 1993, p. 326) and as such we argue that the support of ethical labour should fall into this category. Furthermore, several participants stated that one of their personal reasons for purchasing locally produced foods was the notion that it would support local producers, which can be interpreted as concern for the immediate society the participants live in.

Biospheric values are values that concern non-human species or the biosphere (Stern et al., 1993, p. 326). This value dimension was strongly represented in our sample, with almost all participants stating that their purchasing decisions were at least to some extent affected by a wish to limit their impact on the environment and the suffering of animals. While this is not surprising, it could potentially be interesting for further research to divide this value dimension into separate entities for animal concern and concern for the overall natural environment. For example, every single participant agreed that overconsumption of red meats was bad for the environment, while not all participants mentioned the wish to prevent animals from suffering as a reason for abstaining from meat products. Additionally, it is possible for individuals to abstain from meat consumption due to ethical concerns about the well-being of animals rather than a primary concern for the environment. With veganism becoming an increasingly important trend (as expressed by the participants), the motivations for joining the vegan movement may be useful when striving to understand the green consumer profile.

Finally, egoistic values are based on self-interest, or by asking the question “What is in it for me?”. Many researchers have argued that these values are the main motivation for human behaviour (e.g. Hardin, 1968; Olson, 1965, cited in Stern et al., 1993, p. 324). Unsurprisingly, egoistic values were strongly represented in our sample as a driver for making specific purchasing decisions, both sustainable and standard. All participants agreed that price, which can be considered the most direct measure of the individual’s cost of making a purchase, was a dominant factor in guiding their purchasing decisions. Several participants admitted freely that their main reason for purchasing sustainable foods was that it made them feel good about themselves because they were doing a good thing. In addition, several participants mentioned that they perceive the sustainable products that they purchase to have health benefits and/or to taste better. Since these are factors that only affect the well-being of the individual, they are to be regarded as expressions of egoistic values. One participant who harboured an uncharacteristic scepticism to sustainably branded foods even went as far as to state that sustainable labelling only is a marketing trick that allows consumers to feel good about themselves by paying a price premium, without actually having any impact on the environment. While the rest of the participants in the focus group were reluctant to fully agree with the statement, they did not deny that personal satisfaction was a large reason for making sustainable purchasing decisions. In the end, however, the participants in our focus group agreed that price would always at some point become a barrier to purchasing more expensive, sustainable food products when the price difference to standard options became “too great”.

The final concept of this study to be explored in terms of egoistic motivations for purchasing behaviour is hedonism, defined as the pursuit of pleasure or self-indulgence (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). While most of the participants stated that they do try to make
some sacrifices for the benefit of the environment, it was unanimously agreed across all focus groups that not a single participant would be willing to abstain from their favourite food products simply on the grounds of it being unsustainable. This was discussed in terms of perceived superior taste of certain products and loyalty to brands that had been a part of the participants lives for a long time. We interpret this as an expression of hedonism, since even the most environmentally informed participants would be willing to “look the other way” in order to experience the taste of their preferred product.

While the findings relating to the prevalence of the three presented value dimensions did not yield surprises, it is interesting to explore the relationship between knowledge and value dimensions. Recall our previous discussion of the lack of specific knowledge being a barrier to increased purchase of sustainable foods, as well as our argument that sustainable foods can be grouped into different categories that have different benefits. For example, locally produced food decreases the carbon dioxide emissions related to transport, but also has the benefit of supporting the local economy. Choosing a vegetarian option in favour of a meat product may also have a beneficial impact in terms of carbon dioxide emissions, but may also be considered beneficial from an animal welfare perspective. Choosing an organic product may limit the use of chemicals used, but may also be perceived to have health benefits. In understanding the difference between food categories that are often collectively referred to as “sustainable”, it becomes interesting to see the relationship between the prevalence of each value dimension and the level of knowledge a consumer has about the benefits of different categories of sustainable foods. For example, it is possible that a consumer who is mainly interested in having a healthy diet will look for information that relates most closely to that value. If specific knowledge is a driver for increased purchasing, then strongly prevalent value dimensions will drive the consumer to purchase sustainable foods from a category that corresponds to those values. This is not surprising or contrary to previous research. However, it may be interesting to look further into how much knowledge consumers have about sustainable food categories that correspond to each value dimension. While most of our participants seemed willing to suggest that several value dimensions were important to them, many of them only had specific knowledge relating to one of the dimensions. For example, one participant stated that she preferred a largely vegetarian diet due to both health and environmental benefits, but admitted that she mainly had specific knowledge about the health benefits of her choices. As such, it is interesting to entertain the notion that consumers would be further motivated to purchase sustainable foods if they were given more detailed knowledge about aspects of environmentally friendly foods that pertain to all value dimensions, rather than for example only focusing on the biospheric benefits of a food product.

In summary, all value dimensions were displayed in a way that makes it possible to interpret them as drivers of sustainable purchasing behaviour. However, the prominence of each value dimension seemed to differ among the participants. Additionally, we speculate that lack of specific knowledge about sustainable food categories that relate to each value dimension may be a barrier to increased purchasing of environmentally friendly food. This is due to that several value dimensions may be considered important for the consumer, while it was rare within our sample that consumers possessed specific knowledge relating to all displayed value dimensions.
5.3 Attitudes and perceptions

While attitudes and perceptions are listed as separate entities in our integrative model, many of the comments made in the focus groups were made in a manner that makes it more practical to analyze the concepts within the same topic. In our integrative model, attitudes are of particular importance in predicting behavior as we elaborated upon in chapter 2.4. However, it must be noted that attitudes are argued to be affected by both knowledge and values. It should also be noted that perceptions serve as a type of “filter” through which consumers see the world. In chapter 2.5.1 this was discussed in terms of bounded rationality, whereby individuals lack the capacity to consider every relevant piece of information and instead form opinions based on a selection of available data. As such it is understandable that many of the comments made by our participants were colored by their perceptions of both sustainable food products and the society we live in.

In general, most participants expressed positive attitudes toward sustainable food products, for reasons exhibited in the previous analysis of value dimensions. However, one participant admitted to having strongly negative feelings toward sustainable products due to perceived lower quality for a higher price. The same participant also considered sustainably branded foods to be a marketing trick, rather than the products actually having any impact on the environment. While no other participant shared this distaste for sustainable foods, many agreed that they were at least to some extent concerned that sustainability is being used as a marketing gimmick. While there was general agreement that it is good to purchase sustainable foods, all focus groups broached the subject of the risk that some producers try to take advantage of consumers who want to purchase environmentally friendly foods by selling standard products that are deceptively branded as being “green”. The relevance of scepticism toward green marketing messages as a barrier to green consumption has previously been discussed e.g. by do Paço and Reis (2012, p. 147).

