



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,
COMMUNICATION & LEARNING

REFLECTING AND LEARNING ABOUT SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION ONLINE

The oxymoron of a food retailer's effort to educate
the general public about sustainable consumption
issues

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Abstract

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Purpose: The general purpose of this study is to explore how respondents understand a Swedish food retailer's recommendations and efforts to educate the general public on sustainable consumption issues on their website. More specifically the aim is to explore how these recommendations interplay with the respondents' reasoning, if there is an attitude-behaviour gap in what they already know and agree with and if they express willingness to change habits in line with more sustainable consumption. Characteristics that distinguish this research from other studies in the field are: focus on learning and use of online tools (a retailer's website). Multiple studies have been done on sustainability messages in offline stores, while there is very little research on how these issues are presented by retailers online.

Theory: A sociocultural perspective was chosen as basis for this study where learning is understood as mediated through the use of cultural tools, therefore the concept of *mediated action* is of particular significance.

Method: The study could in an overall sense be described as a qualitative study where a think-aloud technique and interviews were used to get a comprehensive set of data. Both the think-aloud sessions and the interviews were recorded and transcribed and thereafter thematic analysis was employed to work with the gathered data.

Results: Firstly, the website on sustainable consumption was found useful for the respondents but rather hard to find. This goes in line with issues mentioned by Jones et al (2014), asking "is responsible retailing an oxymoron?". The double agenda, forcing the retailers to promote sustainability and sell more at the same time could be confusing for the consumers, distracting them when they actually want to learn about how they can make more responsible choices. It was found that the text mediated information to the respondents, which gave them opportunity to reflect on their experiences and previous knowledge. Attitude-behaviour gap could be seen in the respondents' reasoning about their experiences, as well as distrust towards retailers selling them ecological products.

Foreword

I would like to thank my supervisor Annika Lantz-Andersson for her guidance, advice and support in carrying out this research.

This publication has been produced during my scholarship period at the University of Gothenburg, thanks to a Swedish Institute scholarship.

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Introduction

Ensuring sustainable consumption is one of the seventeen sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations as a part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). Since educating consumers about responsible choices is an important part of reaching the goal, there is a need for research on how to convey sustainability messages in a most efficient way. Although there is a lot of ways to learn about responsible consumption practices, this study will focus on informal ways of learning, since learning is a life-long process and only a small part of our knowledge about the world comes from formal educational contexts (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005)

A multitude of actors is involved in educating consumers on issues of sustainability, one of them being food retailers. In the current context, they are being forced by policies to focus on corporate social responsibility, at the same time trying to sell more. Some authors argue that the role of green marketing done by retailers is to become a bridge connecting the current lifestyle of the consumer with one that is desirable (Anisimova & Sultan, 2014; Lehner, 2015). Others are asking if this is possible, considering retailer's double agenda (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014).

The issues that emerge from reviewing existing research are, among others: distrust to messages about sustainability conveyed by retailers; attitude-behaviour gap, i.e. discrepancy between people's values and their actions; and retailer's double agenda. This thesis will focus on these issues, aiming to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of them. These aspects will be considered in relation to learning about sustainable consumption from a retailer's website.

As for now there have not been many studies focused on how customers can learn about sustainable consumption from the retailers. This study focuses on how recommendations on sustainable consumption are made on a Swedish food retailer's (Coop) website¹ and how respondents reason and reflect on those issues. Thus, this study can contribute to the field of research by focusing on learning in this complex context. The following questions have guided my study:

- 1. How do the respondents experience searching for material on sustainable consumption on one specific food retailer's website?*
- 2. How do the text on sustainable consumption on the food retailer's website interplay with how the respondents talk about it?*
- 3. In what ways can an attitude-behaviour gap be seen in the respondents' arguments?*

¹ The website used is: coop.se. During the work on this thesis, Coop has reworked their website, removing the sections related to sustainability from the main menu.

Literature Review

A systematic literature review was conducted to provide context for this study. The main purpose was to identify the key themes in existing research, as well as possible gaps or suggestions for further inquiry.

The initial search was conducted in the Scopus database using three key terms: “sustainable consumption”, “retailers”, “internet”. The query returned 97 publications, and the results were refined using keyword “food”, which narrowed down the number of publications to 66. Adding another keyword – “learning” decreased the number to 37. Furthermore, the results were refined, by limiting fields to Social Sciences, Business Management and Accounting and Environmental Sciences, which led to narrowing the number down to 5 articles.

The results were checked to have at least 1 citation and be relevant for the topic of this thesis. Furthermore, after looking through the reference lists of the found publications, another 6 articles were added, since they were relevant for the aim of this research.

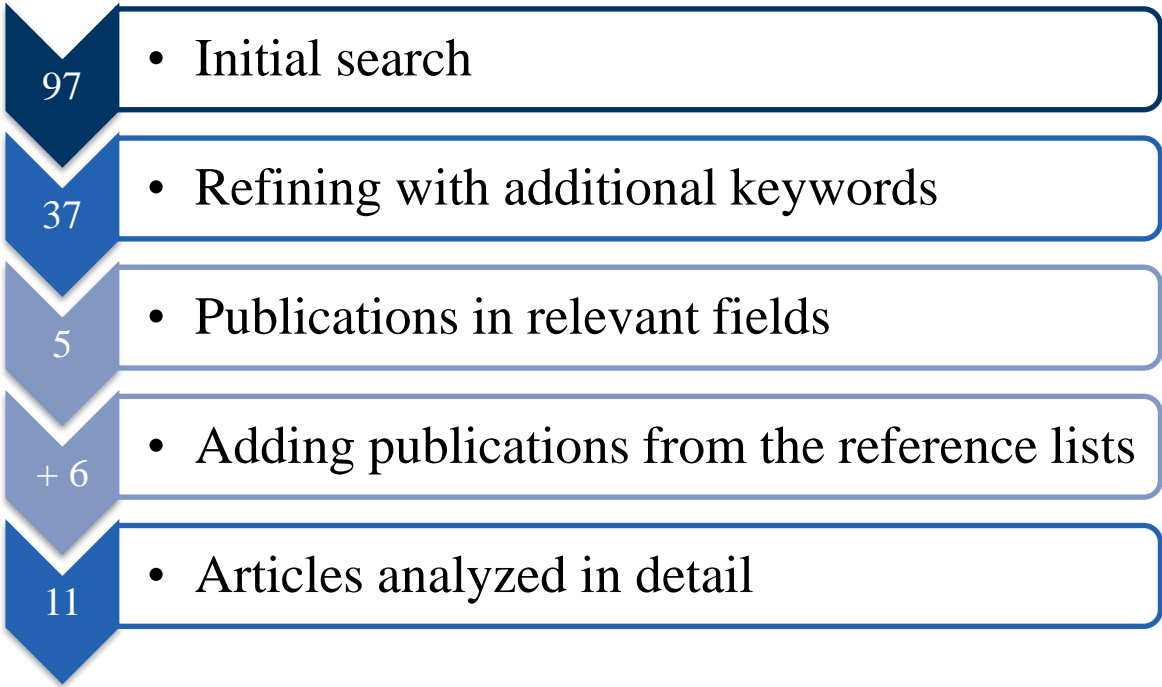


Figure 1 Selection Process

After a brief overview of the selected articles, it became apparent that the majority came from the field of Social Sciences and Business and one of the publications was in the subject area of Economics.

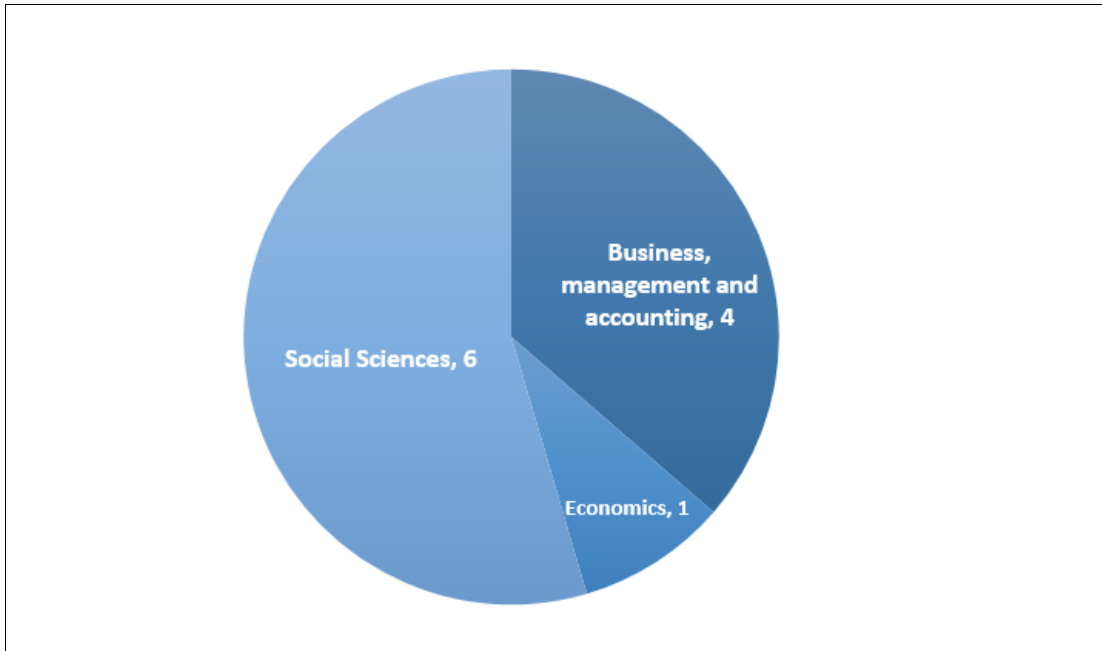


Figure 2 Represented Subject Areas

The time scope of the articles reviewed covers research done in years 2002 – 2016. The initial search was not refined by any time range, however, many of the publications found were written after 2000.

Most of the reviewed research was done in Europe, with exception for 2 publications from USA and 2 from Australia.

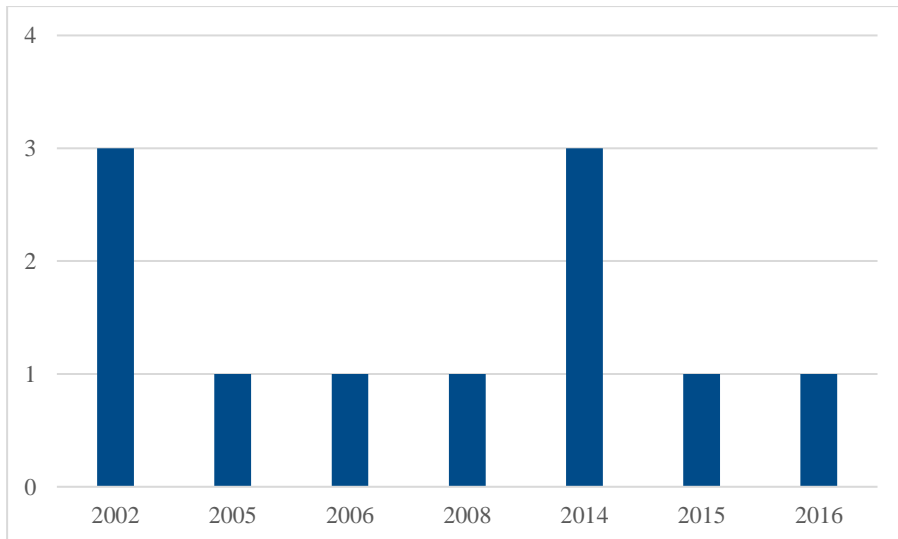


Figure 3 Time Scope of the Review

Defining Sustainable Consumption

What does it mean to consume sustainably? That is an essential question one needs to answer when deciding to make more responsible choices, as it is important to make sense of a concept in order to

apply it (Lehner, 2015). However, it seems that many consumers have a rather ambiguous understanding on this matter (Anisimova & Sultan, 2014), thus one might wonder if a generally accepted interpretation of sustainable consumption is even possible to achieve.

Although many definitions are mentioned in research, the most frequently used (Lehner, 2015) might be the one proposed at the Oslo Symposium in 1994:

The use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials, as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations (United Nations, 2016b)

According to the United Nations, sustainable consumption constitutes an umbrella term, that includes consumption of food, water and energy. In short, the motto behind this concept is “doing more and better with less” (United Nations, 2016a).

However, despite the popularity of the definition by the United Nations, a certain vagueness in use of this concept seems to exist (Seyfang, 2006). Lehner (2015) has done a study of Swedish retailers, where they interviewed 22 companies’ representatives and made 13 store observations. The purpose of the study was to see how the retailers “translate” sustainability, i.e. how they promote sustainable consumption, depending on their own understanding of the concept. The author points out that there is no consensus in operationalizing “sustainable consumption” and suggests that one of the reasons might be the lack of one established definition in use. As a result, different retail chains focus on promoting different aspects of sustainable consumption, depending on the local societal discourse. This research is especially relevant for this thesis as it focuses on the same actor – Swedish food retail and how they mediate knowledge about sustainable consumption to consumers.

The same study lines out different areas that constitute the term sustainable consumption: it is both environmental issues, such as waste generation and recycling, energy use, personal transport choices, food consumption, water use and social factors, for example health, welfare and ethical issues.

To sum up, sustainable consumption is a complex umbrella term, that includes both environmental and social factors. Many definitions exist, but the most frequently used is the one proposed at the Oslo symposium in 1994 (United Nations, 2016b) . However, there still might be lack of understanding of the concept as a whole and some retailers (and probably consumers as well) tend to focus on certain aspects of it. In this study, the main focus is on people’s understanding of sustainable consumption of food.

Consumer Education

Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns is one of the seventeen sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations as a part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). The goal description states that promoting resource and energy efficiency is one of the steps for reaching the result. One of the targets included in the plan is: “By 2030 ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature” (United Nations, 2016a). Thus, one can conclude that educating consumers about sustainable choices in everyday life is an important part of the sustainable development agenda.

Certainly, there are a lot of ways to learn about sustainability and responsible consumption practices, however this study will focus on informal ways of learning, not touching upon formal education in schools and universities.

Ballantyne and Packer (2005) have conducted an overview of the most common theoretical approaches underpinning free-choice learning and gave examples on the roles of free choice learning in facilitating adoption of sustainable practices. The authors argue that although a lot of attention is being paid to environmental education in school, learning is a life-long process and only a small part of our knowledge about the world comes from formal educational contexts. The organizations providing opportunities for informal learning include media, libraries, museums, science centres etc. After reviewing the existing research and theoretical frameworks used to study informal learning, the researchers conclude that these environments are important for promoting sustainable attitudes and behaviours because learners can construct their knowledge and attitudes in ways that are meaningful and relevant for their everyday lives. However, the results are hard to measure, due to differences in learners' prior attitudes and experiences. Another problem to keep in mind is that these learning opportunities might have only limited results in isolation – changes in behaviour can be short-lived if no reinforcing experiences occur (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005). These conclusions are especially relevant for this thesis, since the focus here lies in the field of informal learning as well.

