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TOWARDS PLANT-BASED FOOD CONSUMPTION
PRACTICES
Activity focus group study

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ABSTRACT

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Currently there is an increasing global demand for plant-based foods. There has been a growing interest in decreasing meat consumption especially in Western countries, but the actual amount of consumed meat has not yet decreased. Hence, more information is needed about the change towards plant-based food consumption in the daily lives of consumers.

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyse how young Finnish consumers perceive a change in their daily food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. The focus is on barriers and drivers for the change. This thesis is philosophically based on social constructionism, which assumes that each consumer has their subjective perceptions, but these are constructed and shared in daily social interaction. The qualitative research data was generated through a focus group method, which was refined by adding food-related activities to it and renamed as an activity focus group. Four activity focus group sessions were held with altogether 13 participants.

The theoretical framework was composed from the literature stream of social practice theory, focusing on change in consumption practices, as well as from previous research about barriers and drivers for consuming plant-based food. The change in food consumption practices was addressed through the emergent change in their three elements: material, image, and skill. The social nature of food consumption practices was also emphasized through addressing the role of social environment in the change.

The barriers and drivers for the change that the participants perceived were associated with the three practice elements and the social environment. Material-related barriers and drivers focused on the availability and quality of plant-based foods. Image-related findings stemmed from perceptions of meat and plant-based foods, and the positive characters and health benefits of a plant-based diet were highlighted as drivers. Skill-related issues were associated with the knowledge of plant-based foods and their cooking, and the gradual nature of the change towards a plant-based diet was emphasized in drivers. Social communities, such as households and work communities, as well as social conventions and shared meanings represented social barriers and drivers.

With consumer insight companies can develop products that better meet consumer needs. The findings can assist especially the companies that produce plant-based foods by helping them to understand how consumers perceive the change in their daily food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. In their marketing efforts, the companies can exploit the drivers and help consumers overcome the barriers.

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Kasvipohjaisen ruuan kysyntä on kasvussa maailmanlaajuisesti. Erityisesti länsimaissa kiinnostus lihankulutuksen vähentämistä kohtaan on kasvanut, mutta todellinen lihankulutus ei ole vielä ollut laskussa. Siksi tarvitaan lisää tietoa muutoksesta kohti kasvipohjaista ruuankulutusta kuluttajien päivittäisessä elämässä.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on kuvata ja analysoida kuinka nuoret suomalaiset kuluttajat käsittävät muutoksen päivittäisissä ruuankulutuksen käytänteissään kohti kasvipohjaista ruokavaliota. Tutkimus keskittyy muutoksen esteisiin ja ajureihin. Tutkimus pohjautuu sosiaalisen konstruktionismin tutkimusfilosofiaan, jossa oletuksena on, että kuluttajilla on subjektiivisia käsityksiä, jotka rakentuvat ja jotka jaetaan sosiaalisessa vuorovaikutuksessa. Laadullinen tutkimusaineisto luotiin käyttämällä fokusryhmämenetelmää, jota jalostettiin lisäämällä siihen ruokaan liittyviä aktiviteetteja. Menetelmän uusi muoto nimettiin toiminnalliseksi fokusryhmäksi. Tutkimuksessa toteutettiin neljä toiminnallista fokusryhmää yhteensä 13 osallistujan kanssa.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys koostettiin sosiaalisen käytänneteorian kirjallisuudesta keskittyen käytänteiden muutokseen sekä aiemmista tutkimuksista, joissa on tutkittu kasvipohjaisen ruuan kuluttamisen esteitä ja ajureita. Muutosta ruuankulutuksen käytänteissä lähestyttiin käytänteiden kolmen elementin, materiaalien, mielikuvien sekä taitojen, muutoksen kautta. Ruuankulutuksen käytänteiden sosiaalista luonnetta korostettiin keskittymällä myös sosiaalisen ympäristön rooliin muutoksessa.

Tutkimuksen osallistujien käsitykset muutoksen esteistä ja ajureista liitettiin käytänteiden kolmeen elementtiin sekä sosiaaliseen ympäristöön. Materiaaleihin liittyvät esteet ja ajurit keskittyivät kasvipohjaisten ruokien saatavuuteen ja laatuun. Mielikuviin liittyvät löydökset perustuivat osallistujien näkemyksiin lihasta sekä kasvipohjaisesta ruuasta, ja ajureiden osalta korostettiin kasvipohjaisen ruokavalion positiivisia ominaisuuksia sekä terveysvaikutuksia. Taitoihin liittyvät esteet ja ajurit yhdistyivät tietoon kasvipohjaisista ruuista ja niiden valmistamisesta. Muutoksen asteittaisuus kohti kasvipohjaista ruokavaliota korostui ajureissa. Sosiaaliset yhteisöt, kuten ruokakunta tai työyhteisö sekä konventiot ja jaetut merkitykset edustivat sosiaalisia esteitä ja ajureita.

Saamalla tietoa kuluttajista yritykset voivat paremmin vastata heidän tarpeisiinsa. Tutkimustulokset voivat auttaa erityisesti kasvipohjaisia elintarvikkeita valmistavia yrityksiä ymmärtämään muutosta kohti kasvipohjaista ruokavaliota kuluttajien päivittäisten käytänteiden näkökulmasta. Näin ne voivat markkinoinnissaan hyödyntää muutoksen ajureita sekä auttaa kuluttajia pääsemään muutoksen esteiden yli.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	7
1.1	The rise of plant-based foods	7
1.2	From meat consumption to a plant-based diet.....	9
1.3	Problem setting and research questions.....	10
2	CHANGE IN FOOD CONSUMPTION PRACTICES	14
2.1	Social practice theory approach to consumer research.....	14
2.1.1	Social and routine nature of consumption practices	14
2.1.2	Social food consumption practices and the concept of a plant-based diet	16
2.1.3	Three elements of food consumption practices	19
2.2	Theorizing change in food consumption practices	21
2.2.1	How consumption practices change	21
2.2.2	The role of social environment in the change	25
2.3	Barriers and drivers for consuming plant-based food	27
2.3.1	Barriers	27
2.3.2	Drivers	30
2.4	Synthesis of the theoretical framework	32
3	CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH.....	35
3.1	Research philosophy.....	35
3.1.1	Social constructionist paradigm.....	35
3.1.2	The ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions ..	37
3.2	Qualitative research methodology	38
3.2.1	Activity focus groups	39
3.2.2	Data generation	42
3.2.3	Data analysis	46
4	BARRIERS AND DRIVERS FOR MOVING TOWARDS PLANT-BASED FOOD CONSUMPTION PRACTICES.....	50
4.1	Barriers emerging from the practice elements	50
4.1.1	Material-related barriers	50
4.1.2	Image-related barriers.....	52
4.1.3	Skill-related barriers	55
4.2	Drivers emerging from the practice elements	58
4.2.1	Material-related drivers	58
4.2.2	Image-related drivers.....	59
4.2.3	Skill-related drivers	60
4.3	Barriers and drivers emerging from the social environment	62
4.3.1	Social communities and conventions	62
4.3.2	Socially shared meanings	64
4.4	Conclusions and re-evaluation of the theoretical framework.....	67
4.4.1	Through positivity and gradual change	68
4.4.2	Social pressures come from the immediate circle and further.....	71
4.4.3	Re-evaluation of the theoretical framework	73
5	SUMMARY	77

5.1	Summary of the research	77
5.2	Evaluating the research quality.....	80
5.3	Contribution of the research	84
5.3.1	Theoretical contribution	84
5.3.2	Practical implications	88
5.4	Further research directions	90
REFERENCES.....		92
APPENDICES.....		100
	APPENDIX 1: Questions presented by the researcher in the activity focus groups	100
	APPENDIX 2: Photographs of the ingredients and meals in the activity focus groups	101
	101

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The concept of a plant-based diet in relation to other similar terms	18
Figure 2. The three elements of practice.....	20
Figure 3. Change in the elements of practices over time.....	22
Figure 4. Synthesis of the theoretical framework	33
Figure 5. Stages of the activity focus groups.....	45
Figure 6. The abductive, iterative and interpretive research process.....	47
Figure 7. Definitions of a plant-based diet provided by the participants.....	56
Figure 8. Re-evaluation of the synthesis of the theoretical framework	75
Figure 9. Contributions of the thesis.....	87
Figure 10. Contribution of this thesis on the contribution continuum.....	88

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Barriers and drivers in previous literature	32
Table 2. The practical details of the focus group sessions.....	44
Table 3. Examples of analysing the data	49
Table 4. Findings of the empirical study	67

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The rise of plant-based foods

Plant-based eating, which means preferring plant-based foods over meat, is globally trending. In late 2016, Mintel predicted that “the preference for natural, simple and flexible diets will drive further expansion of vegetarian, vegan and other plant-focused formulations” (Mintel Press Team 2016), which seems to have been an accurate prediction. It is proposed that “plant-based” will be the food trend of 2018 (The Food Revolution Network 2018), and plant-based foods have been recently listed by The Guardian as the number one megatrend that can hinder climate change (Carrington 2017).

The topic is urgent also for many businesses: According to Forbes, there are already many plant-based success stories and they suggest it would be beneficial to enter the plant-based business in 2018, because the sales are rapidly increasing (Fox 2017). For example, in the US veganism has increased with 600% in the last three years and the sales of plant-based products went up by 8% in 2017, and global internet search data show a worldwide increase in the interest of veganism (The Food Revolution Network 2018; Fox 2017). In China, in turn, new dietary guidelines encourage people to reduce their meat consumption (The Food Revolution Network 2018). Hence, reducing meat consumption and moving towards plant-based options seem to raise global interest. This has been an emerging public discussion topic also in Finland.

In Finland, it was at the latest in 2016 when the vegetarian “boom” started off (e.g. Kemppainen 2016). Recent inquiries suggest that Finnish consumers have an interest in decreasing meat consumption as well as an increasing positive attitude towards plant-based options (see Keto-Tokoi 2017; Leiwo 2017). Plant-based eating has gained more ground in public discussion, and grocery store shelves have started to fill with more and more plant-based products (Mäkelä 2017; Markkinointi & Mainonta 2017). For example, in May 2016 the new Finnish innovation “pulled oats” was launched, followed by another similar plant-based product made from broad beans (Kemppainen 2016). The popularity of these products surprised merchants, as also people who do not follow a vegetarian diet

took interest in the new plant-based options (Kemppainen 2016). Pulled oats also found their way to the menus of restaurants, such as the global restaurant chain Taco Bell (Kauppalehti 2017; Väkevä 2017). Since spring 2016, multiple other plant-based products have been launched, such as a plant-based option for kebab meat (see Vöner Oy 2018) as well as “pulled peas” (see Familia Verde Oy 2017).

Some say the boom is part of a fundamental change in the ways of thinking about food (S-ryhmä 2018). However, some propose it is not even a boom, as the consumption of plant-based products still seems to be marginal compared to meat (Herrala 2018). Either way, there seems to be an increasing interest. Another indication about that is that along with the substitute products to meat, the market of plant-based alternatives to dairy products has grown remarkably (Korhonen 2017). For example, one of the largest Finnish dairy companies entered the market of plant-based milk substitutes in 2018 (Kukkonen 2018). Besides, plant-based eating has gained visibility in various events, such as vegetarian food exhibitions (see Vegemessut 2018) and campaigns challenging citizens to try out a vegan diet (see Vegaanihaaste 2018). What is more, meat substitutes have been developed outside Finland as well: One of the latest innovations is the “meat-free meat” developed in Silicon Valley (Saarikoski 2017). Thus, there are currently multiple companies for example in the US and UK that develop these kind of innovations for substituting meat (Fox 2017).

All abovementioned examples underline the recent global interest in plant-based eating as well as the relevance of the topic in the Finnish context. As said, plant-based eating is a trendy topic also from businesses’ point of view as it is a growing market. However, businesses need more information about how consumers adopt these products into their daily lives. This is also related to a recent revolution in marketing thought, which has changed the way how consumers are perceived. In other words, consumers are no longer seen as passive recipients of information. Instead, they have a symmetrical role as active value co-creators that can collaborate in companies’ innovation processes and strategy formation, among other things (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 40; Schau et al. 2009, 30; Webster & Lusch 2013). To summarize, understanding consumers and working together with them instead of just selling to them is found vital for marketing practitioners (Webster & Lusch 2013, 398). That is why this thesis focuses on consumers’ perceptions

related to moving towards plant-based eating. It is beneficial especially for companies that produce plant-based products to understand how consumers perceive plant-based foods, and for example, what kind of barriers to consume them they face in their daily lives. This way consumers can provide insight about their preferences and help companies build their marketing strategies.

1.2 From meat consumption to a plant-based diet

Economic development and increasing welfare, technical developments in agriculture as well as urbanization, among other things, have led to cheaper meat prices and increased global meat consumption (e.g. Graça 2016, 155; Lang & Heasman 2004; Vinnari et al. 2010, 837). It has been found in multiple studies that heavy meat (especially red meat) consumption plays a significant role in urgent environmental problems (Pohjolainen et al. 2015). Meat production needs remarkably more natural resources than producing nutritionally equivalent vegetarian foods (e.g. Duchin 2005), but inefficiently only 15% of the protein in feed crops is turned into human food (de Boer & Aiking 2011, 1261; Graça 2016, 156). Meat production contributes to the climate change, for instance through cultivating feed-grains and damaging grazing lands. Additionally, the global agriculture and livestock sector is responsible for about a fifth of all greenhouse gas emissions due to gases from animal manure (McMichael et al. 2007, 1253, 1259).

It has been proposed in earlier research that to secure future protein supply globally there are two options: to make a transition towards a diet with less meat, or to shift away from industrial meat production (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 239). By decreasing the global meat consumption level from 42 kg (78 kg in Finland, see Herrala 2018) to 32 kg per person per year, sustainability targets could be reached (McMichael et al. 2007; Pohjolainen et al. 2015). Hence, to make rapid changes (and to prevent developing countries from following Western countries in meat consumption levels), the primary goal should be to decrease meat consumption in high-income countries (Beverland 2014, 370; McMichael et al. 2007, 1260; Vinnari et al. 2010, 848). Consequently, the environmentally sustainable ways of eating have lately started to gain more attention also in dietary guidelines in Western countries (Hoek et al. 2017, 118).

Therefore, following a *plant-based diet* is presented as a solution to the environmental sustainability problems of meat-consumption (e.g. Beverland 2014, 373; de Boer & Aiking 2017; Duchin 2005, 111; McMichael et al. 2007; Pohjolainen et al. 2015; Vinnari & Vinnari 2014). In other words, it has been stated in research that the most dominant effect on decreasing meat consumption can be caused by people following a diet with occasional meat consumption, thus following a plant-based diet (Vinnari et al. 2010, 838). This argument highlights the key idea in this thesis: moving towards a plant-based diet does not necessarily mean completely abandoning meat or animal-derived products.

1.3 Problem setting and research questions

Lately, the symbolic meanings of meat, such as masculinity and high status in the nutritional hierarchy seem to have lost their significance in some developed countries (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 245; Vinnari et al. 2010, 838–839). It has been discovered in earlier research that western, urban and well-educated consumers who represent less-patriarchal societies have developed negative attitudes towards meat, but this has not yet affected the consumption levels (Holm & Møhl 2000, 277; Vinnari et al. 2010). Vice versa, it has globally risen during the past few decades and years (FAOSTAT 2017; Graça 2016; Vinnari et al. 2010). For example, in Finland in 2016 and 2017, the overall meat consumption increased (with 1% in 2017) despite the increased interest in plant-based eating (see Herrala 2018; Vuorio 2017). To sum up, this represents a contradictory phenomenon: If the attitudes towards meat have become critical, why have consumers not reduced meat consumption and shifted to plant-based eating?

The discussion on non-meat consumption has become more intense in research through multiple theoretical approaches (see e.g. de Boer & Aiking 2017; Lea et al. 2006; Pohjolainen et al. 2015; Vinnari & Vinnari 2014), but its role in long-term consumer behaviour is not yet widely studied (Vinnari et al. 2010). What is more, especially the abovementioned gap between consumer attitudes and behaviour has been in the focus of researchers, but it has not yet been solved how the scientific arguments for reducing meat consumption can be brought together with the actual behaviour of consumers (de Boer & Aiking 2017, see also Hoek et al. 2017, 118). To summarize, the diet shift has been an emerging topic in research. However, more research is needed to better understand

consumers as active subjects carrying out their food practices instead of just viewing them as passive recipients of information (Graça 2016, 162).

Hargreaves (2011, 89) argues that cognitivist approaches focusing on consumer attitudes and values are too narrow. Especially when it comes to sustainable consumption, the focus on individual consumer behaviour is too tight, as it does not address the social life of consumers. In other words, consumption is more than just individual choices of a consumer, as it is also about the surrounding social structures. These together reflect the tension between the barriers and the drivers for change in food consumption (Beverland 2014, 370–371). Southerton et al. (2012, in Plessz et al. 2016), in turn, add that practices come far behind opinions, which is why changing consumers' values does not mean directly changing practices. That is why the change in consumer behaviour does not depend on how familiar people are with the sustainable ways of consumption, but instead on how their practices are transformed (Hargreaves 2011, 83). Therefore, this thesis does not focus on examining consumers' attitudes or values, but instead on how they perceive changing their everyday *food consumption practices* towards a plant-based diet.

The practice theory viewpoint expands the cognitivist view and shifts the focus to everyday practices. Hargreaves (2011) and Røpke (2009, 2490) propose that practice theory can be a relevant tool for research that focuses on the environmental consequences of consumption and on transforming pro-environmental behaviour. Especially habitual household practices with environmental impacts, such as food related practices, are critical to study in terms of sustainable consumption (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014, 27). Practice theory offers also a possibility to explain how practices change (Halkier et al. 2011, 9; Plessz et al. 2016, 102), however, not only single practices but multiple intersecting practices need to be addressed (Hargreaves 2011). The underlying assumption is that food consumption practices are social by nature, as eating patterns are formed in social relationships and networks (e.g. Contento et al. 2006; Delormier et al. 2009; Sahakian & Wilhite 2014). As Shove et al. (2012, 140) argue, the promotion of pro-environmental behaviour depends on changing social practices. Hence, this thesis adopts *the social practice theory* perspective through focusing on consumers' everyday food consumption practices as well as their social environment.

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyse how young Finnish consumers perceive a change in their daily food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. In order to do this, the following research questions are posed:

1. What do young Finnish consumers perceive as barriers to change their daily food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet?
2. What do young Finnish consumers perceive as drivers for changing their daily food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet?

According to Sahakian and Wilhite (2014, 39), especially when using social practice theory in sustainable consumption research, the researcher needs to make choices in the boundaries of the research. In this thesis, the target group is young Finnish consumers aged between 20 and 30 years. This age range was found to be relevant because it has been proposed that especially young consumers in Finland have begun to show interest in reducing meat consumption and in shifting to plant-based eating (see e.g. Keto-Tokoi 2017). According to Vinnari et al. (2010, 848–849), to keep meat consumption under control it is important to understand the reasons for consumption of non-meat as well as meat. Therefore, academic research should not focus on those people who have the strongest barriers for eating plant-based foods, but instead on those people with an urge to reduce their meat consumption and to move towards plant-based eating (Pohjolainen et al. 2015, 1150). Based on this idea, this thesis focuses on young Finnish consumers with an interest towards a plant-based diet, but who do not yet follow a plant-based diet.

Additionally, the focus is narrowed to the *barriers* and *drivers* as factors in the change process. However, both barriers and drivers are addressed to aim for a holistic understanding of the topic. Furthermore, the focus is narrowed to *daily* food consumption practices. Marshall (2005, 73) proposes that the attention should be shifted from the rituals of food to the daily routines of food consumption. People find eating out (dining) as occasional and exceptional, which is why they do not apply same standards to it as they do to the practices of cooking at home or doing grocery shopping (Pfeiffer et al. 2017, 13). That is why this thesis focuses on these daily practices instead of food rituals or occasional events. To summarize, the daily food consumption practices refer here mainly to grocery shopping, cooking as well as eating ordinary daily meals, both at home

and outside home. Finally, as this thesis focuses on the consumer viewpoint, the corporate perspective is left out.

2 CHANGE IN FOOD CONSUMPTION PRACTICES

2.1 Social practice theory approach to consumer research

The cultural turn in consumer research during the past decades (see e.g. Arnould & Thompson 2005; Moisander & Valtonen 2006; Thyroff et al. 2015) took a cultural approach to studying consumption, while traditional consumer theories focus on consumers' intentions, purchases and post-purchase satisfaction (Thyroff et al. 2015, 48). Consumer culture theory (CCT), which emerged in the cultural turn, focuses on the relationships among consumers' experiences, beliefs, and practices as well as institutional and social structures (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 874). Consumption practices have been perhaps the most widely studied issue in CCT, however, with the emphasis on aesthetic, ritualistic and hedonistic dimensions (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 871). Hence, CCT has been criticized for having too much focus on identity symbols and for obscuring routine activities as well as instrumental aspects of life (Warde 2014, 282).