One participant commented that he feels that while it is not necessarily bad to consume meat, he feels that meat is currently being over-consumed, to which all participants in the group agreed. The same opinion was voiced in the next focus group with equally strong support. It was suggested in both discussions that the meat-eating culture in many places in the world is so strong that it is difficult to cut down on the meat consumption in these cultures. This is an interesting consideration if we accept that the meat industry in general is bad for the environment. One participant suggested that the best way to strongly limit the consumption of meat would be to change consumers’ attitudes toward meat, so that it becomes something that is considered a luxury to be consumed on special occasions, rather than something that is taken for granted as part of an everyday diet. This notion is interesting to mention in our analysis, since it shows that the challenges related to increasing the purchase rate of sustainable foods in some cases pertain to factors that reach as far as to the cultural level. However, it was agreed during the focus groups that the meat-eating culture in Sweden is not as strong as in many other places in the world. Still, the cultural challenges of changing consumption patterns are something that food marketers will almost certainly need to address at some point in time in the fight for a sustainable society.

Another interesting discussion in terms of attitudes was that participants in general seemed to have different attitudes toward different kinds of sustainable foods. While this was in many cases only implied by participants mainly focusing on speaking about a certain type of sustainable food that they apparently felt strongly about, one participant
stated explicitly that she is in favour of sustainably produced foods in general, but that she prefers to express this by limiting her consumption of non-vegan alternatives. However, she has strong negative feelings toward “eco-friendly” foods, due to her belief that GMOs are “the future”. Another participant in another group stated that he avoids products that contain palm oil and that he tries to purchase locally produced foods. However, he has a specific distaste for foods that are branded as vegan.

The comment about avoiding vegan foods sparked a rather interesting discussion in one of the focus groups, on the topic of social factors that relate to sustainable foods. While the participant in question was aware that vegan alternatives often are beneficial from an environmental perspective, he has a strong negative perception of vegans and wants to avoid association with this group of consumers. While he admits that he has never had a personal encounter with a vegan who has behaved unpleasantly toward him, he states that he has come across plenty of material online that has given him the perception that there is a large group of vegans who try to force their agenda on other people. While he does not have any negative feelings toward vegan foods per se, his negative feelings toward vegans as a group are enough to discourage him from purchasing foods that are specifically labelled as belonging to this category. Another participant agreed that there is a social stigma surrounding sustainable food consumption. According to her own experience of trying veganism for a short period of time, there is a feeling that other people tend to jump to conclusions about you based on your purchasing decisions and then react negatively unless you act in accordance with their subsequent expectations of you all the time. She argues that this may be a barrier to trying a more sustainable diet and that society should be more accepting of e.g. consumers who only make vegan purchasing decisions to a certain extent. A third participant in the same focus group later expressed that the discussion about sustainable foods (especially vegan diets) is very polarizing and that he does not wish to associate himself with that discussion.

However, the social aspects of sustainable food consumption were not all bad, according to our participants. In general, most participants agreed that there is an increasing social pressure to make sustainable purchasing decisions, especially in Sweden (some comments were made about this pressure being significantly lower in some other cultures). While the participants agreed that this pressure sometimes can be uncomfortable to endure, they mainly feel that it will be beneficial in the long run and in many cases can be useful. Interestingly, however, several of the participants who voiced this opinion also stated that negative pressure (rather than positive incentives) from marketers could likely make them abstain from purchasing sustainable food products. While this view is contradictory to the stated approval of social pressure, it serves to underline the intricacies of social aspects that affect consumers’ attitudes toward sustainable foods.

We consider it highly interesting to note the social factors that surround the concept of sustainable foods and to see how it can affect the attitudes even of consumers who generally feel positively about environmentally friendly foods in themselves. The discussion in our focus groups firstly suggests that it may not be meaningful to measure consumer attitudes to sustainable foods as a single entity, but that attitudes should be considered only to pertain to specific categories of “sustainable” foods. Second, the results suggest that marketers may need to address the fact that at least certain types of sustainable food consumption are associated with negative connotations due to the rhetoric of certain consumers who actively purchase them. This may be problematic and
it would be careless to assume that the issue will be resolved without active response from marketers of the affected food categories. Third, the sometimes contradictory statements of our participants in regard to the effects of social pressure to make specific purchasing decisions show that it may be interesting for academics to investigate which types of pressure are most effective and in which situations.

Our study differs from previous studies on attitudes toward sustainable foods on several accounts. Authors such as McDonagh and Prothero (2014, p. 1197) have advocated for the negative effects of greenwashing, and our results also supported the notion that there may be a certain amount of negative feelings related to the marketing of sustainable products. However, our results also emphasize the social aspects related to attitudes toward sustainable food purchasing that to our knowledge has not been done before. Furthermore, our results show that it is impractical to consider attitudes toward sustainable foods as a single concept, something that to our knowledge also has not been specifically addressed in previous research. Instead we would argue based on our findings that future research should take into consideration that it is possible for a consumer to have positive attitudes towards certain categories of sustainable foods and negative attitudes toward others.

5.4 The attitude-behaviour gap

As was established in the introduction to this thesis, marketing researchers are still scratching their heads over the reason for the difference between reported concern for the environment and the actual purchasing behaviour displayed by consumers. While our study is not exhaustive enough to provide any answers to this complicated question, the participants did express several insights that we argue could possibly shed light on this issue that we previously discussed in chapter 2.5.2 as well.

Once again knowledge of matters relating to sustainable foods was brought up as a potential issue in several focus groups. We have previously discussed that the participants seemed to have vastly different opinions of what is to be considered sustainable foods. This could potentially be something that has affected the results of previous research. A practical example from our focus group was two participants who confidently stated that 80% of their food consumption was sustainable. When probed, it became clear that they considered their consumption to be sustainable due to it consisted mainly of vegetables, but that the percentage of their consumption that was branded as sustainable was significantly lower than that. Conversely, another participant whose diet consists largely of meat stated that 90% of his consumption is sustainable because most products that he purchases are locally produced. This example may serve as inspiration for future researchers, since it becomes evident that definitions of sustainable foods are very important and that even consumers who actively make an effort to be sustainable may not make purchasing decisions that are to be considered sustainable according to the specific study they are participating in. Apart from simply having differing definitions of what sustainable foods are, several participants complained that they often distrust foods that are labelled as sustainable and that they therefore may not select these products despite a wish to be sustainable. While this may be interpreted as a lack of knowledge, we would argue that it could also be interpreted as a lack of trust toward sustainable marketing efforts.

