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FOOD CONSUMPTION AND THE ROLE OF GUILT IN THE PRE PURCHASE SITUATION

- A QUALITATIVE STUDY WITH AN ECOLOGICAL FOOD APPROACH

Malin Persson Mörk

Supervisor: Jonas Nilsson
Master Degree Project 2018 Graduate School

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What food consumers choose to purchase has an environmental impact. Emotions and guilt has previously been shown to matter in what products consumers choose, but has not been looked into in ecological food consumption. This paper aims to deepen the understanding of guilt in the purchase of food consumption, by investigating when and why consumer experience guilt in the pre purchase situation of food and how guilt in the pre purchase situation influence the choice of food for the consumer. The paper has a qualitative approach and empiric material is gathered through eight interviews of generation Y, highly educated Swedish respondents. The findings show that guilt plays a role in what food consumers choose. Contemplation that leads to unpleasantness creates guilt in pre purchase situation of food consumption. The presence of ecological alternatives, how involved the consumers are in ecological issues and how much information and knowledge they hold of the food seem to influence the creation of guilt in the pre purchase situation. The findings of this study could possibly help shift to more ecological consumption by understanding more about when and why guilt in pre purchase situation of food is shaped, and how to influence the consumers' choice of food.

Keywords: ecological food consumption, emotions, guilt, anticipated emotions, anticipated guilt

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental unsustainability is a major challenge for mankind. The assets of the earth are used at a pace faster than its ability to recover. This pattern will in the long run lead to a lack of resources. It is of utmost importance that something changes to avoid this (Martin and Schouten, 2014). The way the western society consumes is contributing to the unsustainable environmental situation (De Bakker and Dagevos 2012). Unsustainable consumption has been brought up by the United Nations to be a main contributor to climate change (UNFCCC 2015).

One way to reduce ecological impact is to shift to more sustainable food choices (Vanhonacker et al., 2013). Food consumption has been estimated to account for about 20–30% of the total environmental impact in the Western world and food consumption is associated with various environmental impacts (Tukker & Jansen, 2006). Consumers' choices of food therefore represent important environmental decisions (Tobler, Visschers and Siegrist, 2011). Grunert (2011) states that consumers have, through their food choices, a major role in bringing about a more sustainable food production. Although ecological food consumption is growing, organic sales still represents a small share of 4.3 percentage of total sales (SCB, 2013). Furthermore there is still a discrepancy in what consumers claim they consume and what they actually do consume (Vermeier and Veibekke, 2006). Companies stand before a huge challenge: how to influence consumer choice of food toward more ecological food consumption.

Researchers have struggled to understand why the eco friendly consumption lags, and have looked at it from numerous angles. Vermeier and Veibekke (2006) present a

framework for understanding the gap between positive attitudes toward ecological food and intentions to purchase. The framework proposes that involvement, alternatives as well as information and knowledge are parts that hinder ecological food consumption. However, the explanation to why the consumption lags is still scarce and new angles toward understanding what influence food consumption is needed.

An angle of inclination that lacks academic research is the role of emotions in the pre purchase situation in consumers' choice of food (Söderlund, 2003). Emotions have shown to matter when it comes to the evaluation of products and to what consumers choose to purchase as well as in creating intentions and purchase behaviour (Holbrook, 1986). This has been proven in various other consumption settings, why it is motivated to understand more about what the role of emotions is in the pre purchase situation of food.

An emotion that in a quantitative manner has shown to affect what products consumers choose is guilt (Antonetti and Maklan, 2014a, Onwezen et al, 2014). However, what is not known is how and why guilt is created. Moreover the understanding of how guilt in the pre purchase situation influence what food consumers choose to buy is not understood. Hence, a qualitative investigation about what constitutes guilt is motivated. As guilt has been shown to drive consumption it could be beneficial to learn more about why and in what situations it is triggered, and what influence guilt could have on what food the consumers chooses. An increased understanding could help companies and consumers to shift towards more ecological food consumption.

Against this background and the assumption that guilt occurs in the pre purchase situation of ecological food the research questions are as follows:

When and why do consumers experience guilt in the pre purchase situation of food?

How does guilt in pre purchase situations influence the choice of food for the consumer?

