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# Cultural influences on perceived information structures and assortment varieties

- a comparative study of Middle Eastern and Swedish consumers

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## ABSTRACT

<b>Title</b>	Cultural influences on perceived information structures and assortment varieties - a comparative study of Middle Eastern and Swedish consumers
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<b>Advisor</b>	Ulf Johansson
<b>Key words</b>	Culture, Attributes, Assortment variety, Perceptions, Attitudes.
<b>Thesis purpose</b>	The purpose of this study is to investigate and compare how and why consumers of different ethnic backgrounds value and prioritize product attributes among food, in certain ways. We expect to find culturally bound attitude differences and our aim is to relate those to, and challenge, present knowledge of information structures. Consequently, we also aim to use this new knowledge of attribute attitudes in connection to assortment variety theory, as attributes constitute important motives to how consumers perceive variety.
<b>Methodology</b>	The thesis has an interpretative approach using induction and qualitative data collection. Attitudes and consumer perspectives are studied.
<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	A theoretical framework was constructed to suit our purpose and function as an analytical tool, consisting of Culture perspectives, Information structures (product attributes), and Assortment variety.
<b>Empirical data</b>	Semi-structured, shorter interviews were conducted with respondents representing Middle Eastern and Swedish cultures/ethnic backgrounds.
<b>Conclusion</b>	Middle Eastern and Swedish consumers vary in their preferred attributes. Commonly, quality is highest valued but differs in meaning between the groups. Culturally bound reasons are connected to loyalty, level of innovativeness, and knowledge of the market environment. Awareness of the diverse priorities will provide a strategic tool for retailers and manufacturers to offer more profitable assortments.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Lund and Malmö, in May 2006

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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*This first chapter gives the reader an understanding of our interest to study attitudes of consumer groups with different ethnic backgrounds, as part of a wider perspective of food retailing and assortment strategies. Our aim is to produce a clear picture of how this topic is contemporary and relevant to marketing and actors of the food industry.*

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## 1.1 background

With an increasing international migration involving various cultures, domestic markets are expected to experience new, cross-cultural consumption patterns<sup>1</sup>. An important consumer group in Sweden comes from Middle Eastern countries, and eating habits is one of the most culturally bound traditions which imply that differences can be expected among food products<sup>2</sup>. The large and growing number of foreign food stores support this assumption. In Malmö, you will note a large number of foreign food stores trading products that cannot be found, or are found unsatisfactory, in ordinary Swedish retail stores. For example, halal<sup>3</sup> meat, special types of rice, certain vegetables and herbs are sold in Middle Eastern stores. And usually, the prices are significantly lower there than in the ordinary Swedish retail stores.

## 1.2 consumer population

We have chosen to give this study a consumer perspective and being on the Swedish market we decided to compare consumers born in Sweden with a consumer group that represents a large part of consumers that were born in a foreign country with dissimilar traditions; Middle Eastern consumers. The ethnic focus thereby represents consumers of Swedish and Middle East heritage<sup>4</sup>. The research is carried out in

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<sup>1</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> According to Livsmedelsverket Halal means "approved, clean", and accounts for the food approved by Islam's holy book, the Koran. Halal food include: all vegetarian products and sea-products. Only meat products from ruminant animals with split cloves, and that has been slaughtered by halal methods are approved. The opposite term is Haram = forbidden. [www.slv.se](http://www.slv.se), *Halal – livsmedelsregler i islam*, updated 2002-05-29. 2006-05-06.

<sup>4</sup> The Swedish law defines Ethnicity, or ethnic belonging to (translation): "that someone belongs to a

Malmö.

To clarify the structure of the population we put the information together in a table<sup>5</sup>:

Population 01 January 2005	Sweden (National, N)	% N	Malmö (Regional, R)	% R
Total population	9 011 392	100	259 142	100
Total Immigrants (I)	1 125 790	12,5	68 406	26,3
Middle Eastern immigrants (of I)	222 776	19,8	16 264	23,8

*Immigrant = person born outside Sweden. See Appendix 1 for Middle Eastern definition.*

Sweden has a population of just over 9 million inhabitants, whereof 12,5 % are immigrants, excluding children of parents both born abroad (16,2% including the children)<sup>6</sup>. From the information provided by Statistics Sweden's homepage, we determine that 19,8 % of the immigrants are of Middle Eastern heritage on a national level, accounting for an approximate 225 000 consumers. As you would expect, the percentage differs between regions; big cities usually have larger immigrated populations. For instance, Malmö (where this study was conducted) has an immigrated population of 26,3 %, whereof 23,8 % have Middle Eastern heritage.

### 1.3 food retailing in Sweden

Accounting for 12,5 % of the population, immigrant consumers should naturally be considered in retailing strategies. The next step for manufacturers and retailers is to choose competitive positioning; either they offer low priced or premium valued products<sup>7</sup>. Included in the latter is the opportunity of niche products such as ethnic or

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group of people which has the same national or ethnic origin, race or skin colour", <http://rikslex.riksdagen.se>, 2006-05-24. This thesis uses the definition to explain cultural and traditional differences between consumers born in countries which are perceived as different in food consumption habits. We treat consumers born in Sweden as one group (to make it simple we call those consumers "Swedish consumers/respondents"), and consumers born in the Middle Eastern region as one group (to make it simple we call those consumers Middle Eastern/Immigrated consumers/respondents). No other values are included in this thesis. Ethnic food is a commonly recognised definition of food products that are not traditionally related to Swedish food. It may however become integrated and treated as a commodity over time.

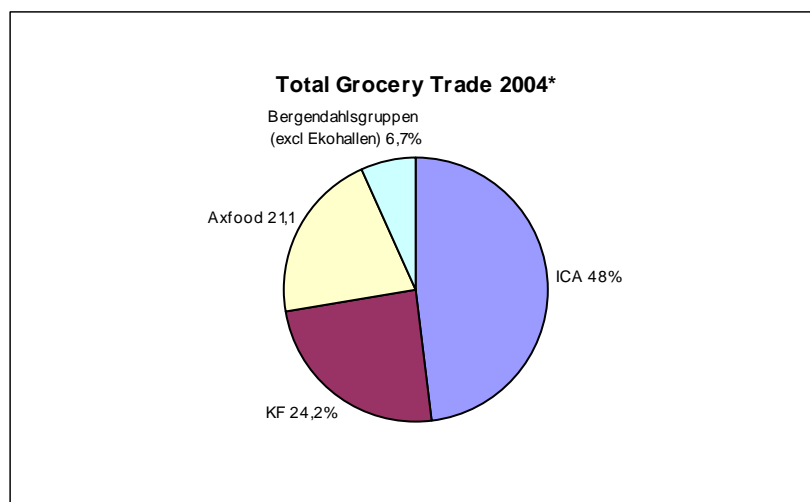
<sup>5</sup> Information by Ewa Undegård, Statistics Sweden, 2006-04-30. Regional information by Elisabeth Pålsson, Malmö Stad, 2006-05-24.

<sup>6</sup> Information by Ewa Undegård, Statistics Sweden. Swedish population 2004-12-31: 9 011 392.

<sup>7</sup> [www.di.se](http://www.di.se), *Den gyllene medelvägen inte kundens val*, published 2006-04-26.

organic food.

In Sweden, food retailing is dominated by ICA, KF, Axfood and Bergendahls-gruppen. Their market shares according to the turn-over in 2004 are shown in the pie chart below. Not included in the chart are Lidl and Netto, who had a turn-over of respectively 2,9 billion SEK and 1,4 billion SEK in 2004<sup>8</sup>:



*Source: AC Nielsen Scantrack. Turnover 2004 Total Grocery Trade = Grocery stores with selling surface > 100 sqm. Excl remaining Bergendahl, non-chain stores, Netto, and Lidl.*

## 1.4 problem discussion

Sweden among most other countries is experiencing an international migration involving various cultures and commonly confusion arise as cultures with varying traditions gather on the same market. Depending on culturally bound habits we consume in different ways and for different reasons, For instance, food retailers and manufacturers are challenged to integrate and prioritise among new values and other preferences in order to design assortment varieties that satisfies a broader consumer base. Understanding key ethnic consumer groups is thereby important in order to expand satisfaction to also include those groups.

Generally, consumers' perceptions and evaluations of assortment varieties are dependent upon whether or not the favourite product can be found<sup>9</sup>. This is a matter of preference, which is linked to certain product attributes forming the preference, for example flavour, price, size or brand. This is common knowledge in marketing theory,

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<sup>8</sup> AC Nielsen Scantrack.

<sup>9</sup> Broniarczyk *et al*, 1998



but how and why are attributes perceived and valued in different ways between different ethnic consumer groups? And more specifically, which differences are key between Middle Eastern and Swedish (born in) consumer groups? In a further extent it is also interesting to investigate the underlying reasons to why people perceive and value attributes in certain ways, as this knowledge will consequently affect assortment variety perceptions and thereby strategies.

We are interested in finding out how the two ethnic groups value attributes and assortment varieties which influence their purchasing decision processes, and also where they shop. We hope to find explanations that explain the diverse attitudes, and we expect to find that those are culturally bound.

## 1.5 previous and ongoing research

In general, theory covering cross-cultural marketing usually focuses on how companies can introduce products into new markets, but doesn't cover product integration between different consumer groups on a domestic market. This specific angle constitutes a knowledge gap which is relevant to research among food consumption, as we know that eating habits vary strongly between cultures. Standardised products are cost effective, but in food assortments it is logical to expect problems when preferences are based on different attribute attitudes. Therefore, theory needs to be complemented using more narrow perspectives of cultural integrations. By suggestions of Wansink *et al*<sup>10</sup> we know that attitudes relating to food products and consumption can be understood by studying cultural influences. Also, Hoch *et al*<sup>11</sup> argue that attitudes are important to understand as they provide a basis for how consumers perceive the assortment variety in a store.

Existing theory of information structures and assortment varieties is rich and we have used a number of articles and literature relevant to the empirical collection and analysis. The problem is culturally bound though, and existing theory does not entirely suit our purpose of evaluating attribute differences between ethnic consumer groups, as the knowledge is based on western markets primarily. The emergence of theory on international marketing and culture is however helpful and has been much beneficial to this research. Usunier & Lee<sup>12</sup> especially have reduced the number of culture bound assumptions needed to make, when relating empirical data to existing theory. Their research includes general attribute differences of marketing across cultures. Mostly, the price-quality perspective is discussed, and their results have been inspirational.

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<sup>10</sup> Wansink *et al*, 2002

<sup>11</sup> Hoch *et al*, 1998

<sup>12</sup> Usunier & Lee, 1996 and 2005

More specifically, we have as expected not been able to find research on attribute comparisons on the Swedish market. One study made by Goldman & Hino<sup>13</sup>, approached the problem on a different market; Israel, based on the fact that Israeli Arabs continue to make parts of their purchasing of food in smaller stores, instead of shopping at the supermarkets where the Jewish population makes most of their shopping. The problem is similar, but our research involves another market, and other ethnic groups.

## **1.6 contributions: theoretical and practical**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and compare how consumers of different ethnic backgrounds value product attributes among food differently. By knowing which attributes that differ in value and priority, and why, existing marketing theory can be challenged and revised to include cultural differences. In a further extent, the re-evaluated theory will provide a new basis for assortment variety strategies, as attributes are linked to how consumers perceive assortment variety. In this thesis, we focus on attitudinal rather than behavioural elements.

Understanding key minority consumer groups is also essential. By identifying the diversions of attitudes towards food attributes, retailers and manufacturers can benefit for instance in the design of assortment varieties and new product development. The problem is therefore also of practical relevance. Many assortments in ordinary Swedish retail stores today include what is perceived as ethnic products, but since similar products with other attribute priorities appear in foreign stores, there is reason to believe that the attribute evaluation differs between consumer groups.

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<sup>13</sup> Goldman & Hino, 2005

## 1.7 problem formulation

Based on the problem discussion and the identified knowledge gap we intend to investigate the following problems in this thesis:

- ❖ Which attribute variables among food products, are perceived as important, and less important to Middle Eastern (immigrated) consumers? For which reasons are they important, or less important?
- ❖ How is this different to how consumers born in Sweden value product attributes?
- ❖ Which effect will this knowledge have on perceived assortment variety?

## 1.8 purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate and compare how and why consumers of different ethnic backgrounds value and prioritize product attributes among food, in certain ways. We expect to find attitude differences which are culturally bound, and our aim is to relate those to, and challenge, present knowledge of information structures. Consequently, we also aim to use this new knowledge of attribute attitudes in connection to assortment variety theory, as attributes constitute important motives to how consumers perceive variety.

## 1.9 conditions & limitations

This research treats attributes, preferences and assortment variety on a categorical and product level only and does not aim to explain those factors on a store level. The research is also limited to consumers' attitudes and does not involve actual behaviour. Although the results are derived only from the information given by consumers, to provide a realistic context for the research, expert sources<sup>14</sup> have been consulted to secure that we choose relevant consumer groups and products.

This research is limited to the Swedish market and its conditions. The research has

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<sup>14</sup> Information by Jörgen Mattsson (ICA Supermarket Malmö), store managers of Middle Eastern stores in Malmö, Ewa Undegård (Statistics Sweden) and Elisabeth Pålsson (Malmö Stad).

been carried out in Malmö, which should be considered when analyzing the results, as those may be less applicable to areas of different configurations (see introductory statistics). We have considered the time limit when designing this research, meaning that the research design would perhaps look different given different time limits.