It was also stated by many participants that both price and availability are factors that may prevent environmentally conscious consumers from purchasing sustainable foods to
as large an extent as they would like. While the factors have been established as barriers by previous research, it is important to note that this view was shared also by the participants in this particular study. On the same note, there were some interesting comments made in the third focus group on the importance of price. First, one participant stated that she purchases sustainable foods whenever she has the money for it. She does this because she perceives these foods to taste better and to be healthier than standard options, and the fact that she feels that she contributes to the environment by doing so is more of an added bonus. At a different time in the discussion, another participant voiced his impression that many consumers seem to regard the purchasing of sustainable products as a luxury rather than a duty. In his view, this has the consequence that the average consumer spends a large part of his disposable income on other things than food and then cites a lack of money as an excuse not to purchase sustainable food products, when in fact the price would not be an issue if priorities had been slightly different. This notion may be interesting from a marketing perspective when discussed in connection to product attributes related to the egoistic value dimension. For example, if a consumer mainly purchases sustainable foods due to concern for their own health or taste experience, they would logically be more likely to regard sustainable foods as a luxury than a duty. The sentiment can also be connected to the concept of hedonism, which was previously discussed in terms of consumers choosing products that are perceived as tastier than standard options even in cases where they are unsustainable. In this instance, however, hedonism is expressed through the consumer prioritizing pleasure at another point in time over saving money that could facilitate more sustainable food purchasing. As such, the prevalence of hedonism as a barrier to sustainable purchasing may not be as obvious as in cases were all relevant factors come into play in the actual purchasing situation.

Another suggestion that was discussed in length in several focus groups can be interpreted as the difficulty in seeing a concrete impact of making sustainable purchasing decisions. In our theoretical framework we discussed this in terms of fatalism, defined as the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). Within the framework of this study, the term was used to describe consumers potentially feeling that their purchasing decisions would fail to have an impact on the environment and that it therefore would be meaningless to spend extra money on sustainable food products. While this attitude was only explicitly expressed by one participant, several other participants agreed that it would be more motivating to purchase sustainable foods if they were to become more aware of the direct impact that the specific purchase would have on the environment. However, most participants surprisingly stated that they do feel that they as individuals have the power to have a positive impact on the environment by purchasing sustainable foods. It was generally agreed in all focus groups that the most important perceived impact was not due to the direct environmental effects of the individual participants’ purchases, but rather due to the fact that they have the power to affect other people they are in contact with. This social aspect is not directly related to the theoretical concept of the attitude-behaviour gap, but shows that emphasizing the broader, social impact of sustainable purchasing habits could be an interesting argument for swaying consumers who are currently hindered from investing in sustainable food products due to a perception that they are powerless to have any real impact on the environment.

However, it was also discussed that the social aspect of sustainable consumption may lead to false positives in responses in surveys. One participant stated that it may be socially
beneficial to overstate your concern for the environment without actually acting on it. While this was not explicitly expressed by other participants, the extensive discussion about the perceived social pressure related to sustainable consumption may be interpreted as support for this notion. A final, interesting notion was brought forth by one participant in the third focus group, who suggested that people tend to overestimate the importance of their positive actions and underestimate the importance of their negative actions. This interesting notion is actually consistent with the psychological concept of “positive illusions”. The concept, developed by Taylor and Brown (1988) is used to describe the tendency of human beings to make overly positive evaluations of themselves, be unrealistically optimistic about the future, and to have unrealistic perceptions of their own skill (Taylor & Brown, 1988, p. 193). If we speculate that positive illusions come into play when researchers try to measure the attitudes and behaviour of consumers, it is possible that consumers genuinely perceive themselves to make more sustainable purchasing decisions than they actually do, contributing to a gap between reported attitudes and actual behaviour.

In our theoretical framework we established that the reasons behind the existence of the attitude-behaviour gap are unclear, but speculated that response biases Hiramatsu et al. (2015) and social pressure Minard (1952) could lie at the root of the attitude-behaviour gap. Our findings confirm social pressure as an important factor, but beyond that our study can mostly serve to provide inspiration for further study. For example, it could be interesting to look further into positive illusions (Taylor & Brown, 1988) as a relevant concept for explaining attitude-behaviour gaps in many areas, not only sustainable food purchasing. For clarification, the subject of positive illusions was not included in chapter 2 Theoretical framework since no previous literature that we examined discussed it. It is solely a product of the discussions of the focus groups, that we nonetheless deemed relevant enough to bring up.

5.5 Heuristics
Heuristics were included in our study, as seen in chapter 2.5.1, by asking participants which factors they look for when estimating the environmental friendliness of products and ultimately deciding which products to purchase.

The results within this topic were not surprising, orbiting mainly perceived price-quality relationship of products. This distinction was generally agreed to be made based on factors such as design of the package (colour, labels, images related to nature, and materials used), brand, and the look of the product itself, whenever visible. The discussion followed assumptions made in previously introduced theory about heuristics and bounded rationality in that most participants rarely engage in deep information search while in the store. Interesting findings include that most of our participants do trust sustainable labels to some extent, but that their trust toward them is limited due to an incomplete understanding of the meanings of these labels. As such, it would be interesting for future research to examine how different labels are valued among consumers, which of course relates to which type of sustainable food is preferred. An interesting note from the second focus group was that some labels may carry weight that exceeds the main message of the label. One participant noted that he prefers products that are labelled as produced in Sweden over products that are labelled as environmentally friendly but produced in other countries. This is due to that he trusts that a product that is produced in Sweden will not only have a smaller carbon footprint due to the shorter transportation, but that it will also meet higher standards than foreign products in terms of quality and ethicality. This was
agreed upon by several other participants, with one of them adding that she perceives products sold by local farmers to be superior even to KRAV-labelled products in all categories relating to sustainability.

Furthermore, most participants seemed to have one main factor that they rely upon in situations where it was difficult to discern which of two products is more sustainable. As previously mentioned, several participants mainly consider country of origin. Other participants look for factors such as specific ingredients that they perceive to be bad for the environment or use heuristics such as whether it is possible to naturally produce a certain product close to the market at the time of purchase. From both practical and academic perspectives, we argue that it would be useful to further study how consumers rank different factors that they perceive to signal sustainability. This would allow marketers to gain a clearer understanding of which factors to emphasize in products, leading to increased sales.

A topic that was brought up in all three focus groups (although in slightly different wording) was the force of habit. One participant in the first focus group stated that he does not plan his grocery shopping beforehand, but rather makes all his decisions in-store. While this may not be directly related to heuristics per se, this type of behaviour does imply that the use of heuristics will be especially important for this particular individual. This is due to that he has to make up his mind about every single purchase in the actual purchasing situation, a process that will be very time-consuming without the use of heuristics. While this input did not yield any specific insight into how heuristics are used by consumers, it does serve as an example of why heuristics are important to understand from a marketing perspective. In the second focus group, one participant repeatedly brought up the fact that she makes most of her purchases based on habit. This view was supported by several participants across all focus groups. It was discussed that the participants in general feel apprehensive toward trying new products without an incentive, especially if the new products are more expensive or if the participants are unsure of the quality of the product. Several participants mentioned that familiarity with a product, product line, or brand plays an important role in their decision-making. This once again shows the importance of accounting for heuristics and the difficulty of breaking consumers’ habits when marketing sustainable food products. We interpret the results to mean that it is highly relevant for marketing researchers and practitioners to both gain a deeper understanding of how consumers use heuristics as a decision-making tool and explore ways of overcoming the barrier posed by the force of habit that is preventing consumers from trying more sustainable options.