The aim is to deepen the understanding of guilt in the pre purchase situation of food consumption.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study builds on the theoretical framework of emotions with focus on guilt. It concerns what happens in the pre purchase situation whereas the anticipation of emotions is motivated to look deeper into. Since the qualitative research concerning guilt and sustainable food consumption is scarce, the following presentation of previous research will be broadened to what is written about guilt in the context of sustainability as well as from a quantitative aspect. Section two will review what is previously presented to be the reasons to hinder the consumption of ecological food.

2.1 EMOTIONS

Consumer marketing research has over the past 20 years highlighted the importance of emotions in understanding consumer attitudes and behaviours. Within the area of communication and advertising multiple studies have shown that emotions triggered by the product and the advertising content affect both attitudes and behavior (Batra, 1986, Derbaix 1995, Edell & Burke, 1987, Muehling & McCann 1993, Söderlund, 2003). Emotions connected to consumption show the same pattern; attitudes and

evaluation of products are affected by emotions (Holbrook, 1986 och Gardner, 1984). Emotions also seem to matter in the creation of long-term preferences (Batra & Ray 1986, Bettman 1981, Zajonc 1981). Psychology research has come to the conclusion that emotions constitute a fundamental part of people's decision-making and long-term planning of life (Damasio, 1994). However, these studies have not been conducted within the area of sustainable consumption of ecological food.

The definitions this study will use are presented by Söderlund (2003) and is described as:

“ A short and experience in the conscious of a specific individual, connected to a specific object”.

Theories of emotions are concerned with a variety of emotional experiences, including anger, gratitude, guilt, hopelessness, pity, pride and shame (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). This study will focus on guilt in the pre purchase situation of food.

2.1.1 GUILT

Guilt has been defined by a number of researchers, and has been looked into from a marketing perspective for over 20 years. The definitions differ but the authors have had a common belief that it is connected to a sense of unpleasantness, building from a discrepancy in one's standards - furthermore what forms one's standards such as social aspects, norms and morals is more or less included in the definitions. Baumesiter et al. (1994) describes guilt as a negative and unpleasant state occurring when one's behaviour or intentions are in contradiction with one's moral standards. Kugler and Jones (1992) add that guilt also can be due to violation well-established social standards.

Lin and Xia (2009) bring these together and land in the definition of guilt being an unpleasant emotional state resulting from the failure to attain a personal, social or moral principle. These definitions are built from a broad context and are not specifically looked into from a sustainable consumption perspective, whereas it is valuable to know more about why and in what situations guilt occurs in the sustainable context.

Lascu (1991) describes that guilt can be conceptualized either as a personal trait, guilt trait, saying an individual's preposition which finds expression in a general tendency to feel guilty, or as an emotion, guilt state. The later is aiming at a temporary state, in line with the definition from Söderlund (2003) and this is what will be analysed in this study.

Guilt is academically divided into anticipated guilt, reactive guilt and existential guilt. Rawlings (1970) distinguishes anticipatory guilt from reactive guilt and existential guilt. Anticipated guilt raises from contemplating one's standards. Reactive guilt occurs when the internalized norms regarding what makes a behaviour acceptable were infringed, existential guilt occurs when the individual feels more privileged or more fortunate than others. (Renner et al. 2013, Huhmann and Brotherton 1997)

2.2 ANTICIPATED EMOTIONS

This study focuses on what happens before the purchase moment whereas the anticipation of emotions becomes interesting: the contemplation on what the purchase and consumption will feel like becomes central. Anticipated emotions are the expected emotions when considering the outcome of a certain future behaviour (Bagozzi et al. 1999). In a pre purchase situation, this means that the consumer

foresees the consequences in terms of anticipated emotions related to the usage of the product, or in this case also to the purchase. In addition anticipated emotions are motivated to look into due to the findings of Bagozzi et al. (1999). They argue that anticipated emotions foresee intentions even stronger than felt emotions: consumers strive to experience positive emotions and avoid negative ones based on their decisions (Frijda, Kuipers, & Schure, 1989).

Anticipated emotions are looked into from a sustainability perspective. Honea (2012) shows that anticipating guilt-relief, joy and pride positively influence consumers' intentions to decrease the use of plastic water bottles. Onwezen et al. (2013) take a step further and explore the combined effect of both anticipated guilt and pride and show that both emotions simultaneously influence the purchase of sustainable low-cost products. Ecological food could be argued to be in this category.

