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Occasionally organic

-A study of occasional consumers of organic food

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Abstract

Title: Occasionally organic – A Study of Occasional Consumers of Organic Food

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Key words: Organic food, Perceived value, Involvement, Occasional consumers, Perceived quality

Purpose: This thesis provides insights in the perceived values and the level of involvement associated with buying organic food among occasional organic consumers in Sweden.

Methodology: Based on the framework of the actors approach and using an abductive methodological perspective, this thesis has been constructed with a qualitative research strategy, and carried out through in-depth interviews.

Theoretical perspectives: Two main theoretical perspectives have been used as a foundation for this thesis, perceived value and involvement. The former has been examined through four different dimensions, in order to provide a more holistic view of the concept.

Empirical foundation: Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with occasional consumers of organic food domiciled in three different cities in Sweden.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that both low perceived value and low involvement could be reasons why occasional consumers often opt out on organic food. The findings from the four-dimension framework on perceived value indicate that the quality and emotional dimensions add some value to organic food, while the social dimension did not add any relevant value. The economical dimension affected the value negatively, and the price for organic products was considered to be high. When investigating involvement, we found that it was low for grocery shopping in general, and equally low for organic products.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce our choice of topic, and present the reader with relevant background. We will further identify the research gap and with that in mind motivate our research questions and purpose. Finally, we will also discuss the limitations with this thesis.

1.1 Problem background

The interest in environmental issues started gaining popularity in the USA in the 1960s (Klonsky and Tourte, 1998), while in Europe such matters began to concern the consumers in the mid-1980s (MacKenzie, 1991 in Davies et al., 1995). Since then, consumers have become increasingly aware of the relevance of such issues (Tanner 1999; Roberts 1996), and also that certain products can have a negative impact on the environment (Gurău and Ranchhod, 2005). Moreover, consumers in the Western world have increased their interest in and knowledge about nutrition and health (Wier and Calverley, 2002; Hughner et al., 2007). This health consciousness has led to a focus on food safety and quality (Vindigni et al., 2002) where avoiding harmful additives and agricultural chemicals has become a major concern for consumers (Lee, 1989).

This rising concern has led to an increase in demand for organic food products (Gurău and Ranchhod, 2005; Hughner et al., 2007; Wier and Calverley, 2002) since many consumers believe that organic food is healthier and better for the environment (Hughner et al., 2007). Organic food refers to food produced without using inputs of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms, irradiation or food additives (Allen and Albala, 2007). The industry of organic foods is heavily regulated, and organically produced food has to comply with predefined standards in order to be marketed as organic (Willer and Kilcher, 2009). This implies that the production costs of organic foods relative to conventional foods are higher, leading to a price premium for organic foods (Giannakas, 2002). The high price is considered one of the main barriers to the sales of organic products (Achilleas and Anastasios, 2008).

The organic production process is a credence quality attribute (Grunert et al., 2000), meaning that it is not observable to the consumers, neither before nor after consumption. Thus, consumers can only know that the product is organic when they are informed of it, as they may not detect any characteristics suggesting that a product is organic even after the purchase and use of the product. This fact coupled with the higher price of organic products relative to conventional products, implies that information regarding such products is of particular importance because without it, there are no incentives for the consumers to buy organic foods. (Giannakas, 2002)

The industry however seems to cope with the issue of the credence quality attributes within organic products rather well, as statistics show a clear trend where the sales of organic food products have increased rapidly in both Europe (The European Commission, 2010), and the USA (Organic Trade Association, 2011). In Europe, the market for organic foods has had an annual growth rate of approximately 10% in the previous years (Ruiz de Maya et al., 2011; Willer, 2010 in Stoltz et al., 2011) and in the USA the share of organic foods have increased from 2.2% to 4% of the total sales of food products between 2004 and 2010 (Organic Trade Association, 2011). The trend can be observed also in Sweden, where the share of organic foods among the total sales of food products has increased from 1.9% to 4.1% between 2004 and 2011 (Statistics Sweden, 2004; Statistics Sweden, 2011).

When describing purchasers of organic food, several researchers make a distinction between non-consumers, regular consumers and occasional consumers (Stoltz et al., 2011; Midmore et al., 2011; Hjelm, 2010; Jensen et al., 2011). Non-consumers, as the name suggests, show little to no interest in organic foods (Jensen et al., 2011). This makes them a minority, as most consumers have a positive attitude towards organic products (Saba and Messina, 2003). Non-consumers commonly distrust organic products and are resistant to the idea of buying them, as they do not perceive any benefits that may motivate the price premium (Jensen et al., 2011). These consumers will not be placed much focus on within the scope of this thesis, as they are not encompassed by our purpose.

Regular consumers are a relatively small group of people (Jensen et al., 2011). The concept

of regular consumers of organic food products lacks a consistent definition in the literature, but it generally refers to “convinced” organic consumers, who tend to choose organic products over non-organic on a habitual basis. They are also usually more knowledgeable about organic food than non-users (Bredahl and Thøgersen, 2004). Despite being a smaller group, they often account for the majority of the total sales of organic foods (Jensen et al., 2011, Pearson et al., 2010; Magnusson et al., 2001). For example, a study shows that 23% of the consumers are accountable for 84% of the total sales of organic foods in the UK (Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs, 2004, in Pearson et al., 2010). In another study, it was established that regular consumers of organic foods accounted for 82% of the total sales of organic food products in both Italy and Denmark (Jensen et al., 2011). This tendency can be seen also in Sweden. According to a study of Swedish organic consumers by Magnusson et al. (2001), it was found that even though a majority of the them had a positive attitude towards organic food products, it was only 4-10% of them that actually had the intention to purchase organic alternatives (Magnusson et al., 2001).

The last group of organic buyers, the occasional consumers, is the vast majority of people between the two extremes described above (Jensen et al. 2011). This implies that they are a quite heterogeneous lot, as they may more resemble either regular consumers or non-consumers in their attitude towards organic food products. Generally though, they have been found to be price sensitive and convenience-oriented in their buying behavior (Jensen et al., 2011). These consumers, who do not deliberately opt out on organic food products, yet do not buy them on a regular basis, are the main focus for our thesis. Due to their generally positive attitude towards organic food (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009), yet relatively low purchase frequency of such products (Magnusson et al., 2001), it appears that there is a gap between attitude and behavior. Therefore we find the occasional consumers relevant and interesting to examine more studiously.