Buenstorf and Cordes (2008) look into consumer learning and model changes in consumer behaviour via processes of individual and social learning. The aim of the research was to investigate whether and how consumer learning can shift consumption towards activities that are more sustainable. For that purpose, a mathematical model of cultural transmission of consumer behaviour was designed, taking in consideration a complex interplay of processes that affect the population's consumption patterns. The authors discuss learning theory of consumption, where the behaviour is informed through two learning processes: associative and consciously controlled. The former is based on hedonistic motivation and sensory feedback and is not very relevant for environmental characteristics of products. The latter, the researchers argue, is mostly provided by the social environment: communication with other people and observing role models. Communicating with other consumers through social groups and media is a big source of consumption knowledge, as well as following role models promoting sustainable consumption. However, much like in the previously mentioned research, Buenstorf and Cordes (2008) point out that if media or role models stop paying attention to certain issues, the consumers might turn their attention to something else – in other words, continuous discussion on sustainability matters is needed (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005; Buenstorf & Cordes, 2008). The article is relevant for this thesis, since it provides a deeper understanding about how consumer behaviour is formed within processes of individual and social learning.

Among the multitude of stakeholders involved in promoting sustainable consumption, this paper will focus on food retailers. In a study done by Lehner (2015) the author describes the current context, in which food retailers are forced by the policies to focus on CSR², which in turn pushes them to communicate sustainability messages to consumers. The author argues that the role of the green marketing in this situation is to become a bridge connecting the current lifestyle of the consumer with the one that is desirable. The researcher points out that it means translating responsible consumption into simple behavioural recommendations, that are easy for consumers to follow. They stress that the majority of people will not adapt a hundred percent sustainable lifestyle, and the role of retail is to help introducing a step-by-step change (Lehner, 2015). The author argues that this process of sense making, in which both consumers and retailers are involved, is a prerequisite to cope with a new concept in order to incorporate it into action.

Anisimova and Sultan (2014) are making a similar point in their study on consumer awareness about organic foods and purchasing behaviour. The research is based on a literature review and proposes a research framework in which the consumer trust and knowledge about organic foods serve as

² Corporate Social Responsibility

mediators influencing purchasing of organic foods. They point out that due to a poor understanding of what organic food is, consumers might tend to distrust retailers trying to sell them these products. One focus of this thesis will be investigating consumer's perception of information about sustainable consumption provided by a retailer to see if the same pattern will emerge. The authors of the article argue that it is important for the companies to create programs that educate people about organic foods, and at the same time act on their hedonistic and sensory motives, such as safety and healthiness (Anisimova & Sultan, 2014).

However, there are certain issues when it comes to putting retailers into a role of an educator. In an exploratory study made by Jones et al. (2014) the researchers looked at the top ten UK's food retailers communicating sustainability messages on their websites and in the shops. The question that they are asking after making the observations is "Is responsible retailing an oxymoron³?" The authors are referring to retailers' double agenda, which includes both the aim to sell more and the need to promote sustainable consumption, enforced by the policies and social trends. While some of the retailers do indeed have sustainability information on their websites and in the shops, the consumers are at the same time being bombarded by the messages urging them to consume more (Jones et al., 2014). The same issue is being pointed out by other researcher, who in their case study were looking at online communications of a big food retailer in France (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016) and it is also part of this thesis to see if the same situation can be experienced by the disposition and design of Coop's website.

Another problem pointed out by Jones et al. (2014) regards differences in consumer awareness. Even with the information available on the retailer's website, it is unlikely that it will reach those who know (or care) little about environmental problems. A pitfall could be that these tips and recommendations are found only by those consumers who are already aware of the problem and actively seek more information about it (Jones et al., 2014).

To summarize, promoting sustainable consumption is an important part of sustainable development agenda, adopted by the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). Although environmental education in schools and universities is a very important part of the strategy, a lot of information about the world is gained via informal learning, for example from media, social groups, science centres, museums, as well as from communicating with other people and following role models (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005; Buenstorf & Cordes, 2008). An important stakeholder in promoting sustainable consumption is food retailers, that can with help of green marketing become a bridge between consumers' current lifestyle and the one that is desirable (Anisimova & Sultan, 2014; Lehner, 2015). However, one needs to consider differences in consumers' attitudes and levels of awareness. Finally, one might ask: is responsible retailing oxymoron? Are retailers capable of teaching the general public about the issue when they clearly have their own agenda, namely, urge consumers to buy more? (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014)

Attitude-Behaviour Gap

With sustainable consumption being an important goal to achieve, consumers are often seen as the main driver for change, someone who needs to do "their bit" (Hobson, 2002; Seyfang, 2006). Does it mean that they need more knowledge about the matter? Is giving information and tips enough to facilitate shifts in consumers' behaviour?

³ an epigrammatic effect, by which contradictory terms are used in conjunction: *living death, fiend angelical* (Collins English Dictionary, 2012)

Learning about environmental issues is of course important in order to develop peoples' awareness in order to become responsible consumers, but some researchers argue that information is simply not enough to make a change (Hobson, 2002; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Oskamp, 2002; Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014). This is for example discussed in a study done by Hobson (2002), where they were analysing interviews with individuals in the UK who participated in a program called "Action at Home" – an initiative aimed at promoting sustainable lifestyles. The aim of the research was to consider how the discourse of rationalization of lifestyles resonates and impacts upon the citizens. 44 semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to answer the question. The author points out that sustainable consumption is often presented as a public knowledge problem, implying that consumers will do what it takes as soon as they learn more about the problem. However, as the study concludes, even if the individuals were aware of the issues and had read the recommendations, they were more concerned with questions of social justice and found it unfair that so much responsibility is being put on them, although "so many people can hardly afford to consume enough". Some respondents agreed that the tips they were getting would have been a right thing to do, however due to the practicalities of their lifestyles they cannot afford following them. One of the aims of the current study is to see how a similar discourse presented on a retailer's website resonates with consumers who read it.

Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) has done a similar study of the discrepancy between attitude and behaviour, known as the attitude-behaviour gap (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). The aim of the research was to analyse the most frequently used analytical frameworks explaining this phenomenon, such as early US linear progression models; altruism, empathy and pro-social behaviour model and others. In conclusion, a visual model of pro-environmental behaviour is proposed. After doing the literature review the authors state that increases in knowledge and awareness do not necessarily lead to pro-environmental behaviour. Some of the factors that act as barriers to the desired change are indirect experiences, temporal discrepancy (as the time passes, the memories do not affect the behaviour as much), normative influences and others. The authors mention that it is important to keep in mind that people's values can be transitory and even contradictory.

It seems that although reaching sustainable consumption is an important goal, giving people knowledge about the problem is not always enough. One needs to keep in mind the attitude-behaviour gap: being aware of the problem does not necessarily mean that the individual will take action in solving it. Consumers can feel that it is not fair that a lot of responsibility is on them, or they might feel that the recommendations they get do not comply with practicalities of their lifestyles (Hobson, 2002).

The focus of this study is on how Swedish food retailers present recommendations and educate the general public about sustainable consumption issues, how individuals react to these recommendations and if there is an attitude-behaviour gap in what they already know and agree with and what they are doing in everyday life. The thesis aims to contribute to the research in the field by focusing on learning about sustainable consumption online. The literature review shows that only few studies have been done on how retailers promote sustainability on their online resources (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014), thus this research can contribute in narrowing this gap.

Theoretical Background

In this section, the theoretical framework chosen as a basis for this research is described. First, a brief overview of the sociocultural perspectives on learning and development is given, followed by a description of a concept that was of particular importance for this thesis, namely *mediated action*. The theoretical framework and the concepts mentioned has guided the collection of data, as well as the analysis and discussion.

Sociocultural Theory – An Overview

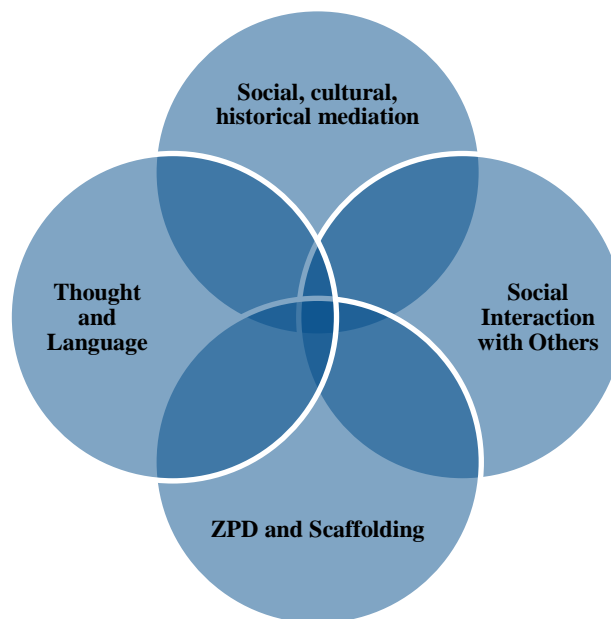


Figure 4 Components of the sociocultural theory as used in this study

Sociocultural theory is rooted in Marxist psychology, evolutionism and materialism. The founder of the theory, Lev Vygotsky, was a Russian psychologist, active in the beginning of 20th century.

To learn something, in sociocultural view, is to become attuned to affordances and constraints of the environment and with the tools available (Vygotsky, 1980).

In his book “Mind in Society” (1980) Lev Vygotsky wrote that people’s learning is tightly bound to the tools of the culture. It is important to mention that “tools” are not only physical objects, like pens and computers but it also refers to language that we use to communicate and understand each other including mental concepts within language and different kinds of texts for example on websites, like in this study. There’s a certain tension between people and their tools: tools are changing and people are changing with them (Vygotsky, 1980).

One of the key concepts of the theory is Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It builds on the idea of experts and novices: learning is what a beginner can do with the help of a more experienced person, which is something that the learner not yet can do on his or her own (Vygotsky, 1980). The concept of

ZPD will not be directly used in this research, but is worth mentioning since tools can also play the role of being supportive.

Important aspects of the sociocultural perspective related to this study are interaction and dialogue. In fact, dialogism is a sister-theory to sociocultural theory. It was developed by a Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin approximately at the same time as Vygotsky was working on his theory. According to dialogism there is no fixed meaning before a person says something, but the meaning comes to existence as a part of a dialogue (Bakhtin, 2010). This view is reflected in the choice of methods for this research and as a premise for the analysis of the gathered data.

Mediated Action

Sociocultural theory and some of its key concepts, such as tools, dialogue and language were considered relevant for this study, as I plan to look at learning and perception of information in relation to a certain tool (a website and its content). Mediated action is therefore an important concept to discuss. In sociocultural theory learning is understood as mediated through the use of cultural tools, such as spoken language and various physical tools. People use these tools to understand and interact with the world, in accordance with their needs and goals.

According to sociocultural theory human action is always *mediated* through the use of different tools or *mediational means* that are understood as shaping the action. Vygotsky described language as one of the primary mediational means (Vygotsky, 1980).

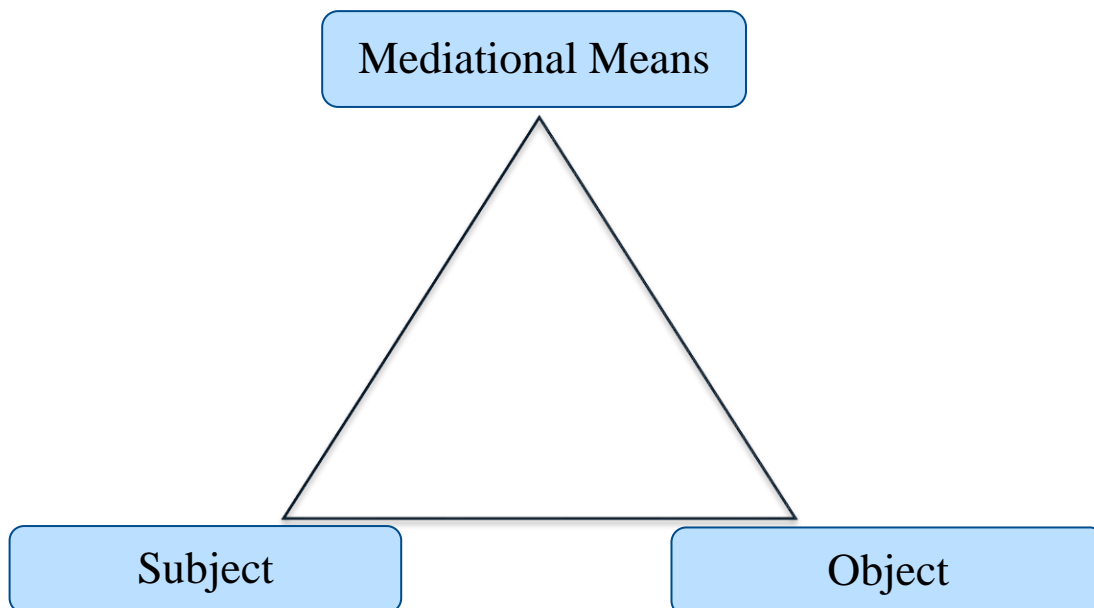


Figure 5 Triadic Representation of Mediation

In a more recent work done on the sociocultural perspective by Säljö (2009), he points out that the notion of mediated action constitutes a major unit of analysis when it comes to acts of meaning or meaning-making practices. A tool, such as language or a text serves as a means for social and intrapersonal discourse and thus becomes a source for meaning-making (Säljö, 2009). This thesis will focus on mediated action, where a website with texts acts as a tool, or mediational means in a process of meaning-making. I will look at how the text on the website mediates the perception of material and

how meaning is created as a part of a dialogue between the interviewer and the respondent. Looking at this type of mediation can be valuable, because in today's digital era we see new types of texts characterized in multimodality, where the written language and context surrounding it interact and interplay with peoples' learning (Säljö, 2010).

In this particular research, I want to explore a specific mediational tool – the website and its text as an interactive structure. I want to see how a text placed in this particular context affects how the learners reason and argue on the issues at hand. The unit of analysis in this study is mediation – interplay between the respondent and the interactive structure in a situated practice of an interview. The interview is seen as a dialogue that facilitates meaning-making. The starting point will be the information found in earlier research, namely the discrepancy between two messages that consumers receive from the retail: consume more sustainably versus consume more (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014). In addition to this starting point, analytically the dialogue is understood in relation to the learner's previous experiences, beliefs and knowledge that will co-construct the themes that will emerge. Finally, I want to explore the notion of attitude-behaviour gap (Hobson, 2002; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) and see if this phenomena can be seen in the ways the respondents talk about their experiences and beliefs.

Research Design and Methods

This section provides a description of the methods used for the data collection and analysis, as well as rationale for choosing them. I give a detailed description of the research design, as well as go into ethical considerations of the study and its possible reliability.

The study could in an overall sense be described as a qualitative study conducted by a mixed-method format. A think-aloud technique and interviews were used to get a more comprehensive set of data. The focus of the research is on how people perceive learning about sustainable consumption from a food retailer's website.

Background

The focus of this study is on what kind of learning about sustainable consumption is made possible on food retailer's websites. Therefore, I started with looking at what major food retailers there are in Sweden. After searching on open online sources as well as the existing research in the field, I discovered that there are 4 large companies with origins in Sweden and 2 international companies, that have almost 80 percent of Swedish retailing market (Tjärnemo & Södahl, 2015). The Swedish companies are: ICA, Coop, Axfood (includes two retailer chains: Willy's and Hemköp) and Bergendahls (retailer chain City Gross). In addition, there are two hard-discounters⁴, originating from other countries: Netto (Denmark) and Lidl (Germany). See figure 6 for information on market shares of the retailers.