Consequently, Warde (2014) proposes that theories of practice provide a potential addition to the cultural approach. *The practice theory* approach shifts the focus towards understanding the daily practices of consumers (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014). Thus, it does not focus on the symbolic, discursive or textual dimensions of practices (Reckwitz 2002, 252), but on doings, materials and embodiments (Warde 2014, 826). Since the "practice turn" in the beginning of new millennium (Warde 2016, 47), practice theorists have theorized practices with diffused end results (Shove & Walker 2010, 472). Warde (2014, 286) concludes that what practice theory approaches have in common is that they try to remain separate from the models of individual choice. Nevertheless, there are overlapping features with cultural theories.

2.1.1 Social and routine nature of consumption practices

Unlike some cultural theories, practice theory finds the social to exist in practices themselves instead of existing only in mental qualities, discourse or interaction (Shove et al. 2007, 12). As Reckwitz (2002, 251) argues, there is a social order that exists within

practices. Hargreaves (2011, 93) adds that practices support social relations which ensure that practices are maintained and reproduced. Also Warde (2005, 146) highlights the role of collectively developed daily conventions over the choices of an individual. Most practices involve interaction with other people, however, to be social the practice does not necessarily need to involve social interaction (Reckwitz 2002, 252). In other words, all practices are fundamentally social, as the basis for practice theory lies in sociology (Reckwitz 2002, 252).

Practice theory is also referred to as *social practice theory* (e.g. Sahakian & Wilhite 2014). In this thesis, practice theory and social practice theory are used as complementary terms that both acknowledge the social nature of practices, yet the social context is emphasized. There has been an increasing interest in applying social practice theory to studying consumption, especially in relation to sustainability issues (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014, 25; Warde 2014, 287). Despite the criticism of social practice theory being too theoretical (see also Halkier et al. 2011), Sahakian and Wilhite (2014, 37) find it potential for examining social practices with environmental concerns, such as food consumption. Practice theory has been used in previous research also in the context of change in daily practices as well as in the context of cooking, which demonstrates its methodological implication in consumption research (see Halkier et al. 2011).

Practice theorists view practices as habitual, conventional and routine by nature (Dwyer 2009, 331), and so is food consumption (e.g. Marshall 2005; Warde 2014, 288). As practices are repeated continuously, consumers rarely describe them consciously (Halkier & Jensen 2011; Røpke 2009, 2494). Especially sociologists emphasize routines, however, they have given less attention to the objects, infrastructures, and products involved in practices (Shove & Pantzar 2005, 44). Practice theories were brought to the context of consumption and thus “materialized” especially in the work of Shove and Pantzar (e.g. 2005) (Røpke 2009, 2492). Shove and Pantzar (2005, 44) note that products are used not only for signaling identities, but also for the reproduction of life. As Warde (2005, 137) explains, consuming is “a moment in almost every practice”.

From the social practice theory viewpoint consumption can be defined as a process, where agents take part in “appropriation and appreciation” of goods, services, information,

performances or ambience (Warde 2005, 137). Whether these are actually purchased or not does not matter (Warde 2005, 137). The purpose can be for example utilitarian, expressive or contemplative. Shove and Pantzar (2005, 45) add that consumption is part of the reproduction of practices. Thus, consumption is carried out for practices, as part of other practices and as a consequence of practices. For example, food consumption happens in the reproduction of daily practices, such as cooking and eating. As Reckwitz (2002, 250) proposes, *consumption practice* is formed by several actions of consumption.

2.1.2 Social food consumption practices and the concept of a plant-based diet

In terms of daily eating, the focus in business and consumer research is on what foods are consumed (Warde 2016, 53). Food consumption might have been too routinized to evoke a lot of interest in consumer research, but what makes it outstanding is its ordinariness (Marshall 2005, 69). Thus, the daily routines of consumers, such as food consumption practices, are interesting in terms of “ecological economics”, as they account for a huge share of resources (Røpke 2009, 2496).

Food consumption is individual, especially in postmodern societies (Marshall 2005, 69). However, it is still regulated by rules and conventions that are culturally and socially shared (Marshall 2005, 69–72). Delormier et al. (2009) conceptualize eating from a social theories viewpoint, especially based on Giddens’ (1984) work. They propose that previous behavioural theories have focused on the individual food choices, thus underestimating how eating patterns are formed in relation to other activities and other people (Delormier et al. 2009, 217–218). For example, food consumption is implemented in other practices and social relations, such as cooking with friends or going for lunch with colleagues, as the empirical part of this thesis also presents. To conclude, food consumption practices are social by nature and eating patterns are formed in social networks and social relationships, such as family and colleagues (see Contento et al. 2006; Sahakian & Wilhite 2014).

Eating is also very sensual and the taste is an important factor in food consumption (Marshall 2005, 74). However, what defines a good taste is socially regulated, and the socially shared perceptions can override individual experiences (Marshall 2005, 74). That

is, a person might find some plant-based food tasty if it is commonly perceived so, or vice versa. Additionally, the (social) context where the food is eaten can define the food more than its nutritional values (Marshall 2005, 71–72). As Warde (2016, 76) explains, “eating is situated within established patterns of social relations and shared understandings which steer the orchestration of timings, settings and companions in a conventionally recognizable and acceptable manner”.

What is more, following a certain diet defines what food is consumed. *A plant-based diet* is a diet that consists mainly of vegetarian food, but it does not necessarily mean a completely meat-free diet (Lea et al. 2006, 829). According to this definition, also fresh and minimally processed foods can play an important role. Along with meat, the consumption of dairy products and eggs can be decreased, while the consumption of nuts, seeds, legumes, grains, vegetables, and fruits is usually increased (Lea et al. 2006, 829). Food consumption practices that are based on following a plant-based diet are described in this thesis as *plant-based food consumption practices*.

Plant-based diet is not an unambiguous concept. *Semi-vegetarian* is a closely related term, for which there is no commonly shared definition. Yet it can be defined as a person who prefers plant-based food but occasionally eats meat (fish, poultry, red meat), for example less than 10% of her or his diet (Vinnari et al. 2010, 838). In other words, a semi-vegetarian diet can be described as one form of a plant-based diet, or even as a synonym to it. Here, perhaps a more well-known term *vegetarian diet* refers to a diet where no meat, meat products, poultry, seafood or flesh from any other animal is consumed (Dinu et al. 2017; Ruby 2012). However, there are vegetarians who allow, for example, fish or poultry in their diets and still call themselves vegetarians (Ruby 2012, 141). It is estimated that in Finland 6% of consumers are currently vegetarian (Herrala 2018). A related term, *a vegan diet*, in turn, is characterized by a total exclusion of any animal-derived substance, such as leather products along with food (Dinu et al. 2017). Based on inquiries, approximately 2% of Finnish consumers are vegans (Herrala 2018; Leiwo 2017). Thus, people following a vegetarian or a vegan diet seem to be a marginal group in Finland.

Another term which is used in research and is similar to semi-vegetarian is *flexitarian*. It also describes people who mainly follow a vegetarian diet, but consume meat

occasionally (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 243). Hence, it is a form of a plant-based diet as well. The term is composed of the terms flexible and vegetarian, meaning basically “a flexible vegetarian” (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 243). It has been used to highlight the role of those people that eat meat (with various levels), but not every day (de Boer et al. 2017, 396). In this thesis, the term is used as a synonym for a semi-vegetarian with *occasional* meat consumption as presented above. Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship between these theoretical terms.

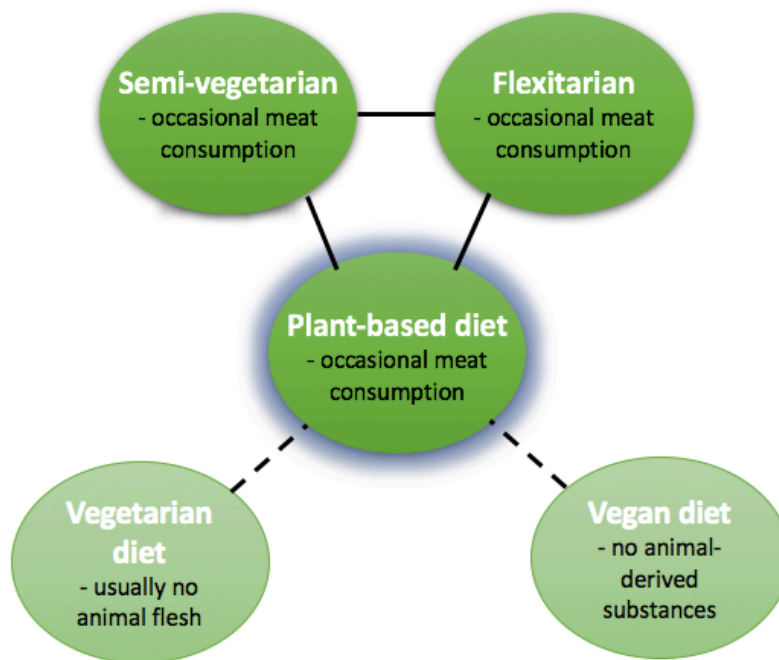


Figure 1. The concept of a plant-based diet in relation to other similar terms

Thus, it is assumed in this thesis that flexitarians and semi-vegetarians are people who follow a plant-based diet in their food consumption practices, as elucidated in Figure 1. To summarize, here the difference between the terms semi-vegetarian/flexitarian (plant-based diet) and vegetarian diet is that the former allows moderate or occasional consumption of meat (including all meat types), but in the latter the person abstains from eating any meat. A vegan diet, in turn, is clearly different, as it forbids all animal-derived substances. All in all, while all these diets and terms refer to preferring plant-derived foods, this thesis adopts the concept of a plant-based diet that highlights the possibility for occasional meat consumption.

2.1.3 Three elements of food consumption practices

There has been disagreement among researchers on what a practice exactly is (Hargreaves 2011, 83). According to Reckwitz (2002, 249–250), a practice can be described as interconnected ways of bodily, mental and material activities, like moving, handling objects and others as well as describing things, emotional states and motivational knowledge. A practice is a mode of behaviour, like a template (Reckwitz (2002, 250). For example, the practice of doing grocery shopping requires bodily activities (going to a store), material activities (grabbing the products and paying for them) as well as mental activities (making the selections).

Warde (2005, 133–134) divides practices to elements based on Schatzki's (1996) views. These elements are understandings, procedures, and engagements. Understandings refer to the idea of what to do and say (see also Schau et al. 2009, 35). As Schatzki (2002, 73) explains, a practice is a set of interconnected doings and sayings. Procedures refer for example to the rules and instructions that guide practices. Finally, engagements refer to the emotions, moods, and purposes, such as rituals of gift giving that are involved in practices (see also Schau et al. 2009). However, this view does not address separately the material dimension of practices which is a relevant part of food consumption practices.

Pantzar and Shove (2010) take into account the material dimension and provide another division of practices into three elements: *skill*, *material*, and *image*. This view is adopted in this thesis. The element of *skill*, also referred to as competence, represents the bodily knowledge, competence and procedures for carrying out the practice. In other words, it refers to skills, know-how, and technique (Shove et al. 2007, 2; Shove et al. 2012, 14). Shove and Walker (2010, 473) sum up that a practice in its essence contains the doing and knowing how to do competently. Skills are frequently distributed among people and things, which matters also for the formulation of practices (Shove et al. 2007, 143).

Material, in turn, refers to the objects or tangible physical things and entities needed to conduct the practice, such as technology, human body, the stuff of which objects are made, and physical spaces (Shove et al. 2007, 2; Shove et al. 2012, 14). As Shove et al. (2007, 143) argue, the reproduction of everyday life involves configuring and integrating

material objects that have an extraordinarily important role in reproducing and transforming the daily practices. What is more, Shove et al. (2007, 65–66) sum up well the relationship between materials and skills by proposing that many products are valuable only if they are combined with necessary skills and expertise.

Finally, the element of *image*, also referred to as meaning, means basically the symbols and meanings as well as ideas and aspirations attached to practices (Shove et al. 2007, 2; Shove et al. 2012, 14). What Reckwitz (2002) broadly refers to as mental activities, is the element of meaning from the viewpoint of Shove et al. (2012, 23). Figure 2 illustrates the three elements and their connections.

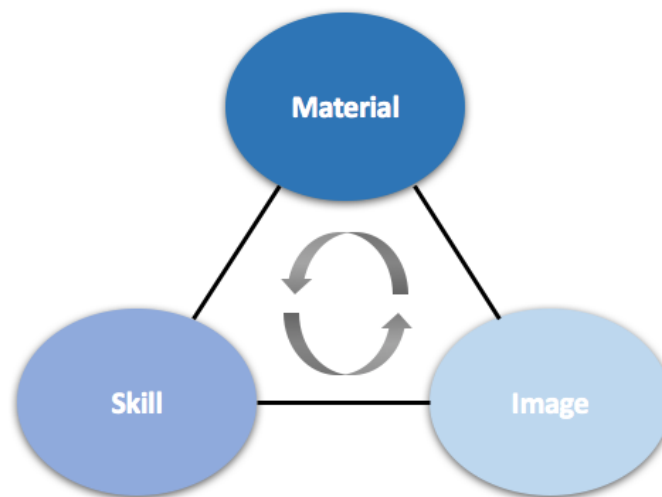


Figure 2. The three elements of practice (based on Shove et al. 2012, 25, 32; Pantzar & Shove 2010, 450)

Based also on the empirical part of this thesis, in the context of food consumption the *skill* element can be attached to the technique and know-how of cooking and shopping for food as well as the knowledge of nutritional information of food products. The element of *material*, in turn, relates to the food products and their contents, cooking equipment, physical spaces such as grocery stores or restaurants as well as technologies, such as food production technologies. Finally, the element of *image* refers, for example, to the meanings, perceptions and aspirations attached to certain foods.

The three elements of food consumption practices are independent in the sense that they have their own histories and futures, but they are also mutually transformed when they get integrated into practice (Pantzar & Shove 2010, 450), as presented by the arrows and lines in Figure 2. Practitioners link elements together and form recognizable entities, practices. Warde (2005, 134) summarizes well Schatzki's (1996) view of practices as entities and practices as performances: practices are coordinated entities but require to be performed to exist. Practice is an entity as it is a nexus of doings and sayings, but it is the performance of doings and sayings that actualizes and reproduces these entities (Warde 2005, 134). However, when it comes to food consumption, it is important to note that the elements that contribute to performing the practices do not form only a single practice entity (Warde 2016, 49). Instead, food consumption practices include multiple activities, such as cooking and grocery shopping. Yet the division to the three elements helps in examining how food consumption practices change.

2.2 Theorizing change in food consumption practices

Despite criticism, it has been demonstrated in research that practice theory is a suitable approach to studying change (Warde 2014, 294–295). Instead of focusing on the individual choices and causal processes of change initiated in external influence, like behaviourist theories do, practice theories focus on the socially shared basis of action and the emergent processes of change (Shove et al. 2012, 143). This emergent process is described next.

2.2.1 How consumption practices change

Practice theorists widely emphasize the dynamic and reproductive nature of practices. As Warde (2005, 141) argues, “-- the sources of change in behaviour lie in the development of practices themselves”. Practices can change constantly when people in various situations adapt them differently (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014, 27). In other words, practices can emerge and evolve through minor adjustments that individuals make to them, thus through continuous innovation and reproduction (Shove et al. 2012, 61, 73). Hence, Pantzar and Shove (2010) as well as Shove et al. (2012) highlight that practitioners, here consumers, have a creative and active role in reproducing practices.

The change in consumption practices can be addressed through their elements. However, Pantzar and Shove (2010, 456–457) present prerequisites for the change of practices. Firstly, a proto-practice needs to exist, meaning the prototypes of materials, images and skills for carrying out the practice. In proto-practices, links between all three elements are not yet made (Shove et al. 2012, 25). For example, there might be plant-based food products available, consumers can have the know-how on cooking and they may have attached meanings to the products, but these do not form a practice unless they are linked together. In other words, for new forms of practices to be innovated, the elements need to be effectively integrated by consumers (Pantzar & Shove 2010, 456). Consumers need to purchase, cook and eat plant-based food as well as preferably perceive these activities positively in order to continue repeating them.

Furthermore, Shove et al. (2012, 32) propose that the change of practices can be followed through the change of their individual elements. Figure 3 illustrates this emergent process, however, it extends the original illustration (see Shove et al. 2012, 33) and adds the connections between the elements (the lines) that were presented earlier (see Figure 2). The connections are elucidated as the elements together form a compound practice that changes through changing all its elements, thus none of the elements should be ignored to make a change (Warde 2016, 134). To conclude, change in individual (yet interdependent) elements can exemplify the change in the whole practice over time.

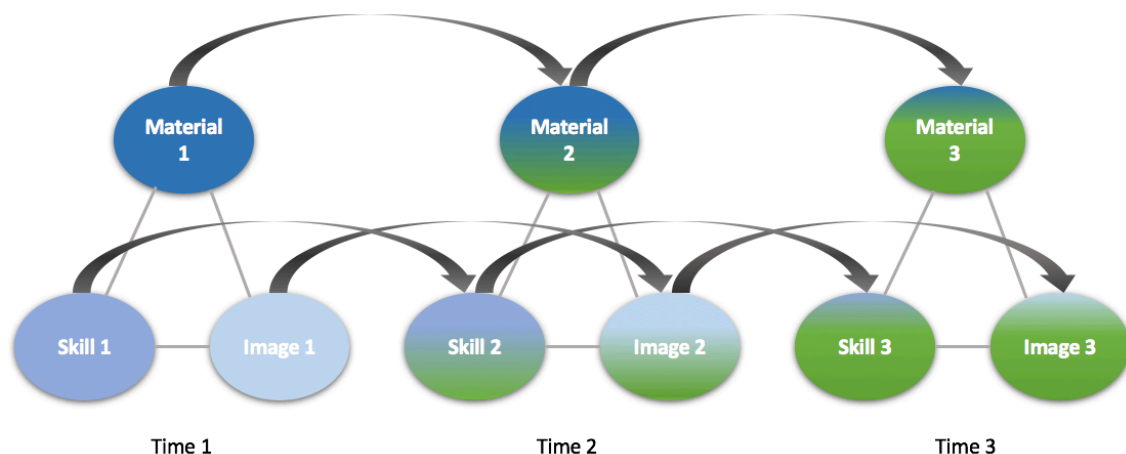


Figure 3. Change in the elements of practices over time (based on Shove et al. 2012, 25, 32–33; Pantzar & Shove 2010, 450)

However, the change does not necessarily mean that all elements would need to be changed simultaneously or linearly. Shove and Pantzar present (2005, 61) that new practices can emerge from existing ones as new compositions, or they can be new elements combined with the previous ones. Each new combination of elements has in some way emerged from previous ones (Shove et al. 2012, 125), as are the new elements in Figure 3. In other words, in changing food consumption practices new materials (e.g. new products and ingredients) are combined with old and familiar ones, new skills (e.g. how to cook certain plant-based meals, knowledge of nutritional facts) are combined with the existing skills related to food consumption, and, for example, images attached to plant-based food are combined with ideas of everyday eating. Thus, personally changing one's eating habits is rather about shifting allegiance between established practice types (and elements) than about radical innovation (Warde 2016, 145).

All in all, the fit between old and new elements is important (Shove & Pantzar 2005, 61). In terms of plant-based foods this could mean that the new elements, such as new plant-based products, need to fit into the existing food consumption practices and their elements, such as familiar recipes. The producers of plant-based products, such as the developer of pulled oats Gold & Green Foods Ltd, seem to be addressing this, by for example providing recipes where traditional meat-based food, such as hot dogs or meatballs are innovated and meat is replaced with pulled oats (see Gold & Green Foods Ltd 2017). This could help consumers in integrating the new products (material) with the familiar recipes (skill) and with their liking of dishes such as meatballs and mashed potatoes (image).

At this point it is emphasized that consumption does not happen in a vacuum, so the whole system of practices needs to be addressed. As Shove et al. (2007, 152) state, most consumption takes place as a part of other practices. So does food consumption, as it is a part of, for example, cooking as well as other non-food related practices, such as socializing with colleagues or friends. Additionally, eating is influenced by other broader and even societal practices, such as how good health is promoted (Warde 2016, 90). According to Reckwitz (2002, 256), individuals can be seen to be the crossing point of practices. Røpke (2009, 2493) takes this view further and proposes that practices recruit practitioners and compete for their attention. Consumers manage their set of practices and

engage in “projects”, a series of tasks necessary to be completed for a certain aim which can be institutional or individual, and they can involve other people. For example, following a diet for weight-loss could be this kind of a project that includes multiple tasks (e.g. grocery shopping, cooking, exercising) that all have the same aim. However, as Shove et al. (2012, 78–79) point out, there are dominant projects and practices that are prioritized over others, meaning all practices are not equal for consumers.