2.2.1 ANTICIPATED GUILT

The anticipation of guilt has caught attention in a marketing context, and has been looked into by a number of authors. The anticipated guilt builds on the previous definitions of guilt and the core concerns an unpleasant feeling. Rawlings (1970) explains anticipatory guilt as referring to the anticipation of a feeling people might experience when they contemplate violating their personal standards. Burnett and Lunsford (1994) say that guilt may also develop when consumers contemplate buying products that carry low social approval. This anticipation provides an opportunity to avoid the unpleasant emotion linked to transgression. However, an actual transgression is not necessary for guilt to occur. Cotte, Coulter and Moore (2005) describe it in a similar manner: anticipated consumer guilt arises from

contemplating a potential violation of one's own standards. They analyse the relationship between moral standards and moral behaviour in relation to emotions like guilt, embarrassment and shame.

The anticipation, leaving the possibility to avoid a certain negative feeling, why it is of interest in the marketing context. The possibility to avoid the unpleasantness creates a potential effect on the behaviour, something that has had focus in the consumer behaviour research. In order to not feel guilty, consumers has proven to change both consumptions intentions and behaviour (Lindenmeier et al. 2017). This has as well been brought up in the context of consumption of sustainable food. However, the research is mainly quantitative and builds on finding relationships that are created after the guilt occurs. This study wishes to deepen the understanding on what happens before this stage: what makes the guilt occur.

In the context of sustainability anticipated guilt has been shown to arise when consumers think about, for example, purchasing products from companies accused of unethical corporate conduct they may anticipate guilt (Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007). Lindenmeier et al. (2017) add to the investigation by showing that anticipated guilt is a major driver of fair-trade buying behaviour. Furthermore, anticipated consumer guilt mediates the effects of its antecedents on fair-trade buying intention. The antecedents brought up in the study are negative effects and self-referencing ethical judgement. The study is conducted in a quantitative matter. Steenhaut and Van Kenhove (2006), is looking into whether anticipated guilt functions as a mediator between ethical

evaluation and ethical consumption.

2.3 HINDERS TOWARD ECOLOGICAL FOOD CONSUMPTION

To broaden the view of what previously has been shown to matter in the sustainable consumption this section will consider previously established hinders for consumers to purchase ecological food. The gap between attitudes, intentions and behaviour, is something that is previously looked into both when it comes to consuming sustainable products in general, as well as in the category of food: The problem lies in consumer having trouble following their positive attitude when it comes to the actual purchase. Despite the positive attitude consumers rarely purchase ethical products (Auger and Devinney, 2007). The theory builds on research from Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behaviour, suggesting that purchasing intentions of ethical consumers are driven by personal values, internal ethics and moral norms. Guilt is defined to derive from a similar aspect. It is created from a perception of going against one's moral standards, social and moral norms (Baumesiter et al. 1994). The common ground makes it interesting to look further into the role of guilt in ecological food consumption.

One explanation for the gap is given by Follows and Jobber (2000) that claim that positive environmental attitudes are unlikely to be considered as heavily as negative individual consequences. An aspect that seems to be weighted more heavily is *price* concerns.

Vermeier and Veibekke (2006) have been looking into the gap in the context of sustainable food consumption. They focus on three determinants that seem to matter in whether or not a purchase is occurring:

involvement, information and knowledge and availability.

How *involved* a consumer is seemed to matter in whether or not consumers choose to consume ecologically, hence low involvement can be a hinder in ecological food consumption. Involvement consists of needs, motivation and personal values. The three are entangled: Needs that motivate people are expressed by values. Personal values are beliefs that are relatively stable. They build on personal or social desirability of certain behaviours. This can further play an important role in the consumer decision process, for example choice of products (Burgess, 1992).

Availability is presented by Vermeier and Verbeke (2006) to be connected to ecological food consumption and the attitude-intention gap. The lack of products makes it hard for consumers to consume ecologically, even if they intend to: There exist motivation to consume sustainable food but there is a lack of available products on the market, which can make the purchase problematic. De Pelsmacker et al., 2003 add that ethical products often have both limited availability and visibility in stores, and the inadequate promotion in stores makes the alternatives less visible.