## 1.10 definition of terms

In this research certain terminology is used. Some of them are defined in footnotes, the rest we explain here:

- ❖ An *assortment* is the collection of products offered to consumers. Assortments can be viewed on a store-level, or category-level.
- ❖ *Attributes* are certain characteristics connected to products. Such as price, flavour, packaging design, origin, colour, quality, etc.
- ❖ *Perception* can be described in several ways: Recognition and interpretation a) of sensory stimuli based chiefly on memory, or b) are affected by insight, intuition or knowledge gained by perceiving, and the capacity of such insight.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.11 the structure of the thesis

Initially, we have described the background and nature of the problem and its context in chapter 1. The problem and the purpose of the research have been clarified together with conditions and limitations. In chapter 2 methodology and the collection of empirical data is explained. How was this research conducted, and what factors must be taken into consideration when analysing the results? The theoretical framework is presented in chapter 3, describing the different elements relevant to the purpose. In chapter 4 the empirical results are presented and analysed, followed by a discussion, contributions and future research suggestions in chapter 5.

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<sup>15</sup> www.dictionary.com, 2006-04-30

## 2. METHODOLOGY

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*The purpose of this research is to detect and compare perceptions of product attributes between two diverse ethnic groups. In this chapter we argue for the methodological and theoretical choices we have made, as well as the interpretational and cultural elements which must be evaluated when comparing groups of different backgrounds. Cultural considerations are presented both here and in the theoretical framework as it applies to both. The methodological design has been the largest challenge of this thesis.*

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### 2.1 choice of subject

Before we started the thesis project, we agreed to find a subject which we found interesting as well as contemporary to each of our interests. During the last year we have concentrated on marketing and consumption on international levels, but we have also experienced working and studying with students from many parts of the world. It was a natural choice to develop an interest for a subject involving consumers of different cultures, not least because we both have different backgrounds. We enjoyed the challenge that this project constitutes and have gained a lot of knowledge about cross-cultural perspectives, importance of humbleness and reflection, both from our team work, the meeting with respondents, and from theory.

Retailing and food products were preference choices we made early. Common interests and the diversity which those categories constitute gave us a large arena to base our research on.

#### 2.1.1 initial problem

Initially we identified a problem based on the assumption that immigrated consumers are lacking products in the ordinary Swedish retail stores. Knowledge of how assortment varieties could include ethnic foods would open up to opportunities and challenges for Swedish retailers. We tested this problem in a pre-study of the market and found that the assumption did not seem to be grounded in reality as most immigrated consumers found all *types* of products they needed in the Swedish stores (see Appendix 2 for a summary of the results of the pre-study). What we had not reflected on then, was that it is not necessarily the products that are missing, but the

preferred *attributes* of the products. This gave us input to the present problem formulation and purpose, which differ from the initial assumption. The pre-study was based upon relevant theory involving perceptions of assortment and variety, as well as private and manufacturer brands.

### 2.1.2 final problem

The findings of the initial study landed in the present problem formulation. Shortly, one can say that our perspective was further narrowed and we excluded the brand perspective in favor of attributes. Before starting the process this would be perceived as a fairly simple task, but the pre-study convinced us that there is a need to understand the underlying reasons to how consumers of different ethnic backgrounds perceive product attributes, in order to predict perceptions of assortment varieties.

The purpose is then to investigate and compare how and why consumers of different ethnic backgrounds prioritize and value product attributes differently, and we expect to find diverse attitudes related to culture and background. In order to understand the core factors of why consumers prioritize attributes the way they do, and how this is linked to their cultural heritage, we need to evaluate subjective opinions within the empirical data and interpret them into logic theory.

## 2.2 research perspectives

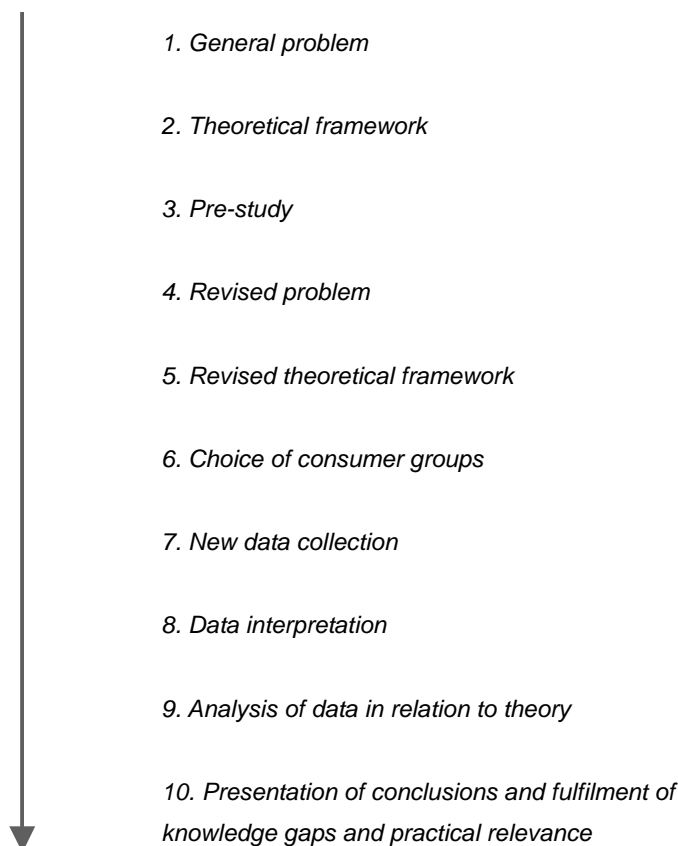
Our purpose includes two major parts: the main purpose is to investigate and compare perceptions towards attributes, and the other part is to link this to perceptions of assortment varieties. We had the possibility to use either a consumer or a retailer/manufacturer perspective, and to look at either attitudes or actual behaviour. Both parts of the purpose include the word *perception* which is simply linked to the way people actually see a reality. And the people most important in this process are the consumers. Further, perception is not based upon actual behaviour, but what consumers think about products when we ask them about it. Therefore this thesis has an attitude perspective, rather than behavioural. The other possibility, to study actual behaviour, would also be interesting, but it would not answer to the question *why?* which we found relevant in order to fill the knowledge gaps of present theory.

## 2.3 research design

When designing the research we were challenged by several issues that are especially relevant to our purpose. Culturally bound factors in relation to methodology were the most challenging parts, such as practical data collection, interpretation considerations, choice and balancing of contrasting ethnic groups, as well as language barriers. Our choices are presented and argued for in the following texts, where we explain the overall process, theoretical choices, methodological choices, and research approach.

### 2.3.1 an overview of the process

The process in which this research was completed:



It is relevant to know that the largest challenge has been to keep a humble approach towards the cultural perspectives. Marketing theory on cultures and internationalisation is often fragmented and culture specific, and much effort has been put into designing the research and being aware of and reflect upon cultural interpretation and nuances between the two consumer groups.

### 2.3.2 theoretical choices

To satisfy our purpose and create a structure for the analysis we constructed a theoretical framework consisting of the three main theoretical fields related to the problems. The theoretical perspectives all relate to each other and have the following order:

- ❖ *Cultural theory* is highly relevant in order to answer to *why* consumers say, perceive and prioritise the way they do. Perceptions are sensitive between cultures and can be expected to differ in expression and interpretation<sup>16</sup>. Culture aspects are discussed both in the Methodology and in the Theoretical chapters.
- ❖ *Information structures* are the gathered sets of product attributes: which attributes are considered, how are they prioritised and what are their meanings? The information structures relate to how assortment varieties are perceived.
- ❖ *Assortment varieties* treat the difference between actual and perceived variety among assortments. Assortments consist of products offering different information structures, and the varieties are judged according to consumers' preferences.

The theoretical framework consists of data collected from literature, marketing and business articles, and also information gathered from internet sources.

### 2.3.3 methodological choices

Epistemology presents two ways of approaching a problem; either by an interpretivistic or a positivistic perspective<sup>17</sup>. Both alternatives demands knowledge to be verified from experience and senses before it is accepted as theory. Interpretivism argues that social realities are subjective which requires special interpretation. Inductive approaches and qualitative methods are preferred and new theory is produced through observations and results, with little or no pre-knowledge. A positivistic view relies on natural sciences and aims to generalise to a larger population<sup>18</sup>. Deductive approaches are used and the researcher is equipped with existing theory from which hypotheses are formed and tested, those studies are

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<sup>16</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

<sup>17</sup> Malhotra *et al*, 2003, and Bryman *et al*, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Malhotra *et al*, 2003.



commonly quantitative.

When we had decided upon which problem to research and which theory that was best suitable as analytical reference we needed to decide upon the methodological choices. Which method of data collection would best suit our purpose? As we were equipped with developed knowledge of information structures, which we aimed to challenge through a cultural perspective, it was not obvious whether to work inductive or deductive, or quantitative or qualitative. For example, we could measure perception with surveys or asking people to prioritise on a Likert scale, which would give fewer nuances but better abilities to generalise<sup>19</sup>. Or, we could conduct focus groups or interviews in order to catch the subjective nuances, which are essential to the understanding of perceptions.

### 2.3.4 research approaches

The context which is being studied in this thesis engages a social reality involving consumers of two diverse cultures, and our purpose aims to explain the basis of different attribute evaluations between the groups. Again, the question *Why* is the key determinant for methodological choice, as we are interested in the subjectively based nuances behind the problem. We are also equipped with theory which does not often explain perceptual varieties between different cultures, meaning that we are hoping to fulfill knowledge gaps of contemporary theory. Those reasons all call for an *interpretivistic* research approach, which is also our choice. *Induction* will enable us to study the social reality and use the impressions to produce knowledge. Alternatively, a *positivistic* approach would give a more general result based on statistical proof. However, it would give limited input to explain the diverse reasoning, and also we were unsure how this method would be perceived by the immigrant respondents. Our pre-study informed us that people are warm, helpful and willing to answer, but also slightly reserved and sometimes suspicious. Technicalities could then be intimidating. As a result of this discussion, we decided to use a *qualitative* data collection method (see 2.5 for choice of qualitative method).

## 2.4 empirical choices

The empirical data collection is based upon our methodology choices. In order to fulfill our purpose, the cultural aspects must be studied and reflected upon before the data collection is started. Our aim throughout the project has been to keep a humble approach to the fact that we are unfamiliar with the field we are about to enter, and

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<sup>19</sup> Rao & Steckel, 1998

that we have to be careful to make assumptions in the design of questions and interview techniques. Also, to be reflexive towards the known theory, as the respondents might confront us with other attributes or perspectives that we had not expected. To be as well equipped as possible, we must learn about the research context.

What makes this even more interesting is that one of the authors is Swedish and therefore has pre-assumptions relating to the Swedish consumers and what to expect from them. But the other author has a completely different perspective, being Chinese, and is therefore more objective in this interpretation. Awareness can be positive or negative, but we both strive for complete objectiveness throughout the project. Both authors are also relatively unfamiliar to the immigrant group.

### 2.4.1 contextual considerations

The cultural and consumer perspectives are central to this thesis. When researching social contexts one must be aware of the differences that can influence the interpretation of data<sup>20</sup>. Some attitudes and behaviours that seem difficult to understand can be explained by the social contexts, and it is a good idea to try to look through the eyes of the respondents<sup>21</sup>. A certain amount of scepticism and openness to unknown alternatives must be remembered in all phases, which is a difficult task. The research design, theoretical and empirical data must be interpreted from the perspectives of both cultures, demanding the researchers to keep a reflexive approach. Naturally, those kinds of considerations apply to both ethnic groups and in this thesis the context represents the culture of both consumer groups as well as the market in which they operate. It is also important to remember that those “rules” do not apply to all members of a group but can be seen as expectations when respondents are met.

As an example, Usunier & Lee<sup>22</sup> stresses that respondents from the Middle East are more likely to communicate in emotional and theatricality ways that are friendship- and relationship building, implying a great sense of loyalty once the friendship is made. When communicating they often look each other straight in the eyes in order to sense the soul and heart behind the conversation. There is a great social security built in their traditions meaning that the cultural bond and solidarity is very strong and you always look after the interests of your friends, immediate and extended family around the world. Also, a large part of the Middle East has great religious influences from Muslim values and traditions.

Sweden, or Scandinavia, and even Northern Europe are often classified as similar in

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<sup>20</sup> Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2002

<sup>21</sup> Bryman & Bell, 2005

<sup>22</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

terms of cultural aspects, even if there are regional differences of course. The form of communication is normally more precise and exact than with Middle Eastern respondents, and religion is less (or not at all) influential in the daily life. The high and low culture context reasoning is explained in chapter 2.6.

Regarding the physical context; the Swedish market and the city of Malmö, it should be considered that immigrated respondents normally have little experience of the Swedish traditions. Whereas the Swedish respondents, naturally, have greater experience, and can also expect to find their preferences in the ordinary Swedish retail stores. The context has been formed from Swedish traditions and values and is then familiar to Swedish respondents, but unfamiliar to the immigrated respondents. But also the other way around, Swedish respondents can be expected to know little or less about Middle Eastern cultures and values. Language barriers and familiarity of products and brands should also be considered.

## 2.4.2 choice of ethnic groups & products

When choosing ethnic groups to study we had three main criteria in mind: 1. one of the groups should be Swedish (born in) as this connects to the comparative purpose of the study. The research is carried out in Sweden and by involving two non-Swedish ethnic groups we would have a three-dimensional problem which was not desired. 2. the other group should be large enough and different enough in order to provide valuable results from the study, and 3. we should be able to find immigrants, i.e. respondents should not be born in Sweden. The intention of the latter choice was to be able to relate statistics, but also to assure that the cultural integration process was not in advanced process as that would complicate our study. By choosing immigrants we can assure the level of integration to be quite restricted.