A final, but interesting topic brought up in one of the focus groups was the general perception that many sustainable food products expire sooner than their standard counterparts. All participants in the group agreed that the stated or perceived expiration date (fruits and vegetables that do not look fresh in the purchasing situation can be interpreted as being perceived to have a short time to expiration) of products is an important factor in deciding which products to purchase. In general, the participants agreed that they use the heuristic that a longer time to expiration is good, and that such products would therefore often be preferred. This led to a discussion about the difficulty of planning sustainable diets being a barrier to purchasing sustainable foods. This was argued to be due to that it is more difficult to utilize all the purchased food before it expires unless you know exactly how to incorporate each product into your diet. As such, the prevalent use of heuristics in food purchasing situations may potentially relate to the
need for marketers to better educate consumers on how to put together meal plans consisting of sustainable food products, as discussed in our previous analysis of lack of prudent knowledge as a barrier to sustainable food purchasing.

In general, our findings relating to the use of heuristics did not present any surprising differences from previous findings such as those made by Moser (2016). However, our results did support Moser’s (2016) view that heuristics hold a potentially vital role in the promotion of sustainable foods over standard options.

5.6 Behaviour
As part of the data collection process, we also considered it necessary to check for the participants’ actual behaviour in the purchasing situations. Behaviour in our integrative model is considered the final product of the effects of the other discussed concepts. As this study relied on self-reported purchasing decisions and the main focus was not on directly measuring the behaviour of the participants, this section will be kept relatively short.

When asked about how frequently they purchase what they themselves consider to be sustainable products, the answers given ranged from 20-90%. When probed, most participants that reported high levels of sustainable purchasing admitted that this was mostly due to them maintaining a largely vegetarian diet and that the percentage of their consumption that was branded as sustainable actually was lower than that, in some cases non-existent. Interestingly, the participant who reported the highest level of sustainable purchasing kept a diet consisting of large amounts of meat based his purchasing motivation on health aspects rather than concern for the environment. The results from the question show that the participants at least to some degree are willing to purchase foods that they themselves consider to be sustainable, but that they all have room to increase their level of sustainable purchasing, meaning that they can be considered a relevant sample for our study. In fact, the varying levels of sustainable consumption that were displayed in the group were, in our view, helpful in cultivating an interesting climate for discussion which sparked conversations that yielded useful results.

During the discussions the different concepts that in our integrative model are argued to be drivers of sustainable purchasing behaviour proved useful concepts for guiding the discussion, which in our view can be seen as an argument for the relevance of our model. While the model does need empirical testing, we argue that the results of our study have provided support for the model being useful in understanding the underlying reasons for sustainable purchasing behaviour.

5.7 Marketing insights
The focus groups were concluded with a general question about how the participants feel about current marketing efforts for sustainable foods and whether they had any recommendations for how they could be made more effective. While many participants could think of examples of marketing efforts that had a positive impact on themselves, several participants in the last focus group displayed such a strong distrust toward current sustainable marketing efforts that vaguely formulated messages about the sustainability of certain products is more likely to actually discourage them from trying that product than to have the desired effect. Some interesting recommendations were also made. In one group, several participants agreed that commercials for locally produced food that strived to form the sense of a personal connection between the consumer and the producer
are effective. One example of this is campaigns that show the face and name of a local farmer who produces the product that is being marketed. In the participants’ view, this kind of effort serves to make the importance of buying locally produced foods feel more tangible. Another positive example was Max’s (a Swedish burger chain) strong efforts to signal how sustainable they are. In the mind of the participant who mentioned this example, the message that Max is a sustainable company is made so overwhelming that it is impossible for the consumer not to notice it.

In terms of possible improvements, we have already mentioned the suggestion by one of the participants to make learning facts about the environment easier and more fun. Earlier in our analysis we concluded that it may be important to provide the population with more specific knowledge about the benefits of sustainable purchasing habits. If this is the case, then it also stands to reason that marketers need to make an effort to find pedagogical and efficient ways of communicating this knowledge. We argue that while these ways do not necessarily need to be “fun”, it is worth considering different ways for marketers to educate their audience.

Another topic that was discussed during the final part of the first focus group was the marketing channels used to promote sustainable food products. Many of the participants felt that marketers are missing out on the opportunity to reach as many consumers as possible. First of all, all participants in the first focus group agreed that the use of social media to increase sustainable marketing should be increased. In a world where more and more people have greatly decreased their television time due to online streaming services, and where social media marketing has established itself as an important marketing tool, it is surprising that the perception of our participants was that this important platform is being underutilized. On the same note, several participants in the third focus group stated that they are most affected by messages that stem from individuals who they consider to be authority figures either when it comes to cooking or sustainability issues. These figures include celebrity chefs who endorse the use of sustainable ingredients when cooking, and sustainability experts who review and publicly comment on the practices of food producers. As such, the idea that marketers of sustainable foods could increase their utilization of such prominent figures in their marketing efforts may warrant further consideration. This argument can in our view be further strengthened by our findings regarding value dimensions and knowledge.

It was also suggested by several participants that they feel that grocery stores often fail to display the sustainable foods in a way that is either clear or tempting. Some participants stated that they often fail to identify sustainable food products, while one participant speculated that lining up sustainable options right next to the standard alternatives only serves to make the price premium of the environmentally friendly product more noticeable. It was discussed whether this issue could be solved by experimenting with store layouts in a way that would make sustainable products easier to locate while decreasing the risk of negative price comparisons with standard products. This could for example be done by creating a section in the store entirely dedicated to sustainable products. While the authors of this thesis find this idea interesting, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the validity of this particular suggestion. However, it is an interesting idea that marketers could experiment with new ways of increasing the consumer’s exposure to sustainable food products, as well as finding new, clever ways of decreasing the perceived price difference between standard and sustainable products.
One idea that surfaced during the third focus group may be difficult to implement due to reasons of market competitiveness, but we still considered it interesting enough to include into our analysis. The idea was that food marketers should utilize the same form of counter-marketing that is used by e.g. tobacco companies, who print information about the hazards of smoking on the package. By making the negative effects of unsustainable consumption more visible in the purchasing situation through texts or images, it is possible that the demand for sustainable products could be increased at the expense of standard options. While this idea may be difficult to implement without the backing of legislation, it may still be an interesting alternative for the future. While all participants of the focus group in question agreed that this approach would likely succeed in changing their purchasing patterns, one participant stated that the counter-marketing messages should be made tangible. For example, he mentioned that he would not be affected by becoming made vaguely aware that sea temperatures are rising by a few degrees every year, but that he would more likely be affected if he was shown an image of the destruction of coral reefs around the world. This was agreed upon by the group, who then turned their discussion to the need for marketing to be specific in order to be effective. It was stated and agreed upon that “a picture of a cow in a green field” would succeed in showing the participants that a product is meant to be perceived as sustainable, but that it would do little to actually motivate them to change their purchasing habits. Instead, the participants called for marketing efforts that show more specifically the production process of the food product, thus displaying in a more convincing way exactly how sustainable the product is and why it should be considered a better alternative than standard products. This of course ties together with our previous arguments about the importance of specific knowledge and educating the consumers in order to build demand for sustainable products more efficiently.