In the first phase of this project, I planned to look at public Facebook pages of these retailers to see if and how they are promoting sustainable consumption and what kind of discussions it entails in the comment section. A quick search on Facebook revealed that almost all of the large retailers had a public Facebook page, where they were posting about sustainability, among other topics (see figure 7 for an example). The only food retail brand that did not have a Facebook page was Hemköp (a chain owned by Axfood).

After examining the Facebook pages and posts related to sustainable consumption, I discovered that the majority of the posts were links leading to the respective food retailer's website, therefore in order to read the full text or watch the video, one had to follow the link. Thus, a decision was made to focus on the content of the websites, as well as to gather consumer-data from interviews instead of Facebook comments and likes. This would allow a more in-depth investigation of how consumers perceive this type of context for learning.

Many examples of information on sustainable consumption were found on retailer's websites, however based on research that suggested that the role of retail is to translate sustainability into concrete behavioural tips (Lehner, 2015), I decided to focus on articles of this type. The first candidate was ICA's website, simply due to the fact that ICA is the largest retailer, constituting 41% of Swedish retail market (Eriksson, Nathalie, & Ranjan, 2016; Lehner, 2015). However, after failed attempts to find materials that would include tips on how to consume more sustainably on their website, I decided to look at the website of the second largest retailer – Coop.

⁴ A retail store which sells products at prices that are lower than the typical market value

After carefully checking the contents of the website, a page called “10 tips for more sustainable food consumption” (Swedish: “10 tips för en mer hållbar matkonsumtion”) on Coop’s website has been chosen⁵ (see figure 8). The reasons for choosing this particular material were as follows:

1. The page contained concrete behavioural tips, which was in line with conception proposed by previous research (Lehner, 2015)
2. The text was not too long (322 words) which made it possible to read and discuss during a short interview

The full text of the article can be found in Appendix 1.

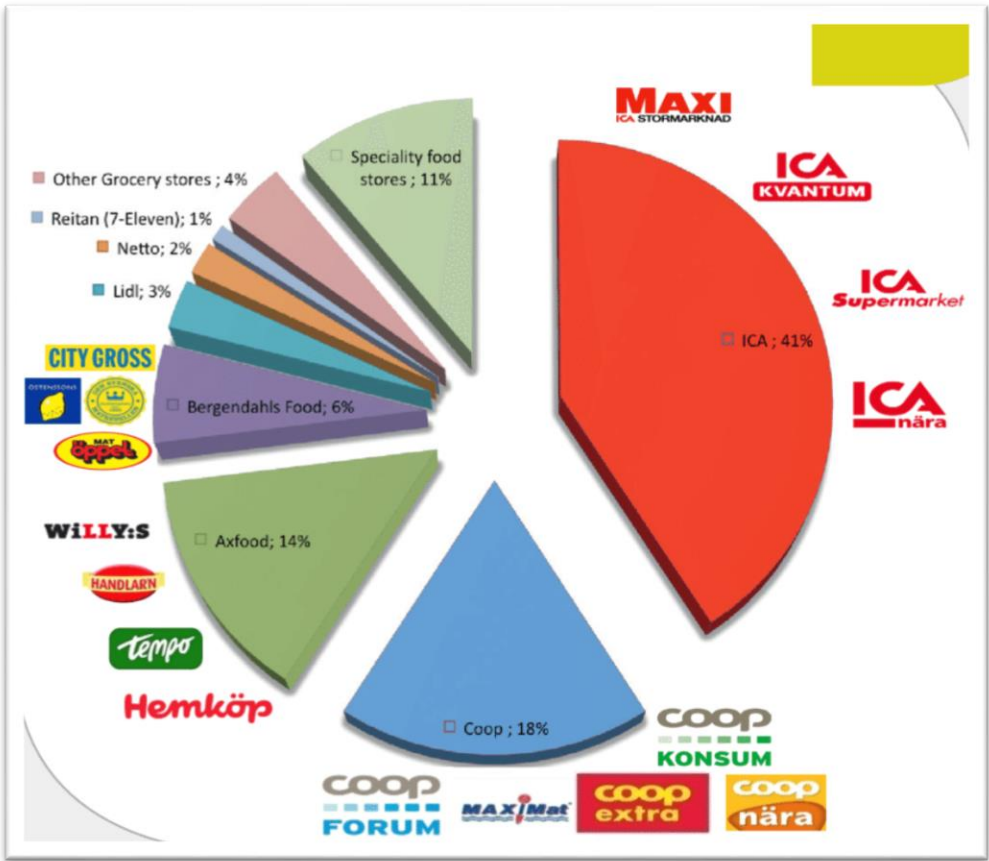


Figure 6 Market Shares of Swedish Food Retailers (Eriksson et al., 2016)

⁵ <https://www.coop.se/Vart--ansvar/Hallbar-konsumtion/Bli-en-hallbar-konsument1/>



Figure 7 Netto's Facebook page⁶

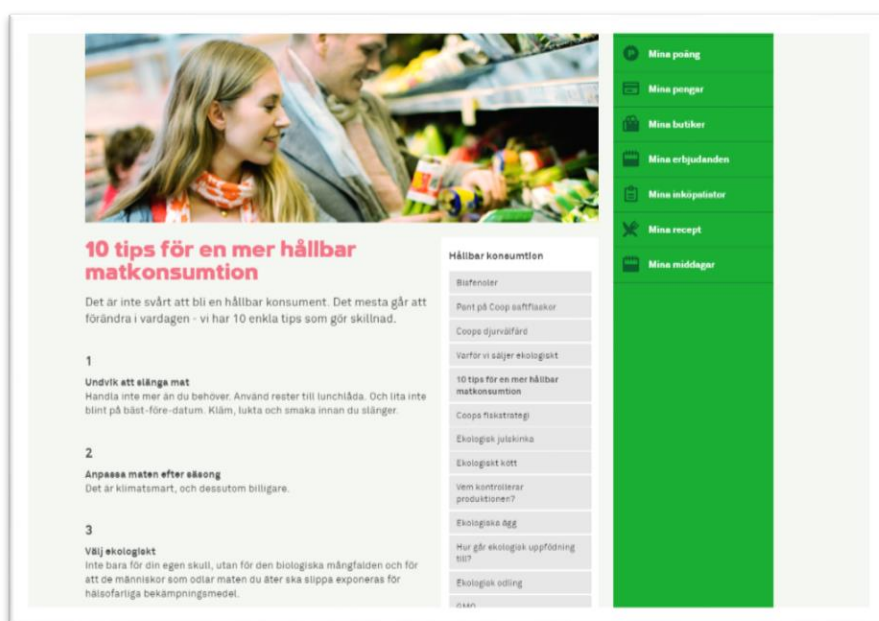


Figure 8 Screenshot of the chosen article at coop.se⁷

⁶ URL: <https://www.facebook.com/nettose/> Accessed: 2017-05-10

⁷ URL: <https://www.coop.se/Vart-ansvar/Hallbar-konsumtion/Bli-en-hallbar-konsument1/> Accessed: 2017-05-10

Data Collection

As mentioned before in general terms this research represents a qualitative study with a mixed-method design. More specifically, think-aloud interventions and semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to collect the data. The methods were chosen based on the theoretical perspective chosen. Thus, in-person interviews were chosen to allow an in-depth study of how the respondents reasoned about the issues mentioned on the website.

The study was conducted in following order:

1. Pre-interview (2 questions)
2. Think-Aloud intervention
3. Post-interview (4 questions)

Sample

A convenience sample of 10 people was chosen for this study, i.e. interviewing the individuals who were available and willing to participate. This sampling technique is common in qualitative research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013) and was also deemed best for the practical reasons, namely limited time to conduct the research. Three interviews were conducted online (via Skype) and seven - in-person. All of them were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed for data analysis. Since the technique of convenience sample and qualitative format was chosen, no demographical data was collected, as the focus was on how people talk about sustainability in line with their previous experience and triggered by the text on the website. Due to the rather small sample there is no ambition to generalize the results to a larger population.

Think-Aloud

Think-Aloud is a research method in which respondents say out loud any words that come to their mind while doing a task and is a way to study participants' thinking, especially when it comes to language based activities (Charters, 2003a). Conducting a think-aloud intervention and analysing the gathered data could be considered a small individual case study (Charters, 2003a). The method was found suitable for this thesis, because I wanted to study **respondents' meaning-making when interacting with a multi-modal text (website)** and see how easy it will be to find the information on sustainable consumption among all images and articles presented there. Think-aloud would also allow to see where it becomes hard for participants to find their way on the webpage, as pauses in their speech could be indicators of high cognitive load (Charters, 2003a).

Since it is important to treat respondents as quasi-researchers in this type of intervention (Charters, 2003a), I started with briefly explaining the nature of the think-aloud method to the participants. They were told that they would be given a task which they needed to perform using coop.se webpage and while they are working on the task, I would like them to say out loud all the thoughts that come to their mind.

The task was to find an article that contains tips on how to consume more sustainably. There are several ways to achieve the goal using this website, however, since I did not want to interfere with the

respondents' search strategies, no clues were given on how to proceed. Below are two examples of how to complete the task:

1. One can enter key word “sustainable” (Swedish: “hållbar”) in the search field at the top right corner of the screen. Among 182 articles that will appear in the results, the 4th line is the text we are looking for (see figure 9).
2. Another strategy is to click on “our responsibility: people and environment” (Swedish “Vårt ansvar: människa och miljö”) in the top menu, then click on “sustainable consumption” (Swedish: “hållbar konsumtion”) in the menu underneath. The article we’re looking for is among those in this category (see figure 10).



Figure 9 Search strategy 1⁸

The respondents were not explicitly given any time frame for achieving the goal, however, the time for the think-aloud and interview together was limited to 30 minutes for practical reasons, so I stopped the search if the respondent could not find the article after 10 minutes. If the respondent found the wrong article I did not point out the mistake, but instead asked if they considered this to be the right article. If they were positive we stopped the search. The reason for not continuing was that I wanted to look into authentic experiences of a consumer searching for information online without anyone controlling or helping with the search. Part of my study is to find out how retailers balance a complicated process of providing knowledge about sustainable consumption on one hand and urging to consume more on the other, that is why it was interesting to look at how this context interplay with the search.

I was trying to interfere as little as possible, following the recommendation outlined by Charters (2003), saying “keep talking” if the respondent had been silent for a while, but otherwise trying to

⁸ URLs: 1,2 <https://www.coop.se/> 3 <https://www.coop.se/Sok/h%C3%A5llbar> Accessed: 2017-05-13

remain in the role of observer. I was following recommendations given by the same author to sit next to the participant, not in front of them, to minimize intimidation and let them focus on the task (except, of course, in the Skype sessions where we saw each other on the screen).

Literature about think-aloud experiments suggests exit interviews to clarify some moments during the experiment and get the participant's perspective on the process – a so called triangulation (Charters, 2003a). Therefore, after the search was completed, the participants were asked: “What did you think about the search process?”, encouraging them to share their point of view and, once again, give them an opportunity to present their opinion as quasi-researchers.

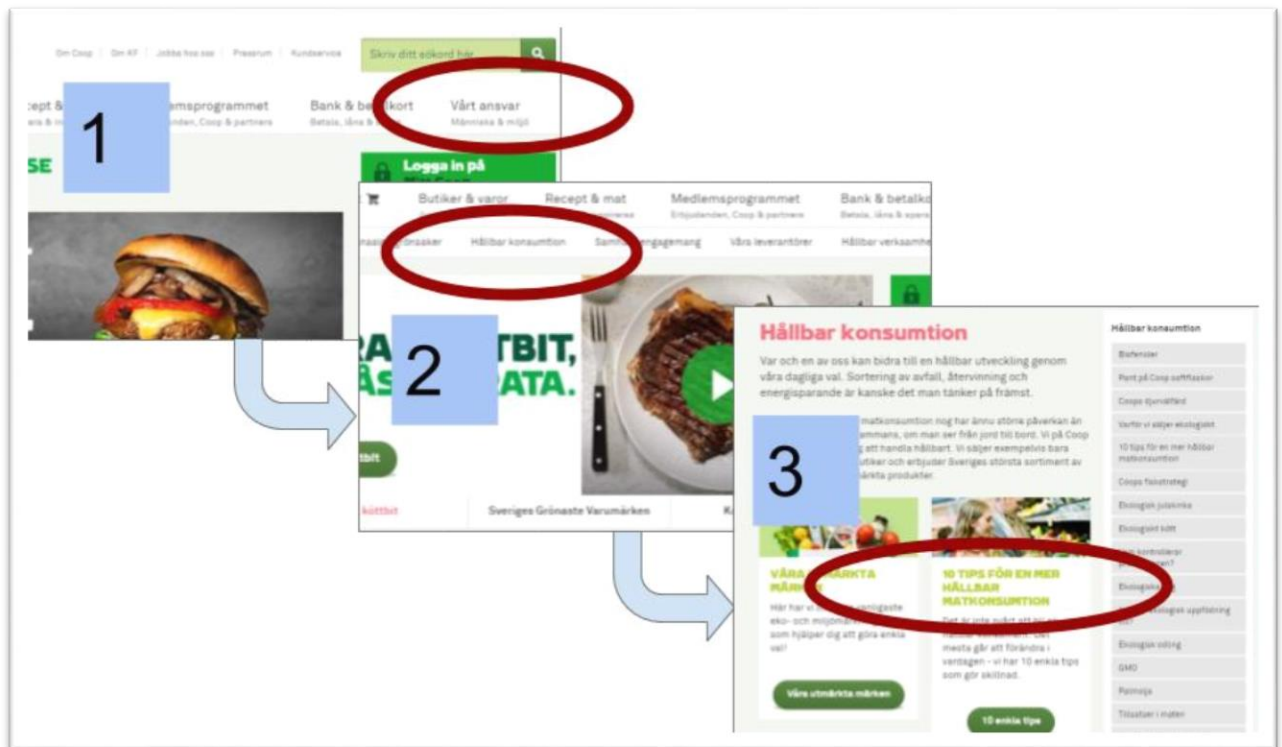


Figure 10 Search Strategy 2⁹

Interviews

One of the goals was to explore the respondent's learning experience using the website, by analysing how they talk about their experiences and possibly how they mention issues that could be related to an attitude-behaviour gap. Therefore, to get an in-depth perspective on these matters, a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was conducted, using the article as a mediational means.

As it follows from the format of semi-structured interview, the questions were written in advance, but the exact words and order were chosen during the talk (Cohen et al., 2013). The goal was to make the conversation vigorous, and try not to urge the respondent to repeat themselves if the answer to a certain question was already given in other part of the interview.

⁹ URLs: 1,2 <https://www.coop.se/> 3 <https://www.coop.se/Vart--ansvar/Hallbar-konsumtion/> Accessed: 2017-05-13

Choice of format of open-ended questions depends on the goal to look at how the participants talked about their experiences, which aligns with the theoretical perspective that were chosen. Here I am referring to dialogism and an approach where the researcher responds to what emerges in a situation. In such a way the interviewer tries to sustain a conversation and record the quality of the case, the chosen wording, as well as eventual pauses and emotional reactions (Cohen et al., 2013).

A pilot test was done before the study to make sure that the text would fit the purpose and to see if the questions allowed for in-depth interviews and to make adjustments if needed. The pilot was done in 15 minutes, conducting a pre-interview, think-aloud intervention and a post-interview. Both interviews consisted of 2 questions. See Appendix 2 for list of questions for the pilot interviews.