As argued in the introductory chapter, the Middle Eastern consumer group is one of the largest ethnic groups in Sweden, which is also valid in Malmö where this research was conducted. Middle Eastern culture is quite different from the Swedish culture, which suited our purpose of detecting differences between the two consumer groups. It was also easy to find respondents that were first generational, which responds to our third criteria. Yugoslavians represent the largest immigrated group in Malmö<sup>23</sup>, but this group alone is much smaller than the entire Middle Eastern culture region.

The aim of our pre-study was not only to test the initial problem, but also to detect relevant products for referential use during the empirical data collection. As consumers only gave us limited replies in this area we further investigated the market by ourselves by comparing the assortments between foreign, specialising stores (Middle Eastern and Arabic) and the ordinary Swedish retailers. In order to make the

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<sup>23</sup> Information by Elisabeth Pålsson (Malmö Stad)

correct choices, we asked the foreign store owners which products that were mostly demanded. Our research resulted in six product categories which are all part of a dried food assortment, ranging from pasta, rice, Bulgur wheat, dried lentils, dried beans to dried herbs (see Appendix 4). We checked that the products were all represented in both types of stores, as we wanted both ethnic and non-ethnic consumers to be able to recognise or at least have heard of them. Then it was also much clearer to us that the assortments varied in attributes rather than types of products.

## 2.5 empirical data collection methods

Our purpose is to compare and investigate differences, and also explain why the respondents perceive reality the way they do. For the empirical data collection we had a few alternatives to choose from within the qualitative field, and here it was important that the chosen method gave us information about nuances and encouraged the respondents to subjective replies. In qualitative data collection the most commonly used methods are interviews, observations and diaries<sup>24</sup>. Due to the restricted time limit of this thesis, we decided that consumer diaries and observations of consumers would be too time consuming. Also, observations are more suited for behavioral data collection which does not provide us with the needed nuances of attitudes. The primary data of this thesis was then to consist of some kind of interview method, complemented with secondary data mainly consisting of articles and observations of store assortments.

### 2.5.1 interview method

Our first aim was to conduct focus groups; one with each consumer group. This would enable the respondents to interact and encourage each other with ideas and thoughts. One risk is that some respondents are more dominant than others, which would restrict the results, but conducted in smaller groups Focus groups are normally nuanced and inspiring both between respondents and to the moderator. Focus groups are functional to detect unmet consumer needs which suited our purpose well, as perceptions reflect core needs<sup>25</sup>. However, it turned out that the cultural differences made this mission difficult. The Middle Eastern respondents were happy to answer our questions spontaneously, but quite reserved and suspicious when asked about participation of discussion groups. We contacted Middle Eastern organizations and schools as well people in town in order to find respondents that would like to participate, with negative results.

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<sup>24</sup> Bryman & Bell, 2005

<sup>25</sup> Rao & Steckel, 1998

With the negative results of trying to gather focus groups we decided that two criteria must be met for the respondents in order to participate: 1. *the time aspect* was important and we estimated that 5-15 minutes would be accepted, and 2. *the place* was also important in order to make the respondents feel comfortable. This analysis resulted in our chosen data collection method: shorter interviews of around 10-15 minutes where the respondents are proposed in a familiar setting. The interviews were conducted with one of the authors, in Swedish.

### 2.5.2 respondents

After establishing an interview strategy that was expected to work, we decided to begin interviewing the Middle Eastern respondents. As this group was most unfamiliar to the interviewer we assumed that the replies were going to be most challenging to interpret and they would also give input to the Swedish interviews.

Respondents were asked to participate in an easy environment, and the interviewer made sure before asking questions that each of the respondents were responsible for the grocery shopping in their household. The “sample” was picked randomly. Also, the ability to understand Swedish was central, and all respondents except one spoke what was perceived as fairly well Swedish and the interviewer sensed each respondent’s ability to understand and adapted the level of clarification to that. One respondent had a friend to interpret to her. The Middle Eastern respondents were all approached in RosCent which is a shopping center located in Rosengård, Malmö, an area with a majority of foreign populations. The Swedish consumers were approached in Malmö City and also in Limhamn, in the same way. Our aim was to collect enough respondents of each consumer group to see patterns and get equipped with substantial data, which resulted in 7 respondents from the Middle East, and 8 Swedish.

### 2.5.3 preparations & interview techniques

Before conducting the interviews, the purpose and problem formulation was revised in order to ensure that the needed information would be gathered. An interview-guide was constructed (see Appendix 3) which purpose was to function as a support for the interviewer, so ensure that all relevant data was brought up during the interview. As described, we had decided on which products to use in the interviews and in order to evoke emotions, feelings and opinions regarding the chosen products, we used photo elicitation during the interviews<sup>26</sup>. The products were photographed in one picture and

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<sup>26</sup> Harper, 2002

described by name (see Appendix 4). Using documents like this evoke deeper elements of the human consciousness, but were also efficient as we provided inspiration for the consumers when we approached them<sup>27</sup>.

One of the purposes of our research is, again, to answer to *Why* consumers perceive attributes the way they do, and this aims to produce subjective replies which we need to interpret. Open answers are therefore required, and the interviewer always asked the questions in an open manner to give the respondent a chance to reply unaided. But, as we were interested in some main attributes based on the theory of information structures, we used a semi-structured technique together with the interview-guide. The limited time and also the knowledge that the interviewer approached people without warning could constitute a risk that the respondents could not recall all relevant information. The semi-structured interview method enabled the interviewer to follow a fairly structured guide which also gave the respondent great freedom to answer openly<sup>28</sup>.

During the interviews the respondents were asked to reply to a number of questions relating to our purpose and the products. To ensure that the interviewer understood and interpreted the replies in a correct manner, the laddering technique was used<sup>29</sup>. This is a technique that enables the interviewer to explore the behind laying reasons to why the respondent answers the way he/she does. This technique was of great help for two reasons: 1. It provided explored meanings of the respondent's answers, and 2. it was used as an interpretative tool afterwards. However, the aim was not to force the respondents to over-analyze, as that might lead to that the respondents start an intellectual evaluation instead of an emotional. The effect of laddering is to provoke emotion and inner motives<sup>30</sup>.

No respondents were in any way related to the interviewer which eliminated the interviewer bias which may occur when relations exist. The interview-guide was however tested on a female relative, to ensure that it made sense and followed a logical order.

## 2.5.4 putting the data together

The interviews were taped in 8 cases, and as not everyone was open to be taped the interviewer took many notes during the interviews, and then transcribed them to the computer the same day. This enabled us to make sure that the important nuances and answers were not mixed up or forgotten.

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<sup>27</sup> Thelander, 2006

<sup>28</sup> Bryman & Bell, 2005

<sup>29</sup> Easterby-Smith *et al* 2002

<sup>30</sup> Aylward, 2003

## 2.6 interpreting & analyzing the collected data

Usunier & Lee<sup>31</sup> identifies ten different sources of culture where traditions are especially relevant and expected: Language, Nationality, Education (general), Profession (specialized education), Group (ethnicity), Religion, Family, Sex, Social class, and Corporate or organizational culture.

This thesis is especially involved with Group, Family, and a form of organizational culture which we relate to the solidarity and strong sense of community the immigrated group has. Religion is also relevant, although not to the products we used during the interviews. As authors and responsible of the interpretation and analysis of data we need to be flexible and open to where culture might be an issue, or not.

Interpretative techniques involved being aware of<sup>32</sup>: the unspoken word and the meaning of un-verbal communication, what is explicitly said is not necessarily implicitly meant, and that interpreters may not necessarily interpret directly. In one of the cases one woman interpreted the answers of another. As the interviewer does not speak Arabic, we must believe that there is a chance that the translation was not entirely correct, however the questions are not in any way sensitive and the reason to manipulation is small. To avoid confusion when someone replied in a non-verbal manner, or in any other way showed that the reply was not entirely verbal, the laddering technique was used and the interviewer asked the respondent if she interpreted the communication in the correct way.

Qualitative data can be interpreted in content analysis or grounded analysis<sup>33</sup>. Content analysis is more objective and deductive in its approach, and aims to find clarity at the end of the research, whereas grounded analysis has an inductive approach observing subjectivity where the respondents views are respected, contradictions are preserved, and the researcher aims to understand the full context. In our thesis we have used the latter technique during our analysis. This means that we have analyzed the empirical material in order to map out the differences and similarities, as well as contradictions between the respondents. As we are dealing with people, we must expect that some replies will be contradictive and unexpected. However, even though we aimed at nuances, we also used the material to find patterns which provided us with some clarification and assumptions. In order to detect such patterns we have complemented with a qualitative approach where we listed the most frequently proposed priorities.

Some level of bias during the translation process should most likely be expected. First the respondent expresses his/her opinion in Swedish which may or may not be the mother tongue. Then this is translated into English in this thesis.

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<sup>31</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Easterby-Smith *et al*, 2002

## 2.6.1 the relation between thinking & action

In this thesis we concentrate on perceptions and attitudes rather than actual behavior. Respondents however, may give us information which relates to either the actual (empirical) world, or to a potential reality<sup>34</sup>. This means that the responds may relate to either the perceived world which we actually experience, or to an ideal world which partly functions as a motivational ideal, but doesn't correspond to the actual reality. There may in other words be differences between what people say they do, and what they then actually do. To avoid this as much as possible, the interview questions were asked in a manner which encouraged the respondent to reply actual experience. For example, the questions can encourage the respondent to put themselves in a realistic situation, for instance: *“So, when you stand in front of the shelf displaying the assortment of pasta, what is important to you when you choose/ how do you make your choice...?”*

Perceptions are partly formed by our cultural heritage as they consist of past experiences and value perspectives. Further, when we express opinions we choose to only present limited facts, and the line between what is the truth and what is not is culturally bound. After establishing truthful replies, the interviewer must reflect upon cultural interpretations. In our interviews we often rephrased the questions to control that the replies were consistent. Also, some (8) of the interviews were taped, which then gave us the opportunity to interpret the full interview afterwards.

## 2.6.2 high & low context cultures

Communication styles contain cultural aspects that need to be considered in a research situation. Usunier & Lee<sup>35</sup> divides languages and cultures into low-context and high-context. In this research we are comparing empirical data gathered from respondents representing both contexts. Also, the researchers represent both contexts.

- ❖ Low-context cultures are commonly more explicit and precise in their communication. Scandinavian cultures are perceived as low-context.
- ❖ High-context cultures are commonly more complicated in their communication. Middle Eastern and Chinese cultures are perceived as high-context.

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<sup>34</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



Communication doesn't only involve the actual speaking, but also non-verbal communications such as the meaning of silence, eye contact, the environment in which the communications is set, and what people actually mean when they say Yes, or No. In this thesis there are many factors to be considered and in our analysis and interpretation of the empirical data we have considered that people sometimes are being honest in different ways, meaning that some replies have been direct and precise, while others must be filtered through a wider context. One good example of what Usunier & Lee describe as different between cultures is the way the interviewer approaches the respondents. High-context cultures like to talk about their lives and about you during the interview, whereas low-context cultures rather listen to your questions and answer them more directly. Further, even though the authors have been working together before, some culture-bound differences still appear occasionally during the work process, which is inspiring and good learnings.

## 2.7 research evaluation

Qualitative research is suggested to be evaluated differently to quantitative because of its diverse structure and nature, i.e. there is no "one way". Bryman & Bell <sup>36</sup> present the following structure, divided between trustworthiness and authenticity, which has been suggested to qualitative evaluations, (*where all parts relate to quantitative equals*):

### *Trustworthiness*

#### ❖ Credibility (*Internal reliability*)

When studying a social reality it is the researchers' responsibilities to ensure that the procedure in which the research is made is correct and according to qualitative recommendations. The largest challenge of this research has been to interpret the answers from respondents. Naturally, we know what has been said, but the difficulty is to establish when there is reason to believe that there is another meaning to the answer. Respondent validation is one way of making sure that we understood correctly. Our interviews were spontaneously performed though and we did not keep contact details on the respondents. What we did do however to ensure credibility was to repeat answers to the respondents during the interviews, i.e. "*According to my understanding, you feel ... , have I interpreted your answers correctly, or did I miss something?*".

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<sup>36</sup> Bryman & Bell, 2005

❖ Transferability      (*External validity*)

This is the question of ability to generalise, or to transfer our results to a different context. We hoped to find some patterns in the comparison between the perceptions of the two groups, which indicates that if the same social setting and conditions applied, the researcher would be able to produce at least similar results. In order to do so we have presented a detailed picture of the market where the research is conducted together with statistics and individual information of each respondent, an interview guide and overall reasoning. It is however impossible to replicate the exact setting again which limits the level of possible transferability.

❖ Dependability      (*Reliability*)

This is a somewhat vague criterion of qualitative evaluation, which aims to create a full description of all phases, enabling “research accountants” to evaluate the process of which the results spring from. In our thesis we have argued for both theoretical and empirical methodology, and described each phase of the process.

❖ Confirmability      (*Objectivity*)

The ability to confirm objectivism from the researchers’ sides is always difficult in subjective research contexts as qualitative ones. Throughout the process we have discussed interpretations and possibilities related to the data in order to ensure a high level of objectivity. Reflection and flexibility have been lead strategies and culture literature has provided sources of inspiration to interpretations, enabling us to make less assumptions.