The third aspect brought up by Vermeier and Verbeke (2006) is *information and knowledge*. Lack of available information as well as uneducated consumers is a hinder toward ecological consumption. Dickson (2001) presents that access to information and awareness of the products are important for consumers to be able to make informed choices. Another hinder is said to be poorly communicated benefits. Another hinder is insufficient information about the production. Consumers themselves often

lack knowledge in the product chain and have trouble understanding how their actions can affect the food supply chain (Verbeke, 2005).

3. METHOD

This study investigates consumer discourses in an empirical context. The assumption of the paper is that reality is subjective and is built by a social, cognitive process. A subjective view is well suited since the perception of the consumer is neither fact nor fiction (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Reality is assumed to be socially constructed and therefore the paper builds on an epistemological view meaning that knowledge is available through social actors (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

3.1 STUDY OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN

This paper explores guilt in the pre purchase situation in food consumption. In a quantitative manner previous research has shown that guilt plays part in fair trade consumption (Lindenmeier et al. 2017). However, less is known about how guilt is shaped and it can be assumed that a more multifaceted view could be beneficial. It is not yet understood how guilt in pre purchase situation influence the choice of food for consumers. To do so a qualitative manner is required. The method goes in line with the aim: to deepen the understanding of what role guilt plays in ecological food consumption in a pre purchase situation. Bryman and Bell (2012) describes that a qualitative manner is preferable when deepening knowledge.

The study takes an abductive approach is suitable since the main theory was decided beforehand but theoretical focus shifted as the empirics are gathered (Bryman and Bell, 2012). The field of emotions and the sustainable context was decided early in the

process. However, the emotion of guilt and the focus on the pre purchase situation was decided along the gathering of empirics. The motive was to let the respondents partly direct the study and as empirical material was gathered the theoretical framework was adapted. The purpose of this was to enable openness toward empirics rather than letting the theoretical background restrict it. Since no qualitative study in the area previously was made, openness toward findings was assessed to be important.

3.1.1 PRESTUDY

Before gathering the empirical material a pre study was conducted. The aim was to understand what emotions that seemed to matter in ecological consumption. Two focus group interviews were conducted, each group consisting of eight respondents. The discussions had a broad approach on consumption of food and concerned the entire consumption practice: from pre purchase situation contemplation to recycling behaviour. The focus groups showed a tendency towards that guilt in pre purchase behaviour mattered, as many of the respondents claimed that it hurt them contemplating choosing non-ecological food. Together with a lack of theoretical qualitative understanding, these findings worked as a ground for the focus on guilt in the pre purchase situation.

Criteria for participants were that they held positive attitudes toward ecological food. This was assessed to be important since the gap in ecological food consist of consumers with positive attitudes not generating positive intentions (Vermeier and Veibeke, 2006). Other demographic aspects were not taken into account in the pre study.

3.1.2 DATA COLLECTION

The empiric material was gathered through eight interviews. To deeply understand how individuals interpret and experience the social reality interviews are best suited (Bryman and Bell, 2012). The respondents were chosen through a convenience method. The demographic profile of the respondents was generation Y, highly educated consumers from Sweden.

Name	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Attitude-ecological food
FILIP A	MALE	28	BSC	NEGATIVE
FILIPPA	FEMALE	26	MSC	POSITIVE
SOFIA G	FEMALE	25	MSC	POSITIVE
EMILIA	FEMALE	28	MSC	POSITIVE
KARL	MALE	27	BSC	NEGATIVE
SOFIA H	FEMALE	26	MSC - ONGOING	POSITIVE
NIKLAS	MALE	23	BSC - ONGOING	NEUTRAL
FILIP M	MALE	26	MSC	POSITIVE

It was no precondition that the respondent held a certain attitude toward ecological food consumption, since a lack of willingness toward purchasing ecological food in relation to the role of guilt could be valuable empirics. However, it a was precondition that half of the respondent held environmentally friendly attitudes, since guilt is understood to be created by a violation of one's personal moral and norm (Rawlings, 1970), hence positive environmental moral and norms were assessed to be important for consumers to facilitate the creation of guilt in an ecological setting.

The motivation of higher educated respondents is that they are assumed to have awareness of the environmentally unsustainable situation and they are

therefore more likely to have contemplated their choice of food. According to Rawlings (1970), contemplation is a precondition to guilt; hence an assumption was made that a certain base understanding could facilitate the investigation of guilt.