1.2 Problem discussion

Today, there is a rather extensive knowledge regarding the *regular* consumers of organic foods. However, the existing research, and thereby also the knowledge of *occasional* consumers is not as comprehensive (Hughner et al., 2007). What is known about the occasional consumers is for instance, as previously mentioned, that they are very price sensitive. This means that the often quite substantial price differences between organic foods and conventional foods is a significant barrier for them to buy more organic foods (Midmore et al., 2011; Hjelmar, 2010; Magnusson et al., 2001). Regular buyers, on the other hand, are not as price sensitive (Stoltz et al., 2011). For practitioners, this implies that in order to reach occasional consumers as well as regular consumers, organic foods should be marketed at a lower price. However, experiments with lowering the prices of organic food show an interesting paradox. It appears that if the prices on organic foods would be reduced, many consumers would perceive it as an indicator of lower quality, thus reducing the price would lessen the competitive advantage such foods have (Cicia et al., 2002; Soyez et al., 2011). Additionally, lowering the prices is not always a viable option, seeing that the production process for organic food often entails higher costs (Giannakas, 2002).

The price issue, according to what has been stated above, appears to be the greatest challenge when targeting the price sensitive occasional consumers of organic foods - quite simply, they think organic food is too expensive. This is related to the consumer's *perceived value* of a product; if the consumer does not perceive the value of a product to be high enough to pay the price, he or she will choose another product among the set of alternatives (Smith and Woodside, 2009). Naturally, the inverse is also true, i.e. if the consumer *does* perceive the value of a product to be high enough to be worth the price, he or she will be willing to buy it. Since occasional consumers have been found to think that organic products are too expensive, it can therefore be assumed that they do not perceive the value of organic foods to be sufficient to choose them over lower-priced alternatives. Therefore, a gap can be observed between the perceived value and the price for occasional consumers of organic products. This gap is the main barrier for many consumers to buy more organic food today (Schmid et al., 2004 in Bodini et al., 2009).

Traditionally, researchers have commonly described the perceived value of a product as the relation between its price and its quality, often as a kind of trade-off (Zeithaml, 1988). However, in recent years, this view has been criticized of being too simplistic and narrow. This has led to the development of new frameworks for understanding the different components of perceived value, incorporating more aspects of the product than just quality (Koller et al., 2011; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). One of these frameworks is provided by Sweeney and Soutar (2001), who distinguished between four different dimensions of perceived value; emotional value, social value, functional value with regard to price and functional value with regard to quality. This framework is particularly interesting for our research, as it has already been applied in the context of sustainable consumption by Koller et al. (2011) who used it to investigate perceived value in the car industry. However, there are yet no studies that employ this framework to explain organic consumption in the food sector, which is why we want to investigate it further in our research.

One possible explanation for why occasional consumers do not experience sufficiently high perceived value for paying the price, is that there has been observed a lack of knowledge and understanding regarding organic foods among consumers (Padel and Foster, 2005; Midmore et al., 2011). Several different certifications exist to certify that products are organically produced, however, according to Padel and Foster (2005), consumers in general are confused by the various marketing messages and organic claims among products on the food market. This creates a lack of confidence in organic foods, and in the supposed values associated with them. Several researchers have found support for this. For instance, Magnusson et al. (2001, p. 223) state; “consumers find it difficult to distinguish between the many types of food labeling that they come across during shopping”.

Another aspect that can be a barrier to purchase for organic foods is the level of *product involvement* (Bodini et al., 2009; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009). Involvement refers to the level of interest, concern and enthusiasm that the consumer has towards products and brands. When consumers are not very involved in a product category, they tend to spend less time and energy on evaluating the alternatives (Beharrell and Denison, 1995) and are likely to simply choose products with lower prices (Bodini et al., 2009). Food is often

regarded as a low involvement product (Bodini et al., 2009). This means that despite the occasional consumers' positive attitude towards organic products (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009), if they normally choose non-organic products, they may not be involved enough in their grocery shopping to even consider buying the organic alternatives instead. The occasional consumers' level of involvement in their grocery shopping is a subject that has not yet been researched in the literature, even though it could be a potential explanation of their low purchase frequency of organic products. Therefore, aside from studying the occasional consumers' perceived value of organic food, we also intend to study their level of involvement.

1.3 Problem definition

The occasional consumers of organic food products have a positive attitude towards organic products, however, as the term "occasional" suggests, they only purchase such products on an infrequent basis. This seems to be due to that they do not perceive a value in organic products that motivate the higher price and/or that they are not involved enough in their purchasing decisions to consider organic alternatives.

1.4 Research question

We perceive occasional consumers as a highly relevant group to examine. Not only does the discrepancy between their attitudes and actual behavior make them interesting to investigate from a theoretical perspective, but their positive attitude suggests that they are potential consumers of organic food, and further knowledge about them is therefore also of interest from a managerial perspective. Taking this into consideration, our thesis will address the following question:

- What values do occasional consumers associate with organic food products and how involved are they in their purchasing decisions when choosing between organic and regular food products?

1.5 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the perceived values and the level of involvement associated with buying organic food among occasional organic consumers in Sweden.

1.6 Delimitations

This study is limited to investigating consumers on the Swedish market. To avoid any potential bias in our empirical study, we strived to have a representative sample of interview respondents from the very wide and heterogeneous segment of occasional consumers. We therefore chose to interview an equal number of men and women, of varying ages and from cities of different sizes. However, as we did a qualitative study limited to twelve consumers, each demographic segment in the study, for example men, or women under the age of 35, is represented only by a quite small number of individuals. Therefore, we will not base any conclusions on potential differences observed between the respondents with regards to demographic variables, but have instead analysed them collectively as a group.

Furthermore, we have limited our study by disregarding certain elements of organic products. Since we are investigating organic food in general, our study covers a large selection of various organic products with different features. In order to make them comparable, we have not included product aspects that vary widely between individual products, or depending on the product category, such as for instance brand, packaging design and advertising.

2. Method

In this chapter, the methodological considerations for this thesis will be presented. We will provide a brief overview of different methodological approaches, and discuss them in order to motivate our choice of method. Furthermore, we will describe how data was collected and analyzed. Finally, the chapter provides an examination of the credibility of the thesis.