Therefore, it is not a simple task to study the change of certain practices in the complex life of consumers. Sahakian and Wilhite (2014, 37–38) point out the pitfalls in studying change in practices from a sustainability viewpoint. Firstly, a decrease in one consumption area can lead to an increase in total consumption. Based on this view, a decrease in meat consumption might lead to an increase in overall food consumption, if it is replaced with multiple other foods. Secondly, it is important to note that changes in one practice can cause a change in another practice (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014, 37). For example, simply changing practices of cooking can lead to change in eating. Thirdly, it should be avoided to focus on one aspect of a practice, but instead providing learning opportunities across the practice is vital for stimulating change (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014, 38). That is also why this thesis approaches the shift to plant-based food consumption practices across all the three elements (skill, material, image). Lastly, durability and reach need to be addressed when evaluating what changes might have the broadest effect (in terms of sustainability) in societal context (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014, 37–38).

What is more, practices do not change solely in the private lives of individuals. The diffusion of new practices plays a key role in the change, as innovation in social practices is a collective accomplishment (Pantzar & Shove 2010, 457). In other words, for a practice to diffuse it needs to be adopted by other people, which emphasizes the social nature of practices. In the context of food consumption practices, the change is mainly a change in what types of meals are served and eaten instead of a fundamental change in the events of eating, as meals basically drive food choices and routines (Marshall 2005, 75–76). Therefore, Warde (2016, 58) suggests that addressing food consumption through meals helps in appreciating the importance of social situations and relations that structure them. Next, the role of the social environment in the change is addressed.

2.2.2 The role of social environment in the change

As Warde (2016, 138) points out, besides changing internally, practices are changed by their surroundings, as they are socially shared and learned in different groups (Närvänen & Goulding 2016, 1540). In other words, along with the practice elements, the environment where food consumption practices are conducted plays a vital role by challenging the change in practices (see Halkier et al. 2011, 9). Despite all practices being fundamentally social (Reckwitz 2002), *the social environment* is addressed separately to highlight its role in the change of food consumption practices, which is also demonstrated in the empirical part of this thesis. As Sahakian and Wilhite (2014, 27) suggest, the change in habitual practices depends on how strongly they are attached to the social context (norms, conventions, values, settings, and institutions) along with the bodily and material components. For example, along with new technologies or demonstrating new ways of carrying out practices, questioning the social norms can change consumption practices towards a sustainable direction (Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 29–31, 37). The social context refers here mainly to *social communities* as well as *socially shared meanings and conventions*, thus the social environment in consumers' lives.

Social communities and networks play a visible role in the innovation and change of practices, and they can be the first encounters of new practices (Shove et al. 2012). Joining a new social network or community can, for example, introduce a person to new practices (Plessz et al. 2016). However, it is important to notice that while engaging in multiple practices, people belong to multiple social communities that can overlap and extend beyond the boundaries of individual practices (Shove et al. 2012, 68). For example, while conducting food consumption practices, consumers can belong to different overlapping social communities such as work, family, friends as well as to consumption-related communities that are formed around a certain brand (see Närvänen & Goulding 2016; Schau et al. 2009).

In social communities, new practices can be innovated and diffused, but communities can also limit the diffusion (Shove et al. 2012, 66). Shove and Pantzar (2005) provide an example of how practices can flow through a community by describing how the practice of Nordic walking spread through social contagion: It was moving between people who

knew each other before and had some interests in common. Social contagion is a common way how practices diffuse in communities, therefore, the role of established networks and social ties (which themselves are outcomes of past practices) is vital (Shove & Pantzar 2005). Based on this view, plant-based food consumption practices can perhaps diffuse more easily among people sharing the same interest in plant-based foods, or among familiar people, like friends.

Besides, the more widespread the practice is within a community or the more it is expected to adopt certain practices in that community, the higher the chance is for an individual to encounter them (Shove et al. 2012, 68). Moreover, the relation between the periphery and the core in the community that conducts certain practices, that is, between full participants and novices, is one key factor. It affects the variety of conducting practices and thus how practices change from within the community (Shove et al. 2012, 72). Especially in the diffusion of practices the boundaries of communities can change when new followers are welcomed (Närvänen & Goulding 2016, 1536). When the practices of plant-based food consumption diffuse, they can cross the boundaries between full plant-based eaters and novices who want to join the community of plant-based eating.

Along with the social interaction in communities, there are shared meanings and conventions that can guide practices. As Plessz et al. (2016) state, the link between practices and related common guidelines (i.e. prescriptions) is socially constructed. In other words, the standards and rules for conducting practices are socially formed and shared, thus affecting how practices are adopted by individuals. Hargreaves (2011) points out that social conventions play a crucial role in the change of practices: they can prevent consumers from making a change if it is contradictory to the conventions that tell what is accepted and expected. For example, if following a plant-based diet is not socially accepted in a certain community, this might prevent an individual from adopting the diet. As Warde (2016, 146) concludes, when individuals try to change their eating practices, they are more likely to succeed if they have social support.

To conclude, the social environment including social communities as well as shared meanings and conventions plays a notable role in the change of food consumption practices. Social communities can help or hinder the diffusion of new practices,

depending on the members and the boundaries of the community. In addition, practices can change from within the community, or joining a new community can introduce new practices to a consumer. Finally, social conventions and meanings can determine what is acceptable or not acceptable.

2.3 Barriers and drivers for consuming plant-based food

When it comes to studying the change in food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet and especially the barriers and drivers related to it, the field is quite new in consumer and marketing research. Most research is made in other than practice theory field, focusing for example on the cognitive food choices or preferences of consumers (e.g. Apostolidis & McLeay 2016; Contento et al. 2006; Pohjolainen et al. 2015). Despite this, the findings from previous literature are shortly presented here, but they are addressed from the practice theory perspective and linked with the three elements of practice. However, the aim is not to provide a holistic description of all previous findings, but instead give examples of most relevant studies in the field, which form a basis for examining the issues in the empirical part of this thesis.

2.3.1 Barriers

According to Pohjolainen et al. (2015, 1159-1160) Finnish consumers attach various barriers to the consumption of plant-based foods, yet the most significant barrier is related to the appreciation of meat itself in terms of taste, nutritional value, convenience and versatility. Barriers have been also attached to the symbolic meanings that meat carries, such as masculinity (de Boer et al. 2017; Pohjolainen et al. 2015). The taste as well as the perceived convenience in terms of cooking and purchasing meat are significant barriers to consume plant-based foods also according to Hoek et al. (2017, 125) who studied Australian consumers. These findings are attached to the image element (appreciation, masculinity) as well as to the material element (nutritional value) and to the skill element (cooking/purchasing meat) of practices.

In terms of substituting meat, it has been proposed that partial replacement of meat with substitutes can be one of the most effective approaches to decreasing meat consumption,

as consumers might be more willing to accept substitution than to change their meat habits (e.g. Apostolidis & McLeay 2016, 85). However, it has been found that despite acknowledging the advantages of meat substitutes, many consumers are not willing to replace meat in their diets. That is, for example, due to product-related factors such as lower sensory attractiveness or general unfamiliarity of the substitutes (Apostolidis & McLeay 2016, 76; Hoek et al. 2011, 662; Hoek et al. 2013, 254). Additionally, the less meat substitute products are consumed, the more consumers want them to be similar to meat (Hoek et al. 2011, 662), thus being too different from meat can represent a barrier. These findings of meat substitutes are associated with the image element (the idea of substitute products).

When it comes to plant-based foods in general, the cooking of plant-based meals is not perceived easy (Hoek et al. 2017, 125; Pohjolainen et al. 2015). Moreover, the participants in the study of Hoek et al. (2017) associated plant-based eating mainly with a completely vegetarian or vegan diet and lifestyle. Hence, they could not identify themselves with it nor consider the diet options in between a meat-based diet and a complete vegetarian or vegan diet (Hoek et al. 2017, 125). Additionally, Lea et al. (2006) found out that the biggest barrier is the lack of information of plant-based diets, however, this study emphasized health-related information. Lea et al. (2006, 835) also found out that half of their Australian respondents were not aware of the environmental and other non-health-related benefits. These findings are attached to the image element (associating with a vegetarian/vegan diet) and to the skill element of practices (inconvenience, lack of cooking skills/knowledge).

In relation to the environmental benefits of plant-based foods, Pfeiffer et al. (2017, 14) suggest that consumers might find the arguments for “saving the planet” or “doing the right thing” too abstract and vague, and they do not propose direct benefits to individual consumers. Thus, highlighting the benefits of plant-based food does not trigger a change in consumers’ everyday food consumption practices if they do not know how to implement the change in practice (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014, 29–31). Especially in the practice of eating out, the personal convenience surpasses general arguments (Pfeiffer et al. 2017, 14). Also Beverland (2014, 373) and de Boer et al. (2017, 395) point out that consumers just do not view reduced meat consumption environmentally relevant. To

conclude, presenting goals that are too vague (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014, 29–31) to consumers as well as the perceived ineffectiveness of environmental impacts can be barriers in terms of the image element.

What is more, Plessz et al. (2016, 118) propose that environmental guidelines (i.e. prescriptions) have not become as stable as nutritional ones, and continuously changing environmental prescriptions cause contradiction in how they are communicated. Consequently, there is no commonly shared view on how the environmental prescriptions should be implemented in practices (Plessz et al. 2016, 118). Hence, the inconsistency of the environmental guidelines represents a barrier that is linked with the skill element (know-how).

Furthermore, barriers to consume plant-based food can also emerge from the fundamental routine nature of practices. As Phipps and Ozanne (2017) propose, repeating everyday practices can bring the feeling of security that is probably not questioned, unless the practices are disrupted. Røpke (2009, 2496) suggests that extreme routinization can be a barrier to address the environmental consequences of certain actions. Basically, this finding is related to all practice elements, as it is about the fundamental routine nature of food consumption practices.

Finally, de Boer and Aiking (2017) emphasized the role of “bridging frames”. These are either push factors that push the consumer away from meat-eating, or pull factors that encourage the use of alternatives to meat (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 245). Frame as a term refers to mental knowledge structures that are based on culturally shared experiences (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 239). Generally, this study suggests that consumers do not easily change their behaviour as they tend to stick to the self-evident frames that are built-in in everyday practices. Additionally, competing frames prevent changes in practices (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 245), such as how consumers tend to evaluate their choices in terms of “value-for-money frame”. This is problematic, as the consequences of meat consumption are not included in the prices. De Boer and Aiking (2017, 245) note that especially this view of competing frames agrees with the sociological approach to practices. The idea of frames could be combined especially with the skill element (self-evident frames) as well as with the image element (value-for-money).

2.3.2 Drivers

Plessz et al. (2016) studied the change of food consumption practices from the life-course point of view. They conclude that life-course turning points associate with changes in food consumption practices (Plessz et al. 2016, 112). These turning points, such as the birth of the first child or children moving out can change the resources and constraints of consumption. In these situations, for example, the standards of food consumption can be rethought along with the possible change in surrounding social networks (Plessz et al. 2016, 112). However, as Bisogni et al. (2005) point out, practices do not necessarily follow changing standards: a consumer might have new standards for evaluating his or her food consumption habits, but the situation might not be suitable for change. Nevertheless, life-course turning points as drivers are attached here to all three elements of practices, as they can change the practice as a whole.

Correspondingly to the idea of life-course turning points, de Boer and Aiking (2017, 245) propose from the frames viewpoint that there are general opportunities to trigger a change towards a low-meat diet. These are another change (e.g. moving to another neighbourhood), increased dissatisfaction with the perceived incompatibility of personal objectives (e.g. violating the personal standards of healthy eating) or the aftermath of interruptive events (e.g. food scares) (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 245). These findings represent drivers that are associated with the image element (dissatisfaction, food scares) as well as all elements of practices (another change).

In terms of drivers related to meat substitute products, Elzerman et al. (2011, 233) state that to increase their consumption, it is necessary that consumers recognize the substitutes as being a product that can really be eaten instead of meat. In other words, the characteristics and the usage of substitutes should not be too different from meat, and besides, the sensory properties (appearance, taste, texture) are important. In general, Hoek et al. (2013, 253) propose that the liking of the substitutes can increase through higher exposure to these products, which can be another driver. These findings are associated with the image element, as they relate to the way consumers perceive the products. However, the physical characteristics of the products (e.g. texture) also represent the material element.

Finally, when it comes to highlighting the different benefits of a plant-based diet, there are contradictory findings. Lea et al. (2006, 833) propose that emphasizing the non-health-related benefits could be a driver for adopting more plant-based foods, because health-related benefits are perhaps not strong enough to trigger the change. However, (Hoek et al. 2017, 126–127) found that plant-based foods are primarily associated with healthiness instead of environmental friendliness. They propose that generally health is the most dominant driver in food behaviour (that is both healthy and environmentally friendly), because health is a personal benefit. These contradictory propositions are linked to the image element as they advocate the way how consumers perceive the benefits of plant-based eating.

Table 1 collects all abovementioned barriers and drivers from previous literature. They are divided according to the elements of skill, material and image to demonstrate how the previous findings are brought to the context of this thesis. These findings form a basis for studying the barriers and drivers in the context of this research.

Table 1. Barriers and drivers in previous literature

	Barriers	Drivers
Material element	Nutritional value of meat Practices are too routinized	Life-course turning points Another change Physical characteristics of meat substitutes
Image element	Appreciation of meat Negative image of meat substitutes Associating a plant-based diet with a vegetarian/vegan diet Environmental impact: too vague arguments, ineffectiveness Practices are too routinized Negative value-for-money	Life-course turning points Dissatisfaction with personal objectives Food scares Another change Meat substitutes similar to meat High exposure to meat substitutes Health benefits/non-health benefits of plant-based foods
Skill element	Convenience of cooking and purchasing meat Inconvenience of cooking plant-based meals Lack of cooking skills/knowledge of plant-based foods Inconsistency of environmental guidelines Practices are too routinized Sticking to self-evident frames	Life-course turning points Another change

The barriers and drivers in general represent an important part of the theoretical framework of this thesis. In the empirical part of this thesis, they will be studied from the practices' viewpoint, however, these previous studies form a basis for new findings.

2.4 Synthesis of the theoretical framework

The synthesis of the theoretical framework of this thesis elucidates the change of *food consumption practices* from the viewpoint of the three elements of practices: *skill*, *material* and *image*. A change in food consumption practices from previous practices to new, changed practices (from meat-based to plant-based food consumption practices) happens through the emergent change of their three elements. However, the change is not a straightforward process, as there are *barriers* and *drivers* for changing consumers' food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. Besides, the synthesis emphasizes the

role of the surrounding *social environment* in the change process. The synthesis of the theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 4, and it forms the basis for the empirical research.

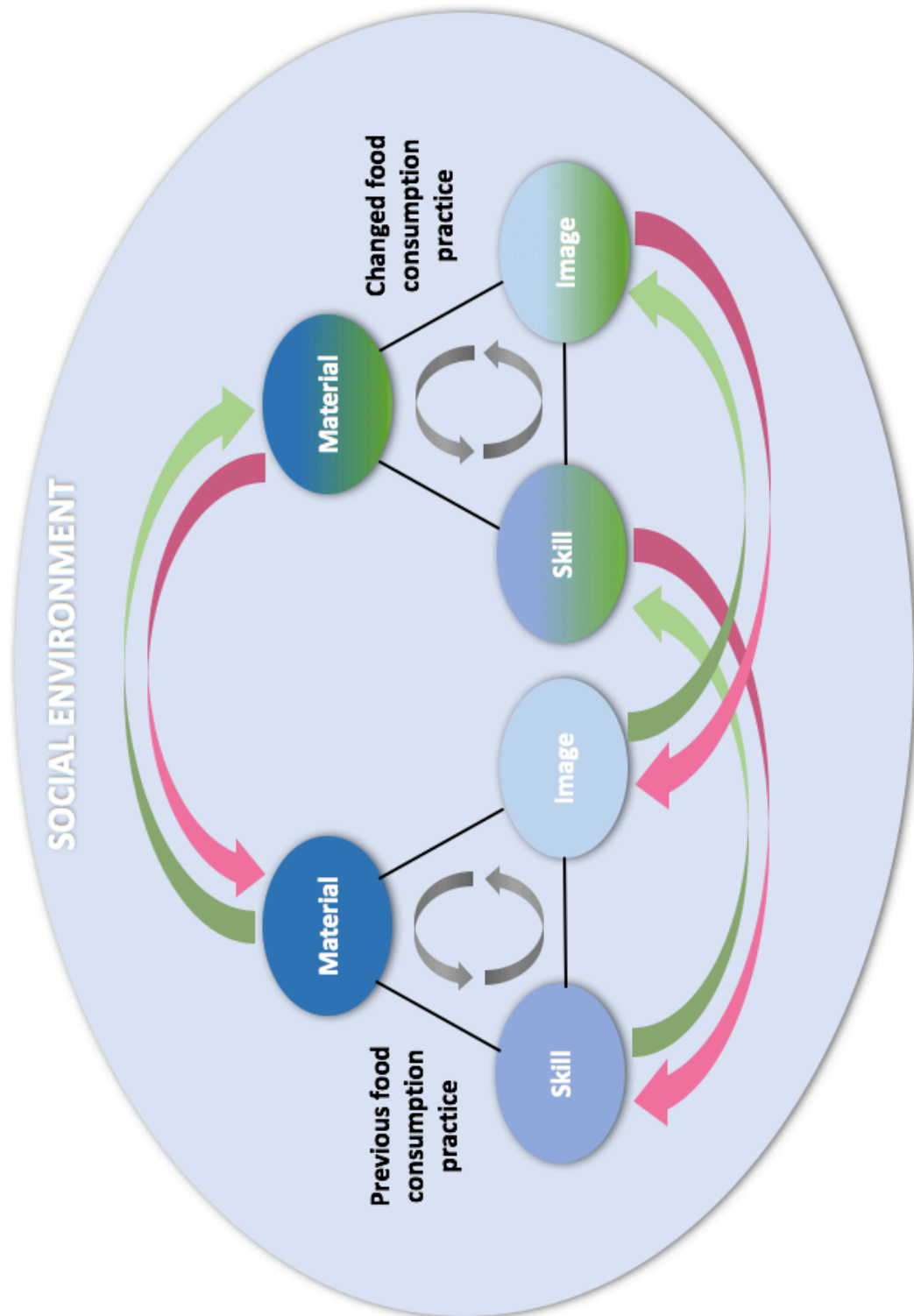


Figure 4. Synthesis of the theoretical framework

The three elements on the left elucidate the structure of the previous (meat-based) food consumption practice before the change. The three elements on the right, in turn, together illustrate the structure of the changed (plant-based) food consumption practice, which has emerged from the previous elements (Shove et al. 2012, 25, 32–33; Pantzar & Shove 2010). The previous and changed elements are illustrated with different colours and gradients in order to elucidate this idea of an *emergent* change process. Based on previous literature (e.g. Shove et al. 2007, 2; Shove et al. 2012, 14), the skill element in consumption practices refers to skills, know-how, and technique as well as procedures to conduct the practice, such as know-how of cooking or knowledge of nutritional information. The element of material, in turn, refers to the tangible physical things such as the food products or cooking equipment. Finally, the element of image represents the meanings, symbols and aspirations related to the practice, such as ideas of plant-based food. The arrows in circle formation inside both practices illustrate the way how the three elements shape each other (Pantzar & Shove 2010, 450).

The red arrows between each previous and changed element represent the barriers to change food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. The green arrows, in turn, represent the drivers for this change. These arrows that are opposite in direction together illustrate the change process in each element: barriers hinder the change and drivers enable or further it. Certain barriers and drivers can be associated with specific elements of practices, however, not necessarily with one element only.

All in all, all consumers have their own daily lives and social environments where they conduct the practices of food consumption. Thus, the barriers and drivers for changing food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet are subjective perceptions of consumers. Hence, it is impossible to form an objective theoretical description of the change towards plant-based food consumption practices. Therefore, the empirical research addresses the barriers and drivers with an interpretive method that acknowledges the subjective, but socially shared realities of consumers.

3 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

3.1 Research philosophy

Behind the research there is always a research philosophy, which affects its methodological choices and ways of producing knowledge (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 10). Questions of the philosophy and knowledge production can arise especially in qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 10). The framework of a research is called *the paradigm* (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 13). A paradigm is defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as a system of beliefs or a worldview that guides the researcher. This part describes the philosophical account of this thesis, the chosen paradigm, as well as the philosophical assumptions that guide the research.