### *Authenticity*

- ❖ The authors have strived to produce a fair perspective of the studied context. Both Swedish and Middle Eastern consumers have constituted respondents with no immediate connection to the food or retail industries. They also represent different age categories (stated in Appendix 5) which eliminate the possibility that this research applies only to for example young mothers or students. The ontological and pedagogic authenticities are however more complex for our thesis. The knowledge gaps and practical contributions will not directly constitute a help for the respondents to understand their own or others social contexts. Our aim is instead to provide help for the market actors, who will then use the information to produce better fitted consumer realities.

## 2.8 a critical view of methodology & sources

Qualitative research is sometimes criticized for being too subjective by nature, that the interpretation and assumptions made by the researchers contain too many personal evaluations and that the studies lack in transparency. Further, the almost impossible mission of replicating a qualitative study or generalizing results strengthens the first argumentation of how reliable conclusions that actually can be drawn from the results?<sup>37</sup>

The authors of this thesis have strived to always been aware of this, as argued also under Research Evaluation (2.7), and we have taken those considerations into account when designing the research process and interpreting theory as well as the data collected. As far as being qualitative, we have aimed to produce data which is usable both in practice and in theory. A quantitative research of this specific problem would be difficult to design without making some assumptions and interpretations of the social context.

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<sup>37</sup> Bryman & Bell, 2005

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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*The theory chapter has a logical structure, explained by a theoretical framework model in order to provide an understanding of the specific angle of our researched problem. Consumer attitudes are central to this study, and it is essential to consider the cultural aspects in relation to those, as attitudes can be expected to vary among consumers of different ethnic backgrounds. The methodology chapter includes culture aspects of interpretation.*

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In the model below we present the theoretical framework model which we aim to use as an analytical tool when analysing our empirical data to satisfy our purpose. First, we present cultural theory which aims to explain attitude variations between different ethnic consumer groups. When conducting interviews with respondents belonging to different cultures we will need to be equipped with knowledge of how to understand and interpret the information we are given from both groups. This also includes having a fair understanding of the variations of consumption patterns.

Secondly, information structure is presented which provides knowledge of existing theory of product attributes. Our research aim is to challenge and re-evaluate this in relation to our purpose which means that we must have knowledge of present theory. Within an assortment several attribute elements are set in information structures, and we explore the key attributes such as price and quality, sensory attributes (like flavour and colour), size and brand preferences. Some culturally bound observations are explained, and it will be interesting to see if they match our empirical results.

Third, assortment variety is discussed and the relation between actual and perceived variety. Consumers have perceptions about existing assortments which are based on the subjective judgements of the information structure. The purpose of our third problem is to connect the conclusions of the new, culturally bound information structure knowledge to assortment variety, which defines our practical contributions.

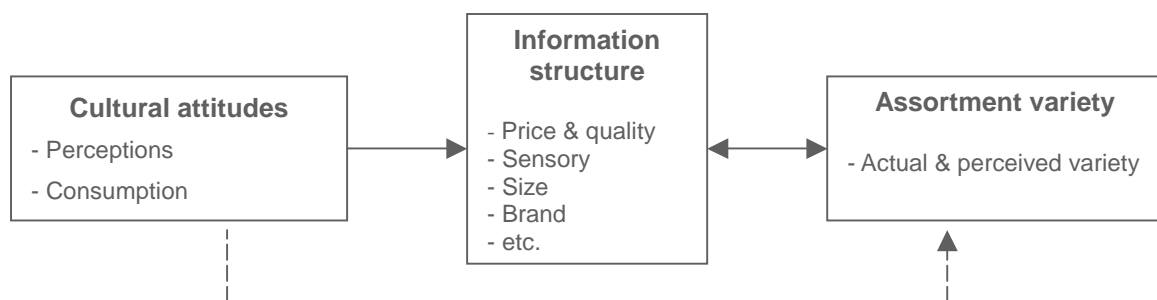


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

### 3.1 a cross-cultural perspective

Different cultural backgrounds affect consumers' behaviour and attitudes toward consumption, which requires an understanding of the cultural influences from the home country. According to Usunier & Lee<sup>38</sup>, consumers of different cultural origins consume groceries differently as their daily consumption patterns are structured by their cultural backgrounds. One of the most important consumption domains is eating habits which is regarded as the origin of, and fundamental motivation for food consumption. It is also considered to include "*the whole process of purchasing food and beverages, cooking, tasting, and even commenting*"<sup>39</sup>. In addition to the social interpretation of eating habits, cultural variations include the quantity of a meal, the composition of each meal, the drink accompanying the meal, the social function of the meal, and the cultural meaning of preparing the meal.

#### 3.1.1 food consumption & life-styles

Usunier & Lee<sup>40</sup> refer to Brunso's five prime areas which are all related to how food lifestyles have been developed in Western Europe:

- ❖ Shopping patterns, like frequency and types of stores
- ❖ Quality aspects such as nutrition and health
- ❖ The relation between price and quality
- ❖ Cooking traditions, such as social events
- ❖ Purchasing motives, such as social relationships

Wansink *et al*<sup>41</sup> early established the importance of understanding different cultural backgrounds and consumers' shopping attitudes toward food consumption, when studying a country's cultural influences. The acceptance of unfamiliar food depends on its ability to appear consistent with cultural perceptions and consumption patterns.

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<sup>38</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

<sup>39</sup> Usunier & Lee, 1996, p.112.

<sup>40</sup> Usunier & Lee, 1996

<sup>41</sup> Wansink & Cheney, 2002

There are two perspectives of ethnic consumption which both provide reasons to why this is a major dimension of cross-cultural consumer studies<sup>42</sup>:

- ❖ The first is that “*ethnic consumption has introduced modified consumption patterns in those countries that have been opened to immigration for some time*”, for example Turkish kebab and yoghurt.
- ❖ The second is “*some ethnic products have reached world-class status by being adopted in most countries of the world, through migration and international travel*”, for example Italian pasta and pizza, and Asian food.

The social interpretation of eating habits, such as the composition of each meal, leads consumers of different cultural background to have different patterns of variety-seeking during the shopping process.

Further, Wansink *et al* defines two critical factors which determine how easily products can be successfully integrated into a new culture<sup>43</sup>:

- ❖ The strength of cultural attitudes and traditions in daily life
- ❖ The general perception of food consumption within a culture

Those are related to people’s decision making processes which are affected by the cultural context (see 2.6.2). Thereby, characteristics of cultural contexts influence food consumption, and different cultural contexts will help to understand how food preferences vary among countries. Higher context cultures result in strong preferences toward cultural traditions and practices. Food presentation, taste and texture are considered as important and it also creates an unwillingness to try foreign food. In contrast to higher context cultures, lower context cultures lead to enhanced individual decisions and preferences, resulting in a willingness to change cultural patterns<sup>44</sup>.

### 3.1.2 consumer loyalty

Cross-cultural studies on consumption patterns also indicate that culture influence

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<sup>42</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005, p.87

<sup>43</sup>Wansink & Cheney, 2002

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

consumer loyalty. Usunier & Lee<sup>45</sup> suggest that loyal and disloyal consumers are distinguished by their level of innovativeness. Loyal consumers prefer to be sure about what products they want to buy. They hardly ever switch products once they have acquired a preference. This behaviour decreases the opportunity to find other, better and more valuable choices. Disloyal consumers are willing to try new items, such as different brands, and gladly shift from one to another when they think that a new product might bring them more value for money. A high level of innovativeness indicates disloyal consumers and vice versa, and national cultures influence this level of innovativeness. A study made by Steenkamp *et al* suggests that consumer innovativeness is higher among people from individualist cultures and cultures with less uncertainty avoidance<sup>46</sup>.

## 3.2 information structure

Information structures are the structure of which product attributes are prioritised and presented among products and assortments. Attributes have been explored by many researchers and the major elements that have been discussed include price, quality, size, and brands. But also sensory attributes, such as design, colour, flavour or taste. For instance, if a manufacturer of soft drinks wants to position itself towards teenagers, it will probably enhance sensory attributes like design and flavour in the product development process, and perhaps also the brand, as those attributes are highly valued and perceived as important determinants in the information structure among the target group. Price is perhaps the least relevant attribute in this case.

### 3.2.1 price & quality

The first attributes discussed are price and quality, which are also the most common and re-appearing attributes. Commonly, they appear together in theory literature where the general idea is that a wide range of prices will increase the perceived variety of an assortment<sup>47</sup>. Quality is often hard to measure objectively, and *perceived* quality is even more difficult to measure because of its subjective nature. Mostly, quality is evaluated among other attributes; *intrinsic attributes* like taste or design, and *extrinsic attributes* like brand or price<sup>48</sup>.

Most common is the assumption indicating that consumers perceive low prices to be

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<sup>45</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Inspired by Broniarczyk *et al*, 1998

<sup>48</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

related to poor quality and the opposite where high prices indicate good quality, indicating a positive correlation between the two attribute dimensions<sup>49</sup>. However, McGoldrick<sup>50</sup> suggests that there is only little or no correlation between the price and perceived quality. He suggests that price may affect the consumers' perception of prestige, but that there is little or no relation to other, more quality related dimensions. Consumers make price evaluations related to internal reference points, meaning that there are certain higher and lower price thresholds within which the consumer is willing to pay for a product. The reference prices can be viewed as internal price standards to which all new prices are compared, and theory suggests that even though price is a relatively concrete attribute in comparison to for example design, *perceived* prices are not.

Bell & Lattin<sup>51</sup> point out that consumers purchase products from a wide range of categories and often visit multiple stores which relates to complex shopping intentions. Consumers sometimes have poor knowledge of product prices and therefore feel a need to compare prices between the different stores in order to make correct decisions. This is a general idea which of course differs between product categories. For example, there is a difference between consumers' price awareness's regarding frequently bought items and less frequently bought items, like cars or food.

Regarding frequently purchased goods, McGoldrick<sup>52</sup> refers to Danaher and Brodie's three generalizations regarding the price elasticity of those products:

- ❖ In low competitive product categories, or storable goods, price elasticity is usually higher.
- ❖ Products with a high market share normally have low price elasticity.

Usunier & Lee<sup>53</sup> emphasizes cultural aspects related to price. For example, the prices in Northern Europe are generally perceived as quite high. But the products are also perceived as very robust and durable. The authors explain those arguments as grounded in a Lutheran lifestyle, favouring material well-being. Northern Europeans expect things to last for a long time and always seek for high quality while looking for the best price-quality relation. Further, consumer goods are experienced more or less immediately after the purchase, and research has shown that given the same price

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<sup>49</sup> Ofir, 2004

<sup>50</sup> McGoldrick, 2002

<sup>51</sup> Bell & Lattin, 1998

<sup>52</sup> McGoldrick, 2002

<sup>53</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005



conditions those products are not necessarily evaluated differently between cultures<sup>54</sup>.

### 3.2.2 sensory attributes

Previous research has studied the impact of different qualities within different categories. Sensory attributes include flavour, design, taste, colour, texture, appearance, etc. Research on food categories indicate that the most important attributes regarding this category include taste/flavour, texture and appearance<sup>55</sup>. For example, the key attribute criteria for wine and cheese are taste and other sensory experiences. When purchasing food, consumers cannot usually taste or try the products before the purchase, leaving them to predict sensory attributes from the available information on the label, such as the area of production, expiry date, origin, ingredients, etc.

Draganska & Mazzeo<sup>56</sup> conducted a study on sensory attributes within the ice cream industry, which can be related to perceptions of quality. The study showed that the flavour was the key determinant when respondents were asked to prioritize which attributes were most important when choosing ice cream. Second determinants were brand and price which the respondents also connected to their perception of quality.

### 3.2.3 brand attributes

Brand is another way for consumers to perceive a product, or an assortment variety. As we described in the methodology chapter, traditional manufacturer brands are competing with an increasing number of retailer brands on the Swedish market today. A study made by Laaksonen and Reynolds<sup>57</sup> suggests that there is a desire from both retailers and consumers to introduce private brands, because private brands have the ability to provide higher margins for retailers and offer better value for money for consumers.

Consumers believe that variety depends upon whether or not their favourite product can be found. Bettman *et al*<sup>58</sup> further describe that the choice process is constructive in situations when consumers do not have well-developed preferences. This means that if consumers lack product preferences, they need more criteria such as a

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Moskowitz & Krieger, 1995

<sup>56</sup> Draganska & Mazzeo, 2001

<sup>57</sup> Laaksonen & Reynolds, 1998

<sup>58</sup> Bettman *et al*, 1998

recognised brand in their comparative evaluation in order to make a purchasing decision. Furthermore, research of the organic food industry suggests that retailer brands have the opportunity to develop competitive advantage by introducing products in niche categories<sup>59</sup>.

However, the brand name is not necessarily the determining attribute, for some product categories sensory attributes will be of higher impact; like wine, cheese, exclusive chocolate, etc. Wine, for example, is often judged by quality of grape and origin, rather than the brand or size.

### 3.3 assortment variety

The information structure along with the organization of the shelves and consumer intentions, are all determinants of assortment variety and thereby affect consumers' variety perceptions. The information structure contains information regarding the attributes of the products included in an assortment. The variety and construction of attributes forms a basis for satisfying the subjective preferences of the stores' customers. Hereby, the assortment offered to consumers has a great impact on variety perceptions, as suggested. Some particular attributes have more impact than others when consumers evaluate variety.

Assortment variety has been reflected in several ways in previous studies. The general definition of variety is being different or diverse in any way. For example, an assortment can vary in size and number of products<sup>60</sup>. The degree of diversity influence consumers to perceive assortments in subjective ways. Due to economic reasons and limited shelf space, understanding how consumption will be influenced by variety of an assortment is one of the key concerns for retailers. Consequently, understanding individuals and their cultural backgrounds is essential when researching consumers' perceptions of assortment variety.