2.1 Methodological considerations

2.1.1 Methodological approach

The method is the approach by which the purpose is investigated. Bryman and Bell (2005) point out the importance of making a conscious choice of method in order to investigate a certain research question in the best way possible. They describe two general approaches to research, inductive and deductive. Inductive method involves first collecting empirical data and then creating theory from the observations that are made. Deductive method is the opposite, and constitutes of first studying the theory and constructing hypotheses, then basing the empirical data collection on these hypotheses. In practice, it is often difficult to distinctly separate the inductive and deductive approaches, and regardless of which approach the researchers intend to use, the other one tends to occur to some extent as well (Bryman and Bell, 2005). The combination of the two is referred to as abductive method (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Abductive method does not however entail a simple mixture of deductive and inductive method, but rather a successive process of development in both the empirical and the theoretical area. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) point out that the abductive method is a more realistic approach than a strictly inductive or deductive method, and that it is also less constricting.

Taking into consideration the nature of our research, as well as Alvesson and Sköldbberg's (2009) rather harsh critique towards employing a strictly inductive or deductive method, we considered the abductive method to be the most appropriate research strategy for this thesis. Since we intended to create theories from our empirical findings, the inductive method could have been considered. However, in the early research stages we needed to

study existing theory to some extent, in order to form a background of knowledge as a foundation to the qualitative research we implemented. This is not allowed with a strictly inductive approach, whereas the abductive method permits the researchers to take theoretical preconceptions into consideration (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Therefore, abductive method was the one that we considered to be best suited for this thesis.

2.1.2 Research strategy

Research strategy is divided into qualitative and quantitative methods. In quantitative studies, the researchers aim to test theories in quantifiable, numerical terms. Qualitative studies on the other hand, involves generation of theories through investigating how individuals perceive reality (Bryman and Bell, 2005). The choice of which method to use should be determined by the nature of the specific research question at hand (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

Our research question is centered on perceived values and involvement. These concepts could probably have been studied to some extent through a quantitative method such as questionnaires. However, as we wanted to explore the thoughts and notions behind the consumption behavior of the occasional consumers more in-depth, we considered that a qualitative approach was best suited for our empirical data collection. Using a qualitative approach is further supported by suggestions from other researchers in the field of organic consumption. Hjelmar (1997) points out that through qualitative studies, we can gain deeper insights into consumer shopping behavior regarding organic food consumption. It is also stated by Hughner et al. (2007) that a significant part of the existing research on occasional consumers are of a demographic character, and that to get a deeper and more general understanding of this particular client group, further research is needed, but with a focus on attitudes and motivations towards consumption of organic products. Hence, we consider that our choice of a qualitative approach is well justified.

2.1.3. Methodological framework

Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) stress that the choice of research method should not only be

based on the research question at hand, but also on the researchers' view of reality. They describe three approaches that can be used in a study, the analytical approach, the actors approach and the systems approach. The analytical approach views reality as factive and summative by character, meaning that reality exists independently of the knowledge created by individuals, and that the whole is the sum of its parts. Both objective facts and subjective facts exist. The systems approach also views reality as factive, however, in contrast to the analytical approach, reality is seen as arranged in such a way that the whole differs from the sum of its parts. This implies that it is not only the parts but also the relations between them that are essential, since they have synergies (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009).

The actors approach differs substantially from the other approaches. The ambition with this approach is to analyze the meanings and significances that different actors put in their acts and the surrounding environment. Consequently, people and their interactions are the units of analysis. Here, reality exists only as a social construction, meaning that it is not independent of its observers (i.e. it is not seen as objective). Knowledge through this approach is created through researchers interpretations, and an understanding of reality is obtained through an investigation of intentions. Here, a qualitative method is often preferred (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009).

We perceived the actors approach to be in line with our topic, as people and their values is our unit of analysis. Our topic also has a clear link with the actors approach's aim of analyzing the meanings and significances that different actors put in their acts, as we wanted to explain the values (meanings and significances) consumers (actors) associate with consuming organic foods (act). In addition, as we have a qualitative approach, we also needed to interpret the results obtained, which further contributes to the suitability with the actors approach.

2.2 Research design

2.2.1 Secondary data collection

Data collection can be divided into two different types, primary and secondary data. Secondary data is collected from external sources, and was originally gathered for some other purpose than the study at hand. It is common for researchers to begin their study by collecting secondary data. It can take several forms, such as books, articles, or be retrieved from statistical databases. Secondary data is cheaper, easier and faster to obtain than primary data (Faarup and Hansen, 2011). However, as it is not collected by the researchers themselves, it must be evaluated in order to make certain that it is current, relevant, reliable, accurate and conceptually correct (Rabianski, 2003).

The secondary data we used for this thesis consisted mainly of academic articles retrieved from the Lund University database Summon, and from Google scholar. We also used statistics and information from Statistics Sweden and from the annual KRAV reports, as well as books on methodology, marketing in general, and consumer behavior in particular.

2.2.2 Primary data collection

Primary data consists of data collected by the researchers specifically for the purpose of their study. It can take the form of for example interviews, focus groups and observations. The advantage of primary data is that since the researchers themselves collect it, it is constructed to generate information that is highly relevant for the specific purpose in question. In addition, the researchers know exactly how the data was collected, which means that the limitations are known. The main disadvantage is that it is a lot more time consuming and difficult to obtain than secondary data. (Rabianski, 2003).

The empirical data generated for this thesis was collected through in-depth interviews with people who fit under the definition of occasional consumers of organic food as stated in the problem background, i.e. neither fully convinced regular buyers nor strict non-consumers. The reason that we chose interviews as the method for collecting empirical data is that it

gives us an insight into consumers' thoughts and beliefs, in a way that for example observations cannot, since they do not capture the motivations behind the actions (Bryman and Bell, 2005). This insight into the consumers' minds is important, since our purpose is based on investigating a concept as abstract as perceived values. Besides interviews, focus groups could have been another means to gain insight into the consumers' thoughts and values. However, we believe that interviews are preferable to focus groups, as the latter entail a certain loss of control for the interviewer and can generate an overwhelming amount of complicated, hard-to-analyze data (Bryman and Bell, 2005). Thus, focus groups have some significant disadvantages that we consider rendered them inferior to interviews as a means of data collection.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that there is a series of predetermined themes or questions to be discussed, but also that there is room for variation of the order in which the questions are asked, and for unplanned follow-up questions (Bryman and Bell, 2005). The choice of making our interviews semi-structured was motivated by the fact that these are more flexible than structured interviews (Lundahl and Skärvad, 1999). The possibility of asking follow-up questions enabled us to gain insights that might have been missed if the interviews were too tightly structured. At the same time, semi-structured interviews are more predefined than unstructured interviews, which is important in order to maintain the interview within the themes that are relevant for the researchers. In addition, having the interviews semi-structured rather than unstructured facilitates the comparability of the interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2005). This was particularly relevant for our research, since we conducted our interviews separately.