3.1.1 Social constructionist paradigm

Generally, the paradigm of *constructionism* represents postmodern thought (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 101). *Moderate constructionism*, also called weak constructionism, as a paradigm is closer to the relativistic end on the continuum between *naïve relativism* and *-realism* (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 101). In contrast to naïve relativism that sees all knowledge claims equally good and aims to study the knowledge itself, the aim of moderate constructivist research is to create new knowledge through multiple viewpoints of truth. Thus, it finds knowledge community-based and multifaceted (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 101–102). In other words, while the paradigm of *objectivity* assumes that the social world exists independently of people and their activities, constructionism assumes that reality is formed in the interpretations of individuals and groups (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 14).

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 19) point out that the paradigm of constructionism is interested in how people interpret social events and settings. From the constructivist viewpoint, the reality that is shared, individually constructed and dynamic can be accessed only through *social constructions*, such as shared meanings or language. Constructionism as a paradigm can be understood to be similar to *social constructionism*,

but the latter emphasizes the social nature of constructions instead of individual constructions (Burr 2015, 22). The view of (moderate) social constructionism is adopted in this thesis.

Currently, social constructionism is dominating interpretive research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 20). The purpose of this paradigm is to understand how subjective meanings of people and intersubjective processes constitute things (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 20), thus how reality is constructed in a particular setting (Patton 2015, 98). As Burr (2015, 2–3) points out, this paradigm is especially critical towards the assumptions and taken-for-granted understandings people have of the world, based on for example shared categorizations and concepts. In this context, it means being critical towards the assumptions that consumers have in relation to food consumption practices. Burr (2015, 4) notes that these categorizations and concepts are historically and culturally specific, so they cannot be applied to all contexts. Hence, for example the way how Finnish consumers perceive the concept of a plant-based diet cannot be directly applied to all other countries.

Moreover, the knowledge people have of the world is constructed and shared in their practices of daily interactions (Burr 2015, 4), which is why social constructionists are particularly interested in the social interaction. Social interaction is an important part in the context of food consumption practices as well. Finally, according to social constructionism, social action follows the constructions that determine what is appropriate for different people to do in each context (Burr 2015, 5). In terms of food consumption, the social environment and social constructions can determine, for example, what is appropriate to eat in each context, such as at lunch.

In the social constructionist paradigm, objectivity in research is regarded impossible, which is why the researcher must acknowledge her involvement in the research process and how it influences the findings. The researcher can view the research process as a co-production between herself and the participants (Burr 2015, 172). In this thesis, the interpretive and co-productive role of the researcher in the research process is acknowledged: The researcher took part in the research settings and guided the discussion as well as interpreted the findings subjectively, but mostly based on the theoretical

framework. The process of data analysis will be described and demonstrated later to increase the transparency of the interpretive process.

3.1.2 The ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions

The chosen paradigm of social constructionism guides *the ontological, epistemological* and *methodological* assumptions of this research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 10–13). These assumptions affect how the researcher sees the existence of reality, how knowledge can be generated and what methodological choices can be made to produce this knowledge in research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 13).

As Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 13) explain, *ontology* refers to the existence of people, society, the world and their relationships. This research takes the *subjectivist* approach, in which reality is understood to be subjective and unique for each person, so experiences and perceptions might differ among people and in different times and contexts (e.g. Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 13–14; Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 101–102). In this research context, this means different consumers each have their subjective reality in which they carry out their daily practices, despite they might share the social environment. Thus, the experiences and perceptions consumers have of barriers and drivers for moving towards plant-based food consumption practices differ among individuals, depending on the context in which they live. What is more, whether practices can be examined as entities is another ontological question in practice theories (Warde 2014, 289–291), however, considering them as entities can provide implications for analysing them (Warde 2016, 45). In this thesis food consumption practices are treated as entities that can be distinguished in the daily life of consumers.

Epistemology determines how knowledge can be produced by defining what kind of knowledge can exist (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 14). In the context of research, this means it sets the limits for knowledge and defines what knowledge is available and what makes a scientific practice (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 14). In other words, in this social constructionist research multiple viewpoints on knowledge are acknowledged, and thus the purpose is to create new knowledge through them (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 101–102). The aim of this thesis is to study the multifaceted viewpoints that consumers

have about moving towards a plant-based diet in their daily food consumption practices, and by doing so, create new knowledge on the topic. As both the empirical data as well as how it is produced is considered, it is assumed that the data can be interpreted differently (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 19–20). To summarize, it is acknowledged that the research data could have been interpreted differently by another researcher, or another method would have generated different kind of data and findings.

Finally, *methodology* follows the epistemology but concerns the practical orientation of how knowledge of the world can be produced. It guides the research design and process by defining how the research topic can be studied, both in terms of data collection and data analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 15–16). The chosen method for this empirical research is a *focus group study*, which is a qualitative method suitable to the social constructivist paradigm (see e.g. Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008).

3.2 Qualitative research methodology

In the paradigm of social constructionism, qualitative methods are preferred as they are less likely to decontextualize the experience of the respondents (Burr 2015, 170). This thesis adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is often concerned with interpreting and understanding the research topic, as opposed to quantitative research where finding explanations and testing of hypothesis is important (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 5). This thesis aims to understand what consumers *perceive* as barriers and drivers for moving towards a plant-based diet, but it does not aim to generalize, for example, how common certain barriers or drivers are among consumers (see Patton 2015, 87). In other words, qualitative research aims at a holistic understanding and is sensitive to *the context* of the research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 5).

Ghauri and Gronhaugh (2005, 202; in Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 5) propose that qualitative research is relevant especially when prior knowledge of the phenomenon is modest, as in the context of this research. Because the research problems are unstructured due to modest knowledge, qualitative research is usually flexible and exploratory. According to Koskinen et al. (2005, 31), in qualitative research the interaction between the researcher and findings is important. They point out that qualitative research studies

the topic from the participants' viewpoint, preferring naturally existing data instead of artificially generating data for research purposes. What is more, qualitative research usually takes an inductive (theories are outcomes of empirical research) or abductive (moving between everyday descriptions and theoretical concepts) research approach in contrast to quantitative research, where theories are tested deductively (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 21–22; Koskinen et al. 2005, 31).

3.2.1 Activity focus groups

As the aim of this study is to create an understanding of consumers' perceptions of changing their food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet, focus group study is chosen as a suitable method for studying the topic that is not too personal nor too debated to be discussed in a group (Liamputtong 2011, 10). In a focus group study a group of individuals is “focused on discussing a selected topic or an issue” (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 173). Despite the focus on a certain topic, the idea is to discuss in a free-flowing manner, as Moisander & Valtonen (2006, 72) explain. The group can also be given tasks, such as brainstorming, during the discussion (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 72).

According to Hargreaves (2011, 84), practice theory view calls for a methodology capable of studying how actual everyday practices are done. With these kind of methods, the practices can be examined in natural settings instead of relying on questionnaires or interviews, which provides a richer view of the everyday actions of consumers (Hargreaves 2011, 84). As the purpose of the study focuses on food consumption practices, the focus group method was refined and brought to this context by making it more active. This new form of the method is called *activity focus group*. As Warde (2014, 287) states, practice is a mere synonym for activity, thus the name emphasizes the active nature of the focus groups in terms of performing practices in the research setting. In the activity focus groups, the discussion happened while conducting common daily food consumption practices: grocery shopping and cooking a meal (and eating it). The activities were decided to be included in the activity focus groups also because the researcher believed that they would provoke thoughts related to the practices in question.

Focus groups have been used more extensively in market research as well as in consumer research, first merely in commercial research but lately they have gained popularity also in academic research (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 72). Browne (2016) proposes that in applying social practice theory to studying sustainable consumption, creative use of methods is essential. Hence, a focus group is presented to be a suitable method for studying everyday social practices, even if it has not been used much in this research field. Browne (2016, 202–203) concludes that despite the critique for talk-based methods, a focus group is a potential method for studying mundane practices, because it allows new data to emerge from everyday social practices. In other words, it can reveal data of shared routines and cultural conventions, and challenge social norms through incongruence between participants. It can also emphasize the connections between performance, materiality, and cultural conventions as well as between bundles of practices. What is more, humour in focus groups is beneficial especially when the topic is related to more intimate or awkward practices (Browne 2016, 203). Even if everyday food consumption practices are not considered an intimate or awkward topic, humour was present also in the activity focus groups of this research.

A focus group is a fruitful method for this research not only because of its potential for providing consumer insight and revealing new data on social practices, but also because of its social nature. The group discussion setting provides the researcher an opportunity to examine how the participants are influenced by others and why some issues are salient (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 174). As this thesis takes the viewpoint of social practice theory, focus groups suit the research context well. However, due to the limited capacity of the researcher to observe and take notes on the interaction between participants, the focus was kept on the discussion. In addition, with focus groups the gap between sayings and doings can be better understood, because in a group setting the participants are more likely to bring forth this gap and the possible reasons for it (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 174; Liamputtong 2011, 8). In this context, for example, the gap is between the desire to consume more plant based food and the actual food consumption practices.

The group interaction is a key character of focus groups, meaning that the participants interact with each other and with the moderator, instead of just taking turns in answering the questions of the moderator (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 72). This type of focus

group where interaction plays a key role can be described as a less structured approach to focus groups, and the role of the moderator is less visible and active (Liamputtong 2011, 3–4). The role of the moderator is to guide and facilitate the discussion and to encourage participants to actively take part in the group interaction (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 72). In this thesis, the aim was to conduct this type of less structured focus groups, where the moderator's role was mainly to facilitate discussion and to provide some guiding questions (see Appendix 1). Additionally, in less structured focus groups the participants might seek collective topics that are familiar to all participants instead of highlighting their individual experiences. That is, they sort of negotiate what they are as a group, which can provide rich data to the researcher (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 75). However, the aim is not to reach consensus among the group, but instead to discuss understandings and interpretations of the topic from the perspective of each participant, in a comfortable setting. Thus, focus groups resemble natural social interaction (Liamputtong 2011, 4–5).

Additionally, focus groups provide the possibility to bring contested issues under discussion, or worthy issues outside the core topic which would otherwise not have been noticed by the researcher. Also, sensitive moments such as hesitations, silences, awkward moments, defensiveness or surprises can be interesting data for the researcher (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 75). Plant-based foods are considered a somewhat contradictory topic that might uncover different opinions among the focus group participants. Therefore, the researcher is also interested in what kind of debates or new topics it might evoke.

According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006, 73), focus groups can be criticized for being too unnatural, as participants can adjust their sayings to what others in the group have said, leaving the researcher in doubt of the real opinions of the participants (Catterall & Maclaran 2006, 256). Nevertheless, the social influence in the group is not considered to be a problem in this study. Instead, it can bring forth self-evident ways of talking by giving an opportunity to reflect on the culture (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 73–74), and the group dynamics can provide security and support for the participants (Catterall & Maclaran 2006, 256). In this way, focus groups can be used to get an insight of the shared representational and symbolic discourses of consumers' daily consumption activities (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 73–74). In other words, the focus is on the way consumers talk about changing their practices and how practices are represented in the discussion.

The criticism of focus groups has also referred to the shallowness of the method and the risk of participants not actively taking part or conforming the dominant ideas (Liamputtong 2011, 10–11). In this research, all the participants were encouraged to take part in the discussion and reveal their thoughts on the topic.

3.2.2 Data generation

In qualitative research, it is rightful to use the term *data generation* instead of *data collection*, as the researcher often constructs the data in interaction and makes selections of it (Gummesson 2005, 312). In this research, the researcher took part in the activity focus groups and thus generated the data by facilitating and guiding the discussion. The procedure of generating data by using the activity focus group method will be described next.

The composition of focus groups differs depending on the research topic, but usually there are social and cultural experiences or concerns which are shared by the group (Liamputtong 2011, 6). To facilitate proper discussion, it is emphasized that the participants should have something in common, such as some values or interests (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 78). Here, the participants shared the interest towards a plant-based diet. In general, the participants can be selected with criteria that is either related to the topic in discussion or by using demographics as a means for selection (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 78). In this thesis, the criteria was the interest in plant-based foods (topic-related) as well as the certain age range (20-30 years) and Finnish nationality (demographics). The final age range for participants was between 23 and 27 years.

The researcher recruited the participants by contacting them directly via social media or face-to-face. The interest in a plant-based diet was clarified at this phase by shortly asking the participant whether he or she would be interested in eating more plant-based food, however, it was ensured that the participant does not currently follow a plant-based or a vegetarian diet. The size of the groups was kept quite small, from 3 to 4 persons, as the activities of grocery shopping and cooking were considered more challenging in a bigger

group. The real names of the participants are not displayed in this thesis in order to respect personal privacy, so abbreviations are used to refer to the participants.

Additionally, another similarity between the participants in each group was that they already knew each other, as they belonged to a group of friends or colleagues (different group in each session). After conducting a successful pilot study with participants that are friends with each other, the researcher decided to form the groups from individuals that are friends (but not necessarily close friends) or at least in some way know each other from before. Catterall and Maclaran (2006, 264) point out that friendship groups can help overcome shyness and offer a supportive setting that encourages self-disclosure.

The pilot study indicated that because the participants knew each other, they were able to discuss naturally while shopping and cooking. This idea gained further support from the fourth group: in this group the participants were just colleagues, and it seemed that the discussion was not flowing the same way than in other groups that consisted of friends. This was perhaps because the situation was new to the colleague participants, as they do not normally go grocery shopping or cook with each other, so more effort was needed to concentrate on the actual practices. In other groups, the situation was more familiar to the participants (except the plant-based element), which helped them to focus on the discussion. All in all, all four focus groups (see Table 2 below) were included in the data, as they all succeeded well in providing rich data on the topic despite the differences in the flow of discussion.

Table 2. The practical details of the focus group sessions

Group nr	Date, location	Nr of participants, (genders)	Abbreviations	Duration	Age range
1 (pilot)	18.1.2018, Tampere	3 (all women)	W1, W2, W3	91 min	24–27
2	28.1.2018, Tampere	3 (2 women, 1 man)	W4, W5, M1	79 min	24–26
3	20.2.2018, Tampere	4 (3 men, 1 woman)	W6, M2, M3, M4	105 min	24–25
4	27.2.2018, Tampere	3 (all women)	W7, W8, W9	93 min	23–25
Sum	4 groups	13 (9 women, 4 men)		6 h 8 min	23–27 years

The beginning of the focus group is especially important, as it introduces the topic and makes participants motivated to discuss it (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 78). At this stage the moderator has more power in the group, but when the discussion goes on the power is shifted to the participants. After the researcher had shortly introduced the topic, the activity focus groups were started with a question, the purpose being to warm up the discussion: *How would you define a plant-based diet or how would you describe it?* This part of the discussion happened outside the grocery store. In all groups, the store was K-supermarket Kuninkaankulma in Tampere, mostly because of its convenient location near the researcher's home, where the cooking part took place. Additionally, based on the researcher's prior knowledge, it has a sufficient selection of plant-based products. The home of the researcher was chosen as the location for cooking because it was considered to be a convenient and natural environment for the activity, and more neutral than using the home of a participant.

After the warm-up discussion, the researcher gave the participants a task, which was to collect ingredients for a plant-based meal from the grocery store. The plant-based meal was not defined by the researcher in any other way than by saying that this time it means a meat-free meal. After this, the discussion continued while the participants were shopping for the ingredients in the store. The time spent in the store was limited to a maximum of 30 minutes, in order to have enough time for the cooking phase. After the participants had selected the ingredients and the researcher had paid for them, the discussion continued freely on the topic while walking from the store to the researcher's home.

Next, after arriving inside, the ingredients were photographed by the researcher (see Appendix 2). Then, the cooking began and the discussion continued while preparing for the meal. The researcher did not take part in the cooking, as she was moderating the discussion and asking questions (see Appendix 1 for the questions mostly all of which were used in each group). However, she participated in enjoying the meal. In most of the groups, the discussion was closed by the researcher before starting to eat the meal or quite soon after sitting around the table. The final meal was also photographed by the researcher (see Appendix 2). The only other stimulus that was used to stimulate the discussion (see Liamputtong 2011, 19) along with the activities was a printed newspaper article on a new meat-free food innovation (see Saarikoski 2017). Figure 5 below illustrates the stages of the activity focus group sessions and their approximate length.

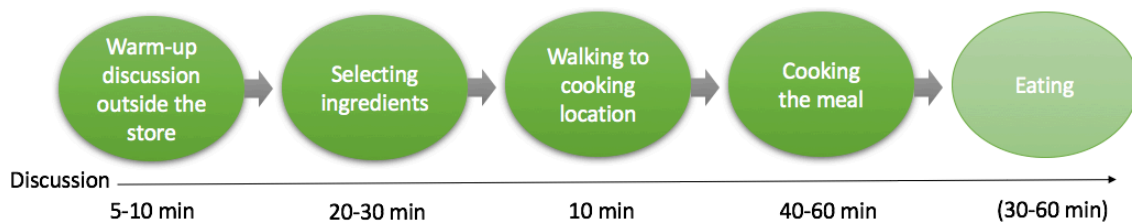


Figure 5. Stages of the activity focus groups

Food and beverages are usually provided in focus groups, as sharing food represents a symbolic meaning of coherence and shows that the discussion is meant to be free-form (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 78). Also for this reason, and because cooking was part of the group activity, it was found natural to close the sessions by eating the meal together.

The presence of food was even found to be necessary to arouse thoughts on the topic and to concretize the food consumption practices in question. The researcher paid for the ingredients, which was considered a suitable prize for participating in the study. What is more, each of the focus group discussions was recorded with an iPhone and fully transcribed the next day. After conducting four focus groups with altogether 13 participants, the data seemed to start repeat itself, which suggests that the saturation point had been achieved.

3.2.3 Data analysis

Research in the paradigm of moderate constructionism usually follows *the abductive research logic*, and that is also followed in this thesis. In contrast to inductive logic, abductive logic accepts that there is an existing theory, but unlike deductive logic, it does not aim at testing the theory but instead at data-driven theory generation (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 102). Abduction refers to the process where the researcher moves from everyday descriptions and meanings people give to theoretical categories and concepts that form the basis for understanding the phenomenon in question (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 23). In other words, the movement happens between theory and empirical data. This way abductive research logic combines both inductive and deductive logic (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 23).

In abductive research, prior knowledge is elaborated in the iterative process, as the knowledge base of the researcher grows (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 33). Thus, the preunderstanding, understanding and explanation phases are embraced in the process towards improved understanding (Gummesson 2003, 484–485). In this research, especially the theoretical preunderstanding of the topic guided the data generation and data analysis, however, it was iterated and extended in the process. The final theoretical framework was formed only while/after conducting the data analysis. Yet the draft of the framework was built based on previous literature, and it worked as a basis for the empirical study. Hence, the theoretical framework guided also data generation through helping to form the questions that were used in the focus groups, but these questions were iterated after the initial analysis of the pilot study.

Abductive logic is criticized for initial theories that might direct data generation and prevent formation of new theories. Correspondingly, the researcher might search for theories that best match with the empirical findings, thus it calls for transparency in describing the research process (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 107). Some researchers relate abduction closer to *interpretivism* and *hermeneutics*, which emphasize the necessity of interpretation in qualitative research that focuses on human action and understanding (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 20–21). For example, Gummesson (2003, 484) states that all research is interpretive, and one framework for interpretation is hermeneutics. This thesis represents an interpretive empirical research that relies on understanding the participants in order to depict broader cultural meanings (Spiggle 1994, 492). Figure 6 illustrates the abductive, iterative and interpretive nature of the overall research process from preunderstanding to findings.