Heaney (2007) describes that younger consumers are the driving power behind attention toward green products. Generation Y is today aged between 18 and 30 years. Young consumers are considered to be the consumers of the future, and consumers are likely to bring their purchasing behaviour into their older age. Therefore could an understanding of how they think in the long run be more beneficial than an investigation of another generation (Strauss and Howe, 1991).

The nationalities of the respondents were chosen due to two methodical reasons. First the geographic closeness was fit for the convenience sample. Second, to get in depth understanding of the respondents it is preferable to use the native language (Bryman and Bell, 2012). Added to this, a precondition was that the respondent were part of western society, since statistics used to underpin the unsustainable environmental situation comes from western society.

The interviews were conducted in a semi structured way. Bryman and Bell (2012) describes that in an abductive manner a semi-structured interview is suitable. The lack of previous qualitative research on guilt in food consumption makes openness toward the respondents and their experience preferable.

The interview themes concerned the consumption practice in large as well as more specific moments connected to ecological food. Guilt was discussed, both as

a part of the pre purchase situation and as a general concept: *what does guilt mean to you?* The interview was directed so that the previously known affecting factors in ecological food consumption were concerned: involvement, alternatives and information and knowledge (Vermeir and Veidekke, 2006).

The actual mentioning of the concept of guilt was brought up at the end of the interview, due to a wish not to affect the answers of the respondent and how they reasoned about guilt. In cases where discussions landed far from the concept of guilt the respondent were brought back by guiding questions.

3.1.3 ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The purpose of the empiricism is to underpin the analysis and strengthen arguments. It was done through theorization meaning adding a new perspective to previous research, as described to be of importance by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015). To ensure the correctness in the reproduction of the respondents' statements the empiric material was transcribed. The material was sorted, reduced and categorized into themes. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) describes that sorting material is important to facilitate the analysis process.

The themes used in the analysis built on the themes used in the actual interview. Themes that the analysis built on were: "*empirical meaning of guilt in general*", "*guilt in ecological food consumption*", "*when does guilt in the pre purchase situation occur*", "*why does guilt in the pre purchase situation occur*" and "*how does guilt in the pre purchase situation influence the choice of food*". The themes were chosen from previous theoretical underpinnings as well as from

how repeatedly and clear they were in the empiric material. The themes were created parallel to the gathering of empiric material; hence it was resorted and re-categorized as the material grew. The sorting process itself builds on the course of action, according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015). The reshaping and reducing of material made new themes visible, and the categorization changed as the material was gathered.

3.1.4 QUALITY

This study will ensure quality through credibility and authenticity, which as Bryman and Bell (2012) suggests, is suitable in qualitative studies. To ensure credibility, the study will use respondent validation, meaning letting the respondents take part of the results, and how their statements were interpreted. Another aspect in this study is transferability: whether or not the result can be transferred into similar cases. Transferability is part of the concept credibility. This study will not be generalizable due to the qualitative manner, however it fulfils the aim by deepening the understanding of guilt in the pre purchase situation of food.

In line with Bryman and Bell (2012), the authenticity in this study is concerned by giving a fair picture of the respondents: generation Y, highly educated consumers from Sweden, with certain pre knowledge of the environmentally unsustainable situation. The study emphasis that it is only this group studied and this cannot be generalizable to the whole population.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings and analysis present the empirics gathered from conducted interviews. It will start with a deepened investigation of what constitutes guilt, from an empiric perspective. This will be followed

by an investigation of when and why guilt occurs. The findings will be put in perspective to previous recognized factors that inhibit ecological food consumption. Lastly will be discussed how guilt can influence the choice of food.

4.1 THE EMPIRICAL MEANING OF GUILT

Guilt is previously defined from a theoretic aspect. However, to analyse the conception of guilt, it must build on the empiric perception of guilt of the respondents. At this stage, guilt is not restricted to the pre purchase situation but will be looked at in a general meaning for respondents. The analysis will start in the empiric meaning of guilt: what is the meaning of guilt to them?

Guilt is definitely something negative. I can often feel guilty in advance, if I know that I am going to disappoint someone.

- **Filip M**

I feel guilty when I do something I know I should not. If I can, I try not to do things that make me feel guilty.

- **Niklas**

Guilt is something you don't want to have. I don't feel good when I feel guilty. I get guilty when I know that I have acted badly towards someone.