The pilot study showed that to get more detailed information about respondent's perceptions and experiences, additional questions after each paragraph of the text had to be added. This re-design extended the expected time frame of the interviews and experiment together to 30 minutes. Moreover, a remark for the interviewer has been noted down, namely the need to remind respondents to continue sharing their thoughts during the experiments, without asking any leading questions that could affect the course of the search. This was secured by adding the before mentioned phrase: "keep talking", suggested in literature about think-aloud methods (Charters, 2003a). See Appendix 3 for the final list of questions for the interviews.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed as a method to summarize and report the data gathered through the interviews and think-aloud experiment. This method of scrutinizing data was chosen due to its focus on language, linguistic features and meaning in context (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). It seemed best fit to my purpose of describing how the participants talked about the issues on the website and to find patterns and trends in process of the communication.

The think-aloud data and interview data were analysed separately, as they were answering different research questions. The themes for future coding were defined in advance, based on the literature review and the purpose of this study: finding the text; signs of learning; distrust; attitude-behaviour gap; opinions and suggestions about the text. The themes are presented in the same order in the Findings section.

Ethical Considerations

The study follows The Swedish Research Council codex for research on humanities and social sciences that specify the individual protection requirement that includes information, anonymity and confidentiality (CODEX, 2016). The participants' confidentiality was ensured by giving each interview a unique identification number. Pseudonyms were used in the text of this thesis for the sake of readability, thus real names of the respondents are not mentioned in the text.

The respondents did not receive any payment for participation in this research, however, most of the participants expressed that taking part in this study allowed them to reflect on their previous experience and learn more. This might allow to say that at least to some extent the process was mutually beneficial.

The data collected during the study is unlikely to be considered sensitive, however, parts of the transcripts containing any personal data were not used as examples in the text.

Coop have granted their permission to use screenshots of their website in this thesis, given that the source URL is specified.

Reliability

To ensure the quality of the study and add to reliability of the results, the recommendations about conducting think-aloud interventions were followed (Charters, 2003), as well as the guidelines on doing semi-structured interviews and performing thematic analysis (Mills et al., 2010). The format of mixed-method was applied to provide a more comprehensive data collection.

However, keeping in mind that this is a qualitative study, performed with a rather small convenience sample, one should be careful with generalizing the results to a larger population. The purpose of this study was rather to observe the phenomena mentioned in the literature review in a real-life context and contribute to a deeper understanding of them, than to provide results that could be applied to wider population. The methods chosen for this study allowed to explore how the participants reasoned about sustainability issues when working with the website and the text. However, one should bear in mind that learning occurred in a constructed situation of an interview, thus the way the respondents interacted with the website may be different from how they would do it in real-life.

Findings

The aim of the analysis was to answer the following research questions:

- 1. How do the respondents experience searching for material on sustainable consumption on one specific food retailer's website?*
- 2. How do the text on sustainable consumption on the food retailer's website interplay with how the respondents talk about it?*
- 3. In what ways can an attitude-behaviour gap be seen in the respondents' arguments?*

As described earlier, in analysing the transcribed data from the interviews and the Think Aloud part, the following themes, originating from the literature review and following the aim of this study have guided the analysis and are presented in this section as follows: *Searching for the article on the website, Signs of Learning, Distrust, Attitude-Behaviour Gap and Opinions and Suggestions About the Text*. The Theme: *Signs of Learning* is further divided into the subsections; *Reasoning before and after reading the text on the website, Reasoning on personal experience and Personal reflections*.

Searching for the article on the website

One part of this study was to see how the participants experienced searching for the article about sustainable consumption on the webpage. Some respondents found the search very easy and straightforward, for example Daniel in excerpt 1 below said it took him only a couple of clicks to get to the right text. However, he was not completely sure about what “people and environment” heading will include (see figure 11):

Excerpt 1

Interviewer (I): Did you think it was easy to find it?

Respondent (R): I think it was like 2 clicks. So...

I: Was it where you expected it to be?

R: I was a bit unsure if this “people and environment” will be about how the company thinks about people and environment or ... or giving tips or broader... that was my thoughts about... this option.

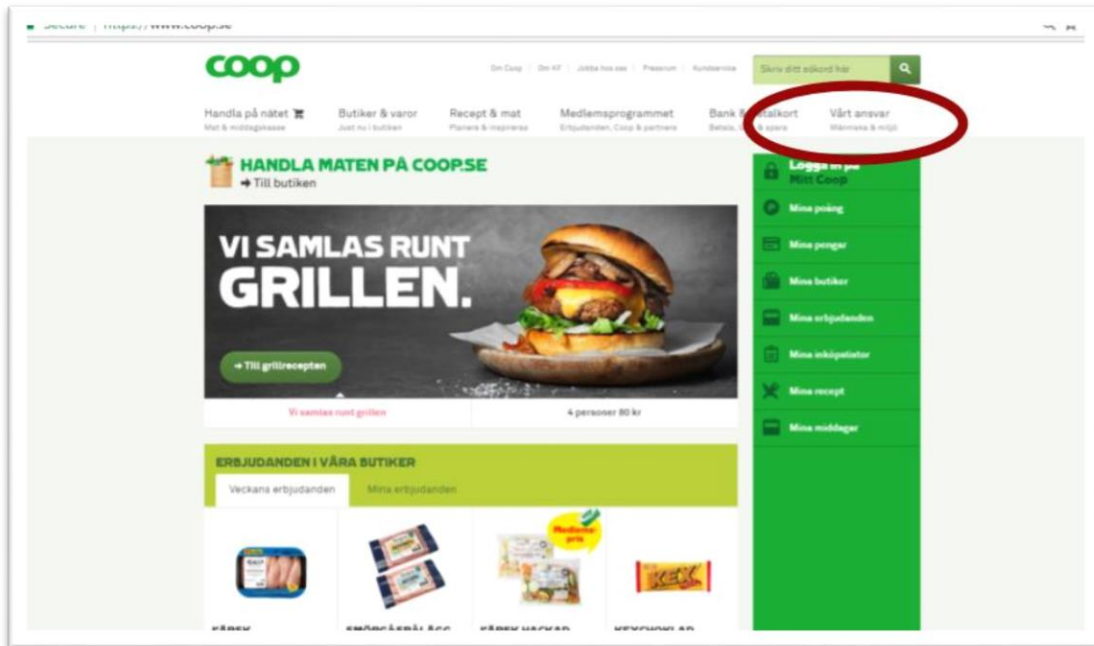


Figure 11 "Our responsibility" heading¹⁰

In excerpt 1, Daniel's answer suggests that even though he says that he felt it was quite easy to find the article about sustainable consumption, he did not find the heading to be particularly distinct. Tora also thought the search was rather easy and told that if one looks carefully at the headings, it's not hard to find:

Excerpt 2

I: Do you think it was easy to find the information?

R: mm yeah... Yeah... I guess I do... when I really looked at the headings I could guess where I could find it.

Both Daniel and Tora display that they had to make assumptions to find the right webpage, Daniel by saying "I was a bit unsure" (excerpt 1) and Tora formulated that she "could guess where" to find it but still they both argue that it was fairly easy for them to do that. Some of the participants needed more time to find the text and had to try several ways of searching before they found the write page with the right article, four respondents could not find it at all. During the think-aloud part and in the post-interview afterwards they had a chance to reflect and share their thoughts about why it was not easy to find. One of the things that several respondents mentioned was the position of the "people and environment" heading in the upper navigation menu (it is the last heading on the list – see figure 11). Alexander, for example, starts reading the headings one by one, however, he never gets to the right one, gets distracted and proceeds to other sections below:

Excerpt 3

So, I'm looking first here in the upper navigation part

[reads aloud] buy online ... shops ... member's program.... yeah, there's nothing

¹⁰ URL: <https://www.coop.se/> Accessed: 2017-05-13

*[reads aloud] my money ... shops ... promotions... buy... bla, bla, bla, there's nothing
I'm scrolling down ... promotions ... promotion video chicken ...favourites points...*

Afterwards, when asked about this, he explains the problem:

Excerpt 4

I: what did you think about the search on the page?

R: It was good, I found right away what I was looking for. So.. And now I can see that there was [a heading] here at the top. It's just me...who didn't... It was like the last... and I was looking for "responsible consumption" and it's called "our responsibility" ...that's why I didn't register it.

Anna had a similar problem – she could not find the article after trying several ways of performing the task and mentioned the positioning of the heading as one of the issues:

Excerpt 5

I: What do you think about searching on this website?

R: It was really difficult... I mean ... yeah... maybe I also didn't pay enough attention to that word "responsibility" cause I mean it actually says beneath, but it's super small... like environment and people and stuff...but it was to the RIGHT of the BANK?! I don't know but that was already out of...I mean the least important to me on the right side...after having all these recipes where I thought it's connected as well to responsibility ... eeh... sustainability [upper register is used to show words emphasized by the respondent]

The difficulties the respondents had with finding the right section could be dependent on their previous knowledge on sustainable consumption and concepts they used as tools for thinking. The respondents could have been looking for specific keywords, for example Alexander who says, "I was looking for "responsible consumption" (excerpt 4), which they could not find in the headings of the webpage. Therefore, the website mediated a certain kind of knowledge merely through its layout, making the participants consider what concepts and keywords are included in the term "sustainable consumption".

Recipes turned out to be something that was distracting some of the respondents' attention. Some of them thought that tips on responsible food consumption are most probably located under the heading "Recipes and Food". For Tora that was the first section she saw and connected to the concept of sustainable consumption:

Excerpt 6

So I'm starting to look at headings here emm...

And if we're talking about food first I'm looking at recipes and food

Anna was looking in the same section:

Excerpt 7

Mmm I was thinking it should be somewhere like with the recipes that's like what most grocery stores do...having it with ... like... climate-friendly recipes...

Emm...here in the recipes and food...

Anna's reasoning suggests that she already has experience with similar websites, since the layout of the webpage triggers her to talk about where she would expect the article to be, based on her knowledge about retailer's webpages. For example, she says "that's like what most grocery stores do" (excerpt 7).

Rebecka was not able to find the right article and spent most of the time searching in the recipes section of the website:

Excerpt 8

Mm... here on this website ... ok once again so lots of pictures about food

Lots of nice food

Ok ah tofu, I like this tofu

Tikka Masala, I LIKE tikka masala, how am I going to make tikka masala? [laughs]

But responsible... I don't know if this has anything to do...

It just says how to cook this food... it has nothing to...

Veronica was expressing frustration with having to go through all the recipes to find the right text:

Excerpt 9

Where is it I should look? ... Because if I just click on those menus that they have and the alternatives, so it is basically ... recipe, recipe, recipe ... Like ... I don't give a damn about recipes... because I want... If I would now want to become a better consumer when it comes to food and keep it sustainable for myself and my... not my citizens, but like people around ... then I need to feel convinced that ... why I should be more sustainable when it comes to food... to have like a bit more "in your face" propaganda....

Overall, while five of the respondents found the article relatively fast and without issues, the others were mentioning the distractions on the website that steered their attention from the right headings. They express that they for example had expected to at least find "climate-friendly recipes" (excerpt 7) and display disappointment about not discussing sustainability but "It just says how to cook this food" (excerpt 8) and Veronica goes even further in arguing that if she would "want to become a better consumer" she would have liked to have a bit more "in your face" propaganda...." (excerpt 9). These findings comply with issues mentioned by Gonzalez-Lafaysse et al (2016), as well as by Jones et al (2014): even though some retailers have information about sustainability on their websites and social media, the consumers are still being bombarded with messages urging them to consume more. For example, Olivia got distracted by weekly ecological deals:

Excerpt 10

*...I don't know what would draw my attention...maybe this one...
weekly ecological [clicks on it] ...everything that they mean...
that they have... [reads aloud] see this week's ecological deal
because ecological is usually expensive and would be interesting to check what they have here
Alright... I haven't found anything interesting here because nothing of this... okay potatoes...
yeah...so I'll go back and... eeh... well, so sort of yeah... that's my first ... thought...
and then I would get lost and proceed to the recipes because it's me [laughs]*

Rebecka was distracted by the contents of the main page (see figure 12 for example) and had to ask to remind what the task was:

Excerpt 11

*Ok, first of all I think I first like get an overlook about this website
Yeah, this website...Coop...aha...and then they have one like a really good video...
[reads aloud] do kids eat ecological?
I don't know, I have no idea, I think that my son doesn't like vegetarian food at all [laughs]
Ok and here's lots of coupons...Ok...coupons and ads... tatata... alright.
Ok, so I'm going to ask again, what's your question? I... my task is I have to search for ...
what I'm going to? An article?*

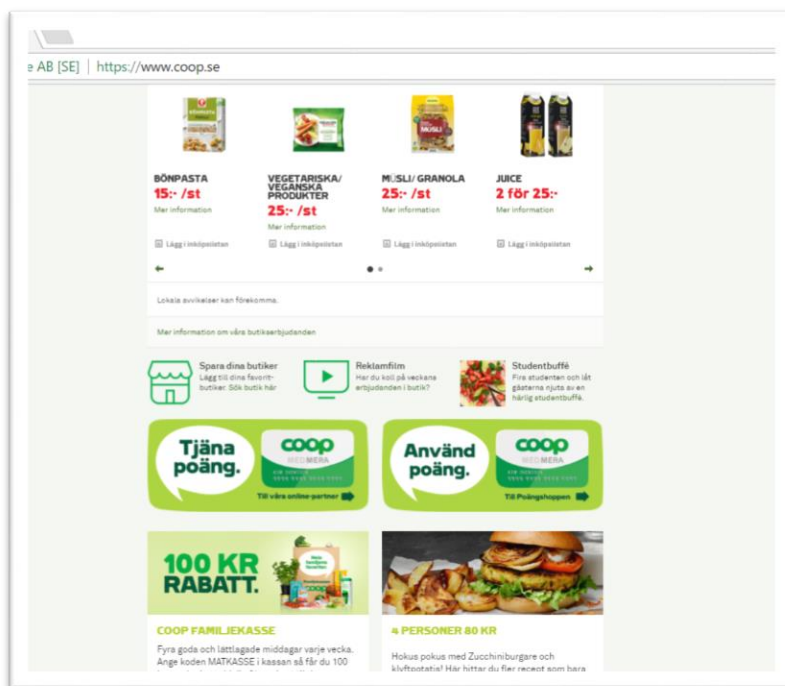


Figure 12 Coop's main page¹¹

After being on the website and searching for a while, she shares that she thinks the website distracts her attention too much:

Excerpt 12

I think this website is so distracts attention

Too many photos... yeah [laughs]

Was it one article? How can I find any articles?

Seriously, I mean...uhmm

Can you repeat your question again? [laughs]

Veronica felt that Coop did not do their best job with designing the page:

Excerpt 13

I: What do you think, was it hard to find?

R: Yes, it was very hard. I would like to see like first on the page when I just open the page... and then when I have read through I see recipes and what I can make ... I don't think recipes is the first thing one should look for ... but one should look at it as a whole, which is this one [the article we were looking for], I suppose. So, it's a bit sad, I think, of Coop that is a big company and it's anyway one of the biggest food retailers here in Sweden [...] So it's like if they are such a big company then I think they should have done a bit better research ...