There are two components of attribute structure of assortments<sup>61</sup>:

❖ *Dispersion of the attribute structure*, meaning the relative frequency by how

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<sup>59</sup> Jonas & Roosen, 2005

<sup>60</sup> Herpen & Pieters, 2000

<sup>61</sup> Herpen & Pieters, 2005

often a certain attribute appears within an assortment. The more dispersion, the broader variety. For instance, a wide assortment of pasta would include perhaps three packages of whole grain macaronis, and three packages of spaghetti. A narrow assortment would offer only one package of whole grain pasta, but five packages of spaghetti.

- ❖ *Dissociation or association between attributes* considering systematic links between attributes. For example, imagine a pasta assortment with six products represented by two brands, both offering ordinary as well as whole grain (“flavoured”) pasta. This will give a high disassociation between the brand and the flavour, because there is a low association between the brand name and the flavour. In other words, if a brand name is related to only one attribute, the disassociation is low and association high. The more unique products in an assortment, the wider the variety.

### 3.3.1 actual & perceived variety

Generally, assortment variety can be divided into *actual variety* and *perceived variety*. Actual variety means the number of distinct items, which are based upon two components<sup>62</sup>:

- ❖ *Distinct options* (like colour and flavour), or the number of conceptually distinct subcategories (such as food or clothing).
- ❖ *The number of category replicates* (like shelf space or product organization).

Actual variety can also be linked to the information structure of an assortment, such as attribute differences between each object (i.e. price, quality, packaging, colour, brand etc.), and the combination of attributes (i.e. dispersion and dissociation attributes)<sup>63</sup>.

Perceived variety means how much variety consumers actually see:

*“Perception is concerned with how individuals see and make sense of their environment. It is about the selection, organization and interpretation of stimulating individuals so that they can understand the world.”*<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Kahn & Wansink, 2004

<sup>63</sup> Hoch *et al.*, 1999, and De Vries – van Ketel, 2005

<sup>64</sup> Fill, 2002, p. 63.

Therefore, perception of variety is subjectively determined; meaning what consumers perceive is more determining than the actual reality. For example, blind tests of Coca Cola and Pepsi have shown that the tested consumers cannot actually tell the two drinks apart, but in reality they perceive the brands and tastes as very different indeed<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, perceived variety will be influenced by the number of stock keeping units, availability of favourite product, and information structures like how the shelves are organized, or the combinations of product attributes<sup>66</sup>.

Both actual and perceived variety can affect consumers' buying behaviour and their consumption. Actual variety in particular can give impact on how consumers perceive variety, for example, research has shown that larger assortments are always preferred<sup>67</sup>. A large assortment equals a larger actual variety, which will improve the chances of matches between the assortment and what the consumer is searching for. Perceived variety on the other hand, is dependent upon factors such as availability of favourite products, whether or not the consumer can easily find the products, and the range of prices within the offered assortment. The perception of a wide assortment will increase with the availability of favourite products, as those will be more easily noticed than other products in an assortment. This means that there is a consequential link between actual and perceived variety: the consequence of a large actual assortment is an increased perception of the assortment variety.

### 3.3.2 the importance of variety

Variety is important to consumers as they prefer to be informed, or inspired, about the various product options in the store rather than figuring it out by themselves at home. If consumers lack well formed tastes or preferences, they will seek for other criteria, or heuristics variables, to make their decisions<sup>68</sup>. For example, although people sometimes make shopping lists before going to the store, they may not necessarily know on forehand which exact products they'll buy (like which brand, what size, what colour, etc.). The store functions as a source of inspiration to the consumer, and therefore it is important for the retailer to identify the key attribute elements in order to design a matching product assortment structure. Consequently, by offering an attractive (actual) assortment variety, retailers can enhance the perceived variety among consumers within a limited shelf space. According to Broniarczyk *et al*<sup>69</sup> retailers must embrace *efficient assortment* in order to keep up a competitive advantage, for example, cost reductions of keeping broad assortments with low-

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<sup>65</sup> Rao & Steckel, 1998

<sup>66</sup> Broniarczyk *et al*, 1998

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Herpen & Pieters, 1999

<sup>69</sup> Broniarczyk *et al*, 1998

selling products. The fear of reducing consumers' assortment perceptions can be avoided by identifying low-preferred products and remove those from the shelves. Items can be removed substantially if the shelf space is kept constant in terms of size, and more space is given to favourite products.

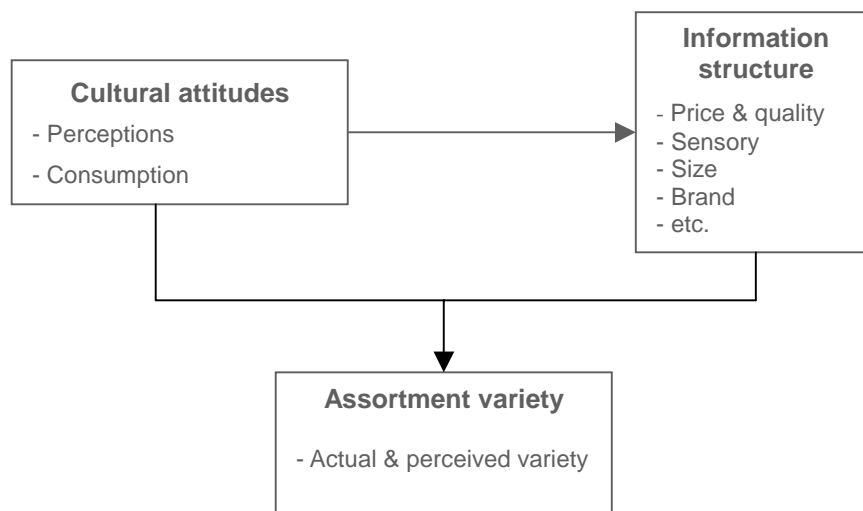
## 4 RESULTS & ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL DATA

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*We will present and analyse the results of the empirical data using the first two parts of the theoretical framework. Cultural attitudes influence the information structure of products and our aim for the analysis is to distinguish which differences that are culturally bound, and why. This knowledge will then be analysed in relation to existing theory of Assortment variety. Appendix 5 contains the empirical data which was used in this chapter.*

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After finishing the data collection we have analysed the empirical and theoretical material. The presentation of the analysis and results begins with Cultural attitudes and Information Structures in combination, because the empirical data showed us that the two are mutually connected. How the respondents prioritise and value attributes is commonly related to their cultural heritage, which was also the initial assumption for the theoretical framework. Also, Assortment varieties are directly affected by both Cultural attitudes and Information structures, as shown in the revised theoretical model below which will be used as our analytical framework. In the following texts we will argue for our analysis and results.



*Figure 2: Analytical framework*

## 4.1 empirical results of cultural attitudes

As argued in theory, eating habits are strongly related to culture and traditions and our results show that there is a great difference in how strongly traditions are followed. For instance, the Swedish consumers seemed to be more fragmented in their eating habits, whereas the Middle Eastern consumers were more precise in their descriptions about what they eat. There is a great difference in the rice consumption for example. Rice is probably considered as a commodity in Sweden, but the ways in which it is consumed varies between the two groups. As Usunier & Lee<sup>70</sup> suggests, this may be a result of how open the countries have been to immigration over the years. Sweden has adopted many foreign food habits, including both pasta and rice, but Swedish consumers don't have the long and strong rice tradition as the Middle Easterners' have.

The high and low culture contexts were obvious in our research and there was a clear pattern between the two groups in the way they communicated. The interviews of the Swedish consumers were in average shorter in time as most respondents politely answered and argued for their answers. The Middle Eastern consumers were more involving, asked personal questions, spoke about their life situation and showed a more "visual" interest in the project. The family was a common subject between the groups, but in different meanings. It is probably a correct assumption to say that Middle Eastern cultures are more traditional in their family structure and hierarchies. Several female Middle Eastern respondents emphasized the importance of being a good cook for your family and friends, which is culturally bound.

Relating to communication is also what is not verbally communicated, and this was particularly obvious within the Middle Eastern consumer group. As part of the emotional involvement the respondents were often theatrical in their communications. Sometimes the interviewer had a feeling that some respondents avoided the questions, perhaps not by intention, but a sense of "speaking around the subject" was felt. Laddering was used to ensure that the interviewer interpreted the replies in a correct manner as there was a risk that the replies may come from perceiving an ideal reality instead of perceiving the actual reality. The Swedish consumers on the other hand were more problematic in the way that the interviewer sometimes needed to put a little more pressure than wished in order to gain the necessary information. Once again, laddering technique was used and it usually worked really good to repeat what the interviewer perceived as their priorities, based on the conversation, as they would then add some extra comments to why they perceive the reality in the argued way.

However, there are of course exceptions to everything and we also found quite a great variety of opinions and behaviour within the groups. Our analysis is as argued in the methodology chapter made on Grounded analysis basis, meaning that we proposed the

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<sup>70</sup> Usunier & Lee, 2005

respondents with the aim to collect subjective meanings. Nuances are well preserved as well as contradictions, but we also aim to see a bigger picture with patterns connected to each culture. The cultural bond is strong within both cultures, but more obvious within the immigrated culture. The interviews suggested that the word of mouth “marketing” is well maintained within the immigrated group, which would perhaps also be expected within Swedish minorities in other countries. Even though it was a challenge to interpret the answers sometimes, we still believe that our pre-knowledge of being aware of what to expect helped us to make good judgements for the replies of both groups.

## 4.2 information structure analysis

We have gathered the Middle Eastern respondents’ attribute priorities in a table, stating first and second priority:

	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Price</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Brand</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Priority 1</b>	6		1		1
<b>Priority 2</b>		3	1		2

*N=7*

Sometimes the respondents have given different priorities to different products; we have then chosen the priority made of the product most frequently consumed. Most commonly the attributes for the Middle Eastern consumer group applies for rice. Rice was considered a necessity with all respondents, and very much culturally bound as they in most cases bought rice from foreign stores. Pasta is a product category which is used more and more within this consumer group, especially among families with children. However, pasta is not a traditional ingredient, but more often adopted from living in Sweden. For example, the children get pasta in school which influences the families to try it at home. Here, we have chosen to analyse the arguments for rice, as this is most relevant according to the cultural perspectives for Middle Eastern consumers.

The average size of household is 4 (median), ranging from 1-6 persons. Out of 7 households, 3 had one or more loyalty cards with a food retailer.



The replies of the Swedish respondents have been put into the chart below:

	Quality	Price	Size	Brand	Other
Priority 1	6	1		3	
Priority 2		5	3		1

N=8

Once again, some of the respondents have valued more than one aspect as number one, or two, and therefore the chart contains more replies than number of respondents. Generally the Swedish respondents were more health and brand conscious in their shopping attitudes, also price came up more frequently as a considered attribute. This may have to do with the language context; that the two consumer groups are more or less willing to talk about monetary aspects, which should be considered. More often the family situation changed the food consumption patterns; children will influence what the family eats. Further, the Swedish respondents consume smaller volumes of rice, on average just as often as pasta. Neither of those products are culturally bound, but both have become adopted in their daily lives, and are not considered as foreign.

The average size of the household is 2,5 (median), ranging from 1-5 persons. All households had one or more loyalty cards with a food retailer.

Below we have interpreted and analysed the empirical data in relation to information structure theory and considered cultural elements. We have divided the attributes as described in the theoretical framework, and under each we analyse both consumer groups respectively, ending with a comparative summary.

#### 4.2.1 price attributes

##### *Middle Eastern respondents*

The Middle East consumer group seems to perceive the commonly positive correlation between quality and price differently than theory suggests. Although low price is often argued to be related to poor quality, this consumer group prefers to buy necessities like rice in foreign stores, which are perceived as cheaper than the ordinary Swedish stores. A young woman from Iraq especially points this out as she argues that good quality food can also be bought in low price stores like Överskottsbolaget.

Attribute theory argues that consumers make price evaluations related to internal reference points, such as experiences from their home countries. This means that they

have a pre-knowledge of the price situation of frequently consumed products, like rice. This would mean that, when Middle Eastern consumers shop in ordinary Swedish stores they perceive the price range for rice as limited, although the price range is perceived as satisfactory among the Swedish consumers.

*“I was once fooled by a store manager to buy cheap rice, 10:- per kilo. And he assured me it was as good as the other one I buy. But it was bad, and we had to throw it all away. I know about prices, good rice will cost around 16-17:- per kilo.”*  
*Afghanistan, woman*

Because Middle Eastern consumers have a set pre-knowledge of price as well as quality for their frequent-consumed products, they choose to purchase those products in foreign stores to what they perceive as more reasonable prices. Even though the price might be a little higher than in their home countries, it is still much cheaper than in Swedish retail stores. Their prime intention is finding the right product with other attributes, which implies that the price is only second or third attribute when evaluated. This is supported by McGoldrick<sup>71</sup> as he argues that price and quality are not really related to any further extent than prestige, which would imply that Middle East consumers consider rice as a product of low prestige. Most commonly, price was valued as second priority. However, it was quite clear that many products were bought from foreign stores, most often for the sake of quality preferences, but also for the lower price. This is interesting and strengthens our problem, as even though they perceive the assortment of ordinary retail stores as satisfactory, many products are still purchased in foreign stores because of the information structure. The general idea though is that price cannot substitute quality.