Another marketing recommendation that was made by almost all participants was to increase the use of price incentives to encourage consumers to try sustainable products. This suggestion makes sense considering that two of the identified purchasing barriers in our study were price and habit. In addition, one participant stated that he feels reluctant to pay money to try a product that may not be as tasty as what he usually buys. The potential price incentives discussed within the focus groups were increased use of free samples of sustainable food products, as well as increased use of discounts. These methods would decrease the cost of breaking current purchasing habits, thus potentially overcoming at least one of the identified barriers. As such, we are surprised that marketing efforts fail to utilize price incentives more efficiently.

Finally, several of the participants voiced the opinion that their perception is that many sustainable products fail to communicate their benefits in a convincing way in the purchasing situation. One participant mentioned that the quality of the product, rather than the environmentally friendly attributes of it should be emphasized more on the packaging. Another participant agreed, adding that the health benefits also should be further emphasized. Considering our previous discussion of heuristics, the different value dimensions, and knowledge sets pertaining to specific categories of sustainable foods that have different benefits, this could potentially be an interesting idea. Depending on what type of sustainable product that is in question, it may be prudent to diverge from the standard “sustainable” labelling and instead emphasize other benefits of the specific product. However, further research into this area is needed before any definitive conclusions can be drawn.
5.8 Analytical summary
The most important insights of the analysis are summarized for the reader’s convenience in the following table, *Table 2, Analytical Summary.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Drivers</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Other insights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td>All value dimensions represented</td>
<td>Failure to consistently activate all value dimensions</td>
<td>The importance of sharing knowledge related to all value dimensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived price barrier, related to egoistic value dimension and hedonism</td>
<td>Possibility to split biospheric dimension into different dimensions for animal welfare and general environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Understanding of the impact of environmental issues</td>
<td>Lack of specific knowledge about impact of sustainable purchasing decisions</td>
<td>Information is perceived to be available, but only if it is actively searched for outside of the purchasing situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of sustainable options</td>
<td>Difficulties with defining sustainable food products and comparing level of sustainability between products</td>
<td>Learning about environmental issues needs to be made easier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived unavailability of sustainable options that are as good as the standard products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes + perceptions</strong></td>
<td>The will to do something good for the environment</td>
<td>Reluctance to be associated with certain consumer groups</td>
<td>Attitudes are specific to certain categories of sustainable foods, rather than generalized to all products that are environmentally friendly in some way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social pressure to follow the example of others</td>
<td>Distrust toward marketing efforts related to sustainable branding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The will to lead by example</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude-behaviour gap</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Less support within the sample for fatalism being a reason, strong support for hedonism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social pressure as explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive illusions as a possible explanation for self-reporting errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulty in defining what sustainable foods are may skew results of studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Heuristics

| The assumption that sustainable foods are healthier and tastier than standard options |
| The assumption that sustainable foods are too expensive to consider |
| Force of habit preventing consumers from trying sustainable products if they usually purchase standard options |
| The evaluation of different labels in comparison to each other may yield interesting results for the future |

### Behaviour

| Lack of planning shopping beforehand makes putting together a menu consisting of sustainable ingredients difficult |

### Marketing insights

| Current marketing efforts that were positively reviewed were the ones that manage to create an emotional connection to the products |
| Marketing efforts that use authority figures and experts were positively reviewed |
| Limited use of pricing schemes and programs |
| Perceived ineffective use of available marketing channels, such as social media |
| Perceived suboptimal product placement in-store |
| Failure to provide specific argumentation for why certain products should be considered more sustainable than other options |
| Failure to make effects of sustainable purchasing seem tangible for the consumers |
| Other recommendations include the use of counter-marketing and activities and alternative store layouts that decrease the negative effects of price comparison with standard options and decrease the risk of perceived availability as a factor |

In the table, the findings from the analysis are organized according to theoretical concept and split into the categories *drivers, barriers, and other insights*. While some theoretical concepts cannot be discussed in terms of drivers or barriers, we argue that all concepts to at least some extent proved useful in fulfilling the purpose of the study.
6 Conclusions

In the final chapter of this study, we will summarize the most important conclusions drawn within the analysis and discuss these in relation to the purpose and research questions of this study. After this, empirical and ethical considerations are commented on. The conclusions are then discussed in terms of practical, societal and theoretical implications. Finally, we make recommendations for future research.

6.1 Purpose and research questions
The overarching purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring drivers of, and barriers to, green purchasing behaviour. In order to achieve this, the subsequent research questions were formulated: “What do consumers perceive to be drivers motivating them to purchase sustainable foods?” and “What do consumers perceive to be barriers preventing them from purchasing sustainable foods?”. To answer these questions, we employed an exploratory approach, utilizing semi-structured focus groups. Next, we will account for the most notable drivers and barriers identified in the analysis.

In regard to drivers, our findings suggest that, in relation to values, all value dimensions are present as possible drivers among our participants. While many participants displayed several value dimensions as possible drivers of their behaviour, most participants favoured one value dimension above the others. However, the favoured value dimension differed among the participants. Barriers in relation to values however, include failure to consistently activate all value dimensions, which we in the analysis relate to lack of knowledge. Another strong barrier is the perceived price difference between sustainable and standard products, which we relate to the egoistic value dimension mainly in terms of hedonism.

In relation to knowledge, we would argue based on our findings, that an understanding of the impact of environmental issues is not necessarily a strong driver by itself. Instead, as we suggested with our integrative model, it is the alignment between values and knowledge that act as a driver of attitudes, which in turn drive green purchasing behaviour. A strong barrier is constituted by the lack of specific knowledge of the impact of sustainable purchasing decisions, as well as difficulties with defining and comparing sustainable food products.

The participants’ attitudes and perceptions of the environment suggest that social factors can serve as drivers of green purchasing behaviour in two forms. First, consumers may feel social pressure to act green because of how people around them act. Second, consumers may wish to display green behaviour due to the possibility of influencing other people around them. We would argue that this distinction is important in that there is a difference between applying pressure to others, and conforming to pressure from others. Barriers on the other hand, include the reluctance to be associated with certain consumer groups and the social stigma that surrounds them, as well as a general distrust toward marketing efforts related to sustainable branding.

In regard to heuristics, the assumption that sustainable foods are healthier and tastier than standard options is most prominent as a driver of sustainable purchasing behaviour. A barrier is the assumption that sustainable foods are too expensive to consider. Another
barrier is the force of habit that prevents consumers from trying sustainable products if they usually purchase standard options.