¹¹ URL: <https://www.coop.se/> Accessed: 2017-05-13

because this... If they now want to like change us citizens ... so that we all shall work for better environment ... this one [the article] should be first I think

To summarize the findings of the think-aloud part, half of the respondents could find the text on the website relatively fast, however, others experienced issues with distractions and struggled to understand which section sustainability belongs to. Olivia got distracted by weekly ecological deals, reasoning that “ecological is usually expensive and would be interesting to check what they have” (excerpt 10). Rebecca’s attention was drawn to a “really good video” (excerpt 11), moreover she mentioned that the webpage had “too many photos” (excerpt 12). Finally, Veronica argues that Coop as one of the largest retailers in Sweden should be more responsible and emphasize the importance of acting for better environment.

The positioning of the headings was confusing: the “Our responsibility: people and environment” section was the last one on the list – some of the respondents got distracted before they got to it. The name of the heading itself was shown to be confusing as well; it was not obvious for all the participants what the sections contained. Several respondents thought that information about sustainable consumption could be found in the “food and recipes” section and did not see the heading “our responsibility” or did not relate it to the concept. These respondents reported that the searching was difficult.

Overall, making sure that information about sustainability will reach the consumers did not seem to be the first priority for the designers of the website. Even though it has been pointed out in previous research that retailers are an important stakeholder in promoting sustainable consumption (Anisimova & Sultan, 2014; Lehner, 2015), it is not the main goal of retailers. The distractions that steer consumers’ attention on this website, such as food recipes, weekly deals and ads show that, as it was mentioned in previous research, retailers’ double agenda can make “responsible retailing” an oxymoron (Jones et al., 2014)

Signs of Learning

Since the main interest related to the webpage in this study is from the perspective of learning, the analysis focused on possible signs of learning when talking about the text together with the respondents during the pre- and post-interviews.

Reasoning before and after reading the text on the website

First and probably the most straightforward way to see if the text was useful for the participants in any way was to ask them about what they’ve learned right after reading the text. In addition to these direct answers displaying the participants own perceptions on what was new to them, the analysis focused on how they talked about sustainable consumption before seeing the text (e.g. what terms and themes they mentioned) and this reasoning was then compared to how they argued in the post-interviews done after the reading.

After reading the text, some of the respondents did reply that some of the information in the text was new to them. For example, Alicia shared that “Eco-labelled fish” and “working conditions” were two things that she had never thought about before:

Excerpt 14

I: What was new for you here in this text?

R: Eco-labelled fish. (see figure 13 for a screenshot of the text) I've never thought about it. And I didn't know. I have never been interested in working conditions... I thought about supporting the small producers but not about the working conditions... uhm... and you know the transport effect... I think it's not about being responsible... it's about being responsible... not being responsible with ... environment or other things... it's being responsible with yourself...ok I understood that for some people shopping is like a pleasure ... I don't know ... it's just this with eco-labelled fish and working conditions

5. Köp miljömärkt fisk

Havet, och alla som bor där, är utsatta för stora påfrestningar. Coop säljer bara fisk som fångats eller odlats enligt gällande lagar och regler. Vi säljer heller inte fisk från bestånd som är starkt hotade eller mycket känsliga för fiske.

Figure 13 Part of the text about Eco-labelled fish¹²

The way Alicia talks about what it means to be “responsible” suggests that the text allowed her to reflect on what it really means to be responsible, and she comes to conclusion that it is being “responsible with yourself”. This could serve as an example of how the text with the headline “our responsibility” mediated specific ways of reasoning and triggered Alicia to reflect about whom one should be responsible to. Daniel both shared what was new in the text by citing the paragraphs and identified something that he still does not know, namely where to look for the fair-trade logo:

Excerpt 15

I: What was new for you in the text?

R: [thinking] [looking through the text] there were at least... 2 or 3 things that were new out of ten

The... adjust food to season... the biggest transport effect is the trip to and from the shop...and store the food correctly and at cool temperatures... these were the things that were new...

I: Do you think that after reading this text you will reconsider some of the habits you have?

¹² URL: <https://www.coop.se/Vart--ansvar/Hallbar-konsumtion/Bli-en-hallbar-konsument1/> Accessed: 2017-05-10

R: yeah, I think I will look at the fair-trade thing. Also, interesting like how to ... that was actually also new, so there were 4 things.... I don't know so much where to look for fair trade signs... I don't know where to look for fair-trade (see figure 14 for a screenshot of the text) or how to identify food that is fair trade...

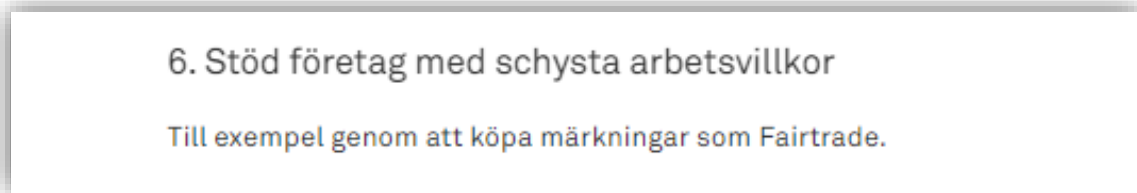


Figure 14 Part of the text about Fair Trade¹³

Rebecka pointed out a paragraph that was presenting a concept that was new to her – saving energy in the kitchen:

Excerpt 16

I: Was there anything new to you in the text?

R: I think there was in number nine. Just number nine about this energy: try to save This I actually haven't thought about too much

Some respondents didn't report learning anything new from the text. However, when comparing their answers in the pre- and post-interviews, the analysis revealed that some of the concepts from the text were used in the second interview, but not in the first, which will be shown below. This suggests that even if they were already familiar with the concepts, reading the text actualized the knowledge and helped connecting the terms with the concept of sustainable consumption. As it was mentioned in the literature review, a certain vagueness in use of the concept exists even among retailers, partly due to the lack of one established definition in use (Lehner, 2015). The fact that the respondents mention different keywords and themes in pre-interview, when talking about sustainable consumption, might reflect this ambiguity. From this perspective, the text mediates knowledge about aspects of the concept, contributing to creating a more consistent understanding of the term among the readers. For example, in the first interview before reading the text, when asked about sustainable consumption, Olivia mentions food waste, eco-food and unnecessary usage of plastic:

Excerpt 17

I: What are your thoughts on sustainable consumption of food?

R: [pause] sustainable consumption of food well, my first thought is eco food, then it's partly my practical thing, it's to... it's for example to buy food so that you don't have to throw away anything, so that's it's not like you stock up with something that will spoil later and you

¹³ URL: <https://www.coop.se/Vart--ansvar/Hallbar-konsumtion/Bli-en-hallbar-konsument1/> Accessed: 2017-05-10

throw it away. And for example, I don't like to buy food that is like packed in huge amount of plastic or something like that, I get just annoyed by that. I'm not sure if that's related to food, but if I think about it, it's something like that.

After reading the text she reports that nothing was new, however, when talking about sustainable lifestyle, she mentions additional topics of buying seasonal food: “to think about the fact that the food is more expensive or cheaper depending on the season” (excerpt 18) and fair trade that she did not talk about in the pre-interview:

Excerpt 18

I: Was there anything new to you in the text?

R: I don't think I didn't know... Maybe about something I don't think all the time thank god... Because there's a lot already... No, nothing... oh wait... something was actually... [looks through the text] No, there was nothing I didn't know I guess.

I: Do you think something will change after reading this? Will you start doing something differently? Or think about something differently?

R: That I will overthink even more? [laughs]

I don't think that it will really ... because a lot of this I already do... it's like that sometimes I let myself buy something out of season or if it's not fair trade... or ecological...

I don't think that I ... since I don't abuse this... I wouldn't say something will change... [...] For example, to think about the fact that the food is more expensive or cheaper depending on the season ... that kind of thing one usually doesn't think too much about.

When asked about sustainable consumption in the pre-interview, Tora mentions buying ecological foods, as well as the danger of purchasing processed products:

Excerpt 19

I: What do you think about when you hear “sustainable consumption of food”?

R: Eh... then I'm thinking... I'm thinking partly about ... ecological food or ecological products really... but I'm also thinking about maybe not buying so much semi-prepared products because it's a lot of processed food that has chemicals and such in it...

I: Is it something that you're doing in your everyday life?

R: Exactly, that's what I'm trying to think about and buy fresh products actually and cook food from scratch.

In the post-interview, she reports that nothing was new to her in the text, however, now she is mentioning being climate-smart in the kitchen, referring to the point about using energy-saving appliances and says that she wants to learn more about that:

Excerpt 20

I: Was there anything new here? Among those tips?

R: Maybe not really new, but the point I thought about the least was this “be climate smart in the kitchen”.

I: Do you think you’ll be thinking more about it now?

R: Yes. Yeah, I think I’ll be more aware of this... and maybe also got a stronger intent to learn more about ... what is energy-saving...

Anna, who is very interested in sustainability, mentions the importance of eating less meat in the pre-interview. She also touched upon the topic of food waste:

Excerpt 21

I: What comes to your mind when you think about sustainable consumption of food?

R: Of food? Comes to my mind that supermarkets throw away so many things every single day, so that I can already see when I walk through the aisles what will be in the dumpsters by the end of the day. Just because of minor marks. Mmm and I think of ... just not eating meat. Be vegetarian, and, if you manage, be vegan.

I: Okay. And is it something specific that you’re doing yourself to consume more sustainably?

R: Well yeah, I’m vegetarian, I try to be vegan but doesn’t always work [laughs] because I really like dairy products. Yeah, I really try to... I never throw away food. It rarely happens because I really try to consume it in time and don’t buy too much and if I see that I can’t consume it I give it to other people. Yeah, that’s about it I would say.

In the post-interview, she says that nothing in the text was new, but as well as Tora, this time she mentions about being energy-efficient – she is referring to the tip about storing food at right temperatures, so that it lasts longer. She also talks about the importance of buying eco-foods:

Excerpt 22

I: Do you think that anything here was new to you in some way?

R: Mm no. I don’t think so. Let’s scroll quickly... no. It was more of a reminder like some things are super established and integrated in my life but some things like thinking more about the temperature again...actually, I wanted to talk to my roommate for ages if we could maybe divide it vertically [the fridge] ... yeah and also trying to buy more ecological in Sweden, although it’s more expensive, but... Uhm yeah.

Relating the content of the text to the personal experience as it is seen here, is consistent with Ballantyne & Packer’s (2005) reasoning about informal learning. Namely, the argument that learning environments like this one are important for promoting sustainable attitudes, since such contexts may support learners to develop knowledge in ways that are meaningful and relevant for their everyday lives.

To summarize this section: some of the participants reported that one or several recommendations were new to them. Other respondents said that they already knew about all of the tips beforehand, however, in some interviews it was shown that the concepts they mention in relation to sustainability before reading the text were not the same as what they are talking about afterwards. For example, in some responses, the respondents also reused issues that they had read about in the text and mentioned them in the post-interviews, for instance buying food according to season or saving energy (as seen in excerpts 18, 20, 22). This suggests that the participants either actually learned something new or that they were reminded of their previous knowledge when reading the text.

Reasoning on their personal experience

The analysis also focused on how the respondents related the contents of the text to their personal experience and if any signs of learning could be shown in their reasoning about these issues. For example, as seen below, Anna mentioned that she tries to “teach the roommates” about energy-saving (excerpt 23), and that storing food correctly when you live in a student dormitory “is a bit difficult” (excerpt 24). Alice shared that even if she knows that seasonal food should be cheaper “it’s not always like this” (excerpt 25). Many respondents mentioned own examples derived from personal experiences of when they were acting sustainably or not. For example, below Anna is sharing her experience after reading the paragraph about being energy efficient in the kitchen. This is one example of a respondent who is triggered by the text to give such example since Anna was not talking about this topic in relation to sustainability before reading the text:

Excerpt 23

I really try to teach my roommates on that as well. To not leave it plugged in all the time, like our kettle would be plugged in all the time if I wouldn't take it out always. Because it's just...it takes not that much but it adds up, it takes unnecessary electricity. For the microwave, it's just a bit pointless in our case because my friends... flat mates are using it so much.

Anna makes a similar reasoning after reading the next paragraph about storing food correctly, she mentions that it is difficult and describes how she and her flat mates have it in their dormitory. She did not mention the topic of storing food before reading the text either:

Excerpt 24

Yeah, that's rocket science. [laughs] how you should store your food. Yeah, that's also for students a bit difficult as we share fridges and it's just so much easier to share horizontally, which doesn't really make sense because I have the two warmest shelves and she has the two coldest more or less. Yeah, but otherwise I try to keep stuff that doesn't need the fridge outside. And do it according to the temperature layers. It lasts longer.

Alice, who comes from abroad, shared her experience with eating seasonal food in Sweden after reading the paragraph related to this topic:

Excerpt 25

Yes, I enjoy fruits in season instead of cans with some fruit [...] and if I buy vegetables in summer they should be cheaper. But actually, here it's not always like this, because most of the vegetables are imported. [...] So, we have a It's like filled paprika, so last summer I

couldn't cook because paprika was very expensive and in November they were really cheap. So, adjust food to season (see figure 15 for a screenshot of the text) it's not always... and ... after which season? Because in Sweden there is no summer [laughs]

I: But back at home, were you following this?

R: Yes, because vegetables are very very cheap in the summer so yeah, we enjoy it a lot. But yesterday it was a little bit of snow here while at home it's warm and sunny. They have a lot of vegetables nowadays. It's reasonable and they like to be climate smart, it should be cheaper but they are not always cheaper in the summer, it depends.

2. Anpassa maten efter säsong

Det är klimatsmart, och dessutom billigare.

Figure 15 Part of the text about adjusting food to season¹⁴

When reading about saving energy in the kitchen, Alice told me about how she tries to do it at home. She was not mentioning this, when we were talking about her understanding of sustainability before reading the text:

Excerpt 26

It means if I want to want ... ok I want to drink tea so ... we fill the water kettle. We make tea and also, we don't start the oven for 1 hour, we use the microwave. Back home we have the stove, we have everything on gas ... here everything is electricity. When we buy things, we have energy class ... AAA class... This is also important.

Below Daniel is sharing his thoughts and experience on eating less meat:

Excerpt 27

But I'm... sometimes it's good for the body I guess - not to eat meat ... to get free from it, because it's more difficult to digest it than vegetables. So, I take some days off, but I usually eat meat and I ... When I try not to eat meat I'm always hungry, so... For me it didn't really work out. But I understand ... greenhouse gases ... yeah...

After reading the paragraph about buying fair-trade products, he remembers about another logo that he saw in the shops, although he doesn't know what it is. He says he likes to buy products with rainforest alliance logo on it, even though he does not know exactly what it is:

¹⁴ URL: <https://www.coop.se/Vart--ansvar/Hallbar-konsumtion/Bli-en-hallbar-konsument1/> Accessed: 2017-05-10

Excerpt 28

R: mmm...there is this duck logo...on ... teas I think... what is it called? [googles] I don't know...

I: mmm duck? I know the frog.

R: a duck... what? Frog.... Yeah! I meant the frog [laughs]

I: The rainforest alliance?

R: Yeah. That one. Uhm and that's also not only on teas but other things as well... that's not fair trade but still...maybe it's a more general thing. So, I like to buy those things. But I'm not consciously looking for fair trade products. And I don't really know ... where does it say that it's fair trade... So, I just I have to find information about it...