Another reason for how the Middle Eastern consumer group perceived the price and quality relation differently is their consumption quantity. As rice is the most frequently consumed product, lower priced good quality rice is preferred and this combination is offered by foreign stores. Compared to ordinary Swedish stores, foreign stores offer everyday-low-price for the demanded rice.

Reflecting on the culturally and language-related contexts we find that the Middle East respondents did not initially mention price attributes, although they later told us that price mattered less, or not at all, when choosing rice. This reasoning can be explained by the culture context features where Middle Eastern consumers are commonly more complicated in their communication, indicating a need to interpret the reasoning carefully. In this case we believe that price is less important, but that the consumers are eager to find the best price for their demanded quality.

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<sup>71</sup> McGoldrick, 2002

*“When I see something I like, I’ll buy it. I don’t care about the price, it is not important. I don’t consider any quality or brand; I just buy what I like.”*

*Iraq, woman*

### *Swedish respondents*

Price was often second priority to the Swedish respondents. Once the quality was established most consumers checked for different price alternatives. This is in line with the cultural expectations of Northern European consumers, who are known to expect solid, durable products of high quality among most categories. High quality is often related to higher prices as well, they expect to pay extra but are still always looking for a “good price”. One of the respondents was looking for lower prices among dry products, and was more willing to pay a little extra for fresh products like meat or vegetables. The underlying reasoning being that dry food is the same in any store (Barilla pasta in ICA or Willys is the same), but meat and vegetables are perceived as having higher quality in more expensive stores.

*“I guess you could say I buy base products from Willys and fresh from ICA Malmborgs here in Limhamn.”*

*Sweden, woman*

*“I’m quite lazy. I buy everything from ICA Supermarket in Bjärred. Price is less important, especially as I buy such small quantities”*

*Sweden, Woman*

In contrast to Middle Eastern consumers, Swedish consumers do not consume rice so often. Therefore, they care less about the price-quality relation as their counterpart do in this category. Instead, the Swedish consumers value lifestyles and perceive nutritional alternatives as qualitative in relation to this type of living.

Even though the Swedish consumers favoured quality to price in their prioritising, the link was still obvious between the two. And in the case of Swedish consumers, the price-quality relation was much more obvious than among the Middle Eastern consumers. The relation often included brand preferences as an explanation, and as we will explain, pasta had a high brand preference which was related to high quality and taste, with the opinion that price was not considered when purchasing this particular brand. The link represents the valuation of high quality and high price.

## 4.2.2 quality

*Middle Eastern respondents:*

Quality is the most fragmented attribute and among our Middle Eastern respondents quality was perceived in several ways as we expected, due to the subjective ways it is usually perceived by. Most often, good quality is made up of intrinsic attributes like flavour, taste or healthy choices, but also extrinsic attributes such as expiry dates or freshness. Those attributes belong to sensory attributes which will be described below.

Several respondents spoke about sharing advice and recommendations between family and friends which was expected due to the strong bond within the culture; solidarity and looking after your family and friends. Food and other products in relation to product attributes such as quality are discussed. Especially if someone tried a new product, they were willing to discuss the experience with others. This calls for a strong bond and relates to the high culture context described by theory. Whereas low context cultures are more direct and precise, high context cultures are more open and negotiable, and like to communicate their experiences.

*“I ask women in my surroundings to get recommendations on what kind of products to buy. I don’t know about that, I don’t speak the language very well, so I can’t know what’s good or bad.”*

*Iraq, man*

*“You must visit Möllevången on Saturdays. There is so much fruit and vegetables. It is so good; very good price, and very good quality. Go there this Saturday, in the morning.”*

*Syria, Woman*

*Swedish respondents:*

With many Swedish respondents quality was directly related to brands. This suggests that they perceive well known brands as high quality products and use them as quality bench marking. Once again, the Northern European demand for quality is obvious.

*“When I buy rice today I only buy whole grain rice. There is only one to choose from. I used to buy ordinary rice, but since I tried the whole grain rice I stick to it. It tastes much better, and it is much more nutritious.”*

*Woman, Sweden*

We decided to place sensory attributes under quality for the analysis of Swedish consumers. The reason for that is that the sensory elements were mostly connected to healthy lifestyles which are perceived as ingredients for a qualitative life. Attributes such as healthy and nutritious alternatives, as well as flavour were frequently discussed with both rice and pasta, among most respondents. This is however related to pasta mostly, as we noticed a large preference for whole grain pasta alternatives and the fact that pasta is more frequently consumed than rice, on average. The openness to new products and the perhaps less culturally bound eating habits are observable as Swedish consumers seem to quickly adapt to new trends, such as whole grain rice and pasta. In general, Swedish consumers may thereby be more innovative and willing to try new food products than their counterparts, making their purchasing patterns more disloyal to the product.

### 4.2.3 sensory attributes

#### *Middle Eastern respondents*

Sensory features as part of perceived quality are the key determining attributes to the Middle Eastern consumer group. Often, sensory knowledge is formed by consumers' experiences from their home countries. In the case of rice, the Middle Eastern consumer group distinguished different qualities of rice from sensory factors such as colour, shape and origin which is based on their pre-knowledge of rice. This relationship is also argued by Draganska & Mazzeo<sup>72</sup>, often quality is judged from the perception of sensory attributes. Therefore, Middle Eastern consumers emphasize good quality, but not judged from brands or price.

Middle Eastern consumers have a well-established knowledge of rice which leads them to focus on finding the right product/favourite product. Due to environment differences (language, eating habits, etc.), perceived quality is interpreted in several sensory-related ways for the Middle Eastern consumer group. *Origin* is most important, as rice is very traditional and the consumers buy rice from specific regions. Origin is then related to certain *flavours* and *tastes*, for example: Pakistani Basmati rice, or Iranian Basmati rice. Origin together with flavour and taste are all related to sensory attributes. Also, the respondents often check for *expiry dates* and *freshness* of the product. *Health* and *ecological* preferences, together with contents also account for quality according to one consumer.

As consumers usually cannot taste or try food products at the time of purchase, understanding information on labels is of special concern to Middle Eastern consumers with language problems. Ingredients, cooking instructions and nutritional

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<sup>72</sup> Draganska & Mazzeo, 2001

information are usually printed in Scandinavian languages or English only. This is particularly a problem to immigrated consumers as they are acting in an unfamiliar environment with unfamiliar products. Once again, the habit of recommending and sharing advice come handy to consumers, but also touching, looking, and feeling the product in order to establish the quality. An easier way to solve the problem is however to buy products which they are familiar with from foreign stores, which is also done as our research shows that many consumers divide their shopping between Swedish and foreign stores.

*“First, I always check the expiry date of the product. Often it has expired and we have to tell them that. In foreign stores it is really important to check the expiry date. Then I read the table of contents, to see what the package contains. The price is not so important.”*

*Syria, Woman*

Other sensory attributes include packaging, size and cooking time. Needs of larger amounts of rice or pasta linked to consumption frequency and number of persons in the household, leads to different demands of packaging size. As we know, cultural differences like eating habits, the contents of a meal and the consumption of each product, matters to attribute evaluations. Size was not mentioned as a priority more than once, however it was often mentioned as an attribute taken for granted. As rice is a bulk product, size is important and prioritized, but not generally before quality attributes. Size can also be said to indirectly relate to price, as bulk products are normally cheaper.

### *Swedish respondents*

Most respondents didn't reflect upon packaging sizes when purchasing pasta. However, two consumers did mention the fact that there is no choice of packaging sizes. For example, if someone always buys Barilla wholegrain pasta, it only comes in one size. It is not a prime problem, but those respondents would buy larger packaging if it was available, but they would not switch brands in favour of size. With rice it was a different story however. In general, rice was perceived as *one* product and thereby more bulky, whereas pasta is bought in different shapes for different occasions, making it less bulky.

This respondent talked a lot about the time aspect, which in a way can be related to the lifestyle, but not necessarily in a qualitative manner:

*“Our entire family is very health oriented and we often go to trainings. Key issue when it comes to cooking in our household is the time. Everyone is busy with school,*

*work, and other activities, so cooking is not allowed to take much time. As little as possible.”*

*Sweden, woman*

Modern families have fully booked schedules and food is not given as much preparation time as it used to, or perhaps as other cultures give it. Stress is a well known phenomenon in Sweden and relevant also to food consumption. Also, we noticed that the respondents with smaller children had a tendency to change their eating habits to better suite the children's preferences.

#### **4.2.4 brand attributes**

*Middle Eastern respondents*

Almost every Middle Eastern respondent told us that brands were not important. We believe this has to do with the fact that the ethnic consumers are not so used to the brands offered in Sweden, which is what they refer to when being asked. This refers to theory in the way that consumers are usually judging assortment varieties from whether or not the favourite product is represented. Many times this is linked to brands, but for this consumer group other criteria become relevant. For instance, many respondents claimed to always buy the same rice of a certain origin or flavour. Bearing in mind though, that the preferred rice could be of a foreign brand.

The fact that brands are perceived differently for each consumer group is of course logical. The brands offered in Swedish stores are known to Swedish consumers whereas Middle East consumers don't always recognise those brands as they belong to an unfamiliar environment. One respondent mentioned the private brands as interesting though; she was willing to test private label products as she was aware of their lower prices, often she was also happy about the quality. The recognition of retailer brands can be related to recognising the store's name.

*Swedish respondents*

Brand is often connected to qualitative attributes, such as flavour, and the Swedish consumers often use brands as a decision making criteria. Brands are therefore also relevant when the consumers try new products; when testing a new product they'll most often favour a recognised brand meaning that the quality is perceived through the brand name and the values it contains. Pasta is often bought from Barilla, because they are carrying whole grain. However, whole grain pasta is quite new to the market and in some time the consumers will probably have many more brands to choose from, which might get consumers to try other alternatives.

### 4.3 a comparative summary

Both groups valued price as second priority, after qualitative attributes. However, each group valued price differently and here we see a clear pattern that Middle Eastern consumers use their pre-knowledge of price as well as quality for their frequently consumed products as bench marks. As argued, they can find their favourite products in foreign stores with reasonable prices which might be little higher than their home countries, but much cheaper than in Swedish stores. The price-quality relationship is perceived as “price is not important” because they are primarily interested in finding the right products. It is clear that Middle Eastern consumers are not willing to sacrifice the right products for a cheaper price which suggests a high level of loyalty and thereby restricted innovativeness. However, they are able to find the desired products in the foreign stores which usually have prices well below the Swedish stores. In contrast to the Middle Eastern group, Swedish consumers do not consume such products in the same quantities. For them, quality is more about healthy eating and living which triggers a high level of innovativeness but lower level of loyalty.

Due to environmental differences (language, eating habits, etc.), perceived quality is interpreted differently between the two consumer groups. In the case of rice, the Middle Eastern consumer group considers origin as an important attribute, which for them is related to quality. The Swedish consumer group do not eat rice as often, meaning that they lack the equivalent knowledge of rice consumption; whereas the Middle Eastern consumers have well-established knowledge of rice consumption which leads their perceived quality to focus on finding the right/favourite product. Consequently, their perceived quality could be related to brands, but when they move to Sweden quality attributes shift to more product focused; like origin or taste. This contrasts to the Swedish consumer group who considers brands to be directly connected to quality.

Another reason why the Middle Eastern consumer group perceived the price-quality relation differently is their consumption quantity. As rice is the most frequently consumed product it is also purchased in larger quantities which enables lower prices. The Middle Eastern consumer group can find a good price-quality relation in foreign stores, where quality is priority 1 and price 2. Compared to ordinary Swedish stores, foreign stores offer an everyday-low-price for rice, which is the reason to why they prefer to shop in foreign stores instead. In contrast to Middle Eastern consumers, Swedish consumers do not consume rice as often. Therefore, they shop in ordinary Swedish stores and care less about the price-quality relation for rice.

As consumers cannot usually taste or try dry-food products when purchasing it, understanding and getting the right information is one concern. The label information is particularly important for the immigrated consumer group who are set in an unfamiliar environment (unfamiliar food and products) when choosing products. Different ways of obtaining product information are by recommendations from



friends and family, checking expiry dates of the products, freshness, colour, quality, shopping in foreign stores, touching, looking and feeling etc.

Sensory features are some of the key determinant attributes to the Middle Eastern consumer group. Sometimes sensory knowledge is formed by consumers' experiences in their home countries. In the case of rice, the Middle Eastern consumer group distinguished rice from sensory factors according to their pre-knowledge of rice such as colour, shape, origin and others. Therefore, they emphasize good quality of sensory attributes, but not based on the reasoning of brand or price.

Due to differences in eating habits between the cultures, the content of each meal and the consumption of each product are varying: needs of different quantities of rice or pasta lead to different demands of packaging sizes. For both the Middle Eastern and Swedish consumer groups, size could be perceived as a concern for frequently consumed products like pasta or rice, but it is never the chief priority. Size is usually a concern even if it is not prioritised.

#### 4.4 assortment variety

The two researched consumer groups have different cultural backgrounds which become obvious when analysing their food consumption. Cultural attitudes and differently perceived information structures lead to different perceptions of assortment variety. The two consumer groups did relate quality and price in diverse ways, as argued in the previous analysis. This has the effect that assortment varieties are perceived differently based on the diverse perceptions between the price ranges offered. Also, quality is based upon diverse attributes which also affect the way assortments are perceived.