- **Sofia H**

Guilt is according to the respondent something that is generating a bad feeling, in line with previous definitions of guilt (Rawlings, 1970): guilt is a sense of unpleasantness. Guilt is strongly perceived as something that does not feel good, hinting that it is something that the respondents want to avoid. Hence, it can be understood from the empiric that statements that includes or implies negative feelings will be generalized as guilt.

In the statements both guilt and anticipated guilt can be interpreted: the respondent experience guilt before, during and after having done something or considering doing something they feel bad about. Contemplating future negative consequences, such as feeling bad due to certain behaviour can be seen in the statements, as an example of the anticipation. In all the empirical meaning of guilt lies close to what is previously believed about guilt.

4.1.2 GUILT IN ECOLOGICAL FOOD CONSUMPTION

It is now empirically established that guilt is something the respondent dislike and wish to avoid. A wish to avoid guilt could have a role in the pre purchase situation of ecological food. If the respondents dislike a feeling created by contemplating purchasing non-ecological food it is possible that they would change how they act, possibly chose the ecological food over the not ecological food. In order for guilt in the pre purchase situation of food to be created, the situation when the ecological consumption takes place must in some manner shape contemplation: in turn possibly create guilt. If guilt in pre purchase situation seems to be triggered by certain aspects, knowing what could be valuable information for marketers, in turn helping the sales: also facilitating the possible purchase for the consumers that hold environmentally friendly attitudes.

I like buying ecological food, it feels like the right thing to do, and it feels wrong not to.
- *Emilia*

Involvement is previously said to matter in ecological food consumption. Involvement seems to matter in the creation of guilt in the purchase situation of food as well. Respondents that claim to care about buying

ecological food also seem to feel bad when they don't. They also seem to consider the consequences for themselves, in a manner of feeling bad even after the specific purchase, as an example of anticipated guilt.

Ecological food matters to me, I like buying ecological food, and I definitely try to avoid not to.
-*Emilia*

I find that before, when I didn't think much about the planet and what affect my consumption had, I could easily buy uneconomical food, but now, when I feel that it is important to me I hesitate buying non-ecological food.

-*Filippa*

The same could be seen the other way around. When the involvement was low, no guilt was created for the respondent.

I don't really care about eco food.

I don't feel bad buying it
- *Karl*

High involvement is previously said to increase the chance of ecological consumption. The findings of this study go in line with the reasoning. However, why high involvement matter has previously not been put in relation to guilt in pre purchase situation of food. The findings of this study show that one reason involvement matter could be due to that it is part of shaping guilt.

4.2 WHEN DOES GUILT OCCUR IN ECOLOGICAL CONSUMPTION?

Guilt in pre purchase situations seems to occur in ecological food consumption. However, the role of contextual factors in the purchase is yet to be understood, when in the pre purchase situation of food does guilt occur? Previously presented reasons for

inhibition the consumption of ecological food function as a part of the analysis.

One aspect that seems to create guilt in the pre purchase situation of food is the price. Price is one of the most established, and mostly mentioned reasons for the attitude - intention gap (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Price and guilt seem to be tangled in ecological food consumption. Paying extra money seems to matter from an emotional aspect. One example that triggers the emotion of guilt is the feeling of spending unnecessary money.

"I feel guilty when I spend money, I often hesitate buying ecological food due to the higher price."

- **Filip A**

In this situation guilt was triggered by spending money rather than from environmental concerns. Paying extra money seemed to create more bad feelings than not following possible environmental concerns. The effect of this could be lack of purchase of ecological food, in line with what is previously established through quantitative research. The role of guilt could be a contributing aspect: Price do matter in the situation, but not necessarily only due to reasons previously given, guilt might play a role in affecting the purchase intention and choice of product.

Lack of alternative is another of the previously presented reasons for the attitude-intention gap in food consumption (Vermeir and Veibekke, 2006). The angle previously taken is that if there is lack of good ecological alternatives, or if no ecological alternative exists, the consumption will omit. However, presence of ecological alternatives and guilt seem to interplay.

Sometimes I do feel that I need to buy ecological food, if it is an obvious alternative next to the non-ecological alternative, then I sometimes buy it, even if it costs more. It feels too bad not to do it.