Tora is sharing her experience with supporting businesses with good working conditions:

Excerpt 29

Eh... right, for example fair trade (see figure 14 for a screenshot of the text). Yes, I do that. Yes, that's ... if I'm choosing between two products ... and one is fair trade or, even better, ecological and fair-trade... even better - KRAV and fair trade ... then I think in most of the cases I would choose fair trade. And even when it comes to wine and that kind of stuff. Yeah. It feels good. [laughs]

Many participants were sharing their personal experiences in relation to the text. It is interesting that many of them have not mentioned those practices when asked about their everyday sustainability before reading the text. It might show that even though they are already following some of the recommendations, they do not have strong connection in their mind that these kinds of behaviours and reflections can be seen as part of sustainable consumption of food. This suggests that the text triggers the participants to reason about certain issues related to sustainability, at the same time mediating knowledge about various aspects included in the concept.

Personal Reflections

Finally, as part of the Signs of learning theme, the analysis focused on how the respondents reflected on concepts, mentioned in the text. Mostly, they explained what they thought a concept means however, sometimes the participants said that they are not sure how to understand a certain part of a paragraph. For instance, Veronica was unsure about what the authors meant by “buy ecological, not only for your own sake but also for biodiversity”:

Excerpt 30

This with biodiversity what do they mean? I [reads through again] do they mean like EVERYONE then, because it's written “not just for your own sake, but even for the biological diversity” ... and... what do they mean by that? Because I ... I mean when it comes to food... unfortunately I can admit as a consumer then I think only about myself, but of course ... it's

not that good that it affects someone else ... but I probably don't think exactly about ... because when I think ecological, then I probably think about the transportation, probably not pesticides and people ... but of course it feels like it's more naturally grown when it's ecological if one thinks that there's no pesticides on the vegetables. But I don't actually think about the people. I think I don't do that because there's so many machines today that take care of everything, so that's probably why I forget about them in that case.

This is one example of how text allows a respondent to reflect on what the concept actually means. In the excerpt above Veronica starts with asking a question “This with biodiversity what do they mean” (excerpt 30) and then reflects on the fact that her understanding of “ecological” and how she “forgets” about certain aspects of the issue and why. Thus, the text serves as a mediational means for meaning-making by triggering her to relate existing knowledge to what is presented in the article.

Daniel was not certain about what “adjust food to season means”:

Excerpt 31

R: So, it's only buy food for each season? And don't try to buy for example... oranges in... summer? Something like that?

I: Mm

R: Eeh... or not importing food...

There were not many cases when a participant expressed uncertainty in their understanding of a paragraph, for the most part the respondents did not ask questions about the meaning of the content. On the contrary, more often the respondents would read a paragraph and then explain how they understand what they have just read. For example, here Anna tells me how she understands the point about buying food according to season:

Excerpt 32

Oh yeah, that one I would actually also do. You should buy according to the season so...you can buy local and ... you don't have to have strawberries in winter or something... mmm or asparagus.

Daniel is explaining how one should not trust the best before date blindly:

Excerpt 33

yeah this is basically what we were speaking about before. To not throw away food. And food that is thrown away some start-ups are just utilizing it. Sell it to people for cheaper price, because even when the best before date ... when it's expiration date is ... says the food has expired... it's still like edible then...

Maria remembered about the “greenhouse effect” after reading about the importance of reducing consumption of meat:

Excerpt 34

Yes. Reduce the meat consumption. Yes. To decrease ... what is it called... the greenhouse effect?

Later she explains how she understands the idea behind ecological food:

Excerpt 35

Yes, I think the idea behind ecological is that they don't use these pesticides and the fruits or like vegetables and fruits are being produced in like natural way.

Maria is talking about fair-trade right after reading the paragraph:

Excerpt 36

Fair-trade. Ok. I think this I have met fair-trade in terms of coffee, eh... and some... some... other products, maybe chocolate or something. Mm, I know what the concept is... means that the workers in that other country where the product is being produced are not being used in any ways or like they're not being like...enslaved...for production they do and for the work they do. But they get like...good...conditions. They work in good conditions.

Anna is explaining how she understands supporting businesses with good working conditions:

Excerpt 37

Okay, yeah, I understand the sentence, like you should buy something like for example fair-trade. Or that have better like working circumstances? No, how do you say that? Conditions for the workers.

These findings suggest that the text has given the participants an opportunity to reflect on the recommendations and talk about how they understand the concepts, serving as a means in a process of meaning-making. In some cases, the respondents were not sure what the authors meant exactly. For example, Veronica was asking “this with biodiversity what do they mean?” (excerpt 30), Daniel was asking what is meant by “adjust food to season”: “So, it's only buy food for each season? And don't try to buy for example... oranges in... summer?” (excerpt 31). In that case, they also had a chance to think about possible message behind the sentences and what the intention of the text might be.

Distrust

Since one part of this study was to see how the medium interplayed with the participants' perception of the content, it was valuable to see if there would be any signs of distrust towards the retailers and their double agenda (to teach about sustainability and to sell more). The analysis was also considering distrust in other actors, such as policymakers or society in general.

The fact that the text was located on a big retailer's website did not seem to cause mistrust in the presented facts and tips. However, the participants sometimes expressed mistrust in retailers or

businesses in general or about Coop in particular. For instance, here during the think-aloud part, Anna is expressing scepticism about Coop being sustainable:

Excerpt 38

Ok. Now it tells me that Coop ... that it like tries to have...sustainable cooperation since long time and that's it's one of their main principles [pause] Oh yeah that they label themselves as one of the most sustainable supermarkets (see figure 16 for a screenshot of the website). So, it's a lot of like information on...what they THINK they are. [laughs]



Figure 16 Coop as one of the Sweden's "greenest" brands¹⁵

Tora found an article about palm oil (see figure 17 for a screenshot of the website) during our think-aloud intervention and said that it was not a good overview of the problem. She mentioned that the reason might be Coop's double agenda:

Excerpt 39

Then I guess I don't think that they problematize palm oil in a broader perspective... the discussion is probably bigger than that in reality... but coop also wants to sell... so somewhere here they have their own interest. As well.

¹⁵ URL: <https://www.coop.se/Vart-ansvar/Hallbar-verksamhet/Coop-och-Anglamark---Sveriges-gronaste-varumarken/> Accessed: 2017-05-23

Coops arbete med palmolja

Palmolja finns i många av våra vardagsprodukter, i allt från schampo och stearinljus till småkakor och färdigmat.



Det är en av de mest använda vegetabiliska oljorna i världen eftersom den både är billig och har positiva egenskaper som gör att den fungerar bra i många produkter. Samtidigt är det en av de råvaror som bidrar mest till skövling av tropiska skogar och därmed till förlust av biologisk mångfald och till klimatförändring. Dessutom har den storskaliga palmoljaproduktionen ofta förödande konsekvenser för arbetare på plantagerna och för lokalbefolkningen.

Coop väljer hållbar palmolja

Coop har ett ansvar för de produkter vi säljer, att de inte ger negativa effekter där de produceras. Därför har vi på Coop bestämt oss – när du köper våra produkter

Figure 17 Coop's article about palm oil¹⁶

The issue with double agenda, namely, promoting sustainable consumption and trying to sell more was mentioned in previous research as one of the factors, contributing to consumers' distrust in these messages (Gonzalez-Lafayesse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014).

The topic that caused the most concern and uncertainty was the recommendation to buy ecological food – it seemed that this tip was something that the respondents have heard before but still were sceptical about. This corresponds with a point made by Anisimova and Sultan (2014), namely the fact that due to a poor understanding of what organic food is, consumers might tend to distrust retailers trying to sell them these products. Several participants told me that they suspect they might be cheated by retailers that want to sell the same products for higher price. For example, Daniel said that since it would take so much time to check if the food is really ecological or not, he simply decides not to purchase those products:

Excerpt 40

They are more expensive than usual food. Sometimes I'm not sure if they're really healthier than normal food or not. So... in order to confirm that I would need to talk with...the producers. Which takes time and energy so [laughs]. I'm a bit.... Yeah. Sometimes believe in

¹⁶ URL: <https://www.coop.se/Vart--ansvar/Hallbar-konsumtion/Palmolja/> Accessed: 2017-05-23

them, sometimes I think that I would need some time to actually confirm that it is ... sustainable food. And I just don't have the time so I don't care about it.

His reasoning suggests the distrust he has towards producers or retailers, for example when he mentions that he's "not sure if they're really healthier than normal food or not". This goes along with argument by Anisimova & Sultan (2014) pointing out that the reason behind distrust towards eco-foods is often caused by insufficient knowledge about what ecological means. However, Daniel also shares that he "sometimes believes in them", but often he does not have enough information to make an informed decision. Later he comes back to this topic to clarify that in fact he does not really know what the difference between ecological and non-ecological is and he suspects that some farms might be pretending to be ecological to earn more money:

Excerpt 41

And the second thing is that sometimes I don't know how the certification about ecological food... I don't know what really the difference is between ... not ecological and ecological... If ecological food is really or if it's price. If it's really from a farm that is not only wanting to get a certificate but really thinks beyond the certificate and tries to produce food that's actually better quality...

Maria shares her scepticism about ecological food as well. She also mentions the lack of "trust":

Excerpt 42

Yeah, I don't know, I'm a little bit sceptical about this "Choose ecological" (see figure 18 for a screenshot of the text) , one can hear so many different opinions that ecological is really... sometimes is really not ecological and they cheat you and so how can you actually trust that you're buying ecological products or not.

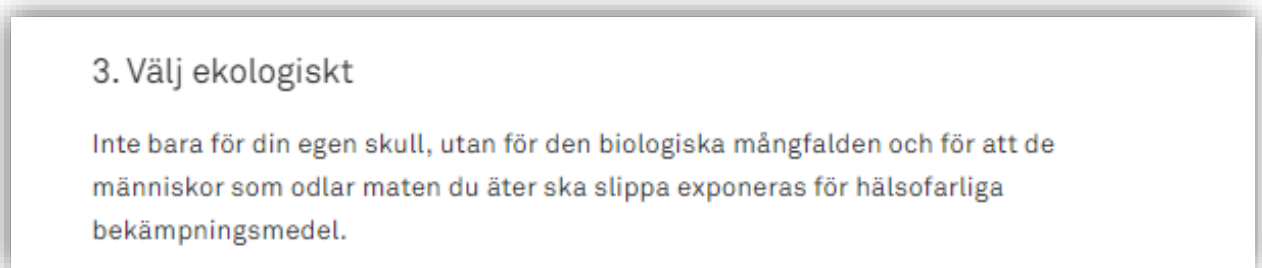


Figure 18 Part of the text about ecological food¹⁷

Later in our conversation she describes a problem similar to what Daniel was talking about: how to tell the difference between ecological and non-ecological

Excerpt 43

¹⁷ URL: <https://www.coop.se/Vart--ansvar/Hallbar-konsumtion/Bli-en-hallbar-konsument1/> Accessed: 2017-05-10

It's just really hard to tell and to know if you're really buying ecological or you're being cheated. I think ... yeah, it's a good idea, a good thing ... shouldn't be bad for your health. Another thing is that yeah... what you buy is really ... is it really what you buy. And what you pay for. Because these products are also more expensive. So, I think if I have the opportunity... I know my boyfriend, he just hates this ... ecological. Because he thinks it's just a humbug ... and he would just ... by principle... not choose ecological because he thinks this is a hype.

Rebecka raises another issue about ecological food: she is concerned that even food that comes from countries far away can be marked ecological and she thinks that food can't be marketed as ecological if the transportation costs are so high:

Excerpt 44

I think about number seven I have kind of associate something. Because it's like I remember before there's some article it's actually proof like some ecological food actually in the end is not ecological. Because they try to like... the transportation is like from a very far place to... and then what it causes, about the delivery is actually causes more pollution. For the environment so that's my husband told me, he said: don't buy ecological food it doesn't mean it's more ecological. It's just like eh... like fashion thing.

Daniel expressed distrust in retailers in general, when it comes to transporting food. He was referring to information that he heard from another person:

Excerpt 45

Yeah so, that's the thing like I heard ... I was speaking with a ...I think he was a Hungarian driver here in Sweden. He was transporting food. And he said that what he sees when he transports food ... even ecological or not... it's like how they store the food can... sometimes just terrible... It's not only that it's ecological or not but also the whole process of how it gets to the shop. Is important because that's ... you can eat food that was on the ground... in a truck...

Alice expressed scepticism towards ecological food as well:

Excerpt 46

When they say ... «buy ecological products, vegetables» and things like that, but actually it's not very far from a road where a lot of cars are. So, I wonder how much ecological they are. Because you know if ok it's a factory 30 kilometres from a farm where they plant eco-food. Let's say a little bit of rain and a little bit of wind and the area that is supposed to be ecological is not so ecological.

To summarize, the text itself did not seem to cause distrust, even though it was located at a major retailer's website, a possible explanation could be that the recommendations were very general and not promoting certain products or referring to Coop in general. However, some participants expressed their distrust in retailers and Coop in general, pointing out that they not only need to promote sustainable behaviour, but to sell as well. For example, when reading about Coop's sustainability

efforts, Anna points out that they are writing about “what they THINK they are” (excerpt 38), implying that there’s a gap between the image the retailer tries to convey and reality. When reading about palm oil, Tora says that the information is insufficient and she thinks the reason is that “Coop also wants to sell... so somewhere here they have their own interest. As well” (excerpt 39). These concerns support the arguments presented in previous research about food retailer’s double agenda (promoting sustainable consumption and trying to sell more at the same time) and distrust that it can cause (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014). The recommendation that caused the most scepticism was ecological food: the participants expressed their concern about possibly being cheated and about other factors that can affect ecological food, such as transportation costs or production location. It seemed that the respondents did not have enough information about what ecological food is and how to tell the difference between eco and non-eco. This corresponds with issues described by Anisimova & Sultan (2014), pointing out that insufficient knowledge of what eco-foods are makes consumers less eager to purchase that type of products.

Attitude-behaviour gap

Another part of analysis was focused on the attitude-behaviour gap. The goal was to see if after reading the tips, the participants would mention the gap between their attitude towards the issue and their behaviour. Several participants were talking about the discrepancy between knowing about something and actually doing it. For example, Alice says that she knows about the importance of reducing consumption of meat, she even mentions about “greenhouse gases”. However, she admits that they are “carnivores” in their family and thus cannot follow this tip:

Excerpt 47

My partner he’s Swedish and I don’t know which religion he is... but the most of Swedish, native Swedes they have no religion. I’m orthodox, but I don’t fast... So, we eat a lot of meat. I think. But ... yeah greenhouse gases, yes.

We have... I don’t know if you’ve heard about it...

It’s a sort of diet... blood type... according to your blood type. And we’re both “carnivores” ... so I’m carnivore and my partner is also a carnivore. And Sweden without meat... what Sweden is this...Sweden without meat? [laughs]

I agree with them but... we’re “carnivores”.

Olivia says that although she knows that it is good to buy eco-labelled fish, there is another factor that she has to keep in mind, namely, the price of the product:

Excerpt 48

[reads aloud] buy eco-labelled fish...

I try... but it doesn’t always work...because for example salmon is too expensive. So here it’s like you have to choose...