2.2.2.1 Sampling

In order to obtain as relevant information as possible, it is important to purposefully decide on a method of sampling (Marshall, 1996). It is indicated that occasional consumers are a wide and heterogenic group, and it has been proved that no significant common denominators regarding demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, education or income exist (KRAV, 2012). Therefore, we faced a decision in our sampling process on

whether to strive for a maximum coverage of the occasional consumers, or focusing on a narrower sub-segment. During our research and literature review, we found no indications that one particular age group, gender or other specific sub-segment would be notably more relevant than others. We therefore decided to pursue a maximum variation strategy, i.e. gaining as large a spread as possible among the subjects (Marshall, 1996), since we believe that this would be the most productive sample in order to answer our purpose.

The empirical material consisted of a total number of twelve interviews. Our maximum variation strategy was pursued by interviewing an equal number of men and women, in ages evenly distributed among a span of 24-64 years. In addition, we wanted to cover consumers in both larger and smaller cities. Subsequently, we decided to conduct the interviews with participants from cities of different sizes. Malmö was chosen as a larger city, and for a smaller town, Lidköping was selected. Additionally, Helsingborg was chosen to represent a medium-sized town. The choice of these cities was motivated by the authors' personal ties to them, which facilitated the process of finding subjects for the study and conducting the interviews. Aside from demographical factors, the participants also varied somewhat in their relation to organic foods. As occasional consumers are a wide segment, some of the respondents were more resembling non-consumers in their attitudes and behavior, whereas others were more similar to regular consumers.

In order to find subjects that fitted the description of occasional organic consumers, we initiated a snowball effect. This refers to contacting people suitable for the research, who in turn also are asked to network with others to further extend the search of potential subjects (Bryman and Bell, 2005). Ergo, we contacted people with whom we were acquainted and whom we believed could fit under our definition of occasional consumers, then we also asked them to help us get in touch with other potential research subjects. This way, we quickly and conveniently gained a large spread of potential participants and could ensure that we selected participants to cover the whole demographic spectrum of occasional consumers. One advantage we found with the snowball method was that it through our contacts gave us some sort of reference for the participants. Since our study is qualitative, rendering the interviews rather time-consuming, we believe that having a reference

significantly increased our credibility as researchers, and thereby increased the inclination for our interviewees to participate, than if we had approached complete strangers.

TABLE 2.1 Interview respondents

Name	City	Age
Arne	Helsingborg	62
Christina	Lidköping	55
Elisabet	Lidköping	50
Emelie	Malmö	24
Filip	Helsingborg	32
Jenny	Malmö	27
Joachim	Malmö	44
Johan	Lidköping	26
Lena	Helsingborg	64
Lennart	Lidköping	59
Richard	Lidköping	36
Vanessa	Malmö	36

2.2.2.2 The interview situation

In order to increase the quality of the interviews they should be conducted in a quiet and relaxed setting (Bryman and Bell, 2005). We therefore opted out on using public spaces such as cafés or libraries, where other people might have disturbed the interviews, and instead conducted them in the homes of our respondents. The interviews were conducted separately, thus only one of the researchers were present during the interview. Therefore, the preparatory work was particularly important in order to ensure that the interviews were conducted in such a way that the respondents would have given the same answers regardless of whom they were interviewed by. This was not perfectly achievable, since the semi-structured interviews allow for some flexibility, for instance spontaneous follow-up questions. However, the data collection was preceded by thorough discussions and planning of how to carry out the interviews, which resulted in an interview guide depicting what questions to cover. Despite the semi-structured nature of the interviews, rather than ensuring that we simply covered certain themes, we opted for staying quite close to the interview guide during the interviews. Additionally, in order to give us the opportunity to discover things we might have overlooked in our preparations, two separate test interviews

were conducted to further prepare for the actual interviews.

The interviews varied in length, with the longest being around 60 minutes and the shortest around 30 minutes. The average time was 40-45 minutes. While some of the respondents gave elaborate answers on our questions, other gave rather short answers. The length of the answers could have been interpreted as a signal of their knowledge on the subject, however our perception was rather that the respondents who had a tendency to give short answers were a bit shy and short-spoken as persons. The interviews were to a great extent intended to let our respondents describe their own perceptions of different aspects regarding organic food, therefore a long and elaborate answer did not necessarily imply that these respondents had a greater knowledge of organic food. Rather, our perception was that they were more outspoken as persons and prepared to “think out loud” to a greater extent, thus their answers did not necessarily provide us with more useful information in comparison to the others.

As mentioned earlier, we followed an interview guide with predetermined questions during the interviews, sometimes adding follow-up questions to ensure that we got extensive answers. These follow-up questions were often used on the respondents who gave short answers, in order to encourage them to elaborate on something they mentioned, or to stimulate their thinking on the question and inspire them to further reflect on the question. Some of the questions also proved to be a bit confusing for the respondents to answer, and therefore demanded some additional explanation. Other times, the respondents gave the answer to one of our questions while answering another question, rendering it superfluous. The questions were all directly connected to concepts from the theory we have chosen to support our purpose with, and structured to roughly follow the same order as our theory chapter. This was done in order to ensure that all the questions had a relevant connection to our purpose, as well as to facilitate the analysis.

For the most part, the interviews simply consisted of dialogue, but during the section that concerned organic certification, we made use of props as a basis to the discussion. First we asked the interviewees if they could name any organic certifications. We then proceeded to

show them a couple of products, labeled with the organic KRAV and Euro Leaf certifications, and continued to discuss their thoughts about these labels. The use of props was both a visual aid for discussing the certifications, and a way to make the interview more interesting for the respondents, thus spurring the discussion.