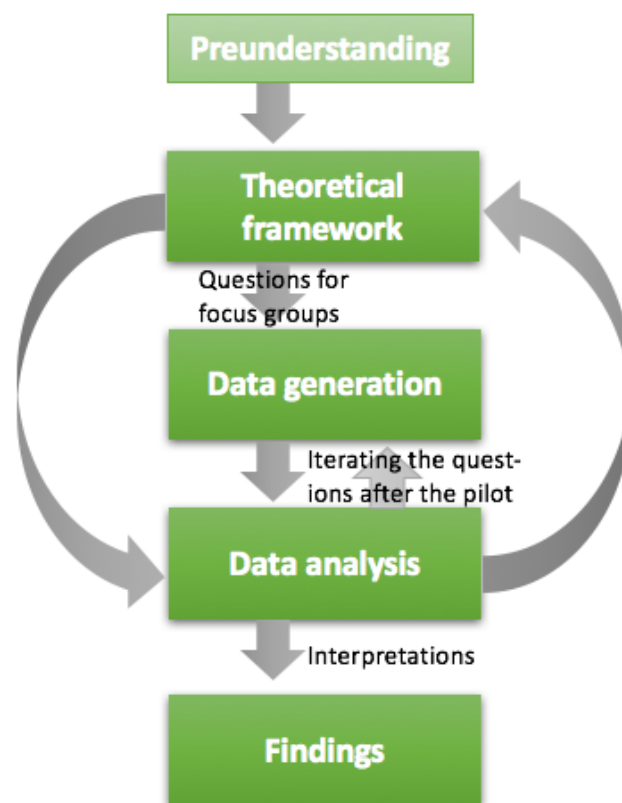


Figure 6. The abductive, iterative and interpretive research process

The process of data analysis can also be described as a circular process, also referred to as *the hermeneutic circle* or *the hermeneutic helix*, where the researcher moves back and

forth between specific and abstract levels and between parts of the data and the whole (Arnold & Fischer 1994, 63; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 31–32; Gummesson 2005, 314–315). In this process, the experience of the researcher as well as the context of the research and prior knowledge affect the interpretations, which finally form the findings.

In data analysis, the data is broken down into parts by “manipulating” it, followed by interpretation, where the meaning and sense of the data is eventually grasped (Spiggle 1994, 492). However, Gummesson (2005, 312) states that in qualitative research the analysis and interpretation often happen simultaneously, as they do also in this research. The preliminary analysis of the data began right after each activity focus group had been held and transcribed, as is recommended by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 187). The analysis followed the form of *qualitative content analysis*, which focuses on finding recurrent themes or patterns by examining the whole set of data systematically (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 187).

In the hermeneutical process of data analysis, the operations of categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration and refutation all appeared (Spiggle 1994), but not in linear order. First each of the transcripts (altogether 74 pages from all sessions) was gone through separately multiple times, and later they were compared with each other. The analysis began with coding, which is part of the categorization process where data is classified and labelled (Spiggle 1994, 493). After coding, the marked concepts were attached to a certain category or theme, which reflects the operation of abstraction. Table 3 below demonstrates the process of data analysis, focusing on the categorization (codes) as well as abstraction and dimensionalization (barrier/driver, material/image/skill/social) of the data.

Table 3. Examples of analysing the data

Parts of data (codes)	Barrier or driver	Material, image, or skill	Social environment
<p>M3: If I go for lunch and pay a tenner for it (money), I really expect to get meat (meat).</p> <p>M4: Me too. No offense, but the idea of paying twenty euros for fodder makes me feel bad (negative idea).</p>	<p>Barrier: value for money</p>	Image	-
<p>W1: Why not, I can't see a reason why I couldn't increase it (positive interest). But I can't see myself making a radical change (negative) and leaving out meat altogether.</p> <p>W3: Maybe not all of a sudden and completely (negative), like "now I will not eat any meat or milk etc.", but I can make individual, separate choices (competence) and probably will, too (positive). That I notice that the vegetarian version of a particular product is as good or better (positive idea) than the original one, and gradually begin to use it (gradually).</p>	<p>Barrier: sudden, radical change</p> <p>Driver: gradual change</p>	Skill (Image)	-
<p>If I go out to eat with my girlfriend (partner), it might be something more plant-based (positive). It depends on the company (company). Or a friend (company) who is on a vegetarian diet, with that person you will go to a vegetarian restaurant and eat a bit differently (positive). (M1)</p>	<p>Driver</p>	-	Partner Friend Eating company

Importantly, Table 3 is a simplification and describes only part of the overall complex hermeneutical process. Hence, after these procedures, the initial findings were integrated to the theoretical framework, thus with previous literature. However, the findings were also iterated as well as refuted throughout the rest of the process. Finally, after the overall analysis and interpretation of the data, the final outcome of the process was achieved (see Gummesson 2003, 486). The findings are presented next.

4 BARRIERS AND DRIVERS FOR MOVING TOWARDS PLANT-BASED FOOD CONSUMPTION PRACTICES

4.1 Barriers emerging from the practice elements

The findings of the empirical study represent barriers and drivers that young Finnish consumers perceive in changing their food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. Based on the data analysis and the abductive research process, the findings are divided here according to the three elements of food consumption practices, *material*, *image*, and *skill* as well as according to *the social environment* of practices. Firstly, the findings of barriers related to the three practice elements will be presented.

4.1.1 Material-related barriers

Based on the analysis and the theoretical framework, the material element of food consumption practices refers here mainly to the food itself, meaning the food products and ingredients that are used in cooking or served in restaurants. It is also related to the nutritional factors, i.e. the stuff which the foods are made of (Shove et al. 2007, 2; Shove et al. 2012, 14).

Firstly, the participants of the focus groups were suspicious about nutritional factors of plant-based foods, as they expressed a worry about getting enough nutrients if they would leave out meat and turn to plant-based eating. Especially protein was highlighted and associated particularly with doing sports. In addition to protein, the participants were concerned about getting enough iron and vitamin B12. This reflects the findings of Pohjolainen et al. (2015), which suggest that the appreciation of the nutritional value of meat is one of the barriers for abandoning it. Thus, the problem of getting enough nutrients from plant-based foods is presented as a material-related barrier.

W5: I have a fixation with protein. I believe that every meal should include plenty of protein, so meat has always been the easy option for me.

W7: I should find out whether my diet provides a healthy mix of nutrients.

W8: And calculate whether it includes enough protein and vitamin B12, which you can only get from meat. -- I should also think about iron and where to get enough of it from.

Additionally, many participants described their food consumption practices as very routinized, which means that they conduct them without much conscious thinking. Besides, meat seemed to be an important part of routine meals. As Røpke (2009, 2496) suggests, the extreme routinization of daily practices can form a barrier for consumers to consider the environmental consequences of their actions. Hence, this routinization of meat eating represents a barrier related to the material element, as meat as a material ingredient seems to play an important role. However, this finding could be also attached to the whole practice, as the routine nature covers all the elements. Furthermore, in relation to the extreme routines, even if the participants showed an interest in including more plant-based food in their diets, they were suspicious, which relates to the idea of Phipps and Ozanne (2017) about security that routines bring. Additionally, this could represent the way consumers stick to the existing and self-evident frames built in everyday practices (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 239), such as familiar recipes which include meat.

I usually begin by thinking about the sources of protein; whether I should eat beef, pork or chicken today. If I ate minced meat yesterday, I might have chicken today. Then I'll think about what kind of dishes I can prepare from chicken. So I know maybe two recipes, and decide that O.K, I'll make chicken and rice. Or maybe chicken salad. (M4)

Finally, some participants commented on the poor quality of plant-based meals in restaurants, especially in terms of protein content. Compared to meat-based alternatives, the availability of plant-based options was generally considered to be worse in (lunch) restaurants as well as in grocery stores. The lack of options was also found to be a problem in the study of Lea et al. (2006). Despite the fact that this situation should have been changing in the West lately (Beverland 2014, 375), it seems that the lack of options or their poor quality are still barriers that relate to the material element.

I wish there was a larger selection to choose from. -- An example: one restaurant served chicken with beetroot risotto. The vegetarian option was beetroot risotto and nothing else. It wasn't very nutritious at all. (M2)

4.1.2 Image-related barriers

The element of image in practices refers mostly to meanings, symbols as well as ideas and aspirations attached to them (Shove et al. 2007, 2; Shove et al. 2012, 14). In this context, the barriers in the image element are mostly related to the ideas consumers have about plant-based foods (or meat) and of the benefits/disadvantages of eating them.

The perceived lightness of a plant-based diet was brought up as a barrier, mainly by male participants. The idea of lightness appeared also in the way they described a plant-based diet, as many male participants associated it with eating “just salad”. Some females told that their (male) partners remained hungry after eating a meat-free meal, and this idea was supported also by the male participants, as shown in the response below.

If I think about a vegetarian diet, salads come to mind first. That if you are vegetarian or vegan, you only eat salad. -- And deeply instilled in my mind is the idea that food is nutritious and keeps you full longer only if it includes meat. (M4)

In addition to the lightness, plant-based foods were not seen as valuable as meat, especially in certain situations. Hence, having not enough value for money is presented as one barrier. For example, plant-based food was thought to be generally more expensive in grocery stores, and on the other hand, it was not found to be worth its price in restaurants. This is in line with the finding of de Boer and Aiking (2017, 245) who proposed that an important competing frame, thus a barrier in this context, is how consumers tend to evaluate their choices in terms of value for money.

M3: If I go for lunch and pay a tenner for it, I really expect to get meat.

M4: Me too. No offense, but the idea of paying twenty euros for fodder makes me feel bad.

When it comes to substituting meat in food consumption practices, only two of the groups ended up in meat substitute products in the research setting (seitan kebab and a dairy-based product Mifu, see Appendix 2). The other two groups decided to skip the substitutes and instead use mushrooms and feta cheese as the protein element of the meal. Furthermore, based on the analysis, a meat-based diet is found to be the norm and plant-

based options are compared to it. In other words, it was expected that substitutes are similar with meat in terms of appearance, texture and taste.

I want to have a meat-like element in my food. (W5)

Consequently, the participants had been disappointed if a substitute product was not as similar to meat as they had expected. Additionally, some did not understand why plant-based options even need to be similar with meat. To summarize, imitating meat (in terms of taste and appearance) was found as problematic and negative, and thus it is proposed that it represents a barrier for consuming meat substitute products.

For example Härkis [a meat substitute product made of broad beans] is so much like minced meat, or it has been created to be a substitute for minced meat, so while you prepare it you think about what minced meat tastes like. And when it tastes like something else than minced meat, you keep thinking whether it tastes good, or if it tastes like anything at all. This is only because you think that it's a substitute for minced meat. (W1)

What usually bothers me about vegetarian dishes is that why do you have to call something a steak, if it's not meat? -- There are many vegetarian options, why do they all look the same? Why does vegetarian food even have to be a copy of food that includes meat? (W6)

As presented in previous research, many consumers are not willing to replace meat with substitutes due to product-related factors such as lower sensory attractiveness or unfamiliarity of the substitutes (Hoek et al. 2011, 662; Hoek et al. 2013, 254). However, unfamiliarity did not seem to be the main reason in this study, as many participants had prior experience of the products. Elzerman et al. (2011, 233) states that the characteristics and the usage of substitutes should not be too different from meat. This idea is contradictory to the findings here, as it seemed that the participants did not want the substitutes to be too similar to meat. Another problem related to the meat substitutes was that they were found as too processed and associated with unnaturalness. In general, the participants preferred natural and simple food over processed and artificial foods. As proposed in the definition of plant-based diet, minimally processed and fresh foods can be associated with it (Lea et al. 2006, 829), thus also in this sense the processed image of substitutes can be a barrier.

I don't eat any convenience food in general. So I see them [meat substitute products] as an unhealthy option. (W4)

I prefer to eat simple food, but many vegetarian protein products have a lot of additives etc. (W8)

In terms of the consequences of following a plant-based diet, the participants seemed to find the effects too insignificant. They compared the effects with other environmentally friendly actions, such as reducing flying or supporting local food, and found plant-based eating less effective than these. What is more, they brought out how they think it is not even environmentally sustainable, if everyone begins to eat only plant-based foods. These findings could be associated with the idea of Beverland (2014, 373) and de Boer et al. (2017, 395) that consumers do not view reduced meat consumption to be environmentally relevant enough. Pohjolainen et al. (2016, 37) found in their study that only 28% of Finns in their sample were at least rather conscious on the environmental unsustainability of meat. However, here it seemed it was rather about the perceived ineffectiveness than about being unconscious of the effects. Thus, it is proposed that the idea of ineffectiveness is one image-related barrier to move towards plant-based food consumption practices.

W2: It's a bit of a contradiction that you drive a car which consumes a huge amount of gas, but eat vegetarian food. --

W3: It said somewhere that if you are on a vegetarian diet for one year, it amounts to the same effect as not going on one intercontinental flight.

On the other hand, the positive meanings and aspirations attached to meat in general seemed to prevent the participants from including more plant-based foods in their diets. Especially taste and enjoyment of eating good quality meat, such as a steak in a restaurant, were brought up. This finding is in line with previous research (Hoek et al. 2017; Pohjolainen et al. 2015), which suggests that the appreciation of meat, especially the taste, is one of the most significant barriers to reduce its consumption.

If I eat out, I really enjoy having a lovely, tasty steak and some red wine. (W1)

Lastly, the participants justified particularly domestic meat, as they perceived Finnish meat production as more ethical than foreign meat production. This finding brings out the ethical point of view that is commonly attached to meat as well and that has been discussed also in academic research (e.g. Beverland 2014, 373–374; de Boer et al. 2017,

395; Evans & Miele 2012; Vinnari et al. 2010, 847). Pohjolainen et al. (2016) also found in their study that Finns endorse especially local meat and thus justify its consumption. Moreover, the finding is in line with Vinnari et al. (2010, 848) who proposed that a large share of Finns think that animals are treated better in Finland than in other EU countries, for example. Furthermore, meat was also found as “comfort food”. Hence, these two are presented as additional meat- and image-related barriers.

I trust the Finnish meat industry, that it somewhat respects animal rights and they are not tortured. I don't know what the truth is, but when you know that it's totally different somewhere else in this world, it makes it easier to eat meat in Finland with a good conscience. (W5)

M3: Yesterday I had lunch at a Thai restaurant with colleagues, after having a bad day. I certainly didn't choose vegetarian options.

M4: Meat is more of a comfort food.

4.1.3 Skill-related barriers

The skill element in practices refers for example to the competence and procedures for carrying out practices (Shove et al. 2012, 14). In this context, it is mostly about the know-how and skills of cooking plant-based foods as well as the knowledge of their qualities and contents.

The participants provided multiple different definitions for a plant-based diet and there were clearly difficulties in defining the concept. Many of them defined the concept through what it is not. Additionally, many attached a plant-based diet first to veganism or vegetarianism and left out all animal-origin foods (or at least meat), which is also shown in many quotations throughout the findings. This finding reflects the study of Hoek et al. (2017), where participants associated plant-based eating mainly with a completely vegetarian or vegan diet, so they could not identify themselves with it nor consider options in between a meat-based diet and a vegetarian or vegan diet (Hoek et al. 2017, 125). De Boer and Aiking (2017, 243) point out as well that consumers think it is exclusively vegetarians or vegans who can eat plant-based food. Figure 7 illustrates how the groups compared a plant-based diet with a meat-based diet, vegetarianism as well as veganism. These findings could also be attached to the image element, as they relate to

the idea of a plant-based diet. However, as they are about the ability to define the concept, they are presented as a skill-related barrier.

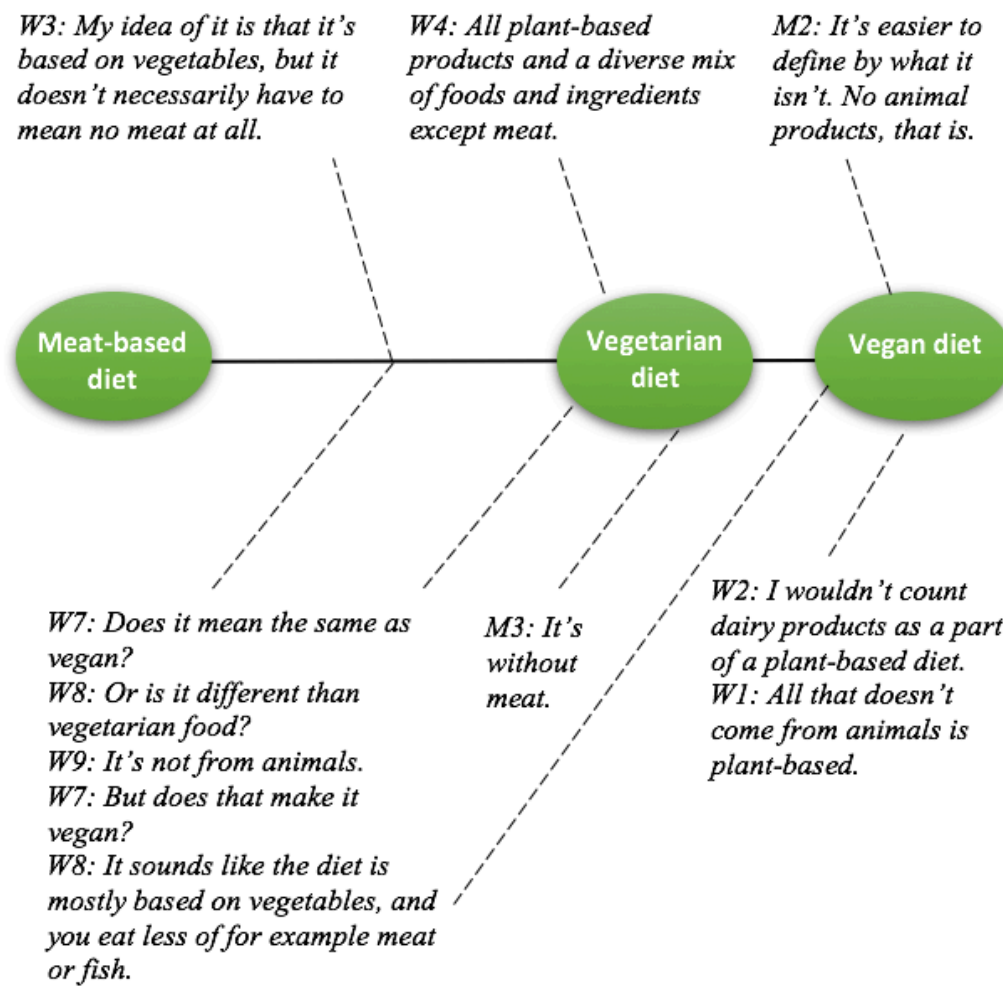


Figure 7. Definitions of a plant-based diet provided by the participants

In other words, the problem of defining a plant-based diet and associating it with vegetarianism/veganism represents a barrier that is attached to the skill element (knowledge of plant-based diet). Along with meat, also the role of dairy products and eggs was difficult for the participants to describe. Consequently, some groups ended up excluding and some including these products in the meals in the activity focus group setting (see Appendix 2). Nevertheless, despite the problems, some participants were able to provide definitions that support the idea that plant-based diet includes some meat (Lea et al. 2006, 829), which is a positive sign.

Along with the problem of defining a plant-based diet, the lack of knowledge in terms of cooking and nutritional facts was the most visible barrier that emerged in the data. The participants pointed out particularly the difficulty of proper seasoning. In addition, the previously mentioned lightness of plant-based food was also considered a problem, as some participants did not have the know-how for cooking heavier plant-based meals.

I don't really know enough about them [plant-based products] to be bothered to change my habits as a consumer. (W2)

W3: They [plant-based meals] might require more seasoning.

W1: Yeah, more than just salt and pepper which you would use to season meat.

Salads are easy, but I can't prepare proper [plant-based] food with sauces and such. (M4)

In general, the participants emphasized how they prefer quickness and easiness in daily cooking. They found it complex, troublesome, and time-consuming to cook plant-based meals (compared to cooking meat) and to study their nutritional values. These findings are in line with the study of Pohjolainen et al. (2015), who found that cooking plant-based meals is not perceived easy, and with the proposition of Lea et al. (2006) that one the biggest barriers is the lack of knowledge of plant-based diets. Additionally, they relate to what Hoek et al. (2017, 125) proposed: especially the convenience of purchasing and cooking meat is ranked high.

I should be more open-minded in trying and tasting [plant-based food], but I usually buy minced meat because it's so easy, cheap and quick and I know what it tastes like. (W1)

It [eating less meat] would make things more complicated. (W7)

What is more in relation to skills and knowledge, another “project” such as learning to play guitar or following a diet in order to lose weight seemed to prevent the participants from starting the project of changing their eating practices. This follows the idea of Røpke (2009, 2493), who proposed that practices compete for consumers’ attention, and to manage their set of practices, consumers engage in projects of which some are prioritized over others (Shove et al. 2012,78–79). In other words, another active project can be a barrier to move towards a plant-based diet, as it can steal the attention of the consumer.

4.2 Drivers emerging from the practice elements

This section presents drivers that young Finnish consumers perceive for changing their food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. As in terms of barriers, the findings are addressed according to the three elements of practice.

4.2.1 Material-related drivers

The material-related drivers that emerged from the data are related to the availability of plant-based options as well as to the qualities of meat. Despite the perceived poor quality and availability that were presented as barriers, many participants were optimistic that the availability and quality of plant-based options will get better and the prices will come down. Moreover, many participants explained how they eat more plant-based food in (lunch) restaurants because the options are appealing, and it is generally perceived easier than cooking the meals at home. This finding is associated with the material element, as it relates to the physical space (home, restaurant) where the practice happens (see Shove et al. 2007, 2; Shove et al. 2012, 14). To conclude, along with a better selection and lower price, eating plant-based weekday meals (e.g. lunch) in restaurants is presented as a driver to move towards plant-based food consumption practices.