Rebecka talks about the same topic – she knows that it is good to buy ecological, but the decision is still being driven by the price:

Excerpt 49

Yeah, the third one I will say like... Yeah, I also know this concept, but it's difficult to follow. Because as I told you first how I usually purchase. It's still kind of price-driven, price decision, the marketing... But of course, you also know this concept because you READ, I mean [laughs]

You know what's the trend for nowadays for consumption like... On TV, media, all kinds of media... they will teach... tell you like you should be more ecological ... But sometimes it's still difficult to follow I think.

Veronica mentioned how the price is still the major factor for her, even if she knows about the importance of buying ecological food and wishes she was able to do so:

Excerpt 50

I: So, if you're in the shop, do you choose eco often and in that case what's the reason?

R: No, I don't do it that often. I wish I could, but it's about the price again. But then one can assess like ok maybe it's worth to buy a bit more expensive and get a better taste experience ... and such... but when you are in the shop you're often in a hurry or you go like oh I need to write my master thesis so I should get home soon. Then you go and look only at the price, you don't think much about that.

Alice mentioned that convenience plays a big role when trying to follow the recommendations given in the text. For example, when we were talking about using public transportation or taking the bike to the shop, she said that she is aware of that but it is not practical for her to do so:

Excerpt 51

You know I'm living in the countryside... What they advise me here ... unfortunately I don't know how to use bicycle...I don't. I can swim but I can't ride a bike. And we have one shop in the village but we don't use it and the other one I should use 1 hour and back just to go there... So, I'm very aware that using the car is ...

I do shopping when I go back from work. But it's very, very rare when I drive to the shop just to buy food. So, it's ... it's on my way from work ... so I'm responsible with this. And I'm... I could say a special case... I can't waste 1 hour to go to and from the shop. I don't feel good so.

When talking about using energy-effective appliances, Maria told me that she had recently bought a dishwasher that has an eco-program, but she cannot use it because it takes too much time:

Excerpt 52

R: energy-effective appliances... we also bought a dishwasher ...that has that function although we don't use that function [laughs]

I: No?

R: No, like it's super long

Some respondents mentioned that, even if they know about the recommendations given in the text, they still prioritize their health and well-being. For example, Daniel shared that he could not reduce his meat consumption, because he did not feel good when not eating enough meat.

But sometimes it's good for the body I guess ... not to eat meat ... to get free from it. Because it's more difficult to digest it than vegetables... [pause] So I take some days off, but I usually eat meat and I... When I try not to eat meat I'm always hungry [laughs] so... For me it didn't really work out. But I understand ... greenhouse gases ... yeah...

Maria told me that eating food according to season would not work for her in Sweden, fruits and vegetables here do not taste good.

Excerpt 53

R: Yeah. [reads aloud] adjust food to season ... yeah ... climate-smart and cheaper ... ok....

I: Is that something you're trying to do?

R: No. Because if did that, I would eat like not so healthy in Sweden. Since there is like ... no fruits here. It's like fruits and vegetables are terrible in Sweden and if I would try to eat even ... it's like even if it's season it's not so good, so, I think I have to eat something that anyway comes from abroad.

To summarize, the participants did mention attitude-behaviour gap, when talking about their experiences. It suggests that even if they know about the recommendations and the information is not new, there are other factors that they might prioritize, such as price, convenience and their own health and well-being. The findings agree with previous research in the field, arguing that having knowledge about a problem is not always enough (Hobson, 2002; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Discrepancy between attitude and behaviour might occur, when consumers take into consideration other factors, such as price, convenience and other practical aspects.

Opinions and suggestions about the text

At the end of the interview the participants were encouraged to share their opinions about the text, as well as any suggestions about how it could be made better. Most of the participants said that these were good recommendations and it is important that retailers have them somewhere on the webpage. Anna said that she thinks it might be helpful for people who “don't know and don't think of all those different aspects” of sustainability yet:

Excerpt 54

Yeah, it's definitely a good thing, because I think that a lot of people don't know and don't think of all those different aspects and it's made in a way that is easy to read, short texts, it's well-structured and like 10 tips is more or less the max I guess people would take in.

Alexander also pointed out that it is good to have a list with simple rules, however, he already “knew most of them”:

Excerpt 55

It was good. A simple list with the most important rules. I knew most of them. It's a good start.

Tora said that this was a good overview of what one can do, she said it was “comprehensive”:

Excerpt 56

Yeah, I think it was good. It was ... they were pretty broad... or comprehensive I think. [pause] that maybe help people to be more aware ...

Alice mentioned that it is important to see that the business is responsible and the text serves this purpose, however, she would never find this text online, because she is not actively searching for information about sustainability on retailers' websites:

Excerpt 57

Actually, being honest I think it's very interesting but ... I would never read this article on my own, because I'm looking at what kind of offers they have ... things like this... Eventually in best case recipes maybe. But that... it's normal to be there and this shows me that they are responsible ... responsible business... and it should be... It should make me more trustful in them I don't know... we don't buy so much online... so if I look on a website [I look] for offers ... eventually for recipes.

Daniel shared a similar thought, he said that he “would never find” and read this text on his own if I did not ask. This suggests that this type of texts are not accessible for those, who are not actively searching for it. He suggested that it would be better to have it on social media or YouTube, where he spends more time:

Excerpt 58

I would never read it. If you didn't ask me, I would not come here to read these things. I think it would be better like ... mainly I consume social media sites and video sharing like YouTube... so if I see and ad there or an ad on social media, then I might read it, but here...on the website I would never find it.

Maria mentions this as well, the text is good and useful and it helps to understand what it means to consume sustainably, but she would never found it on her own, since “it's a bit hidden”. This again suggests that the text is not accessible for common consumers. She also mentions that she is not sure that reading the text would change her behaviour:

Excerpt 59

I think it's good to have it like collected like this. But I ... the truth is I would have never gone on this page just by myself if you don't take me here. So, it feels like it's a bit hidden, but I thought it was a good idea. I mean of course one hears all about these points, but it's good to have it together like what you can do. It's good like you sometimes be like they say you should be more... pay attention to sustainability and be sustainable yourself but like ok, so what can I do? As me the little person you know [laughs] in the big, big world ... yeah what can I just... think of if I want to be more sustainable? I guess that's a good thing. But I don't know if that would change my behaviour. If I would do something that I haven't done before just by reading a list like this.

Olivia was talking about the same issue: the text is good, but hard to find. She says that it is not accessible since she “didn't notice it on the first page”. She mentions things like seasonal or ecological food as an example of something that people can learn from the article:

Excerpt 60

Well, generally, it's useful but when it comes to searching for it... how accessible it is. I think since I didn't notice it on the first page... my attention is of course not the best... But for example, to make it... for example using this article as... a little flag... When you just visit ... 10 tips... bla bla bla... could be done better actually. Because those articles that are for instance ... about how we gather food... They often don't help much... I mean, it's for those who are really interested. Yeah, but for a standard consumer, who is responsible ... I guess you could take me as example...it would be better to put stuff like that. If someone doesn't know something from this text and it would help... For example, to think about the fact that the food is more expensive or cheaper depending on the season ... that kind of thing one usually doesn't think too much about. Maybe someone doesn't know about the eco-labelled... I don't think it's useless. That's for sure. It just has to be more accessible.

Rebecka was also positive about the value of the text, but just like other participants, thinks that it has to be easier to find, since it's “such important things”:

Excerpt 61

I think it's very useful actually in one way it's like 10 tips, you know, people like to read ... have like guidelines so it's kind of like guidelines. And it also mentions knowledge you already know but you already know doesn't mean you'll be aware of this. So, it's good it makes you feel aware of these some certain things. You should be careful yeah. But I think maybe it's like such important things maybe you should put on the website ... Should put more ... in some other places easier for reader to get the information.

The participants were also giving suggestions about how the article could be made better. For example, Maria said that people are probably not attracted to this text because it is “very boring” and it would be more interesting to have it in a game format:

Excerpt 62

But if it would be somehow more interesting like more fun to read this ... do something or ... have it in some game format or something. I think that would maybe attract a little bit more

attention. Because this is like very boring I think and I don't think it really attracts people to read or even they read but it won't change much unless you want to change anyways your behaviour

Rebecka said that she would like to see the sources for the information, so that she can be sure that those are scientifically proven recommendations. She says she wants to know “what’s the evidence”:

Excerpt 63

I: Do you think there's something missing here? Or maybe something could be done differently?

R: Yeah definitely. Because for me I'm more like from scientific background. I would wish to see what's the evidence. For example, there's 10 tips but what's your source? To support you saying so? So, under each tip you can put like one link about like where you cited this knowledge. That would be more persuasive for people. Especially I think people who already have this knowledge, they have a certain...should have a certain educational background so the people will be focused on what's the scientific support.

Veronica said that she would like to have some more explanations or examples, possibly with pictures:

Excerpt 64

I would prefer it to be a bit more explained. Some points, like we said about the kettle for example, they can show some examples in pictures, not just text. But I understand that they have short points like this because it has to be simple, one should be able to keep it in mind. Anyway, some points were clear and good but it could also be because I knew it since before, that it complies with... that the points are anyway based on the knowledge I already have and that I agree with, there was nothing I could be critical about. In that way, it was easy to understand. But yeah, as I said, a bit clearer when it comes to some examples.

Alexander mentioned that he wants to have further guidance on each point, possibly links to other texts, because if he need to search himself, he could lose his interest:

Excerpt 65

The question is: what does one do next? Like [Points to the right side of the page where the menu is] I can see here there is all other different articles. I would need a little bit more details... like it's a bit... how do you say ... shallow. I would love to have links for everything. Ok, what do I do with that - here's more detail in this article. Because, yeah, it's very short here. And it's important to have a summary like that, but, then I would like to be able to continue directly from one of them further to more information. Otherwise I need to search myself. So maybe I lose my interest (laughs) faster

To sum up: most of the participants were positive about the text, saying that it was a good summary with simple recommendations. However, many of them mentioned that they would never found it on their own, since it is “hidden” and they do not have a habit of looking for information about sustainable consumption on retailers’ websites. This finding relates to other research in the field,

arguing that even with information available on the website, it is unlikely that it will reach those who know (or care) little about environmental problems (Jones et al., 2014). Some of the respondents suggested that the text could be made better by adding examples, pictures, links to further reading or sources of the information. Other participants said that the recommendations could be given in a different format or on another platform, such as social media or YouTube.

Discussion

The aim of this study has been to explore how respondents understand a Swedish food retailer's recommendations on sustainable consumption issues on their website and how these recommendations interlay with their reasoning, if there is an attitude-behaviour gap in what they already know and agree with and if they express willingness to change habits in line with more sustainable consumption. By analysing how the text on the website mediated certain topics I have shown how the respondents focused on certain issues. Furthermore, I have endeavoured to show how the website's message relates to the reasoning of the respondent as a part of the dialogue with the interviewer. In this section, I will discuss the findings in relation to studies mentioned in the literature review and give suggestions for future research. The findings are discussed in the same order as in the previous section.

Finding the Text

In the context of modern society, food retailers are forced by the existing policies and social trends to focus on CSR, which in case pushes them to promote sustainability (Lehner, 2015). Previous research pointed out that even though some retailers do have information about sustainable consumption on their websites, social media accounts and in stores, the consumers are still being bombarded by the messages, urging them to consume more (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014). The aim of this research was to see how the respondents experienced learning about sustainable consumption from a big Swedish food retailer's website.

The think-aloud intervention and the post-interview suggested that for half of the respondents it was hard to find relevant information. The following problems were observed during the respondents' search:

1. *The positioning and the name of the heading was confusing*

Most of the participants chose to look for the article "manually" without using the search field. The article they were looking for was placed under the heading "Our responsibility: people and environment" (see figure 19). Some of the respondents did not think that tips on sustainability would be placed in that section – they thought information about Coop was there, not messages to consumers. This could depend on their previous knowledge about the concept and the keywords they associate with it. From this perspective, the layout of the website mediated learning through its structure and words chosen to be placed in the headings. The search itself craved a certain level of reflection about what aspects are incorporated in the term "sustainable consumption". This finding goes in line with the ambiguity of the term, mentioned in the literature review – since the concept is so complex and does not have one established definition, it can be understood differently by different actors (Lehner, 2015).

The position of the heading (last on the list) also caused difficulties: some respondents never got to it, getting distracted by other information on the page. Several respondents pointed out that they thought that the last item on the list is the least important. It is hard to speculate, why Coop has chosen to design the page the way they did. However, keeping in mind that retailer's main goal is to sell more, one can assume that educating consumers about sustainability is something that they must do, but not their first priority. This might serve as an example of retailer's double agenda, mentioned in previous research in the field (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014)

2. Distractions.

Another problem, encountered by some of the participants was distractions. The section that attracted a lot of respondent's attention was "Food and Recipes". Several of them complained that they had to go through too many recipes, before they found their way to articles about sustainability. Furthermore, since the heading has the word "food" in it, several participants thought that tips on responsible consumption of food could be found there. It is important to mention that each recipe is followed by a button "buy the ingredients", which might be a reason why the retailer has decided to focus on this type of content (see figure 20). Other distractions were weekly ecological deals, pictures and ads. This again confirms the issues mentioned by Jones et al (2014), asking "is responsible retailing an oxymoron?". The double agenda, forcing the retailers to promote sustainability and sell more at the same time, could be confusing for the consumers, distracting them when they actually want to learn about how they can make more responsible choices.