All the interviews were recorded using the voice memo function on our mobile phones, which had been tested during test interviews prior to the actual interviews, to ensure that the sound quality would be sufficient. When the interviews were done, they were transcribed in order to allow for more efficient search and analysis of the respondents' answers. This was particularly important for giving both the researchers access to the empirical data since the interviews were conducted separately.

2.2.2.3 Interpretation of data

In total, the interviews generated transcripts of 80 pages. Since the questions were structured to follow the concepts we used in our theory, the data was automatically divided into five different segments, the four different value dimensions and involvement respectively. During the preliminary analysis we looked at each question in turn, comparing all of the answers and looking for similarities and differences, then writing down a small summary for each one. At this stage, we also started selecting quotes from the respondents that we wanted to include in the analysis. The quotes were chosen either because they were representative for a majority of the respondents, or because they deviated from the general consensus and thereby provided an additional perspective.

When possible, answers were encoded into groups in order to facilitate the analysis. For instance, for the question on how they looked upon the price as a possible indicator for quality in organic food, we tried to interpret the answer into whether they did think price was an indicator of quality or not, before studying the answers fully in a more analytical way. The intention of this was not to try to turn our qualitative study into a quantitative one, but rather to simplify the data and making the answers more easily comparable, thus giving us a general idea of the mindset of our sample as an entity. For some questions, this

was possible, for others not. After all, the questions were qualitative and designed to give comprehensive, nuanced answers. Therefore the nature of the answers sometimes did not allow them to be sorted into categories. For questions with ambiguous answers, we avoided encoding them at all in order to ensure that they were not misinterpreted, thus protecting the validity of our study.

It is important to point out that the purpose of this encoding was only to give us a preliminary idea of the general mindset in the group. It was followed by a second, deeper analysis where we reflected on the answers on a more analytical level, for example interpreting whether the respondents were vague or convinced when answering. This analysis was merged with the preliminary analysis, making it more nuanced and comprehensive. The reason for merging the preliminary analysis with the secondary one was that the first one mainly was a reflection of the empirical results, which in itself would have been rather irrelevant without an added layer of theory-grounded analysis. We therefore chose to present the empirics and the analysis conjointly.

The second analysis was a little more flexible than the preliminary one. It roughly followed the order of the questions, but sometimes, we found that respondents had discussed a matter connected to a certain question also when answering another question. Therefore, the frame for the analysis was mainly the five different sections rather than the individual questions. This analysis process was also less compact and linear than the first one. We allowed it to take more time so that we could truly get a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the answers, and often revisited questions for a second or third viewing. The final results of the preliminary and secondary analysis can be found in chapter 4, and are presented in five different subchapters, representing the four value dimensions and involvement respectively. Since each of these chapters presents a great amount of information, we chose to present the main respective findings in a summary at the end of each subchapter.

Finally, we wanted to integrate our research into a single comprehensive and cohesive discussion. The discussion therefore consisted of merging all of our results and findings

from the different sections. As each of the five sections includes several different theoretical constructs, we had a wide variety of concepts to consider simultaneously. To facilitate the discussion, we therefore constructed a mind map depicting all the different concepts. This was used as a visual tool to reflect on how they were connected, interrelating or dependent on each other in a more structured way. This was a very inductive and creative process, fuelled by discussions on a conceptually higher level. It was therefore followed by a rigorous examination, where we critically reviewed our own reasoning and ensured that it was fully grounded in the previous analysis and focused on the perspective of occasional consumers. The result of this is the discussion, which can be found in chapter 5.

2.3 Credibility and methodological critique

Every method has its advantages and disadvantages. We have already discussed why we found it preferable to conduct our research with a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative, which was mainly because we need to gain insight into the minds of occasional organic consumers. Therefore, we benefit from the more penetrating and holistic investigation that the qualitative approach allows for (Larsen, 2009). Yet, the potential shortcomings of the qualitative research method must not be ignored. We will therefore discuss these below, based on the credibility of our study. High credibility is important in order to create trustworthiness of the process and results of a research. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the credibility is often discussed within three concepts; the reliability, the validity and the generalizability of the research.

2.3.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency and trustworthiness of the research. It is often discussed within the context of reproduction, i.e. whether or not the results of the study can be reproduced by other researchers and in other moments of time, with the same methodological approach. Hence, it is about ensuring that the interviewees will give the same answers to our research, as they would have done to other researchers.

Unintentionally leading questions is one way of affecting the reliability, as these might lead the answers in a way that a question posed in a different way would not have done.

Therefore it is important to take such possibilities in consideration. However, too much emphasis on the reliability of an interview might also affect the creativity and the width of variation as it may constrain the interviewer's personal style and ability to improvise. (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009)

In qualitative, face-to-face studies, the interviewer is more likely than in quantitative studies to have an effect on the answers of the respondents, which is referred to as the interviewer effect. This can be caused by the respondent wanting to make a good impression, or giving an answer he or she thinks that the interviewer wants to hear, rather than being truthful (Larsen, 2009). In addition, there is also a risk of having unintentionally leading questions in the interview, implying that the answers might become skewed (Kvale, 1997). The risk of having an interviewer effect influencing the results may thus affect the reliability of the study.

As we conducted our interviews separately, it is possible to suggest that the reliability of our study to some extent actually could be examined by comparing our results. We found during the analysis of our interviews that the answers of the respondents often were notably similar, despite having been conducted by different interviewers, which might be interpreted as a sign of high reliability. Yet, we recognize that after working on this thesis together for months, we probably share a similar mindset regarding our topic and it would therefore be presumptuous to rule out the possibility of interviewer effect. Additionally, since our topic concerns organic food, which may be seen as a matter of conscience related to environmental concern, we are aware that the face-to-face interview situation might have caused the interviewees to exaggerate their inclination to buy organic food in order to appear more concerned.

2.3.2 Validity

Validity refers to the correctness of the conclusions generated from the research. To ensure that a conclusion is accurate, correct and refers to the truth, it is important that the measure that is devised actually reflects the concept that it denotes (Bryman & Bell, 2005).