- **Filip A**

4.3 WHY DOES GUILT OCCUR?

It is now concluded that the contextual factor of presenting alternatives can be part of generating the emotion of guilt in the pre purchase situation. But why is guilt triggered by alternatives?

It can be argued that one reason for guilt in the pre purchase situation of food consumption to occur is that alternatives put consumers in a situation where they have to contemplate their choice: it is hard for the consumer to avoid contemplating their choice when the ecological alternative is evident. Some consumers feel guilty even if an alternative is not presented: they contemplate the alternative even if it is not physically in front of them. This could be understood through what personal moral and norms the consumers hold. If consumers feel strongly about environmental sustainability, it is possible that they contemplate the consequences even when no ecological alternative is presented. When consumers contemplate doing something that goes against their personal moral or norms they feel guilt in the pre purchase situation.

Even when there is not ecological milk to choose from, I feel bad buying the non-ecological one. I care about the planet a lot and I don't like doing things I know is bad for it.

- **Filippa**

Doing something that feels bad is empirically explained as the meaning of guilt for the respondents. Going against moral and norms, the theoretical ground and

explanation to why guilt engenders, could generate the bad feeling. This reasoning seems to be applicable in the pre purchase situation of food as well.

4.3.1 THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

One aspect that seems to matter in whether or not guilt in the pre purchase situation is created is how much knowledge the consumers hold of the food they contemplate purchasing. It can be understood as the more information the consumer has about negative consequences of purchasing non-ecological products, the more likely is it that emotions of guilt in the pre purchase situation is created. This could be implied as knowledge forming moral and norms. As Rawlings (1970) suggests: going against personal moral and norms is creating the emotion of guilt. Likewise, more information might influence involvement. Understanding consequences could possibly influence motives and needs, hence influence involvement. The reasoning is empirically indicated:

I more often think about buying ecological products that I know more about. It is harder to choose not to buy something if I know that it is bad.

- Sofia G

Hence, educating consumers could play a role in increasing the emotion of guilt. Practically more informed consumers could lead to an increased consumption of eco food, with the starting point that emotions could affect intentions and behaviour, as presented by previous research.

Knowledge and information are previously presented reasons for the gap in ecological consumption. The findings in this study point in the same direction: more informed consumers are more likely to choose the

ecological food. Guilt in the pre purchase situation could play a role in why information and knowledge possibly influence the choice of food, an aspect that is previously not brought up.

4.4 HOW DOES GUILT IN PRE PURCHASE SITUATIONS INFLUENCE THE CHOICE OF FOOD?

What food consumers choose to purchase could have an impact on the environment, and a shift toward more ecological consumption is one way to improve the unsustainable situation.

In the pre purchase situation of food consumption guilt seems to play a part in what food the consumers choose to buy. The respondents explain that they have a wish to avoid unpleasantness and this seems to play a role when consumers evaluate what food to purchase. Why guilt in the pre purchase situation is created is ground to understanding how it influences the choice of food. In line with previous research in other settings, and strengthened by the analysis, guilt occurs when a consumer contemplate violating personal moral and norms. Involvement that is closely related to personal moral and norms seem to influence what food consumers choose. High involvement increases the possibility of guilt being created. The same pattern follows the opposite: low involvement can be a hinder toward guilt creation. If a consumer feels guilty toward choosing a product, the chances of that product being picked seem to decrease.

In the context of ecological food this could have the implication that in order to increase the chances of ecological food being chosen, ecological food that makes consumers feel guilty in the pre purchase situation could be a way to shift toward ecological food

consumption. Consumers with high environmental involvement seem to feel more guilt in the pre purchase situation than those with low involvement, when contemplating purchasing ecological food. Therefore making consumers more environmentally involved could be a way of increasing the pre purchase guilt, hence influencing the choice toward picking ecological food.

The result of this study shows that consumers with low involvement in ecological food sometimes still choose ecological food. Guilt in the pre purchase situation seems to play a part in influencing the choice of food. For low involvement consumers' guilt is not as easily triggered, whereas the context become central. To create guilt towards purchasing ecological food, an obvious ecological food alternative seems to facilitate the creation of guilt, for consumers with low as well as high environmental involvement. Practically this means that having clear ecological alternatives could help shift toward ecological food consumption. To make the alternatives that already exist seem more ecological could as well be a way to trigger guilt in the pre purchase situation.