Apart from these drivers and barriers, this study also produced several other insights that we deem important in order to better understand the green consumer profile, all of which are accounted for in chapter 5. The insight we consider most valuable is the difficulty related to defining sustainable food products and the implications of this issue. We argue that differing opinions and knowledge surrounding what constitutes sustainable foods is reason to question the very foundation upon which much of contemporary research within the area is built. We would also argue that this may be a partial explanation for the attitude-behaviour gap. These implications, and more, is further discussed in chapter 6.5.

Finally, we would like to comment on the nature of drivers and barriers in this study. While one might argue that the absence of a driver constitutes a barrier, and vice versa, the responses of our participants suggest that this may not necessarily always be the case. For example, the absence of a barrier may not motivate sustainable purchasing behaviour unless drivers also exist in one form or another. This insight, while secondary, we would argue facilitates better understanding of the conclusions drawn above, as well as increases our understanding of the green consumer profile.

We have in our view succeeded in fulfilling the purpose of the study and answering the research questions. We have identified several possible drivers and barriers, many of which have previously been given little to no attention within marketing research, and provided additional insight into possible explanations for the vexing attitude-behaviour gap.

6.2 Data quality, truth criteria and ethical considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, the principles accounted for in chapter 3.9 were followed. To expand upon this, before starting the focus group sessions, all participants were informed that they were not obliged to divulge any information that they were uncomfortable with. Although the authors of this thesis made an effort to create a relaxed interview environment and discussion climate, the risk that the participants were not fully honest with us can never be completely written-off. Furthermore, while focus groups provide a stimulating environment for discussion of various concepts, it is also a risk that the participants were influenced by the presence of others and their voiced opinions. However, it is the impression of the authors that the participants provided us with honest answers and at no point did any participant exercise the option to refrain from answering a question. While some participants were more talkative than others, it is also the view of the authors that every participant was given sufficient possibility to express their own opinions of every question and thus contribute to the discussion in an equal way.

Regarding the conclusions drawn from the empirical data, in line with chapter 3.11, we are aware that (as is the case with any qualitative study) the comments may be interpreted in different ways. In the case of the raw empirical data, the authors made an effort to ask probing questions in cases were the participants used ambiguous wording in order to avoid misunderstandings. Furthermore, the participants were given the opportunity to review a summary of the focus group they participated in, thus providing them with a chance to rectify any potential mistakes in our interpretation of their responses. No participant voiced any complains, which we argue is a sign that we have interpreted the responses correctly. In terms of interpretations of the consequences of the opinions
expressed in the empirical data, we have used our theoretical framework as a foundation from the analysis and drawn conclusions relating to the various concepts in our integrative framework. While we have strived to present convincing argumentation for our interpretations, we encourage the reader to exercise critical thinking and argue for different interpretations if there are any. Furthermore, we recognize that our interpretations are naturally coloured by the theoretical framework we constructed prior to the interviews, meaning that a different theoretical point of departure may result in different interpretations of the data. Ultimately, it is our view that we have provided solid argumentation for the theoretical framework we are employing, that we have taken measure to receive as accurate empirical data as possible, and that we have argued sufficiently in our analysis to warrant confidence in the relevance of our interpretations. We have done this by abiding by the concepts of reliability and generalisability that can be viewed in chapter 3.11.

It should be recognized that the empirical data was gathered from a sample of students at Umeå University, with every participant being between the age of 20 and 29 years, an outcome dependent on the convenience sampling utilized. The characteristics of the sample should be taken into account when discussing the generalisability of results. While the participants of the focus groups can be classified as e.g. young adults or students, we would like to comment that the selected participants were a result of our sampling techniques, rather than a conscious decision to target a specific segment. It should furthermore be noted upon that the generalisability of the results may be affected by the fact that students in general have a limited disposable income compared to other segments, which may increase the importance of factors such as price as a barrier to sustainable food purchasing. Factors such as cultural differences should also naturally be accounted for, as pointed out by several participants who pondered the difference in how certain marketing efforts would be in their home country as opposed to in Sweden. While the purpose of an exploratory study such as this one is not to draw definitive conclusions about any specific segment, one must be aware of the possibility that the empirical data that was collected could have been different if a different sample had been selected. The fact that not much else demographical data of the participants was collected may be considered an issue from a replicability perspective for this study. However, we argue that publication of more detailed demographic data would infringe on the anonymity of the participants. Furthermore, we would argue that very little of this demographic data would be of use for this thesis and its purpose.

While other truth criteria exist, especially in relation to qualitative data gathering, no consensus on this matter exists in contemporary research. Bryman and Bell (2012, p. 399) discuss trustworthiness for instance, which in itself is a multi-faceted criterion including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. We would argue that the reliability criteria in this study, and the steps we have taken to reach it, can be synonymous with dependability, and as Saunders et al. (2009, p. 335) themselves put it, transferability is synonymous with generalisability, at least to the extent it has been applied in this thesis. Moreover, in relation to Bryman and Bell’s (2012, p. 399) credibility, while we have excluded its use in this thesis, we would still like to comment shortly on it. Most, if not all, of the findings that we have produced are very much in line with previous academic literature and empirical data, as shown by the relevance of our integrative model that is based on previously established concepts. Furthermore, the insights derived from the focus groups were similar across all three instances, which we also consider to be an
indication of the credibility of the results. It should still be noted upon by us as authors that the perspectives derived from the focus groups are not all existing perspectives on the matter, but the implications of this notion are covered by our statements regarding the generalisability of this thesis.

6.3 Practical implications

The purpose at the outset of the study was to increase the understanding of the green consumer profile by exploring drivers of green purchasing behaviour, which we have argued is of relevance to marketing practitioners who aim to increase demand for sustainable products. Within the context of this study, we focused on the food industry, although it is possible that our findings may be of relevance to other sectors as well. While the findings of this exploratory study still need to be verified by future research, we argue that several points in our empirical data and our conclusions can be considered to be of interest to practitioners. Firstly, as argued in our analysis, a major barrier for increased purchasing of sustainable food products seems to be a lack of specific knowledge about the benefits and drawbacks of sustainable foods versus standard alternatives. From our analysis it became evident that a recurring theme among our participants was differing opinions on what constituted sustainable foods, different arguments for purchasing sustainable foods depending on which value dimension was in focus, and a general indifference toward marketing messages that in essence only state on a general level that consuming sustainable products is good. It also became evident that social factors may be both drivers and barriers to increased purchasing of sustainable foods, suggesting that marketers need to actively consider these types of factors in their marketing. Additionally, several participants voiced a general distrust toward marketing efforts that fail to specify exactly why their products should be considered sustainable. Finally, in accordance with previous literature on the subject (e.g. Moser, 2016), perceived price and availability were identified as barriers to sustainable purchasing.