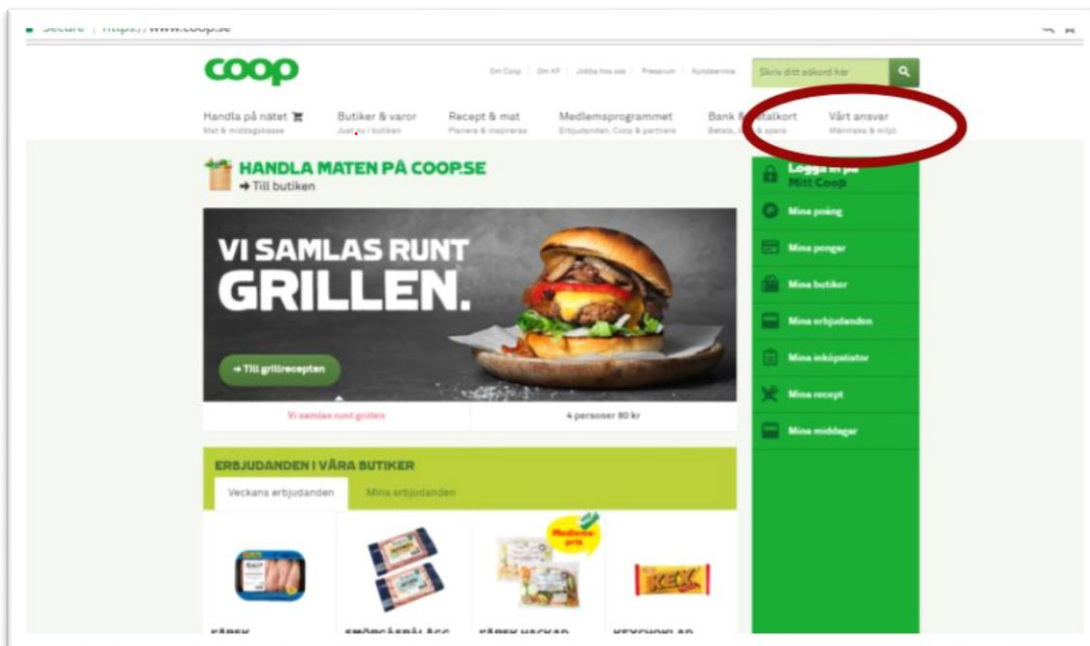


Figure 19 "Our Responsibility" heading¹⁸

¹⁸ URL: <https://www.coop.se/> Accessed: 2017-05-10

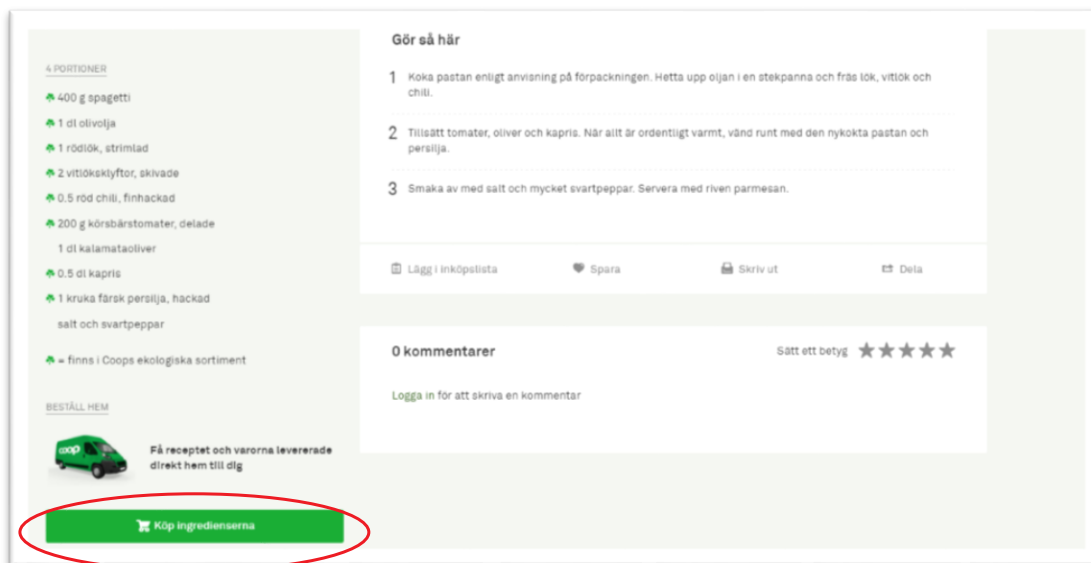


Figure 20 “Buy the Ingredients” button¹⁹

Coop has a lot of articles about sustainable consumption on their website with opportunities for consumers to learn about various aspects of the concept. However, while it was relatively easy for half of the respondents to find the information, others had difficulties with performing the task. It seems that the position of the heading and its name contributed to the confusion, showing that educating about sustainability might not be something that Coop chooses to prioritize, which is understandable, since the main goal of a retailer is to sell. The same conclusion follows from seeing how the respondents get distracted by the recipes, which could also be put on the website in order to sell ingredients. The findings confirm arguments made in previous research, showing that retailer’s double agenda could distract consumers attention from messages about sustainability (Gonzalez-Lafaysse & Lapassouse-Madrid, 2016; Jones et al., 2014). This suggests that if the retailer wants their sustainability messages on the website to reach the consumer, they have to rethink their design and layout, so that the article is easier to reach. More research is needed on how websites like this one could be redesigned so that the rest of the content do not steer consumers’ attention from the responsible consumption messages. Of course, this is only possible if the retailer is genuinely willing to make sure that this information reaches the consumer.

Signs of Learning

Since the focus of the study is on the learning perspective, the following possible signs of learning were presented in the analysis:

1. Reasoning before and after reading the text on the website
2. Reasoning about their personal experiences
3. Personal reflections

¹⁹ URL: <https://www.coop.se/Recept--mat/Recept/s/spaghetti-med-chili-vitloek-kapris-och-persilja/> Accessed: 2017-05-10

The findings suggest that the text mediates learning about sustainable consumption, which follows both from the participants' self-report and the analysis of pre- and post-interviews. According to Lehner (2015) there is a certain ambiguity in using the term "sustainable consumption", which leads to differences in understanding of what is included in this concept. These differences were seen in the analysis of the pre-interviews where the respondents mentioned different things in relation to the concept. The text mediated knowledge about the term by listing the behaviors that constitute responsible consumption. Therefore, the analysis showed that some of the participants had a more comprehensive view of the concept after reading the text, which resulted in that they included more aspects in their reasoning.

Moreover, the web-article allowed the participants to make meaning out of the concept in the context of the interview situation, by giving them opportunity to talk about the issues in relation to their personal experiences. This agrees with the argument made by Ballantyne & Packer (2005), where they point out that this type of informal learning environment allows for development of knowledge and attitudes in ways that are meaningful and relevant for everyday lives.

The text together with the situated practice of the interview situation allowed the participants to connect their previous knowledge and experience with new information. It also gave them opportunity to reflect on the recommendations, which served as a tool for meaning-making. This relates to the argument made by Anisimova & Sultan (2014) and Lehner (2015) that retailers can play a role in educating people about responsible consumption, if they choose to place information about it on their websites. As mentioned by Ballantyne & Packer (2005), the results of informal learning like this is hard to measure, thus we cannot make speculations about how much exactly the participants have learned from the experience. However, drawing on the theoretical perspective taken here it is possible to see how people change their ways of talking about and reflecting about certain issues, like in this study issues related to responsible consumption (Vygotsky, 1980). More research is needed on the roles of texts in a context like this one mediate learning to the consumers.

Distrust

The analysis revealed that some of the participants were skeptical towards the recommendation to buy more ecological food. They expressed concern about possibly being cheated by the retailers to purchase products for higher price. This finding confirms the argument made by Anisimova and Sultan (2014) on how consumer awareness about ecological foods influences their purchasing behavior. They pointed out that due to a poor understanding of what eco-foods are, consumers tend to distrust the retailers. The authors suggest that this is a reason why it is important to educate people about this concept. The findings made in this study confirm this point. Some of the respondents in this study mentioned that they do not have enough knowledge about ecological food to make an informed decision.

The analysis further showed that other recommendations in the text did not cause distrust. The context surrounding the article (a website used by retailer to advertise products) did not have big effect on the participants' attitude towards the content of the text. This implies that retailers do have an opportunity to promote sustainable consumption and teach about responsible purchasing behavior, as suggested by previous research (Anisimova & Sultan, 2014; Lehner, 2015). However, the retailers need to consider the fact that some parts of the text might cause distrust, namely the ones related to ecological foods. This makes it even more important to educate consumers about what ecological foods are and how one can make informed decisions, when buying products marked as "eco". Future research might bring light on how such knowledge could be mediated efficiently.

Attitude-behavior gap

The findings related to the attitude-behavior gap agree with previous research, namely, that discrepancy between knowledge and action occurs (Hobson, 2002; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). The text served as a medium for the participants to reflect on their experiences and helped reveal the attitude-behavior gap in their everyday actions. The reasons mentioned by the participants comply with those seen in previous research: even if they know what is the right thing to do from the ecological perspective, there are still practicalities of life that they need to consider (Hobson, 2002). The respondents in this study named price, health concerns and convenience as example of reasons for not following the recommendations.

This finding suggests those who aim at promoting sustainable consumption should keep the attitude-behavior gap in mind. Giving the consumers knowledge about responsible purchasing behavior is important, however, it will not guarantee behavior change on its own. More research is needed on how to narrow “the gap”.

Opinions and suggestions about the text

The analysis revealed that the participants had mostly positive impressions of the text and found it useful. Many of them thought it was a good overview and mentioned the importance of having a list with tips. This goes in line with how Lehner (2015) described the role of retailers, namely, to translate messages about sustainability into simple behavioral recommendations, that are easy to understand. The finding together with the previous research suggests that a list with short instructions like this one is a suitable format for promoting responsible consumption.

However, even though all the respondents were positive about the value of the text, most of them mentioned that it was not easily accessible. Two reasons were mentioned in relation to inaccessibility of the article:

1. *The text is hard to find on the website*
2. *The respondents do not look for articles about sustainability on retailers' websites*

The first point was already mentioned before in the first part of this section and suggests that promoting information about sustainability is not the retailer's priority.

The second point goes in line with argument made by Jones et al (2014) that tips and recommendations like the ones in the article often are found only by those who are actively searching for them. This suggests that this material is more likely to attract those who are already interested in issues of sustainable consumption. At the same time people who know (or care) little about how to purchase responsibly are unlikely to find the article.

The findings suggest that if retailers are genuinely willing to promote sustainable lifestyle, they have to rethink their design choices, namely the layout that they choose and where they place articles like the one mentioned in this study. The text has to be easy to reach even for those, who are not actively searching for it. A suggestion for future research would be to study how design of the website can help consumers reach texts about sustainability similar to the one used in this study.

Study Limitations

The findings in this study mostly agree and support the previous research, however, since it is a qualitative study with a convenience sample, one should be careful when generalizing the results to a wider population. Future research can study similar texts and materials presented on other retailers' websites or social media, as well as to use a bigger sample to deepen the understanding of the issues mentioned in this thesis.

Conclusion and Implications

The focus of this research was on how Swedish food retailers give recommendations and try to educate the consumers about sustainable consumption. After reviewing some of the existing literature in the field, the research questions were formulated. Thereafter a study, based on sociocultural theory and concept of mediated action was designed, consisting of a pre-interview, a think-aloud intervention and a post-interview. After analyzing the data, gathered during the interviews and the intervention, the following findings were summarized and discussed:

It was hard for some of the participants to find the article about sustainable consumption on the website, due to the positioning of the headings and various distractions. This suggests that promoting responsible consumption is not the retailer's priority. I would argue that the retailer has to re-think their design choices, for example making the article accessible from the first page, in order to ensure that all consumers can easily find the materials,.

The text together with the situated practice of the interview situation allowed the participants to connect their previous knowledge and experience with new information. It also gave them opportunity to reflect on the recommendations, which then served as a tool for meaning-making. This suggests that texts of this type, even when placed on a retailer's website, can support learning. The website as such can function as Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1980) by building on the intended participants' previous knowledge and step by step challenge with more detailed information or posing questions that inspire the participant to search for more information. The text itself did not cause distrust in the participants and the respondents mentioned that they found the information useful. However, many of them expressed concerns about ecological food being not really ecological. This suggests that more information and education is needed to help the consumers to make informed choices.

The attitude-behavior gap could be seen in the participants' reasoning about their experiences. They mentioned price, convenience and health concerns as some of the factors that hinder them from following the recommendations given in the text. This suggests that educators and other actors promoting responsible consumption, such as food retailers, should keep this issue in mind when designing materials to promote responsible purchasing behavior.

Bringing it to a close, the findings in the study support the previous research and observes the phenomena mentioned in the literature in the real-life context. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues connected to consumer education in informal contexts. The findings might be of interest both for future research and for retailers who are willing to promote sustainable consumption and need more information on how to design their webpages to serve that purpose. During the work on this thesis, an interesting thing happened; Coop reworked their website, removing the sections related to sustainability from the main menu. This confirms the assumptions about low priority of messages about responsible consumption for those who design the website.

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Appendix 1: Full Text of the Article

The text is given in Swedish, followed by translation to English

Original:

1. Undvik att slänga mat

Handla inte mer än du behöver. Använd rester till lunchlåda. Och lita inte blint på bäst-föredatum. Kläm, lukta och smaka innan du slänger.

2. Anpassa maten efter säsong

Det är klimatsmart, och dessutom billigare.

3. Välj ekologiskt

Inte bara för din egen skull, utan för den biologiska mångfalden och för att de människor som odlar maten du äter ska slippa exponeras för hälsofarliga bekämpningsmedel.

4. Minska köttkonsumtionen

Nötköttet är den största miljöboven av alla, köttindustrin producerar otroliga mängder växthusgaser. Hitta andra mättande proteiner att fylla tallriken med emellanåt, till exempel bönor, linser eller tofu.

5. Köp miljömärkt fisk

Havet, och alla som bor där, är utsatta för stora påfrestningar. Coop säljer bara fisk som fångats eller odlats enligt gällande lagar och regler. Vi säljer heller inte fisk från bestånd som är starkt hotade eller mycket känsliga för fiske.

6. Stöd företag med schysta arbetsvillkor

Till exempel genom att köpa märkningar som Fairtrade.

7. Var aktiv

Våga fråga om ursprung, arbetsvillkor, transporter och olika tillsatsernas betydelse för miljö och människa. Ställ krav. Både i din butik och på producenterna.

8. Den största transportpåverkan är resan till och från butiken

Att alla konsumenterna tar sin egen bil till och från affären för att köpa kaffe påverkar faktiskt miljön mer än transporten från kaffeplantagen till Sverige. Fundera en extra gång innan du sätter dig i bilen – kanske går det lika bra att cykla eller ta en promenad till butiken?

9. Var klimatsmart i köket

Använd vattenkokare och mikrovågsugn, utnyttja eftervärme och köp energieffektiva vitvaror.

10. Förvara maten rätt och svalt

Förvara mjölk, kött och fisk där det är som kallast i kylan och grönsaker och frukt där temperaturen är högre. Rekommenderade temperaturer: Kyl: +5°C. Frys -18°C.

Translation:

1. Avoid throwing away food

Don't buy more than you need. Use the rests for the lunchbox. Don't trust the best-before date blindly. Touch, smell and taste before you throw away.

2. Adjust food to season

It's climate-smart and also cheaper.

3. Choose ecological

Not just for your own sake, but also for the biodiversity and so that people who produce the food you eat don't have to be exposed to dangerous pesticides.

4. Reduce consumption of meat

Beef is the worst villain for the environment, the meat industry produces incredible amount of greenhouse gases. Find other proteins to fill your plate with, for example beans, lentils or tofu.

5. Buy eco-labelled fish

The seas and everyone who lives there are exposed to big strain. Coop is only selling fish that was caught or farmed in accordance to existing laws or regulation. We don't sell fish of sorts that are endangered or very sensitive to fishing.

6. Support companies with good working conditions.

For example, by purchasing Fair-Trade labelled products.

7. Be active

Dare asking about the origins, working conditions, transportation and various additives' effect on the environment and people. Make demands. Both in the shop and for the producers.

8. The biggest transportation effect if the trip to and from the shop.

The fact that all consumers take their own car to and from the shop to buy coffee affects the environment more than the transportation from the coffee plantation to Sweden. Think again before you get into the car – maybe it's better to take a bike or walk to the shop?

9. Be climate-smart in the kitchen

Use the kettle and the microwave, use final heating and buy energy-efficient appliances.

10. Store the food correctly and at cool temperatures.

Keep milk, meat and fish in the coldest parts of the fridge, keep vegetables and fruits at higher temperatures. The recommended temperatures: fridge: +5°C. Freezer: -18°C.

Appendix 2: List of Questions for the Pilot Interview

Pre-Interview:

1. What are your thoughts on Sustainable Consumption?
2. What does sustainable consumption mean to you?

Post-Interview:

1. What did you think about the search on the page?
2. Can you reflect upon the material you've read?

Appendix 3: Final List of Questions for the Interview

Pre-Interview:

1. What are your thoughts on sustainable consumption?
2. Is there something you do in your everyday life to consume more sustainably?

Post-Interview:

1. What do you think about searching for the article on the webpage?
2. What do you think about this text?
3. Is something missing here or something could be done better?
4. Do you think something in your behaviour will change after reading this?