If the selection became larger and the price cheaper, it would probably make a difference. (W3)

I very often eat vegetarian food at the university, because I can't always be bothered to prepare it at home, and they have good vegetarian dishes, which are ready. (W1)

In terms of technologies, one of the groups discussed the ineffectiveness of meat production and compared it with the production of some plant-based options (which they found effective). This relates to the idea of Sahakian and Wilhite (2014, 29–31) about new technologies triggering a change in practices, here a new effective technology of producing plant-based foods. In other words, the effectiveness of producing plant-based food (compared to meat) is presented as a material driver. However, this could relate to the image element as well, as it is also about the image consumers have of the production.

M2: Meat itself isn't necessarily a very efficient form of nutrition, because you have to produce the same fodder and water which you then feed to the animals, and at the end [of the food chain] you have the same nutrients that you first began with.

M3: That is frustrating. This is why I was happy to see a documentary film about Quorn [a meat substitute], where you can make a huge quantity of Quorn-mass out of a small amount of mushroom protein.

4.2.2 Image-related drivers

The image-related drivers attached to moving towards plant-based food consumption practices are mostly related to the ideas and meanings of plant-based foods, meat, and meat substitutes. A plant-based diet was associated with positive qualities like healthiness and trendiness as well as being aesthetical, colourful and ecological. As also Lea et al. (2006, 829) found out, a plant-based diet is generally associated with healthiness as well as with environmental friendliness. Especially the perceived healthiness of plant-based food, yet in terms of the nutritional value and lightness, emerged in the data. Besides, the variety within a plant-based diet was described as positive, thus as a driver.

Healthy and light, good nutrients and vitamins. -- When you eat vegetables, you usually eat more diversely. (W4)

Healthy and ethical, I would say. (W1)

Interestingly, the healthiness seemed to appear in the discussions more than other benefits of plant-based foods. This finding is supported by Hoek et al. (2017, 126–127) who propose that plant-based food is primarily associated with healthiness (instead of ecological benefits), and as health is a personal benefit, it is generally the most dominant driver in food behaviour. However, Hoek et al. (2004) propose that for non-vegetarian consumers, health is not as important a factor than for vegetarians. All in all, in this context health effects seem to be positive drivers to move towards plant-based food consumption practices, but they are not the only considered issue.

While the issue of imitating meat was previously presented as a barrier, some participants nevertheless attached positive ideas to meat substitutes. For example, they were found to increase the versatility in plant-based eating, which is presented as a driver along with the general positive idea of variety in a plant-based diet. On the other hand, the idea of not

even trying to imitate meat but instead enjoying the benefits of plant-based foods, such as variety and different taste, is interpreted as a driver, based on the barrier related to imitating meat.

I don't cook the same kind of vegetarian food and I don't think that vegetarian food should be a substitute for meat. Instead it increases the variety of foods I can cook. That some dishes taste different is a good thing, because it gives me more options. (W6)

Finally, the participants attached some problems to meat itself, which are interpreted as drivers for decreasing meat consumption and moving towards a plant-based diet. They brought out especially the negative health effects of eating a lot of meat as well as the environmental effects of it. In research, a plant-based diet is argued to be a healthier option, as meat correlates with symptoms related to, for example, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer (see Dinu et al. 2017; Duchin 2005, 111; McEvoy et al. 2012; McMichael et al. 2007; Orlich et al. 2013; Pohjola et al. 2015). Despite the perceived ineffective environmental impacts of a plant-based diet (presented as a barrier), it seemed that the negative effects of meat can also be drivers. Yet health issues were again emphasized.

I often think that I should eat more vegetarian food. I have started to think about the ecological aspect more recently, but I also think about this because eating a lot of meat is not good for your health. (W7)

4.2.3 Skill-related drivers

The drivers related to the third element of practice, skill, relate mainly to the knowledge of plant-based foods and the know-how of cooking as well as the competence to make a change. As it has already been presented, lack of knowledge is one of the main skill-related barriers. Consequently, increasing knowledge emerged as a driver from the data. The participants highlighted the need for more information about the nutritional facts and contents of plant-based foods as well as the demand for new recipes that could be easily remembered and used in everyday cooking. What is more, some participants were waiting for more studies about the benefits of plant-based foods for motivation, which is presented as another driver. This finding associates with Reckwitz (2002, 249–250) idea that practices also contain the “motivational knowledge” to perform them.

I should search for new recipes, because now when I go shopping for groceries I just know the basic dishes I can make. I should look into more vegetarian recipes, so that when I go to the store I have this bank of ideas already in my head. (W1)

Clear research results would probably increase my motivation. For example a study that says that you will be this much healthier if you eat only vegetarian food. Then I would be prepared to put more time and effort and money into it. (W3)

Furthermore, the participants attached some benefits to the cooking of plant-based foods, which are interpreted as skill-related drivers as well. Despite the perceived inconveniency of cooking plant-based meals presented a barrier, these benefits included the quickness of cooking plant-based options, the hygiene of plant-based foods (no fear of meat-related bacteria such as salmonella) as well as the perceived ease of combining different types of vegetables and improvising with them.

The easiness of these compared to meat is that you don't have to cook these, it's enough to throw them into the pan, fry for a moment and it's ready. It save's a lot of time, and you don't have to think about food hygiene the same way as you do while cooking with meat. (W5)

When there's a colourful mix of ingredients in the fridge, I can pretty easily improvise and choose what to cook out of them. (W4)

Finally, all participants highlighted versatility in their food consumption practices, and pointed out that they prefer flexibility over absoluteness (such as following a strict diet). They brought out that decreasing meat consumption in their daily food consumption practices would be more possible than fully abandoning meat. Moreover, they did not find an absolute or radical change in their practices tempting, but instead they were up for a gradual change towards a plant-based diet. These findings could also be attached to the image element, as they relate to the overall idea of the change. Yet they are presented here as a skill-related driver, as they are also about the general competence for the change.

W1: Why not, I can't see a reason why I couldn't increase it. But I can't see myself making a radical change and leaving out meat altogether. --

W3: Maybe not all of a sudden and completely, like "now I will not eat any meat or milk etc.", but I can make individual, separate choices and probably will, too. That I notice that the vegetarian version of a particular product is as good or better than the original one, and gradually begin to use it.

I could easily eat less meat, if I only could get used to the lifestyle. I could be without meat for weeks, but when I start craving minced meat tortillas I want to be able to have them. (W7)

4.3 Barriers and drivers emerging from the social environment

This section addresses the findings that relate to *the social environment* in food consumption practices. Based on the analysis, along with the barriers and drivers related to the practice elements, there are both barriers and drivers that emerge from the social environment as well. Thus, these are not linked with the practice elements, as they seem to affect the whole practice rather than its specific elements. The social environment in this context refers to *social communities* as well as *socially shared meanings and conventions*.

4.3.1 Social communities and conventions

Based on the data analysis, the social communities refer especially to the household members as well as to the eating company in each situation. The household members represent both barriers and drivers, which relates to the findings of Hoek et al. (2017, 128) as well as de Boer et al. (2017) that household members are social influencers in the change towards less meat-eating. For example, the participants here brought up that if their partner is not interested in following a plant-based diet, it is a barrier for the other person to cook plant-based meals. However, some participants, especially men, told that their partners had taught them to eat plant-based food and they got positive experiences of it, which is presented as a driver.

I believe I would eat more vegetarian food if I lived alone, but I don't want to cook separate dishes for the two of us, as my partner wants to eat more meat than I do. (W5)

I tasted those [pulled oats balls] with my partner, and they were good! (M4)

When it comes to the eating company, the participants highlighted that what they choose to eat depends much on the company in each situation, such as colleagues, friends, and relatives. These are both barriers (e.g. colleagues choose a restaurant with poor vegetarian options) and drivers (e.g. friends want to cook vegetarian food). Some participants

pointed out that it would help them to choose plant-based options, if their eating company had the same objective to use more plant-based food, which highlights how the eating company can be a driver. This finding reflects also what Beverland (2014, 375–376) points out on the importance of social support in terms of being a vegetarian.

My colleagues have a big influence on where we eat. If they name a certain restaurant, that's where we will go and eat whatever is available there. (W6)

If I go out to eat with my girlfriend, it might be something more plant-based. It depends on the company. Or a friend who is on a vegetarian diet, with that person you will go to a vegetarian restaurant and eat a bit differently. (M1)

It helps a lot if your friends are on a similar diet. (W2)

What is more, the participants explained how in certain situations they do not want to be the “difficult person”, thus to cause trouble to the people around them by being the only one eating plant-based food. That is, for example, when visiting someone who has been cooking for you or when cooking with friends. In other words, this finding is presented as a social barrier. It relates to what Beverland (2014, 375) summed up that “being a vegetarian can be alienating”, and that people need to accommodate their choices and adopt new social practices if someone in the group turns vegetarian. On the contrary, as de Boer et al. (2017, 388) propose, being a non-vegetarian is a social norm and often taken for granted. To conclude, these findings reflect social pressures (see de Boer & Aiking 2017, 245) or conventions (see Hargreaves et al. 2011) that can hinder (or drive) the change.

W2: It can be a huge social issue, which is why I'm not completely vegetarian. There are so many situations where you don't want to be "the difficult one".

W1: Especially if you're in a group where everyone is omnivorous.

W3: It is quite a big deal, if you have to cook separately for someone.

Moreover, there can be some events in life that help triggering the change in food consumption practices. As presented by Plessz et al. (2016, 112) life-course turning points can change the resources and constraints of food consumption and thus drive a change. This idea is supported in the findings, as it seemed that events such as moving to live on your own, sharing an apartment with a boyfriend/girlfriend or doing an exchange abroad were drivers for moving towards a plant-based diet. These findings are also attached to

another idea of Plessz et al. (2016) that joining a new social network or community, such as a new work community, can introduce a person to new practices and thus represent a driver. To sum up, a driver for change can be another change in life (see de Boer & Aiking 2017, 245), such as moving to a new neighbourhood or a life-course turning point.

In my changing towards more plant-based eating the biggest influence was when I was an exchange student in Germany a year ago. In the city I lived in, being vegetarian could be quite radical. There were a lot of notices looking for flatmates that said “Only vegetarians can apply to live in this apartment”. (W4)

Where I work determines what I eat. So last week I ate maybe 50 grams of meat. (M2)

Finally, the urban living environment, in turn, was brought out as a driver, which reflects the study of Vinnari et al. (2010, 848) who found that urbanization can possibly increase non-meat consumption, despite the fact that it has also been proposed to increase meat consumption. However, as the participants all live in urban areas, it cannot be interpreted whether a rural living environment, in turn, represents a barrier.

I believe that in the Helsinki region and other big cities or university cities, where people move more and there are more [plant-based options], people might be more curious and eager to try new things and get to know about new things, whereas in the countryside life is more static. (W4)

4.3.2 Socially shared meanings

Based on the analysis, along with the social communities and conventions there are socially shared meanings that play a role in the change of food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. The meanings that emerged from the data represent both barriers and drivers for including plant-based food in food consumption practices. They relate mostly to the way plant-based eaters or meat eaters are perceived as a group. These findings could also be associated with the image element of practices, as they represent the meanings and ideas related to plant-based food. Nevertheless, they are presented here as social barriers and drivers, as they stem from the social environment.

Firstly, the idea that the participants had about people who follow a plant-based diet was multidimensional, and as presented earlier they associated a plant-based diet also with

vegetarianism/veganism, which might impact these ideas. Plant-based eaters were described as, for example, conscious about environmental and health issues, radical, bohemian and liberal, politically aware, having a convergent outlook of the world as well as being hipsters and hippies. It appeared that some participants would not like to belong to this group that was perceived as somewhat homogenous, which is presented as a barrier. This was mainly because there were negative issues attached to this group, such as how they criticize or educate meat-eaters or bolster their ego through their diet choices. These ideas are reflected in what Beverland (2014, 376) proposes: consumers regard vegetarianism being undertaken by mainly ideological and ethical reasons, and meat eating is often criticized by non-meat eaters quite provocatively.

W2: I think the common perception still is that vegans are people who make a big noise about themselves. There are these jokes: “how do you know that someone is a vegan – don’t worry, they will tell you”. So I don’t really want to bring it up, so that it doesn’t look like I have a problem with it.

W1: Yeah, in order to avoid being categorized, you don’t want people to associate things like being egocentric or self-important with you and your diet.

That kind of incrimination is really irritating. That I should feel guilty about eating the way I do. (W7)

On the other hand, some participants perceived that the heterogeneity of plant-based eaters has increased. As Shove et al. (2012, 72) propose, the relation between full participants and novices in a community reflects the variety of conducting practices and affects the way how practices diffuse or who are accepted in the community. In this context, the perceived heterogeneity of plant-based eaters could mean a larger variety in the practices of plant-based food consumption and thus broader boundaries of the community. Hence, heterogeneity can be a driver to join this group, as there are different people with different levels of plant-based eating and no strict boundaries.

It feels like a vegetarian diet is a trend nowadays, it’s not just a hippie thing anymore. Or the way I see it, it’s not a certain type of people anymore that are vegetarian. (W1)

Additionally, the idea of meat-eaters emerged as a driver as well. The participants attached mostly negative issues to meat eaters and described them to be “older men” and “sullen” people having a certain attitude, appreciating traditions as well as being

uneducated people. They expressed how they would not like to belong to this group either, which can be a driver to reduce meat consumption and to join the group of plant-based eaters.

W9: Middle-aged men and older [eat meat].

W7: Yes, men.

W8: Not necessarily very well educated either.

That sullen type of Finns, people with strong principles and maybe a certain kind of attitude. (M3)

Furthermore, it seemed that the ideas the participants had about plant-based eaters can change in some situations that make them “question the social norms”, as Sahakian and Wilhite (2014, 29–31) state. For example, one participant explained how he was positively surprised, when a person that he thought would never follow a plant-based diet turned vegetarian. However, this is not necessarily a driver to change practices, as it might just change the thinking. Additionally, it was brought out that social influencers (both celebrities and familiar people) could help to distribute more information and know-how about plant-based foods. These could be interpreted “positive role models” who can change the image of plant-based eating, as proposed by Beverland (2014, 379). In other words, these are presented as drivers. Närvänen and Goulding (2016, 1536–1537) also found in their study that advocates, such as celebrities, can have an important role in the diffusion of practices and meanings. Celebrities have also been used in media to promote veganism and particularly its health benefits (Lundahl 2017, 85).

I am influenced by my friends, for example. Someone has tried a certain diet and told me that it works well. Other people I regard as influencers have an effect, too. (M3)

To conclude, as Marshall (2005, 71–72) argues, the social context where the food is eaten can define the food itself more than its nutritional values. This idea summarizes well the significant role of social communities and socially shared meanings in the change towards a plant-based diet.

4.4 Conclusions and re-evaluation of the theoretical framework

As presented, the participants perceived various barriers and drivers for changing their food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. These barriers and drivers emerged from the three elements of food consumption practices, *material*, *image*, and *skill*, as well as from *the social environment* that surrounds the daily life of consumers. The key findings of the empirical study are collected in Table 4 according to these four factors.

Table 4. Findings of the empirical study

	Barriers	Drivers
Material element	Problem with getting enough nutrients (protein, iron, B12) Meat-based practices too routinized, sticking to self-evident frames (e.g. recipes) Lack of plant-based options Poor quality of plant-based options (restaurants)	Increased selection of plant-based options Lower price Having plant-based meals in lunch restaurants Effective production of plant-based foods
Image element	Lightness of plant-based food Negative value-for-money Meat substitutes: imitating meat, processed image Environmental impacts: ineffectiveness Appreciation of meat (taste, comfort food) Justifying the consumption of domestic meat	Health benefits of plant-based food Variety in a plant-based diet (incl. substitutes) Negative effects of meat (health)
Skill element	Problems with defining a plant-based diet: associating it with a vegetarian/vegan diet Lack of knowledge and skills (cooking, nutrients) Inconvenience of cooking plant-based meals Another ongoing/competing project	More knowledge and research of plant-based foods (nutrients, health effects) Better cooking competence (recipes) Benefits of cooking plant-based meals (fastness, hygiene, ease of combining ingredients) Gradual change
Social environment	Household members Eating company (e.g. colleagues, friends) Social conventions of eating meat Negative image of plant-based eaters	Household members Eating company (e.g. colleagues, friends) Another change (e.g. a life-course turning point) Joining a new social community (e.g. work) Urban living environment Increased heterogeneity of plant-based eaters Negative image of meat eaters Social influencers (friends, celebrities)

The new findings that were not presented in the theoretical framework are bolded in Table 4. While these were not presented in the framework (the purpose of which never was to provide a holistic description of all previous studies), many of them were associated here with previous literature, thus they were supported by it or contradictory to it. However, many of the findings were also completely new, especially in relation to the social

environment as well as to the drivers in general, which seem to be addressed less than barriers in previous research. All in all, moving towards a plant-based diet in daily food consumption practices is both about overcoming the barriers as well as reinforcing and increasing the drivers.

4.4.1 Through positivity and gradual change

In terms of the material element of food consumption practices, especially the selection of plant-based products in both grocery stores as well as restaurants was considered to be poor, despite the market invasion of plant-based innovations in Finland. Especially in the restaurant context, also the quality of plant-based options was regarded as bad. On the other hand, eating plant-based meals in lunch restaurants emerged as a driver, as it was perceived easier than cooking them at home. Therefore, increasing the availability of good quality options is one key issue in terms of helping consumers to move towards a plant-based diet, perhaps first in lunch restaurants and later also at home.

When it comes to the image element, the key problem in terms of the image of plant-based foods was that they were not considered to provide value for money. Besides that, the positive environmental (or health) effects of following a plant-based diet were not regarded as significant enough. In general, these problems also stem from how meat still seems to be highly appreciated (see also Pohjolainen et al. 2015) and how it is an important part of food consumption routines, despite recognizing its negative effects. Consequently, plant-based options, especially meat substitutes, are compared to meat, which seems to cause problems if they are not similar enough. On the other hand, it was pointed out that trying to imitate meat in these products, as was also proposed in earlier research (Elzerman et al. 2011, 233), is not even positive, as the plant-based options have their own positive characters. Hence, the substitutes might not be a key solution for reducing meat consumption. Thus, perhaps it is also about how these products are described, as talking about meat *substitutes* might just enhance the idea of imitating meat.

If you talk about it as a meat substitute, you do expect it to be like meat, and it might taste bad because of this. If you thought of it as something completely new instead of a substitute for meat, your attitude could be a lot better. (W3)

What is more, based on the findings it seems that health issues get the most attention in food consumption practices. In other words, the positive health effects of eating plant-based food (as well as the negative health effects of eating meat) are emphasized more as drivers, even though more knowledge was needed. There are contradictory propositions in previous literature on this issue, as some propose the non-health effects should be emphasized (Lea et al. 2006, 833) and some state that health is the most dominant factor (Hoek et al. 2017, 126–127).

If I had to choose a diet based on either ethical or personal health reasons, I will put myself first. That's just the way it is. (M1)

In relation to this, Beverland (2014, 378) proposes that vegetarians who follow the diet for health reasons are viewed positively by omnivores, so they could work as role models and increase the likelihood of the diffusion of plant-based diets as well. However, Hoek et al. (2017, 126) conclude that the concept of healthy and environmentally friendly foods is “a blank-sheet” for consumers that could be filled: bridging these two benefits in marketing efforts could help consumers in adapting both healthy and environmentally friendly diets. Either way, the health aspect seems to play a necessary role in changing everyday food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. In contrast, the environmental effects were not found significant enough and the ethical reasons did not seem to be drivers either. Besides, de Boer et al. (2017, 395) bring out that emphasizing health factors instead of ethical issues is in general more neutral and less risky.

In general, highlighting the positive aspects of a plant-based diet instead of demonizing and denying meat seems to evolve in the drivers related to the image element. In other words, as there are positive qualities attached to a plant-based diet, such as variety and healthiness, these can work as drivers and enhance the positive image of plant-based foods. Hence, it is perhaps easier to increase the appreciation of a plant-based diet than to decrease the appreciation of meat. As Beverland (2014, 378–379) sums up, the messages about a plant-based diet should focus on the benefits of the diet rather than on the dangers of eating meat. “Through positivity” can be the key, as one participant concludes in the response below.

If you thought about not having to eat meat in a positive way, that you can get all the same things from vegetarian food and it's just as tasty, maybe you soon wouldn't think about meat anymore. (M3)

Nevertheless, it is important to note that simply highlighting the virtues of plant-based foods is not enough to change the food consumption *practices* (Beverland 2014, 375). In other words, the third element, skill, needs to be addressed as well.