Guilt in the pre purchase situation could be a hinder for consumers choosing ecological food. Consumers that are more motivated by price concerns seem to feel guilt in the pre-purchasing situation when contemplating paying a higher price. If consumers feel guilt in the pre purchase situation due to price concerns, they are less likely to choose the more expensive food. To make ecological products cheaper and less associated with a high price could decrease the chances of guilt in the pre purchase situation; hence decrease the

hinder toward consuming the ecological food.

One possible explanation to why guilt in the pre purchase situation influence what food consumers choose could be that it has the potential to influence the purchase intentions, that is a step toward a purchase. The purchase intentions are previously explained as something that is shaped partly due to what attitudes consumers hold. What can be seen in this study is that a wish to avoid the unpleasantness sometimes makes consumers choose food that goes against their attitudes. Consumers that hold negative attitudes toward ecological food could choose ecological products to avoid the sense of unpleasantness. The result of this study show that this choice partly depended on guilt in the pre purchase situation.

5. CONCLUSION

This study adds to a deepened understanding of guilt in the pre purchase situation of food through answering when and why consumers experience guilt in the pre purchase situation of food and how guilt in pre purchase situations influence the choice of food for the consumer.

Previous research shows that guilt is created through contemplation of personal moral and norms. The findings of this study indicate that previous theory is applicable in the pre purchase situation of food.

When guilt is generated differ depending on what personal moral and norms the consumer hold. The contemplation needs to generate unpleasantness for the consumer in order for guilt to be created. A pre purchase situation where the contemplation is pronounced facilitates the creation of guilt. Clear ecological alternatives and price can work as a means to pronounce

contemplation and generate guilt in pre purchase situations.

Guilt in pre purchase situations of food can influence the choice of food thus consumers tend to try to avoid the sensation of guilt. The consumers tend to choose the alternative that is less uncomfortable, hence to choose the product of which the purchase will reduce the anticipated guilt. Environmentally involved consumers tend to feel guilty when contemplating not buying ecological food, whereas consumers with low involvement tend not to.

What foods consumers choose to purchase have an impact on the environment, and a shift toward more ecological consumption is one way to lessen the demand on the planet. Practical implications for marketers could be that generating guilt of not purchasing ecological food could be a way of influencing the consumers' choice of food. Increasing the environmental involvement of consumers and pronouncing situations where guilt is generated are means that could increase guilt in pre purchase situations. This could be done by increasing consumer knowledge of food and what consequences the choice of food can have. However, guilt does not necessarily make the consumer choose the ecological food. Guilt in pre purchase situations is not only generated by contemplating purchasing ecological food, but other aspects, such as contemplating paying a higher price, also matter. Hence, a good psychographic understanding of consumers is necessary in order to direct the guilt in a manner that shift toward ecological consumption.

6. FUTURE RESEARCH

This study adds to the understanding of emotions by establishing that guilt in the pre purchase situation has a role in consumption of ecological food. The paper has a broad focus, and gives an overview of what role guilt plays. What is written in the area is mainly quantitative, hence further qualitative studies is suggested. To further deepen the understanding in specific areas could be useful to look into: other aspects than those brought up could be further looked into, for example social pressure.

Emotions in large are lacking understanding in the sustainable food context. Theories of emotion are concerned with a variety of emotional experiences, including anger, gratitude, guilt, hopelessness, pity, pride and shame (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). To look further into other emotions could be valuable to better understand how to decrease the gap and help companies to marketing sustainable food and consumers to consume food according to their attitudes.

To make a broad investigation within the field of emotions and ecological food consumption: what emotions seem to matter and why? This could give a hint of what emotions to focus on in a later quantitative study.

This study focus on what happens before the actual purchase. However, map the role of guilt in the entire consumption circle, from pre purchase behaviour to recycling lacks investigation, hence a deepened understanding of what happens after the consumption could be useful. One suggestion is to put this in relation to anticipated emotions, since a better understanding of what makes the

anticipation could be useful. Since the sustainable situation is as dependent on what happens after the consumption and the handling of waste, an investigation in the area is highly motivated.

Guilt lacks investigation in other sustainable contexts as well. For example there are to this date few studies handling the role of guilt in recycling, something that according to findings in this study could have an impact on how people choose to consume as well as handling their waste. The pre-study in this investigation point at that also recycling seem to trigger guilt.

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