According to Kerlinger (1979 in Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009), the validity of a study can be defined by the researchers asking themselves if they actually measure what they think they measure. Qualitative studies have a benefit in this sense as they facilitate ensuring high validity (Larsen, 2009). This is due to the fact that qualitative researchers, in contrast to most quantitative studies, conduct their research face to face with the participants in the study, meaning that they can ask follow-up questions, ask for specifications, and thus increase the understanding and reduce the risk for misinterpretations (Larsen, 2009).

Since our semi-structured interviews allowed for posing follow-up questions and asking the respondents to clarify their answers, the conditions of our research were favorable to creating high validity in our study, which of course is something we purposefully strived to achieve. While recognizing that misinterpretations are always a risk with human communication, we would therefore argue that our choice of method allowed for a high level of validity in our research. There is however an additional aspect to be considered regarding the validity of our empirics, due to the fact that our interviews were conducted in Swedish and then translated to English. Despite our best efforts to be as faithful as possible to the original statements of our respondents, this language conversion might have entailed a loss of preciseness when citing them, thus affecting the validity of our study.

2.3.3 Generalizability

The generalizability of the study relates to whether the results of the study are mainly of local interest, or if the result can be applied and transferred on a broader scale in other situations (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Traditionally, generalizability has mainly been associated with quantitative research. This is due to the fact that qualitative research usually is carried out on smaller, purposefully selected samples, which has led many researchers to assume that results from qualitative studies are not generalizable, and non-representative for a larger population (Morse, 1999). However, Morse (1999) points out that if qualitative studies were not generalizable, they would be of little interest at all. She further explains that generalizability in qualitative studies comes from careful selection of participants, to ensure that each of them will represent a contribution to emerging theory.

Byrne (2001) similarly stresses the importance of the process of sampling (i.e. participant selection) for gaining generalizable results from qualitative studies. She notes that as data analysis and collection are often conducted simultaneously during qualitative research, the occurrence of observed recurring themes that capture the experience of the participants is a sign that the study is becoming saturated and that the sample size is sufficient (Byrne, 2001).

Following Morse's (1999) and Byrne's (2001) suggestions for increasing the generalizability in qualitative studies, our process of sampling was very purposefully conducted. Following our maximum variation strategy, we carefully selected each interviewee in order to ensure that we gained an even spread of participants regarding gender, age and city of residence. Despite the heterogeneity of our sample, we noted several recurring themes in the answers from the interviews, which suggests that some level of saturation was achieved, subsequently improving the generalizability according to Byrne (2001).

However, while some scholars deem that generalizability is achievable also in qualitative studies (Byrne, 2001; Morse, 1999), others would beg to differ. Larsen (2009), for example, states that a disadvantage with the qualitative method is that it *does not* allow for generalization of the findings. While a more extensive discussion of generalization of qualitative research will not be held within the frames of this thesis, it can be concluded that regarding generalizability, qualitative studies usually are considered to be inferior to quantitative ones (Larsen, 2009), and we therefore must recognize the limitations of our choice of method in terms of generalizability.

3. Theory

The following chapter provides a comprehensive presentation of the previous research and the theories on which we have based our thesis. Two main concepts will be explained respectively; perceived value and involvement. A wide amount of research on these two concepts will be presented, forming the theoretical framework for this thesis.

3.1 Introduction to the theory

Since our purpose is concerned with *perceived value* and *involvement* with regards to organic foods, we will use theory related to those two concepts as a foundation for our empirical data collection. First, we will discuss perceived value, which will be described based on a conceptual framework by Sweeney and Soutar (2001). As mentioned before, we believe that this framework is suitable for our thesis since it has already been used for analyzing the perceived value in the context of sustainable consumption before (Koller et al., 2011). Our second theoretical concept, involvement, refers to the interest consumers feel for products, and how much time and energy they put into their consumption. This will be presented both from a theoretical perspective, and through a review of previous research with particular regards to food shopping and organic products.

3.2 Perceived value

The importance of creating value for customers has been stressed by numerous researchers (e.g. Smith and Colgate, 2007; Holbrook, 2006; Snoj et al., 2004; Woodruff, 1997). For instance, Woodruff (1997) argued that superior customer value is the next major source of competitive advantage, and Snoj et al. (2004, p. 156) calls customer value “...an extremely important concept in marketing...”. Holbrook (2006, p. 715) even states: “Customer value serves as the foundation for all effective marketing activity”. The terms *customer value* and *perceived value* are commonly used interchangeably in the literature. To illustrate this, Woodruff (1997, p. 141) stresses: “...customer value is something perceived by customers rather than objectively determined by a seller”. However, in order not to confuse the

reader, we will exclusively use the term perceived value for the remainder of this thesis.

Perceived value from the customer perspective is commonly explained by citing Zeithaml (1988, p.14) who defines the concept; “perceived value is the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given”. Several other definitions have been proposed, but most of them are quite similar in that they reference this notion of customer value as a trade-off between the benefits that the customer receives, and the sacrifices he or she makes in return (e.g. Anderson et al., 1993; Snoj et al., 2004). Zeithaml (1988) described this in terms of *give* and *get* components. The ‘give’ components represent what the consumer has to give up in order to obtain a product or service. The sum of the ‘give’ components in the perceived value construct is known as perceived price, or perceived sacrifice (Zeithaml, 1988; Snoj et al., 2004). This refers to all factors that have a negative influence on the perceived value (Snoj et al., 2004). The give component that is most often recognized is the price, however there are several other possible sacrifices connected to the acquisition of a product (Zeithaml, 1988). The ‘get’ components refer to the benefits received in return, meaning the factors that have a positive influence on the consumer’s perceived value. This is commonly translated to mean the *perceived quality* of the product (Snoj et al., 2004; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

Perceived quality is however not usually considered the only ‘get’ component in the value trade-off, as several authors consider that view to be too simplistic and narrow (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The terminology is not perfectly clear on what exactly the concept of perceived quality entails, but usually the interpretation suggests that it is a mainly functional, product attribute-related, utilitarian factor (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Zeithaml, 1988). Even though perceived quality is an undeniably important factor on the benefit side in the value estimation, several researches emphasize the importance of also including elements such as emotional and social aspects (Smith and Colgate, 2007; Holbrook, 2006; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). An example of this is the framework proposed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001), who identified four different dimensions of perceived value. This is not a comprehensive model, but rather a framework that provides some structure

for discussing the different aspects of perceived value. In order to provide a more holistic view of the perceived value concept, we have therefore chosen to structure our presentation of theory based on this framework.