When the actual, offered assortment does not carry the demanded structure of sensory attributes, the Middle Eastern consumers will perceive the assortment as too narrow. This is not unexpected, Swedish consumers would probably perceive the assortments in foreign stores as narrow as well. Due to the sensory preferences, noticing the "wrong" attributes lead to a more narrowly perceived assortment variety. For instance, when Middle Eastern consumers shop in ordinary Swedish stores the perception of the rice assortment is narrow as it does not contain the right origins or flavours. Whereas the Swedish consumers, who seem to lack such sensory knowledge, perceive it differently according to their priorities.

For each consumer group brands are also perceived with different meanings, which lead to different perceptions of assortment varieties. The fact that brands are perceived differently for each consumer group is of course logical, because the brands offered in Swedish stores are known to Swedish consumers whereas Middle Eastern consumers

don't always recognise those brands as those belong to an unfamiliar environment. Therefore, brands can be a reference or a determining attribute for the perceived variety of the Swedish consumer group. The reputation and early-established features of the manufacturer brands make Swedish consumers relate it to high quality. Therefore, if the assortment carries their favourite brands, they will perceive the assortment variety wider. In contrast to the Swedish consumer group, Middle Eastern consumers announce that brands are not important to them. However, they buy other brands from the foreign stores, which are closer related to their food cultures. Therefore, to some degree, brands will influence their decision making process and become one key attribute when they perceive assortment variety.

Language knowledge and translation abilities should be added as a key attribute for the Middle Eastern consumer group, when perceiving assortment varieties. A lack of product information leads to a more narrowly perceived assortment variety; whereas Swedish consumers probably have a wider perceived variety within the same assortment as they don't have any problems finding the right information.

To summarise assortment varieties and their relations to product attributes, the culturally bound traditions affect the way different consumer groups perceive the actual variety. The information structure is highly relevant to each group's perception of the offered assortments. To Middle Eastern consumers origin is an important attribute to rice, but to Swedish consumers well-known brands seems more important.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

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*In this last chapter we conclude our findings of the analysis and discuss how this knowledge can be relevant to theory and practise. We also argue for how this subject can be further researched in order to broaden the overall view including different perspectives.*

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### 5.1 conclusions

The purpose of this research was to investigate and compare how and why consumers of different ethnic backgrounds value and prioritize product attributes among food, in certain ways. We assumed that we would identify culturally bound attitude differences, and our aim was to relate those to, and challenge, present knowledge of information structures as well as assortment varieties.

We conclude our findings as follows:

- ❖ As a result of cultural habits and traditions, Middle Eastern and Swedish consumers vary in their preferred attributes. Commonly, quality is the highest valued attribute, which differs in meaning between the groups. Middle Eastern consumers favour sensory attributes such as origin and flavour over price, and even more over brands which were perceived as unimportant. Swedish consumers perceive well-known brands as bench marks for high quality. For both groups, price is second priority.
- ❖ Culturally bound reasons are connected to loyalty, level of innovativeness, and knowledge of the market environment. Middle Eastern consumers are less innovative but more loyal to products, focus on family traditions and rely on personal recommendations. Swedish consumers are more open to innovation, less loyal and have a stronger focus on life-style qualities.
- ❖ The results are also of practical relevance to the design of assortment varieties. Middle Eastern and Swedish consumers showed different priorities within the information structures. Awareness of those diverse priorities will provide a strategic tool in the aim to offer more profitable assortments.

## 5.2 discussion

The findings of the empirical study provided inspirational input to understanding the current Swedish market; a mixed population provide a greater challenge to retailers and manufacturers. Food consumption habits are consequently influenced by this and by identifying the key attributes prioritised by the different consumer groups, Swedish retailers and manufacturers can strengthen their competitive advantage. The recognition of Sweden as a mixed domestic market requires new strategies including cultural perspectives and as theory suggests, providing correct assortment varieties is essential to retailers as a result of limited shelf space and costly, low-selling assortments. The challenge is to formulate a strategy of how to offer an actual assortment which is perceived as satisfactory and preferred by both ethnic groups. By evaluating how important ethnic groups perceive assortment varieties, in relation to Swedish consumers', the actual assortments can be rearranged without disappointing any consumer group. For example with rice, the actual information structure should also prioritise origin, as well as brands, which would lead to a higher level of dispersion within the actual assortment. The preference products should always be kept according to theory, but competing products can be considered to include for example ethnic preferences.

## 5.3 suggestions to future research

We have investigated this problem from the views of consumers and their attitudes. It would be interesting to follow up the results by researching consumers actual behaviours. Does the actual behaviour match our results? It is also relevant to approach the market actors: retailers and manufacturers, and their opinions and plans about those emerging consumer groups of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Based on the knowledge that Middle Eastern consumers have a strong sense of solidarity to other members of the community, it would be interesting to find out whether Swedish retailers would actually be able to profit from those consumers. Is it possible to estimate if Middle Eastern consumers would betray the foreign stores if they found the preferred assortment variety in the Swedish store?

The third input relates to generations. We decided to concentrate on immigrants in order to avoid integration values in the answers. How long does it take before the preferences are changed, i.e. how strong are the cultural bindings really to the products? If the second or third generation tend to integrate to Swedish cultures, then the opportunity is less valuable.

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## APPENDIX 1: DEFINING THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East is a definition which can be interpreted in different ways depending upon the purpose of using the term. Most commonly, it is used to define an area of cultural similarities, which is relevant to our purpose. No exact country boundaries are given but based on the information given by the Wikipedia-website the following nations are included in the term: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Cyprus, Turkey, Syria, Georgia, Armenia, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, and the regions of the West bank and Gaza. We have also included Afghanistan, being an important immigrant group in Malmö.



Source: [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com) (Mellanöstern), 2006-05-24.

By the number of foreign stores related to the Middle East in Malmö, we expect culturally related attitudes towards food consumption to differ between consumers born in Sweden or in the Middle East. Foreign consumers may have trouble finding what they search for in the “ordinary” Swedish retail store, or for other reasons choose to make complementary purchases in foreign stores. Eating habits is one of the most culturally bound traditions, and therefore food products are relevant to study. Being an every day necessity, food is also interesting from a retailing point of view.



## APPENDIX 2: KEY RESULTS OF THE PRE-STUDY

Jörgen Mattsson, store manager of ICA Supermarket in Hermodsdalstorget (Malmö), was asked about Middle Eastern consumers and what he believed we'd find out from interviewing consumers in this group, asking them what they miss in the traditional, Swedish retail stores. He explained that price would probably be an issue sometimes. And also certain product attributes, like size of packaging. He believed that the products missing to the Middle Eastern customers of his store would be bread (because of the price), meat (because of the price, but also that they don't offer halal meat, when that is the preference), and fruit and vegetables (because of freshness). Some attributes collide with Swedish traditions, like meat for example. Jörgen told us that they had tried to offer halal meat to the customers, but other customers did not accept it and stopped coming to the shop for ethical reasons. Fruit and vegetables is another cultural issue, Middle Eastern consumers expect the products to last for some time in the refrigerator and therefore the products are less ripe in the store. Middle Eastern consumers have a different consumption pattern, fruit and vegetables are consumed every day in larger quantities. When buying fruit, they expect it to be mellow in the store already.

Out of the 15 respondents of our pre-study, only 1 claimed to make his shopping as good as solely in foreign, Middle Eastern stores. Everybody else initially claimed that they made their shopping in traditional, Swedish retail stores such as ICA, Willys, City Gross, Hemköp, and COOP Forum. A few also mentioned low price chains like Netto and Lidl. Respondents were generally impressed with the Swedish retail stores' assortments, and the only product that came up as a fundamental problem to most Middle Eastern consumers was halal meat which has to be bought in special butchers.

However, instead of listing products that Middle Eastern consumers were missing in the Swedish retail stores, product attributes were more frequently and enthusiastically brought up, which turned out to be reasons for making complementary shopping in foreign stores. For example:

*"Fruit is too expensive in Hemköp. We buy that from Arabic stores. And halal meat".*

*"The only products we buy from other stores, foreign stores, are halal meat. Nothing else. Well yes, and beans and rice, but only because the packages are larger. Yours are too small, we consume a lot."*

*"They need to lower the prices. It's too expensive with fruit. That's what I'm missing at ICA."*

Some other products were brought up, like certain kinds of nuts, sweets and vegetables, but it was not thought of spontaneously, and only came up once or twice. So, our result of the study showed that ethnic consumers perceived the assortment, on a product-inclusive level specifically, as satisfactory in the ordinary Swedish retail stores, but certain attributes were unsatisfactory, which makes Swedish retail stores lose opportunities to this consumer group. This led us to a slightly different problem: which product attributes are important or less important to Middle East and Swedish consumers? Are there any differences, and similarities?



## APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW MATERIAL (PHOTO ELICITATION)

Pasta

*(Pasta)*



Ris

*(Rice)*



Bulgurvete

*(Bulgur wheat)*



Röda linser

*(Red lentils)*

Vita bönor

*(White beans)*

Torkade örter

*(Dried herbs)*

Above picture was shown to respondents during the interviews. First, the three top products were discussed (pasta, rice, and Bulgur wheat), as they are all used as independent side dishes that are served in combination with other dishes. Then, the three products below were discussed (lentils, dried beans, and dried herbs), all being ingredients in various dishes, for example casseroles and stews. To avoid confusing, the respondents were informed that the products represented the whole product category, for example, the red lentils represent lentils in general and could also be for example, green lentils.

## APPENDIX 5: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

### respondent 1: Iraq

*Woman*

*Age: 36-55*

*Household: 6 persons*

*Loyalty cards: MedMera*

Respondent number 1 comes from Iraq and works in a music store selling traditional Arabic music. Pasta and rice are necessities in her household and are consumed between 3 times per week and daily. Beans are less commonly used, around twice a month, and the other products she tells me she doesn't consume often at all. To her, price is unimportant when purchasing any kind of products; food, apparel, etc.

*“When I see something I like, I buy it. I don't care about the price, it is not important. I don't consider any quality or brand; I just buy what I like.”*

As rice is frequently consumed, she explains that they usually buy bags of 10 kg each time. Pasta is also bought in larger packs of 1-2 kg. Food purchasing is most often done in City Gross as it is close to her work, but also foreign stores are used for this purpose. She cannot tell if she buys rice or pasta in either shop, as it depends on the moment and where she is right then. She finds City Gross to have all she needs, but uses different stores because she feels like it.

### respondent 2: Afghanistan

*Woman*

*Age: 26-35*

*Household: 2 persons*

*Loyalty cards: - (none)*

Respondent number 2 is very happy to talk about her habits, and several times she assures me of how easy it is to find her preferred products in Sweden. *“You will always find what you need”*, and most of her shopping is made in City Gross and Mixfood (retailer stocking foreign, mostly Middle East products, located inside RosCent in Rosengård, Malmö). She is very concerned about quality and will only ever buy brands that are well-known and that she has tested. However, she might try new brands, but very cautiously.

Rice is a necessity consumed twice a day, every day, and she laughs when telling me that they keep sacks of rice under the beds, as they purchase large quantities: sacks of between 60 to

150 kg. The rice is called Cela, a special kind of Basmati rice, and it cannot be found in City Gross. The rice is purchased in foreign stores. Quality and ecological attributes are very important and she carefully reads the declarations. Price is not important as such.

*“I was once fooled by a store manager to buy cheap rice, 10:- per kilo. And he assured me it was as good as the other one I buy. But it was bad, and we had to throw it all away. I know about prices, good rice will cost around 16-17:- per kilo.”*

Pasta, lentils and Bulgur are seldom used, but if she buys pasta it is always of the Barilla brand. She grows her own herbs and beans, so she never buys that. But she frequently uses it in her cooking. Healthy and ecological food is preferred.

### respondent 3: Turkey

*Woman*

*Age: 46*

*Household: 4 persons (once a week they are 10: 3 families)*

*Loyalty cards: - (forgets them and cannot find them)*

Respondent number 3 runs a store selling women’s clothing and accessories in RosCent shopping centre, Malmö. She uses all of the suggested products except the herbs, explaining that it is normally people from Iraq and those areas that consume those kinds of herbs. Bulgur and lentils are consumed once a week, pasta and beans twice a week, and rice at least twice a week (often more frequently). Rice is bought in bags of 5 kg and it is always Jasmine rice. Pasta is bought of a certain brand: Ankara macaronis.

Considered attributes are prioritized as: Quality and assurance of freshness. It is important to check the packaging for expiry date before picking it from the shelves. Price is less important as it comes after quality and expiry date. The respondent doesn’t have any other preferences regarding brands, except the pasta. Private label is not considered especially. She will look at the packaging carefully and try to establish the quality of the product in this way.

Most food purchasing is made in Mixfood, City Gross, Willys and Abdos (foreign Supermarket in Malmö).

#### respondent 4: Syria

*Woman*

*Age: 56+*

*Household: 5 persons*

*Loyalty cards: -*

Respondent number 4 comes from Syria and has help from a female friend during the interview, as she speaks poor Swedish. Normally, she makes all her grocery shopping at City Gross in Rosengård, and she recognises and uses all products on our list. She explains the importance of cooking and food in their home and culture, and how different it is to Swedish habits.

Rice is the product mostly consumed; the family eats it every day. It is a special Pakistani Basmati rice which is purchased in Arabic stores, as the price is much lower there. At least sacks of 5 kg are purchased at once, approximately monthly. Product attributes are valued as 1. quality and origin, and then 2. price.

Pasta is used weekly, around once a week. This means that she doesn't feel it is important which one she buys and cannot prioritise between product attributes. She just buys whatever she sees. Lentils and beans are the same, those are also not frequently consumed, and herbs are only occasionally used in salads.

The respondent recommends me the fruit and vegetables market in Möllevången on Saturdays, as it is much cheaper, they have much to choose from, and the quality is good.