Previously, academics have assumed that an increase in environmental awareness will lead to an increase in pro-environmental purchasing behaviour (Hines, Hungerford & Tomera, 1987; Mostafa, 2007; Sheltzer, Stackman & Moore, 1991). This view seems to have been adopted by practitioners, who in the eyes of our respondents tend to convey general messages about the importance of being environmentally friendly. In contrast, our results suggest that it is, in fact, not enough to communicate a general need to be environmentally friendly. Instead, our data suggests that marketers should aim to educate their target groups on more specific information about the benefits and drawbacks of sustainable and standard foods, as well as provide more convincing argumentation for why a product should be considered sustainable. Recommendations given by our participants included making it easier and more interesting to learn about environmental issues, communicating more specific facts about the production of the marketed products, making the benefits and drawbacks of different products seem more tangible, focusing on additional benefits such as health and taste rather than simply environmental factors, providing tips on how to incorporate sustainable food products into a diet, and making it easier to compare the environmental effects of different products.

From a social perspective, the participants’ comments suggested that it may be beneficial for practitioners to devise some way of displaying that other people also engage in sustainable behaviour, since this was identified as a driver of sustainable purchasing behaviour. For example, one might consider displays in the store that show how many sustainable products that have been purchased during the last week. Such a system could
also potentially decrease the risk of consumers feeling that they are alone in their struggle to help the environment. Another option could be awareness campaigns similar to those used to raise awareness for the fight against e.g. diseases such as cancer, where regular consumers are encouraged to display sustainable consumption decisions that they make through various social media challenges. The other social aspect of sustainable food consumption that was brought up was the existence of negative connotations related to certain categories of sustainable foods. Recall the example of a participant who wants to be sustainable, but actively avoids vegan foods because of his perception that many vegans behave badly toward other consumers. This is an issue that should be addressed as soon as possible by marketing practitioners, in order to avoid the problem spiralling out of control.

Furthermore, marketing channels were discussed as a way of increasing the impact of marketing. Several participants perceived social media to be underutilized, while others were of the view that in-store messages should be delivered in a more clear and informative way. Finally, the use of authority figures within the culinary and sustainability fields was expressed by our participants as a marketing tool that was considered efficient, but underutilized.

Finally, the issue of price and availability was emphasized as a barrier to sustainable purchasing. While it may be difficult for marketers to completely eliminate these factors from the equation, some creative tools may be possible to decrease the size of this barrier. Firstly, marketers should make an effort to ensure that sustainable food options are always easy to locate in the store, as to avoid any unnecessary perceived lack of availability. This can be achieved by use of visual cues on the packaging as discussed by Moser (2016) and through positioning in store, as discussed by our participants. To overcome the barrier posed by the price premium associated with sustainable products, most participants called for more frequent use of discounts specifically directed at sustainable products as a way of increasing interest for that food category. One recommendation that the authors of this paper would like to make is the implementation of loyalty programs that spur the consumer to increase their consumption of sustainable foods. This may include programs where purchasing of sustainable food products leads to discounts on other food products, or programs that track the consumer’s sustainable purchases in order to make their efforts seem more tangible. While one participant pointed that one food change has a mobile app that attempts to do this, this approach to sustainable marketing is currently very rare, to the best knowledge of the authors of this paper.

6.4 Societal implications
In the introduction to this thesis, the importance of turning the tide of our consumption habits was emphasized, with the main argument being that our planet will eventually become uninhabitable unless its population as a whole becomes more environmentally friendly in their behaviour. Since humankind cannot survive without a functioning planet, the importance of sustainability cannot be understated in a world where the population is simultaneously becoming both larger and more affluent (Rosling et al., 2018).

From a societal perspective, we argue that the most relevant concepts of our integrative model pertain to the social impact on attitudes toward sustainable foods, and the level of knowledge required to motivate consumers to engage in increased sustainable purchasing behaviour. If we consider the effects of social pressure on purchasing behaviours, it becomes evident that we as a society need to support and encourage each other to become
more sustainable in our consumption. While active marketing efforts should of course be maintained, most participants in our study agreed that the main driver of their motivation to be “green” comes from seeing how other people around them engage in sustainable behaviour, and that the main impact an individual has through sustainable purchasing habits pertains to the possibility of influencing other people around them to “join the movement”.

The results of our study suggest that even participants who considered themselves knowledgeable about matters concerning sustainability often lacked specific understanding of the effects of certain purchasing decisions, and that they would be more motivated to increase their sustainable food consumption if they had more information. It is not unreasonable to assume that the same logic applies to other aspects of life than the purchasing of foods, thus increasing the effect that a better educated population could have on the environment. While marketers are in the best position to address the issue of providing consumers with specific knowledge in the short-term, one can also imagine ways that society as a whole can help solve the issue in the long run. For example, why not increase the emphasis on sustainability as a subject in schools from a young age? If experts and a large portion of society seem to agree that saving the environment is one of the most urgent issues of our time, why not consider changing the curriculum to reflect this sentiment? While we understand the complexity of taking such a measure, we strongly urge society as a whole to consider various ways of solving an issue that ultimately affects our entire species.

6.5 Theoretical implications and future research
In the beginning of the writing of this thesis, we took a critical look at the state of current literature and reached the conclusion that there is a lot that marketing practitioners and academics still do not understand about the green consumer profile. As such, our hope was that our study could contribute not only to practitioners, but also to academics. With this goal in mind, we decided to employ an exploratory approach, based on an integrative model that we ourselves constructed. In our view, we have succeeded in shedding additional light on the intricacies of sustainable purchasing behaviour. In the following, we will account for our contribution to marketing literature and give recommendations for future research within the field.

While the integrative model was constructed based on established concepts within marketing literature, we argue that we have made a meaningful contribution by synthesizing the various concepts into a single, logical model. We do not presume to say that the model is perfect or complete, and it still needs further empirical testing before it can be considered objectively reliable. However, the model is based on previously established concepts and especially the connections between knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviour have been previously verified by literature such as e.g. Homer and Kahle (1988), Huang et al. (2014), Chan (1999), and Mostafa (2007). Furthermore, the model proved useful in facilitating formulation of interview questions that created insightful discussion into the purchasing behaviour of the participants, as well as potential barriers and drivers. As such, we argue that there is sufficient reason to consider our integrative model a relevant tool for explaining and understanding green purchasing behaviour. We invite future academics to test, expand, and improve the model as the state of marketing research progresses.
The first concept of our model concerns values, which can be split into three value dimensions: egoistic, biospheric, and altruistic. While our results did not differ from previous research by e.g. Stern et al. (1993) and Shin et al. (2017) in that all three value dimensions were represented as relevant for explaining the purchasing motivations of our participants, our study did yield some interesting insights. Firstly, the sense of fatalism experienced by consumers argued for by McDonagh and Prothero (2014, p. 1196) did not seem as meaningful as a purchasing barrier as could have been expected among our sample. This was explained by the participants either stating that they would feel good about doing their part regardless of the actions of people around them, or by stating that they do have a significant impact on the environment by affecting other people with their own behaviour. Hedonism, however, was strongly indicated as a barrier to sustainable purchasing in cases where the participants felt a strong sense of loyalty to a certain unsustainable product, or when the unsustainable product was perceived to be of superior taste compared to sustainable options. Moreover, it can be argued that hedonism is at fault in situations where consumers spend a large portion of their disposable income on unnecessary pleasures and thereafter argue that they do not have an obligation to invest in sustainable foods because they simply cannot afford it. McDonagh and Prothero (2014, p. 1196) called for further exploration of both hedonism and fatalism as barriers to sustainable purchasing, and we argue that we have done so. By exploring the concepts, we have provided useful food for thought for future in-depth studies of the phenomena. Furthermore, we argue that the sustainable purchasing motivations of our participants suggest that it may be useful to split the biospheric value dimension into separate entities for animal welfare and concern for the environment in general, with the former referring to the ethical treatment of animals. We also argue that our research shows the need to further evaluate the connection between the possession of knowledge and the activation of certain value dimensions. This is due to our interpretation that participants who emphasize several value dimensions still often only seemed to be knowledgeable about facts related to one of the value dimensions, which could be steering their purchasing behaviour in a specific direction that would be different if they had more knowledge concerning the other value dimensions as well.