3.2.1 The four dimensions of perceived value

The four-dimension framework of perceived value constructed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001) consists of four different dimensions. These are: functional with regard to price, functional with regard to quality, social, and emotional. The dimensions are somewhat interrelated. For example, the purchase of a car that performs well on the functional level with regard to quality, is likely to have a positive emotional effect as well. For practical reasons, we have chosen to refer to the first dimension as economical value rather than functional value with regard to price, and to the second dimension as the quality value, rather than functional value with regard to quality. Our framework can be seen in figure 3.1. We will continue our discussion by presenting each of the four value dimensions in turn.

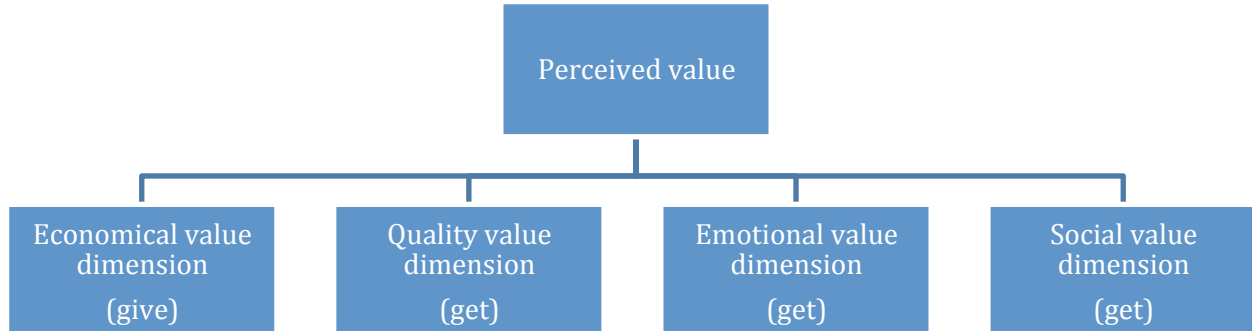


FIGURE 3.1 The perceived value framework (inspired by Sweeney and Soutar, 2001)

3.2.1.1 The economical dimension

The economical value dimension differs from the other three in the sense that it examines factors that *negatively* affect the perceived value of a product, or expressed in Zeithaml's terminology, the 'give' components of the value construct (Zeithaml, 1988). Sweeney and Soutar (2001, p. 211) define this dimension as "the utility derived from the product due to

the reduction of its perceived short term and long term costs". As that definition suggests, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) have turned the economical dimension into one affecting product value in a positive way, by discussing it in terms of *reduction* of costs. We do however find this construct to be overly complicated. For the purposes of this paper, the economical dimension will therefore be discussed in the more direct sense of having a negative influence on the total perceived value. According to Zeithaml (1988), viewing the economical dimension as having a negative influence on the perceived value is common among researchers.

As mentioned earlier, the five factors in the construct of perceived value are often referred to as perceived price, or perceived sacrifice. According to Zeithaml (1988, p. 10) this simply entails; "From the consumer's perspective, price is what is given up or sacrificed to obtain a product". She further divided the price into three components; objective price, perceived non-monetary price and sacrifice. Objective price refers to the actual price of a product. However, rather than noticing or remembering the actual price of a product, consumers commonly encode prices according to their own subjective perception of it. Whereas the objective price is just a number, the perceived price means that the consumer encodes it into a more meaningful concept, assigning it a notion such as 'cheap' or 'expensive' (Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991).

In order to form this perception of a certain price as cheap or expensive, the consumer must have some information about the product (Grewal and Compeau, 2006). For example, in order to decide whether \$ 20,000 for a car is a cheap price or an expensive one, the consumer needs information about things such as the condition of the car, the year, and what the prices are for similar alternatives. In classical economic theory, consumers have perfect information to base their decisions on. In reality however, not only do consumers have limited information, studies show that they lack the ability or inclination to actually process all the information available. Therefore, buyers rely on cues to facilitate their decision-making process (Grewal and Compeau, 2006). Cues are informational stimuli that can be used to assess the product prior to consumption (Steenkamp, 1990). There are several kinds of cues, which will be explained more in detail when we present the quality

dimension of value. For the economical dimension however, the only cue we will examine is the price.

The role of price as an indicator of perceived quality is a much-researched one. This stems from the idea that consumers tend to believe products of higher quality to be more expensive, and products of lesser quality to be cheaper (Veale and Quester, 2009).

However, in an extensive literature review, Zeithaml (1988) found that despite the common assumption of a positive relationship between price and perceived quality, the importance of price as a quality indicator depended on several other factors. For example, for product categories with large price variations, such as perfume, price as a cue tends to be more important than in categories with low price variation, such as canned beverages. Also, the availability of other cues was found to affect the use of price as a quality indicator. For example, Dodds et al. (1991) investigated the effects of price, brand and store name as cues for decision-making. Their findings showed that when information such as brand or store name to associate with the product did not exist, the relative importance of price as a cue tended to increase. Moreover, Dickson and Sawyer (1990) found that many consumers are not aware of the price at all in grocery shopping. Yet, the evidence is not conclusive that price would be a less important cue when other cues are available. For instance, Veale and Quester (2009) investigated quality cues for Brie cheese and found that price was by far the most prominent cue used by consumers, despite high availability of other cues.

When estimating the price, the consumer evaluates it in relation to some sort of reference price. This reference price commonly consists of a personal price expectation, which the consumers use to estimate whether they find a particular product to be cheap or expensive. The price expectation is formed by a variety of factors assessed by the consumer, such as product attributes, brand, and/or type of store, and past knowledge of prices. Additionally, retailers are doing their best to influence the consumers' price expectations by providing other information than just the objective price, such as regular price (if the product is sold at a discount) or price recommended by the manufacturer (Grewal and Compeau, 2006). However, making a product appear low-priced is not always ideal. When the price is perceived as a quality indicator, consumers may regard prices too far below what they

expect as a sign of poor quality, and therefore opt for a higher priced alternative (Dodds et al., 1991).