Generally, the respondent is open to try new products when they appear, but cautiously to test the quality first.

#### respondent 5: Iraq

*Man*

*Age: 38*

*Household: 1 person*

*Loyalty cards: - (just got residence permit after several years, perhaps he will apply for cards later)*

Our 5<sup>th</sup> respondent is a man, living by himself in Malmö, usually shopping at Mixfood. He prioritises closeness when he buys groceries, and doesn't want to travel far to buy food.

All products are both recognized and frequently used. Starting with rice again, the respondent tells me that he eats it 3-4 times a week. Every 2 weeks he purchases about 5 kg of Arabic Basmati rice, but occasionally, when shopping in Lidl and Willys he'll buy Asian or Iranian

rice. Bulgur is bought in smaller packages as it is consumed once a month approximately, whereas pasta is more frequently consumed, about 3-4 times per week. Pasta is bought weekly in smaller packages, and he usually consults female friends or relatives to get recommendations. Lentils, beans and herbs are also used weekly, but bought in smaller packages each time.

*“I ask women in my surroundings to get recommendations on what kind of products to buy. I don’t know about that, I don’t speak the language very well, so I can’t know what’s good or bad. The manufacturer is not important, only that I get the right type of product, and the quality, then comes price also.”*

To our respondent, who speaks fairly well Swedish, the language is a problem, and as he may have difficulties reading the labels to get information about the product, he’ll feel the product instead. Does it feel good? Does it look good? Generally, foreign stores are considered as cheaper than the ordinary Swedish stores (especially with vegetables), so he shops in foreign stores and Mixfood. There he’ll also be able to get information about the products.

#### respondent 6: Iraq

*Woman*

*Age: 17*

*Household: 4 persons*

*Loyalty cards: ICA, MedMera*

Respondent number 6 comes from Iraq and lives with her parents and sibling; she usually helps with the grocery shopping. Mostly, food is purchased in Mixfood, Lidl, and Abdos. From Abdos, it’s mostly halal meat, bread and spices that are bought. Again, rice is consumed frequently (jasmine rice), around 2-3 times a week, whereas pasta more seldom due to not all family members’ likings of it. Bulgur is consumed around twice a month and herbs very often. Lentils and beans not so frequently.

Most important when buying those kinds of products are quality and then price. They often talk about quality and get recommendations from friends on what to buy. They’ll try something new, and then decide if it’s good to switch to or not, if it is a good price. They often try private label products.

ICA and other Swedish retail stores are perceived as more expensive than the foreign stores. Quality is most important, but you’ll find good products in cheaper stores. For example, Överskottsbolaget sells rice at a good price, and the quality is really good.

## respondent 7: Syria

*Woman*

*Age: 29*

*Household: 4 persons*

*Loyalty cards: MedMera*

Respondent number 7 does most of the grocery shopping in Mixfood, Abdos, City Gross and COOP Forum. The family comes from Syria, and consumes pasta weekly, rice twice a week, and Bulgur more seldom.

*“First, I always check the expiry date of the product. Often it has expired and we have to tell them that. In foreign stores it is really important to check the expiry date. Then I read the table of contents, to see what the package contains. The price is not so important.”*

Rice is consumed in large quantities, and the family buys sacks of 10 kg twice a month. It is special Basmati rice, originating from Pakistan, which is bought in the stores around Möllevången. The origin is important. Same with other products.

Lentils are mainly consumed only during Ramadan, not the rest of the year. At Ramadan she'll buy around 3 kg of lentils to last the month. Beans and peas are not bought in dry form; beans are usually bought tinned so she doesn't need to soak them. It saves time.

Herbs are purchased of a certain Persian brand from the stores around Möllevången. Big packs of about 150 g each (remember, dried herbs are light) at once. About once every two months dried dill and mint are bought and used for cooking.

Pasta is brand oriented. Only Barilla is bought for this purpose.

## respondent 8: Sweden

*Woman*

*Age: 61*

*Household: 1 person*

*Loyalty cards: MedMera*

Our first Swedish respondent lives on her own and usually shops at COOP Forum, mostly because she always has been. She is quite concerned with health aspects, and likes to try new healthy alternatives.

The respondent recognises all except the Bulgur wheat, but she only consumes pasta and rice, not the other products. She eats pasta and rice once a week respectively, approximately.



*“When I buy rice today I only buy whole grain rice. There is only one to choose from. I used to buy ordinary rice, but since I tried the whole grain rice I stick to it. It tastes much better, and it is much more nutritious.”*

She only buys smaller packages of pasta and rice, and in both cases she values quality highest. Rice is always bought from Uncle Ben's, as it is the only whole grain alternative. Pasta is always Barilla. However, she claims that it is the quality that matters, not the brand. Second most important attribute is price. If there were more alternatives to choose from she would try them, and if it was a product she was not familiar with she would value the instructions high with the first purchase. The first time, she says, she would probably buy something produced in Sweden, and then she says she would try something else if there was an alternative. Mostly, this is of practical relevance, to understand the contents and how to prepare it.

#### respondent 9: Sweden

*Woman*

*Age: 48*

*Household: 3*

*Loyalty cards: ICA and MedMera*

Our next respondent is also Swedish and makes almost all of her shopping in ICA Supermarket in Bjärred where she lives. It is most convenient as it is close to home. One of her daughters is a vegetarian.

Pasta and rice are eaten twice a week respectively, but she's not familiar with Bulgur wheat. When buying pasta she chooses quality above all attributes and solely buys Barilla, or sometimes fresh pasta if there is a good price-offer. Second most important is price. She isn't concerned with large packages even though they consume quite much being three in the family. But often there is an offer of "Buy 3 for..." Occasionally she'll notice a new brand which she might try, but until now she has always come back to Barilla.

Rice is bought differently. Here, the product is important, only Basmati rice is consumed and price is the most important attribute, followed by size. She buys the rice from foreign stores, in larger sacks. She claims it is difficult to tell the different brands apart, the quality is perceived as equally good, and therefore price comes first.

As she has a daughter who is a vegetarian she also buys lentils and beans. But beans are bought in tins, not dried. However, they consume it sparsely and therefore aren't bothered by price:

*“I'm quite lazy. I buy everything from ICA Supermarket in Bjärred. Price is less*

*important, especially as I buy such small quantities. There is only Risenta to choose from, so that's what I buy. [...] If there were other alternatives I'd look at the price first, then quality and taste the second time I bought it. Then I'd buy the one I liked best."*

Herbs are bought and consumed either frozen or fresh.

#### **respondent 10: Sweden**

*Woman*

*Age: 56+*

*Household: 1 person*

*Loyalty cards: MedMera*

The third Swede is a woman living on her own, doing most of her shopping in Hemköp. Sometimes, she also shops in Konsum.

She doesn't eat Bulgur wheat, but she does recognise it. Pasta and rice are consumed, but quite seldom. When she eats pasta she prefers whole grain, and prioritizes quality as the highest attribute, followed by price. She doesn't think that the brand is important at all. When buying rice she values the same attributes, again no brand is preferred over another.

Beans are consumed, but only in tins. Herbs are bought either fresh or frozen in smaller quantities. Here she values price as most important, followed by recognition. Is it a brand she'll recognise she'll favour it if the price is good. Lentils are never consumed.

#### **respondent 11: Sweden**

*Man*

*Age: 56+*

*Household: 2 persons*

*Loyalty cards: MedMera, ICA*

The next Swede is a man who lives with his wife in Vellinge. He normally makes their grocery shopping on his way home from work, at either ICA, or preferably City Gross in Rosengård. He's excited about the assortment variety and how much he'll find in City Gross, and how nice it is to find products that you normally don't see in ordinary Swedish stores. Especially meat is appreciated from City Gross.

Pasta is consumed around twice a month, and then he buys a certain kind: Barilla no 13. He tells me about a vacation in Italy, where they were served this special kind of spaghetti (a

more flat, or eclipse shaped spaghetti). They found it much better tasting than ordinary Spaghetti, and were glad to find it in City Gross in Sweden. So here, brand is most important. But there is no second value, all else is irrelevant. He claims that he'd never buy pasta from Kungsörnen, for example.

Rice is consumed more frequently, about four times a month. They either consume Basmati rice or Jasmine rice and he'll buy around 2 kg at the time. Here he finds it difficult to prioritize, claiming that he'll "just take something" from the shelf. No preferences with rice in other words, and also no evaluation between the products offered in the assortment. Bulgur is consumed very seldom, and he never buys it on its own. If he buys Bulgur, it's always mixed with pasta.

Beans are consumed every second month, and then only ready-cooked kidney-beans in tins. Lentils are rarely used, and herbs are consumed but always in smaller packages as he doesn't believe that big packs will last long in quality.

#### respondent 12: Sweden

*Woman*

*Age: 39*

*Household: 1 person*

*Loyalty cards: MedMera*

The next respondent is also Swedish and she makes most of her shopping in ICA and Willys, sometimes in Konsum. She differentiates her shopping patterns as:

*"I guess you could say I buy base products from Willys and fresh from ICA Malmborgs here in Limhamn."*

Pasta and rice are consumed around twice a week respectively, rice a bit more seldom than pasta. She'll only buy Barilla, and claims quality to be top priority. Price is less important, but she'll compare the price of Barilla between stores. She'd never trade the quality for a lower price. Occasionally she'll buy special, delicate, pasta from special stores. Like black pasta and alike.

Rice however, is bought in large sacks of 10 kg from Axfood (Willys). It is always special jasmine rice which is imported from another country, and of a foreign brand which she can't remember the name of. Again, quality or brand (preference) is valued: *"The taste is good. It is a big package and a good price"*. She'll share the sack with her mum.

When discussing beans she claims to use it occasionally only, like in bean salads and alike. Sometimes she buys beans in a tin, sometimes she'll buy them dried and prepare them by herself. She'll buy whatever there is, she'll favour anything that is recognized, like a brand

she knows of. Lentils are never consumed, but she buys a lot of seeds, like sun flower seeds. That she'll buy from health store, sometimes you can also find them in ordinary stores, to be bought by weight. Herbs are hardly ever used, except as flavouring in sauces.

#### **respondent 13: Sweden**

*Woman*

*Age: 31*

*Household: 4 persons*

*Loyalty cards: ICA*

Respondent number 13 comes from Sweden and has a family of four, whereof two younger children. Most shopping is made in ICA Malmborgs or Willys.

Since having children, pasta is consumed more frequently than before: every second day. She'll always favour whole grain pasta, leaving quality as number one. If there is more than one choice, she'll decide the product with the best price. The size of the packaging is also relevant, but difficult to consider as whole grain pasta is hard to find in larger packages.

Rice is consumed once a week and here she'll take whatever she likes. Although she never buys Uncle Bens as it's too expensive and doesn't live up to the price. She thinks private label is just as good and often she'll buy that. Quality is most important again, then price.

Bulgur is a favourite, but the rest of the family isn't fond of it. So she'll have it a couple of times a week on her own. As it is not so common and there isn't so much to choose from, she'll buy whatever there is. Same with lentils and dried herbs. She consumes all of them, and usually she'll buy dried lentils from Risenta as that is often the only alternative. She'd try something new if there was, and if it had a better price. Beans are usually bought tinned. Herbs are bought from the spice assortment, or frozen, in smaller quantities.

#### **respondent 14: Sweden**

*Woman*

*Age: 45*

*Household: 5 persons*

*Loyalty cards: ICA*

Respondent number 14 is also Swedish and makes most of her shopping close to where she works; in Hemköp. She also makes the shopping in Willys Hemma which is close to where the family lives.

The family is very health-oriented and seldom eats pasta or rice, it almost a little “forbidden”. Bulgur is not recognized at all, lentils are never consumed, beans are only bought in tins but not very often, and herbs are only consumed fresh.

*“Our entire family are very health oriented and we often go to trainings. Key issue when it comes to cooking in our household is the time. Everyone is busy with school, work, and other activities, so cooking is not allowed to take much time. As little as possible.”*

When buying pasta the first priority is the health aspect, only whole grain pasta, branded with “Nyckelhålet” is bought and consumed. Second priority is the cooking time, it needs to be quick. She usually buys larger packs from Kungsörrens, as they are a big family, but also because they think that those products fit with their demands.

The cooking time is also important when buying rice. She only buys a special kind of rice from Uncle Bens which is “Quick cooking rice”. The time aspect is the one and only priority here. Unfortunately this rice doesn’t come in whole grain, or else she’d buy it. She does find it a bit expensive though, and it is only sold in smaller packages.

#### **respondent 15: Sweden**

*Woman*

*Age: 41*

*Household: 4 persons*

*Loyalty cards: ICA*

Our last Swedish respondent does all of her shopping in ICA Malmborgs. They are four in the family and they eat a lot of pasta and rice. Bulgur is not familiar to the respondent, and the last three products; lentils, beans and herbs are not consumed. Beans are only consumed tinned.

When buying pasta, the most important attribute is familiarity, that she recognises the brand. It’s never a particular brand, but mostly she’ll buy the same type out of habit. Occasionally she’ll buy a cheaper brand depending on what she’s going to use it in. Price is however second priority. The family doesn’t care for big packs despite their frequent consumption, as they shop almost daily and don’t feel they need to buy larger packs for that reason.

Rice however is bought in larger packs of 2-5 kg; she’s not really sure how big they are. She claims it’s good to have it at home, and then it’ll last longer. So, a slightly different reasoning here. Uncle Bens rice is bought when she wants ”normal” rice, and if she buys Jasmine rice she’ll take whatever she feels like at the time.