The second concept that has been established to serve as a driver of attitudes is knowledge. While previous literature, such as Huang et al. (2014), have established knowledge or environmental awareness to be relevant for the consumers’ purchasing habits, the importance of specific knowledge has been neglected in sustainable marketing literature. The importance of specific knowledge was emphasized in every focus group, with many participants agreeing that having more specific knowledge would increase their purchasing motivations and decrease the barrier posed by a distrust in sustainable marketing efforts, that were often seen as attempts to capitalize on the sustainability trend without actually doing anything for the benefit of the environment. While the effects of having specific knowledge versus a more general knowledge still needs to be empirically tested, we argue that one important contribution of our study is to identify the lack of specific knowledge of the benefits of sustainable food products and negative impact of standard options as a potential barrier to increased sustainable purchasing behaviour.

Furthermore, our study showed that there is considerable confusion regarding what should be considered a sustainable product. While this can be largely related to the previously discussed purchasing barrier due to lack of specific knowledge, it may also have implications for how previous research is viewed. If consumers are unable to specify what a sustainable product is, how can researchers possibly find a match between
environmentally friendly attitudes and sustainable purchasing behaviour? Even if the researcher specifies that a specific study interprets sustainable products as “products labelled with eco-certificates”, it is likely that there is going to be a mismatch between the consumers’ reported attitudes and their purchasing behaviour if the consumers actually do feel positive toward helping the environment but express it e.g. by purchasing vegetarian alternatives that are labelled as standard options. As such, we argue that our study provides sufficient reason to call into question the validity of many previous studies concerning the prominence of the attitude-behaviour gap. If the previous statement is put into more positive wording, we simultaneously argue that the identified confusion may be a step toward explaining at least a portion of the attitude-behaviour gap, an issue that has confused academics throughout the years.

Additionally, we argue that the many different opinions on what should be considered sustainable food products and the motivations for purchasing specific categories of sustainable foods show that it is not meaningful to regard sustainable foods as one homogenous category. Instead, researchers must accept that the motivations for purchasing e.g. organic meats might be vastly different from the motivations for purchasing locally produced lettuce. Only then can we truly begin to understand the finer points of the green consumer profile. As such, we argue that our open discussions about what is to be considered sustainable foods and our subsequent identification of barriers and motivations for purchasing decisions have illustrated the need for researchers to exercise care when making blanket statements or assumptions about purchasing behaviour relating to different categories of sustainable foods.

Moser (2016) argued that heuristics are an important factor to further investigate from a sustainable marketing perspective. For this reason, we included heuristics into our study. While our interpretation of the data in general is that it is difficult to draw conclusions about the use of heuristics in food purchasing situations - other than that they are indeed used - we do feel that we can make one specific recommendation for future research within the area. As stated by Moser (2016), labels that signal that food products are sustainable are important in convincing consumers to purchase environmentally friendly foods. While the use of labelling appears important, it is not clear how different labels are valued by consumers in comparison to each other, something that may be interesting for future academics and practitioners within the field. For example, some of our participants stated that they rely heavily on labels, even though they do not know exactly what they stand for. Others voiced a mistrust toward labels for the exact same reason. Finally, some participants stated that they would always value certain labels higher than others due to a perception that e.g. Swedish foods would automatically be assumed to be better than any imported food products regardless of the label. As such, consumers’ attitudes toward specific labels could be an interesting area for future research.

Finally, we argue that our study has indicated the need to account for social factors as both drivers and barriers toward consumption of sustainable foods, something that to our knowledge has been given little attention within sustainable marketing literature. In order to increase our understanding of the green consumer profile, there is a need to further explore how social connections affect the prevalence of sustainable purchasing decisions, both by creating positive pressure to purchase, negative pressure to purchase, and by creating an aversion to specific product categories due to perceived association with undesirable consumer groups.
Our main recommendations for future research are further investigation of specific knowledge as a driver of (or lack thereof as a barrier to) sustainable food purchasing. We also encourage future research to place more emphasis on the previously discussed social factors as both barriers and drivers of sustainable food purchasing. Furthermore, we would be happy to see the integrative model tested and developed to increase its usefulness in studies to come. Finally, we recognize that it currently is difficult to say which, if any, of our conclusions apply to other areas than the food industry. As such, we call for further exploration of the concepts discussed within this thesis not only in the context of sustainable foods, but in as many industries as possible where sustainable products are being sold. This is also true for other changes in context, such as replicating the study with a different samples, and/or in different geographical markets.

6.6 Concluding remarks
It is our hope that our work has been interesting to read and that future researchers will be able to benefit from our insights in their quest to solve the sustainable marketing puzzle once and for all. We have erred and succeeded in many ways during this journey, and have learned things that we believe make us better people. As a last note, we would like to conclude this paper with the words of Thomas Fuller.

“He that plants trees loves others besides himself.”
- Thomas Fuller
Reference list


Appendices

Appendix 1, Interview Guide

Welcome, short introduction to how the focus group will be conducted (3 minutes)

**Introductory questions**

*Q1* What do you consider to be “sustainable foods”?

*Q2* How often do you purchase what you consider to be sustainable foods?

**Main discussion**

*Q3* What are your feelings about sustainable foods?

*Q4* Studies show that consumers generally state that they are concerned with the environment, but that their actual purchasing behaviour does not correspond with these statements. Why do you think that may be the case?

*Q5.1* What are your reasons for purchasing sustainable foods?

*Q5.2* What are barriers that prevent you from purchasing sustainable foods more regularly?

*Q6* Do you feel that you as an individual have an impact on the environment in your food purchasing decisions?

*Q7* Do you feel that you have sufficient knowledge of sustainable foods to make accurate assessments of the benefits of different products?

*Q8* Considering all foods (not just sustainable ones) what information do you look for before deciding to purchase a specific product?

**Final discussion**

*Q9* Do you feel that current marketing efforts are making you buy more sustainable food products?

- Why/why not?
- In your view, how could these efforts be improved?

**Summary and thanking for participation**