Based on the findings related to the skill element, it seems that as plant-based diet is often fundamentally associated with vegetarianism (or veganism), moving towards it is perceived as a jump from meat-based eating to a completely meat-free diet. Therefore, it is presented as a barrier as consumers cannot consider the options in between, as was found by Hoek et al. (2017, 125) as well. Furthermore, the participants brought out the juxtaposition between meat-based and non-meat-based diets as the response below shows.

I do see that the way meat and a vegetarian diet are placed against each other has something to do with me as well. So in a way it does have an effect on my dietary habits. (M3)

This issue is also referred to as a common “black-and-white-deal”, which means that people usually think they either should be fully vegetarians or then not at all (Frizzell 2017). However, novices rarely adopt the most extreme versions of plant-based eating, like veganism (Boyle 2011). Additionally, as was brought out in the findings, the lack of knowledge and skills of plant-based foods and their cooking were perceived as barriers. Consequently, increasing the knowledge of a plant-based diet (in terms of nutrients, its effects and cooking) is a key driver that could also help consumers realize that moving towards a plant-based diet does not mean saying goodbye to meat.

Finally, based on the findings it seems that the participants were especially keen to change their food consumption practices gradually, instead of making a sudden change. Along with the idea of gradual change, the participants seemed to be eager to reduce their meat consumption but not completely abandon it. When it comes to practice elements, it is about the desire to preserve some characters of the previous (meat-based) practices in the change process. This relates to the emergent nature of the change in practices where new practices emerge from the previous ones, as described in the theoretical framework (see

Shove & Pantzar 2005, 61; Shove et al. 2012, 32–33). It has been found also in previous research that emphasizing moderate meat consumption and variety in a diet can be important themes when trying to reduce meat consumption (de Boer et al. 2017, 395). Hence, as Lea et al. (2006, 829) propose, a plant-based diet with occasional meat consumption can be more appealing to many consumers because of the inclusion of meat, and this idea is supported here.

Furthermore, this finding fits the idea that popularizing the term *flexitarian* and increasing the number of them (or *semi-vegetarians*) can be the most effective way to decrease the overall meat consumption among consumers (de Boer & Aiking 2017, 243; Vinnari et al. 2010, 838). To summarize, no matter which term is used, these options can be more “merciful” to consumers and thus work as drivers for the change.

Being flexitarian is more merciful, because you only have to favour plant-based foods. (W4)

4.4.2 Social pressures come from the immediate circle and further

In the findings, the social environment included both barriers and drivers for moving towards a plant-based diet. However, as the social environment (social communities, conventions and meanings) is like a background where the change process happens, it does not seem to directly provide specific material-, image- or skill-related barriers and drivers, but rather reaches the whole practices. For example, the household members that were presented as both barriers and drivers related to the materials (where to go for grocery shopping, what food is selected), to the images (cooking separately for both members is perceived troublesome, partner appreciates meat) as well as to the skills (partner can teach cooking of plant-based meals). Also, another change in life or joining a new social community, such as being in student exchange or having a new job, reaches all elements: it can change which foods are available, bring new social conventions and meanings as well as new people (e.g. roommates, colleagues), who can teach new cooking skills.

Generally, the eating company in each situation seems to play an important role in changing food consumption practices. Especially the role of colleagues as well as friends

was brought out, and they seemed to bring both barriers and drivers. In addition to the immediate circle in life (household members, friends, colleagues), other influencers such as celebrities or bloggers were also mentioned as possible drivers who can, for example, change the image of plant-based foods or help learn new cooking skills.

The biggest impact to what I eat is the company I eat in. (M1)

In other words, both the closest people who the participants share their everyday life with as well as other social influencers can help (or prevent) the diffusion of new practices. This conclusion could be associated with the idea of Shove and Pantzar (2005) about social contagion: practices usually move between familiar people or people who have interests in common. In this context, it seemed that diffusing plant-based food consumption practices is possible among familiar people in social communities, such as work or a group of friends, or other people that share the same interest in a plant-based diet. To conclude, a change in food consumption practices is a collective accomplishment (see Pantzar & Shove 2010, 457).

Furthermore, the idea the participants had about plant-based eaters as well as meat eaters is especially related to the image element of food consumption practices, despite stemming from the social environment in general. It is interesting how the participants described plant-based eaters both as a homogenous and as a heterogeneous group. Many brought out how following a plant-based diet has become more common and trendy, and how it has made them question the idea of its homogeneity. Thus, perhaps the spreading of the diet can continue changing the social norm of being a meat eater (de Boer et al. 2017, 388) and the general image of a plant-based diet. Consequently, it could make following a plant-based diet less “alienating” (Beverland 2014, 375) in social situations and in that way help overcome the barrier of being a “difficult” person.

If a study was done on what kind of people are vegetarians, nowadays it would probably make for quite a diverse group of people. (W4)

To summarize, the social pressures (barriers and drivers) that the social environment brings to the change in food consumption practices are complex and multidimensional, as they stem from both the immediate surroundings and from broader socially shared meanings and conventions. Yet these findings can help in understanding the sources and

the nature of the social barriers and drivers that hinder or drive the change towards a plant-based diet.

4.4.3 Re-evaluation of the theoretical framework

The synthesis of the theoretical framework (Figure 4) illustrated the change process of food consumption practices through the emergent change in their three elements: *material*, *image* and *skill*. The *barriers* and *drivers* that hinder or assist the change process were attached to these three elements in the theoretical framework. The barriers and drivers which emerged in the empirical data associated with these three elements as well. However, some barriers and drivers are not solely connected with only one element, but they were roughly divided under the three elements based on the interpretations of the researcher. In general, addressing the barriers and drivers through the three practice elements is a new approach to the research topic.

Nevertheless, it is important to notice that despite the fact that each element of practices seems to have specific barriers and drivers for change, these elements are interdependent and are shaping each other, and they need to be linked together to form a practice. In other words, for example, overcoming image- and skill-related barriers and thus changing these two elements is not enough to change the whole practice, if material-related barriers such as poor availability and quality of plant-based options remain.

What is more, the whole change process of food consumption practices happens in *the social environment* of consumers, as is elucidated in the synthesis of the theoretical framework. All practices are fundamentally social (see e.g. Shove et al. 2007, 12), but in the findings some barriers and drivers emerged specifically from the social environment (social communities, conventions and meanings). Most of these barriers and drivers seem to affect the practice as a whole instead of specific elements. To conclude, the social environment is like a force surrounding the daily life, and it has both a negative and a positive role in the overall change process.

Finally, the findings revealed that the change process is an *emergent process* (see Pantzar & Shove 2010, 61; Shove et al. 2012, 33) also in real life. In other words, the new plant-

based food consumption practices emerge from the former meat-based practices of food consumption. Hence, the new practices have some of the same characteristics than the former ones, such as the fundamental activities of doing grocery shopping or cooking meals at home. Additionally, *the plant-based diet* itself includes some meat as well (e.g. Lea et al. 2006, 829), thus the changed practices are not completely new. This idea of emergent change process was reflected in the findings, as the participants described their desire for *gradual change* instead of making a sudden jump from current practices to plant-based food consumption practices. To conclude, an ideal change process is emergent, but also gradual in this context.

Figure 8 illustrates the re-evaluation of the synthesis of the theoretical framework. It extends the framework by adding the findings about barriers and drivers that emerge from the social environment as well as the idea of gradual change. As illustrated, in addition to the element-specific barriers and drivers, there are *social barriers* and *social drivers* for change that emerge from the surrounding social environment. Additionally, the green arrows that elucidate the drivers between each practice elements are now highlighted with dashes. The dashes emphasize idea of gradual change from *meat-based food consumption practices* to *plant-based food consumption practices*. Moreover, the previous and new practice elements are still illustrated with different colours and gradients to elucidate the emergent nature of the change.

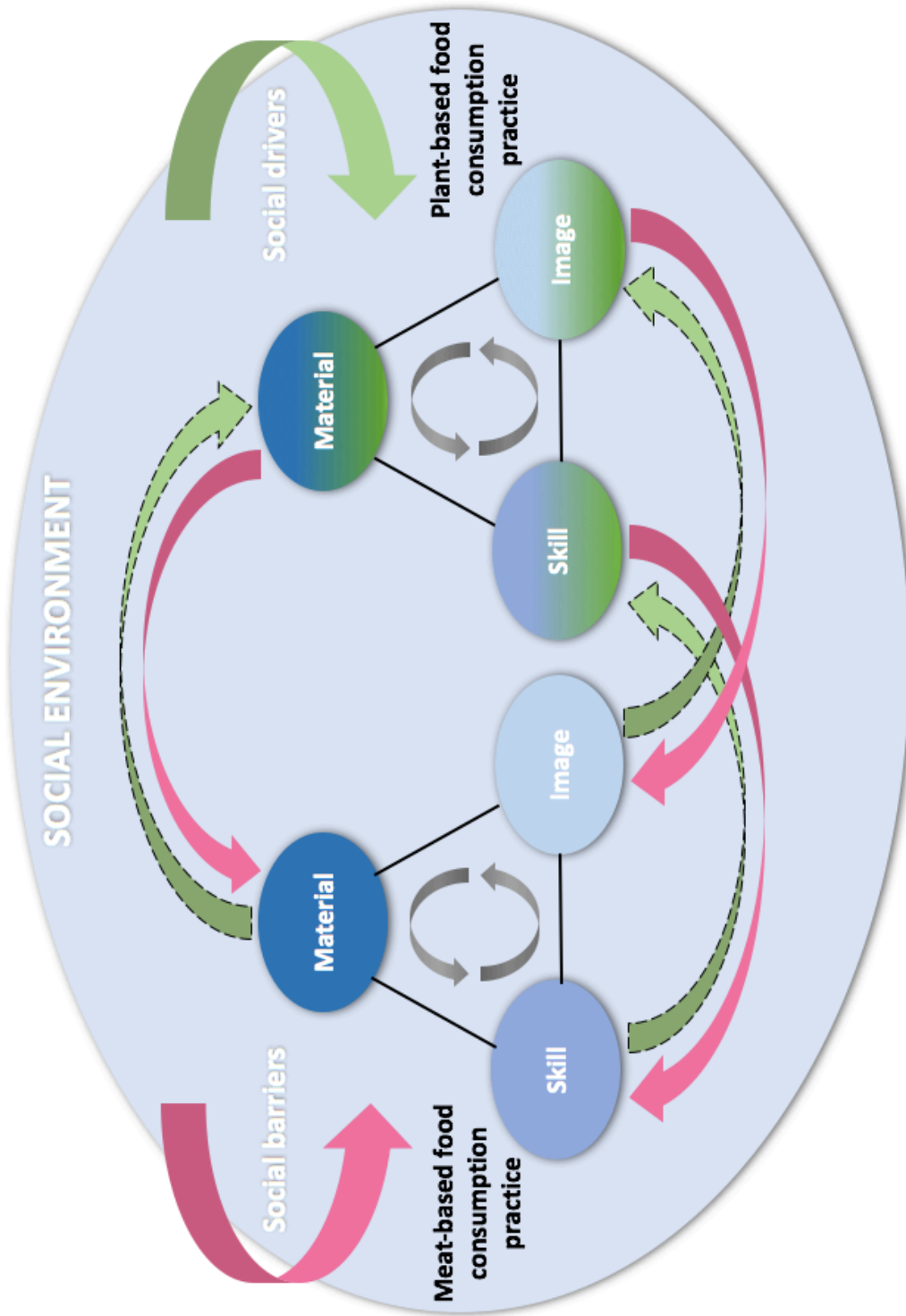


Figure 8. Re-evaluation of the synthesis of the theoretical framework

As the empirical study followed an abductive research logic, where the researcher moves back and forth between the theoretical and empirical parts, this re-evaluation of the synthesis could rather be described as an extension, as it extends the theoretical framework based on the empirical findings of this specific study. Additionally, despite theorizing the change towards a plant-based diet in food consumption practices, it is important to acknowledge that the barriers and drivers presented in the findings were subjective perceptions of the participants as well as interpreted by the researcher. Thus, this extension of the synthesis of the theoretical framework is not an objective description of the barriers and drivers that young Finnish consumers attach to the change of food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. Instead, it is formed based on the findings that emerged from this specific research context.

5 SUMMARY

5.1 Summary of the research

The purpose of this research was to describe and analyse how young Finnish consumers perceive a change in their daily food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. The following research questions were formed to achieve the research purpose:

1. What do young Finnish consumers perceive as barriers to change their food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet?
2. What do young Finnish consumers perceive as drivers for changing their food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet?

Firstly, the theoretical framework was built to form the basis for the empirical research. Following *the social practice theory* approach, the framework was composed from the literature that theorizes the formation and change of (consumption) practices in general as well as from previous research that has examined the barriers and drivers related to moving towards a plant-based diet from other than practice theory viewpoints.

Thus, the theories that describe the emergent change process of practices through their three interrelated elements, *material*, *image* and *skill*, were combined with literature describing practices of food consumption as well as with the studies about barriers and drivers for consuming plant-based food. The barriers and drivers presented in previous literature were attached to each of the three elements of food consumption practices. Additionally, the social context and social nature of food consumption practices was addressed particularly through emphasizing the role of *the social environment* (social communities, conventions and meanings) surrounding the change process. To conclude, all these literature streams were combined to extend and deepen the understanding of the change towards plant-based food consumption practices in terms of barriers and drivers.

Secondly, the research philosophy adopted in this thesis was the paradigm of *social constructionism*, which assumes that reality is shared and formed in the interpretations of individuals and groups. Therefore, it can be accessed through social constructions (such

as shared meanings) that are followed by social action. Social constructionism is especially critical towards the taken-for-granted understandings people have of the world, such as the assumptions consumers have of a plant-based diet. Ontologically, the paradigm assumes that reality is subjective and unique to each consumer. Hence, the perceptions consumers have of the barriers and drivers are subjective, and thus it is impossible to provide an objective description of them. Epistemologically, it is assumed that there are multiple viewpoints on truth (e.g. multiple viewpoints on the barriers and drivers), through which new knowledge can be produced. Additionally, it is acknowledged that the researcher has a co-productive role in the research process and the findings are based on her interpretations.

Along with the ontological and epistemological assumptions, the chosen paradigm affected the methodological choices of the empirical study that was qualitative by nature. The selected method was a focus group study, where a group of participants focus on discussing a certain topic in a free-flowing manner. The method followed a less structured approach, where the role of the researcher was mainly to guide the discussion. The method was brought to the context of food consumption practices by making it active in terms of adding activities to the discussion. The new form of a focus group setting that includes practices of food consumption (grocery shopping, cooking and eating) was named as an *activity focus group*. What is more, the social interaction in focus groups was found to suit the social nature of food consumption practices. However, the data was generated from the discussion instead of observing the social interaction itself.

Thirdly, the data was generated from a group of altogether 13 participants, who formed four groups of three to four people. Nine of the participants were females and four were males. The age range of the participants was from 23 to 27 years, and they shared the same interest in a plant-based diet. Additionally, the members of each group knew each other from before, which helped in generating natural discussion while conducting the activities. All sessions were held in Tampere, and their progress followed the same order: after the warm up discussion, the participants were assigned the task to select ingredients for a plant-based meal in the grocery store, and afterwards they had the task to cook the meal together (and eat it). The discussion happened while doing these activities, and the researcher guided it by providing some questions along with the tasks. Finally, the

generated data was analysed using an interpretive hermeneutic approach, where the analysis moves between theoretical concepts and empirical data. Following the abductive logic of the research process, the theoretical framework was iterated based on the data analysis.

Fourthly, based on the data analysis, barriers and drivers for changing daily food consumption practices were identified and linked with the theoretical elements of practice: *material*, *image* and *skill* as well as with *the social environment*. Thus, it was identified that young Finnish consumers perceive material-, image-, and skill-related as well as social environment-related barriers and drivers for changing their food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. The findings related to the social environment were not placed under the three elements, because the social environment was interpreted as a broader force in the change that addresses the whole practices of food consumption. Besides, despite the division, it was emphasized that the elements connect with each other, as they together form a practice (which is conducted in the social environment). Therefore, it was concluded that overcoming the barriers or reinforcing the drivers related to only one element might not be enough to change the whole practice. Some of the findings were in line (or in contrast) with previous studies, yet they were presented here from a different practices' viewpoint. Additionally, there were findings that have not been addressed in previous studies, especially in relation to the social environment and the drivers in general.

In conclusions, it was first emphasized that to overcome the barriers of poor selection and poor appreciation of plant-based options as well as the problem of imitating meat in the dishes, the availability of plant-based options should be increased, and their positive characters should be emphasized instead of imitating the characters of meat. Especially the positive health effects emerged as a driver. Secondly, it was concluded that the lack of knowledge of a plant-based diet in general is a barrier that emerges in how it is defined and perceived as well as in the lack of cooking skills. Thus, increasing the knowledge could help consumers especially in understanding that a plant-based diet does not mean a completely meat-free diet. Thirdly, it was highlighted that the participants perceived the idea of gradually changing daily food consumption practices as well as reducing meat consumption as a positive way, instead of suddenly abandoning meat. In other words, one

of the key conclusions was that changing daily food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet is about making gradual and simple changes to materials, images and skills, but not about suddenly jumping to a meat-free diet.

Finally, it was concluded that along with the practice element-related barriers and drivers the social environment brings *social barriers and drivers*. These stem from the immediate circle, such as household members, as well as from social influencers (e.g. celebrities) and socially shared meanings and conventions. In general, it was concluded that the eating company in each situation plays an important role in the food consumption practices. The shared meanings, in turn, emerged especially in terms of how people who follow a plant-based (or a meat-based) diet are perceived. However, it seemed that these ideas can change if plant-based eating continues to diffuse and becomes more conventional. To conclude, this way it can become easier to join the group of plant-based eaters.

5.2 Evaluating the research quality

The quality of qualitative research is basically evaluated throughout the research process and especially when making methodological choices (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 290; Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 21), as it was in this thesis. However, at this point the overall quality of the research is evaluated after going through the whole research process. It is pointed out that there is no universal criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research (Patton 2015, 679), thus, the quality is evaluated using the criteria that suits the philosophical accounts of this thesis.

In the social constructionist paradigm that was adopted for the research philosophy of this thesis, objectivity is regarded impossible, as the world is considered to be subjective to each person and knowledge exists in interpretations (Burr 2015, 172; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 13–14). Additionally, the context is a prominent character in most interpretive consumer research (Arnould et al. 2006, 106). In other words, the findings presented in this thesis do not represent an objective truth or facts, but instead they are interpretations of the phenomenon (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 150). Consequently, there is no objective criteria for evaluation, because of the contextual and plural nature of knowledge in cultural consumer research (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 22). As Burr

(2015, 177–178) argues, the classic concepts of reliability (repeatability of the findings) and validity (how accurately scientific explanations describe the real world), as they are conventionally understood, are not suitable for evaluating the quality of social constructionist research. Yet these two, along with generalizability, can provide a basic framework for the evaluation of the research quality (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 290). In this qualitative research context that follows a constructivist philosophical approach, these concepts are replaced with the concept of authenticity and trustworthiness that includes *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 293), originally introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Trustworthiness in general is about whether the findings are an outcome of a systematic process, and whether they can be trusted (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

Firstly, the concept of *credibility* means whether the researcher is familiar with the topic, whether the data sufficiently merits the presented findings and whether the observations and categories are logically linked. It is also about whether another researcher can agree with the claims based on the materials (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). Lincoln and Guba (1985, 304) present that in qualitative inquiry, credibility can be increased through *prolonged engagement* (how much time is spent on the research) and *persistent observation* (focusing on the most relevant issues). Despite the data was generated in one-time focus group settings and within a month, prolonged engagement was applied through the length of the research process (8 months). In other words, the researcher was engaged with the topic during this whole time. However, getting too absorbed in the research context can be risky (Arnould et al. 2006, 108–109), so the researcher tried to get distance to the research by taking breaks of few days at a time. Persistent observation, in turn, was not fulfilled in the one-time focus group settings, but as the researcher spent the 8 months on the topic, it helped her in focusing on the elements that are most relevant. Furthermore, the questions presented in the focus groups were modified especially after the pilot focus group, which helped in focusing on the relevant issues in the following groups.

Transferability, in turn, is about showing the degree of similarity with previous research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294), thus fittingness with another context (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 124). As in quantitative research, it is not about whether another researcher can come to similar findings by replicating the study nor about generalizing the findings

to broader contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 291; Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 29), but about whether any similar findings can be found in other contexts (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 30). In this thesis, multiple similarities with previous studies were presented, which supports transferability. However, as the barriers and drivers have not been studied in the context of practices that much, the credibility could be better in that sense. Furthermore, the context of this study was narrowed to young Finnish consumers, so the findings cannot be applied as such to other countries or other age groups. Hence, transferability is also about providing enough description of the context of the research, so that it can be determined whether the findings apply to another context (Lincoln & Guba 2013, 105). In this sense, transferability was increased here by describing the Finnish context in the introduction as well as providing information of the selection of the participants and the data generation process in this research context.

Dependability is concerned with the researcher's responsibility to offer information to the reader so that it can be identified that the process has been logical, traceable and documented (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). In other words, it is about whether it can be determined that the findings are an outcome of a consistent, dependable process (Lincoln & Guba 2013, 105). To achieve this goal as well as to increase methodological and theoretical transparency (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 28), the whole research process was described here from the point of theory development to the philosophical assumptions and methodological choices, followed by the description of data generation and data analysis, and finally the findings. Describing the conduction of the method is also important in terms of transferability (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 31).

Additionally, describing the collection and the analysis of the data can help in judging the findings (Spiggle 1994, 497). This description was provided in Chapter 3, but it is extended here based on Spiggle's (1994, 497) propositions. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed, which is important for doing the analysis in a systematic way (see also Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 28). The transcription and the first coding of the data were conducted in the same order as the groups were conducted, but later the transcripts were gone through again (in the same order) and compared to ensure that former and latter data was addressed to same extent. In addition, due to the iterative nature of the analysis process, initial interpretations were modified and iterated during the

process. Despite the interpretative nature of the data analysis, the logic behind the interpretations was demonstrated in this thesis (see Chapter 3) as well as backed with literature. Finally, the presented findings were supported by quotations from the data in order to increase their traceability and transparency.

Confirmability is about linking the findings and interpretations to the data (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294), thus demonstrating the dependability of the data collection and inquiry processes (Lincoln & Guba 2013, 105). In this thesis, this was ensured especially by providing concrete quotations from the data, which supported the key findings as well as the conclusions drawn from them. This way it was demonstrated that the interpretations were not just the imagination of the researcher (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). However, following the social constructionist paradigm and *reflexivity* that it requires, the intrinsic involvement of the researcher was acknowledged and reflected on throughout the research process (Burr 2015, 172; Patton 2015, 684). In other words, the perspective, the assumptions, and the prior knowledge of the researcher affected especially the interpretations of the data, so perhaps another researcher would not have come to similar findings. All in all, it is acknowledged that there can be wrong as well as multiple good interpretations in qualitative research (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 26).

Triangulation, which is presented as a method to increase confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 2013, 105), is conventionally presented to increase the *validity* of the research by using multiple data sources, methods or theories (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 293–294). This type of triangulation does not apply to qualitative research, so here it is rather about displaying multiple realities simultaneously and thus adding richness and breadth to the inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 8). This thesis adopted the specific *activity focus group* method that was brought to the practices' context, so it was considered adequate to focus on this one certain method. Yet it is important to point out that using a particular method does not make the research more trustworthy, despite the fact that it might suit the research context perhaps better than some other methods (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 26). Therefore, for example, using multiple methods to generate different kinds of data would have been beneficial in terms of triangulation. However, including the activities in the focus groups helped in generating rich data that was relevant in this particular context (see Patton 2015, 684). Additionally, the triangulation of sources was

fulfilled (see Lincoln & Guba 2013, 106) at least to some extent, as data was collected from multiple focus groups with altogether 13 participants, and mostly the same questions were presented in all groups.

Finally, in terms of the method, the focus was limited to the discussion of the participants due to the limited capacity of the researcher, even though both social interaction and influence could be observed in focus groups (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 174). In other words, adding the observations would have provided data on the social interaction and perhaps revealed more issues related to the social influence in food consumption practices. Additionally, the participants knew each other from before, which was argued to be beneficial for the natural discussion while doing the activities. However, perhaps having strangers as participants could have generated different kind of views. In general, the stages of the focus group sessions as well as the questions used in them were described in Chapter 3 and in Appendix 1 in detail in order to increase transparency and dependability. This was considered important, especially as the method adopted a new form in this thesis.

5.3 Contribution of the research

In this section, the contribution of the thesis is addressed first from the theoretical viewpoint, followed by the presentation of the practical implications. The contributions that add to the research field are addressed from methodological, theoretical and contextual viewpoints. The practical implications, in turn, concern the usefulness of the thesis for marketing practitioners.

5.3.1 Theoretical contribution

To make a contribution is not an easy task, and doing something new in research is necessary but not sufficient to make a significant contribution (Ladik & Stewart 2008, 160–161). Contributions can be viewed from different perspectives, and based on the propositions of Brinberg and McGrath (1985), Ladik and Stewart (2008) identify three domains for contribution: *method*, *theory* and *context*. As Ladik and Stewart (2008, 162) present, the key to success is to assure that there is a meaningful contribution in at least

one of the domains, but, it is very challenging to provide important contributions in all domains.

Firstly, according to Ladik and Stewart (2008, 162), it is possible to make a *methodological* contribution either by developing a new method or refining an existing method. This study refined the focus group method by adding the activities of grocery shopping and cooking to the discussion. The outcome was a new form of focus group study, which was named an *activity focus group*. In this refined form, the fundamental idea of focus groups (discussion about a certain topic) remains, but it happens while conducting the activities. The activities used here related to the specific context of this research, *food consumption practices*, but it does not mean that activity focus groups could not be applied to other (practices') contexts by changing the activities. These contexts could be, for example, other issues related to sustainable consumption such as food waste or shopping for clothing. To conclude, the methodological contribution of this thesis is refining the focus group method and thus generating a completely new form of it.

Secondly, in cultural consumer research, it is expected that the research contributes to the existing literature and theoretical debates (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 41). Theory is essential for defining the purpose of the research and the methodological choices, but the research can also develop the theory and add new insights on the phenomena that the theory describes (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 41). Based on this view, building a theory is about challenging and extending the existing knowledge and focusing on aspects that the existing theoretical models do not address.

As Arnould et al. (2006, 112) state, new theoretical insights can be gained by applying a different theoretical template to a certain consumer phenomena. Hence, *theoretically*, this research contributes to consumer research and sustainable consumption research field by taking a *social practice theory* perspective to examine change in consumers' food consumption practices towards a *plant-based diet*. According to Halkier and Jensen (2011), researchers can take advantage of the social practice theory perspective, as it helps in analysing the complexity of consumption as well as how it is merged into social reproduction and social change. However, social practice theory is more of a perspective than one single theory. This thesis addressed the most relevant topics inside the

perspective, in the context of changing practices, and combined them with the previous studies of barriers and drivers for consuming plant-based food. Additionally, it approached the phenomenon with a social constructivist viewpoint and focused on consumers' subjective perceptions of the barriers and drivers.

Apparently, the barriers and drivers for changing food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet have not been addressed in previous literature, despite practice theory having been applied to studies of sustainable consumption (e.g. Hargreaves 2011; Shove & Walker 2010) and the barriers (and drivers) have been studied from, for example, more cognitivist viewpoints (e.g. Hoek et al. 2017; Pohjolainen et al. 2015). However, this thesis does not attempt to fill a gap in research (see Ladik & Stewart 2008, 162), but rather approaches the phenomenon that has been addressed in previous literature from a new theoretical viewpoint. Additionally, *the social environment* surrounding food consumption practices is not (as far as is known) addressed from a barriers and drivers point of view in the context of a plant-based diet, despite the role of social environment having been emphasized in the applications of practice theory (see Halkier et al. 2011, 9–10). To conclude, this thesis extends the existing theories and provides a new innovative framework (see Spiggle 1994, 501), which integrates barriers and drivers into practice theory and to the social environment of consumers.

Finally, *contextual* contribution is the substantive domain or range of the phenomenon in terms of geography, industry, or type of a customer, among others (Ladik & Stewart 2008, 162–163). As Arnould et al. (2006, 122) conclude, selecting a context that is significant in the lives of many consumers (here food consumption) and seems to have paradoxical elements (barriers and drivers for consuming plant-based food) is likely to provide theoretical insight (if combined with careful study and broad description). This thesis provided understanding of how young Finnish consumers perceive the change in their food consumption practices towards a plant-based diet. Therefore, it provides a contextual contribution by combining the geographical context (Finland) with the type of consumer (age group of 23-27 years). Additionally, this thesis gives insight about how barriers and drivers for consuming plant-based foods are perceived (in the context of practices), and thus contributes to the plant-based food industry and plant-based foods as a research topic. Figure 9 illustrates the contributions of this thesis.

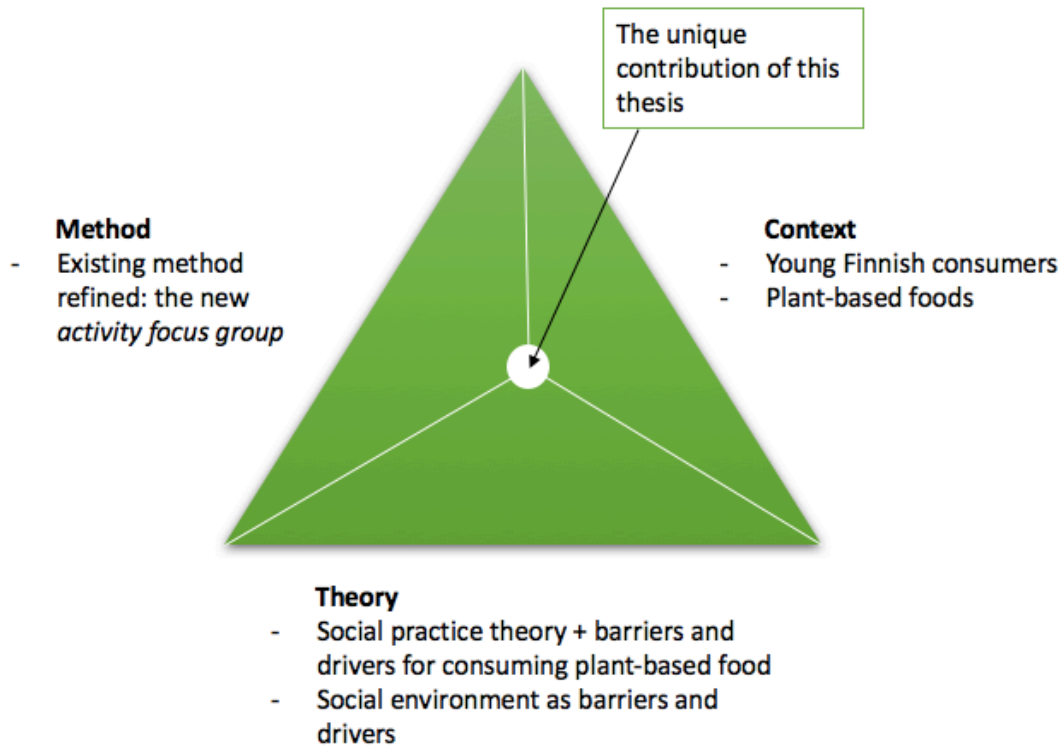


Figure 9. Contributions of the thesis (based on Ladik & Stewart 2008, 162)

The intersection of these three domains (presented in Figure 9) is most likely to provide a strong contribution as it is the unique contribution of a research (Ladik & Stewart 2008, 162). To conclude, the combination of the presented contributions in the different intersecting domains is the overall contribution of this thesis.

Furthermore, Ladik and Stewart (2008) illustrate different types of contributions with a *contribution continuum* (Figure 10 below) that range from straight replication to development of a new theory to predict a new phenomenon. Commonly in marketing research, the contributions set between positions 2 and 5. In this thesis, the contributions are proposed to be closest to position 3, *extension of a new theory/method in a new area*, as illustrated in Figure 10.

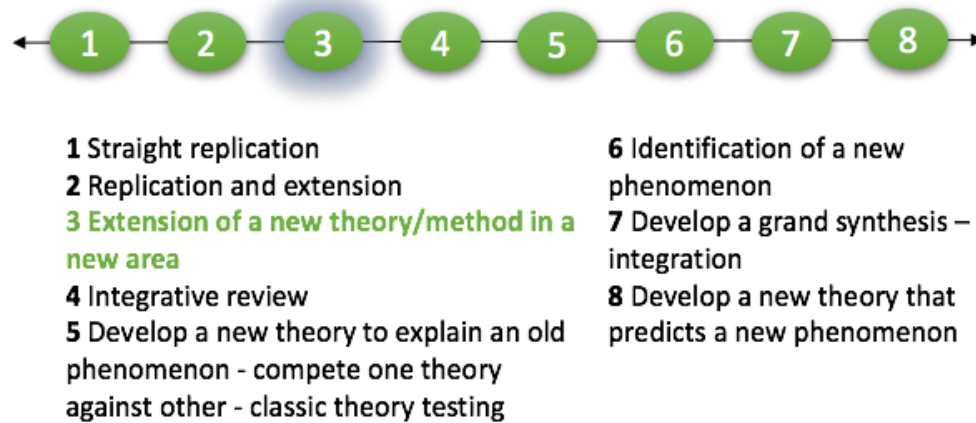


Figure 10. Contribution of this thesis on the contribution continuum (adopted from Ladik & Stewart 2008, 163)

Despite this type of contribution (position 3) being very similar to the contribution in position 2 (Ladik & Stewart 2008, 163), this thesis did not replicate a previous study, as a new approach and framework was combined from previous theoretical propositions. By doing so, this thesis expanded the issue of barriers and drivers for consuming plant-based food to the context of *food consumption practices* and their *social environment*. Hence, it was demonstrated that previous findings in literature (mostly barriers, but also drivers) are not results of a one-of-a-kind event, and they can be expanded to other theoretical and practical contexts (Ladik & Stewart 2008, 163). Most importantly, this thesis developed a new method by refining an existing method. This method was then extended to a new area: food consumption practices and their change towards a plant-based diet.

5.3.2 Practical implications

The value and quality of any marketing research is evaluated in terms of its usefulness in the real world (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 38–39). However, as no objective accounts of reality can be provided, the research can help marketers in, for example, reflecting their role in the market and understanding the complexity of the marketplace (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 38–39).

This thesis aimed at providing an understanding of what consumers perceive as barriers and drivers related to a plant-based diet in the perspective of changing their daily food

consumption practices. In general, it helps marketing practitioners to understand the nature of food consumption practices and the framework for their change. The theoretical framework helps practitioners also to make sense of the findings (Arnould et al. 2006, 106). The empirical findings that revealed both barriers as well as drivers, also stemming from the social environment, can help marketing practitioners to develop their products and marketing efforts to better suit the needs of consumers. The findings are useful especially to those marketing practitioners working with plant-based food products.

Firstly, the perceived barriers related to meat substitute products, such as the processed image or the problem with imitating meat, can help companies in innovating their products and in increasing sales by overcoming the consumer barriers. On the other hand, drivers such as the variety these products bring or the effectiveness of their production, could be emphasized in the marketing efforts and product development. In general, the findings highlighted also the lack of information in terms of cooking plant-based meals or the contents of plant-based products as well as their health effects. This issue could be addressed by marketing practitioners through educating consumers and providing them with better information, such as easy recipes and evidence of the benefits. Health was highlighted in the findings over the environmental and ethical dimensions related to plant-based eating, thus the positive health effects should perhaps be better emphasized in the marketing of plant-based products.

Furthermore, the findings of this study provide marketers information about the role of social environment in the food consumption practices of consumers. For example, especially the negative perceptions of plant-based eaters (as well as meat eaters) as a group can be beneficial in marketing efforts that try to strengthen the positive image of plant-based eating. To summarize, the findings can help marketers to understand the barriers that the social environment brings to food consumption, such as being a “difficult person” in a social situation, as well as help to emphasize drivers in marketing efforts, such as sharing the same goal with the company you are eating with to eat more plant-based food.

5.4 Further research directions

There has been an increased interest towards a plant-based diet both among consumers as well as in academic research, as was described in the introduction. However, the topic is quite new, and as far as it is known, it has not been studied from a practices' point of view before. Thus, the focus of this thesis was quite broad, which can help in providing a holistic understanding, but on the other hand it can limit achieving a deep understanding. This limitation provides possibilities for further research: in further research, the focus could be narrowed to barriers or drivers only, or solely to the social environment, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the (social) barriers or drivers.

Additionally, despite the demographic factors were not a top priority criteria for selecting participants, the participants in this study represented quite a narrow age range (23–27 years). Hence, further research could broaden the age range or even study different age groups and compare their perceptions with each other. The focus groups in this thesis brought out that they think it is mostly younger consumers who have positive perceptions of plant-based eating (as it currently seems to be in Finland, see e.g. Keto-Tokoi 2017), compared to older generations, who they think are accustomed to more traditional ways of eating. Therefore, it would be interesting to study the differences between age groups.

What is more, this study was limited to the Finnish context. Especially as it followed the social constructionist paradigm, it was acknowledged that the constructions like shared assumptions of the world, are historically and culturally specific, which is why they cannot be applied to all contexts (Burr 2015, 4). However, as the challenges of meat consumption are global issues, it would be fruitful to examine the barriers and drivers for changing food consumption practices in other cultural contexts as well. Finally, the participants in this study lived in urban areas. Therefore, it would be interesting to study consumers in rural areas, where the latest food trends might not diffuse that quickly.

Despite food consumption being routinized and daily behaviour, food is also much more than fuel for consumers. For example, food consumption practices are also expressions of one's identity, especially when it comes to meat (Beverland 2014, 374), and adopting a plant-based diet is also about adopting a new identity (Boyle 2011). These issues were

not addressed in the boundaries of this thesis, thus, the role of identity-related factors in changing food consumption practices could be another further research topic. In relation to this, the meanings and symbols that consumers attach especially to a plant-based diet could be examined further. This would provide a better understanding of the image-related factors, which seemed to play an important role in the change process.

Furthermore, as this thesis adopted the social practice theory approach to studying food consumption, the cognitive choice processes of individual consumers were left out. However, as Sahakian and Wilhite (2014, 27) suggest, the change in habitual practices depends on how strongly they are attached to the cognitive processes as well. These processes play a significant role, for example, in doing grocery shopping. To summarize, while the cognitivist approach has been criticized for not addressing the social life of consumers (Hargreaves 2011, 89), the topic could be studied also from this viewpoint to provide an understanding of what factors affect the choices that are part of everyday food consumption practices.

Finally, this study left out the corporate perspective. However, as there are more and more innovations in plant-based food products, as presented in the introduction, it would be fruitful to study the topic from the marketing practitioners' viewpoint. It would be interesting to examine what kind of issues, like the barriers and drivers presented in this research, marketers are addressing (or not) in their marketing efforts. Marketing efforts of animal-based products and the way how meat is appropriated, for example, have been studied in earlier research (see Beverland 2014, 377). On the contrary, the latest plant-based meat substitute products, such as pulled oats, have come to the market only recently, so perhaps they call for more research. Additionally, it would provide useful information to marketers to study how consumers perceive the marketing messages of plant-based food products.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Questions presented by the researcher in the activity focus groups

- If you think about plant-based diet, what comes to mind first? How would you describe or define a plant-based diet?
- Have you tried any plant-based food products? What kind of experiences do you have?
- Think about why you chose these ingredients. Were there any difficult or easy choices? Why so?
- Could you imagine yourself choosing these products if you were grocery shopping in a normal situation?
- Describe the food-related practices in your daily life: for example, how often do you cook, do you eat outside the home, where do you go grocery shopping and how often?
- Would you like to change something in your current food consumption practices or diet?
- Are there other people in your household? Describe their role in your daily food consumption practices.
- What kind of a role do any other people have in your food consumption practices? Who are these people?
- What do you think, what kind of people follow a plant-based diet? What kind of people do not?
- Describe your current relationship with meat.
- Imagine that you would be allowed to eat meat only 1-2 times a week. What kind of thoughts does this evoke?
- How did this grocery shopping and cooking session feel like?
- Is there still something you would like to discuss or say?

APPENDIX 2: Photographs of the ingredients and meals in the activity focus groups



Group 1: Pasta sauce with mushrooms, spinach, zucchini, cherry tomatoes, parmesan cheese, oat-based “cream” and canned artichoke hearts.



Group 2: Rice noodles and sauce with Mifu, mushrooms, red onion, zucchini, pepper, sugar peas, coconut milk and Thai paste.



Group 3: Seitan kebab with sweet potato fries, salad with cherry tomatoes, cucumber and Cantaloupe melon.



Group 4: A pie with feta cheese, spinach, cherry tomatoes, spread cheese and mozzarella cheese. Dough made of milk, flour, butter and eggs. The pie was served with salad with cucumber, cherry tomatoes and seeds.