Having discussed the difference between objective and perceived price, we continue with Zeithaml's (1988) third component of price; sacrifice. Several other sacrifices than monetary price may be associated with the acquirement of a product. Zeithaml (1988) mentions non-monetary sacrifices in the form of time, energy and effort. For instance, if a product is not easily available the consumer may have to go to a specialty store in order to find it, which takes extra time and energy. Moreover, Snoj et al. (2004) emphasize perceived risk as an element that can negatively influence the perceived value of a product. Several kinds of risks are mentioned, for example financial (risk of wasting the money because the product may not satisfy the consumer's expectations), physical (risk that the consumer is harmed by the product) and social (risk that the consumer's status among friends and family may be affected by choosing the product). Zeithaml (1988) stresses the importance of acknowledging non-monetary costs just as well as monetary ones, as for example time is an important commodity among many consumers.

3.2.1.2 The quality dimension

The quality value dimension refers to the "utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of the product" (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 211). Over time there has been several different approaches to product quality (Northen, 2000). Traditionally, quality was viewed as something objective, which refers to a measurable technical superiority or excellence of a product on some predetermined standards such as quality ratings from consumer reports (Zeithaml, 1988). However, this approach was heavily criticized (e.g. Maynes, 1976) as researchers and experts could not agree on what the ideal standard or standards should be (Zeithaml, 1988). Moreover, all quality is perceived by someone, consumers or managers or researchers, meaning that objective quality may arguably not exist.

The approach of perceived quality was introduced in the mid 1980s when it was discovered that a “quality perception gap” existed between the manufacturers and the consumers where the manufacturers believed that quality was improving while the consumers thought it was declining. The research on this “quality perception gap” introduced the expression of *perceived quality* and used it instead of *quality*, to stress that quality judgments are dependent on the perceptions, needs and goals of the *consumer* (Steenkamp, 1990). Hence, this approach analyses product quality from the viewpoint of the consumer, making quality a subjective assessment (Northen, 2000).

The process of how quality actually is perceived can be analyzed through the framework proposed by Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp (1995). Here, the perception process is first divided into two concepts, namely quality cues and quality attributes. The quality attributes are benefit-generating product aspects which cannot be observed prior to consumption. These can also be divided into two different attributes; experience quality attributes and credence quality attributes. While the experience quality attributes can be ascertained by the experience of the actual product (an example is taste), the credence quality refers to attributes that may not be known even after trying the product, such as health benefits or the fact that the product was organically produced. (Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp, 1995)

The quality cues, on the other hand, are used to predict the quality prior to consumption. These are defined as “informational stimuli that are, according to the consumer, related to the quality of the product and can be ascertained by the consumer through the senses prior to consumption” (Steenkamp, 1990, p. 312). Using fresh meat as an example, consumers demand quality attributes such as tenderness, taste and juiciness, i.e. characteristics that can be experienced only during consumption. To predict these attributes, consumers use quality cues such as colour, fat levels, cut, and meat juice. Hence, when searching for products to buy, consumers use quality cues for predicting if the product at hand has the attributes the consumer prefer in such products (Northen, 2000).

The quality cues are divided into intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues (Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp, 1995). Intrinsic quality cues refer to the product attributes that “cannot be changed

experimentally or manipulated without also changing the physical characteristics of the product itself” (Olson and Jacoby, 1972, p. 169). Specific examples of intrinsic quality cues include colour, shape, size and structure (Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp 1995). When intrinsic quality cues are available, these are usually more relevant for the quality perception than the extrinsic quality cues (Szybillo and Jacoby, 1974). However, sometimes it is impossible for consumers to use intrinsic quality cues in order to assess certain qualities of a product. For instance, when a product to a great extent is characterized by credence quality attributes, these cannot be communicated solely by intrinsic quality cues (Northen, 2000). We will get back to this dilemma below.

Extrinsic quality cues, on the other hand, are related to the product but not a physical part of it (Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp 1995). In the economical dimension we have already discussed price, which is an example of an extrinsic cue. Other examples include brand, level of advertising (Zeithalm, 1988), country of origin (Steenkamp, 1990), and information/labels (such as best before date and production information) (Northen, 2000). Extrinsic quality cues usually gain a higher relevance for estimating product quality when there is not sufficient information about the intrinsic quality cues (Zeithalm, 1988).

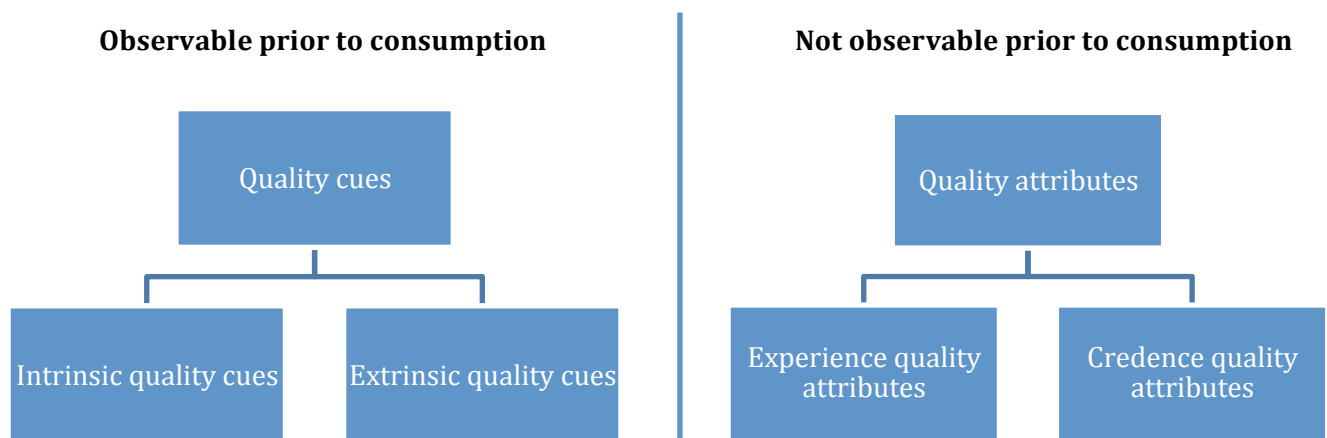


Figure 3.2 Quality cues and quality attributes (inspired by Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp, 1995)

As mentioned before, the organic production process is a credence quality attribute, meaning that consumers have no possibility of knowing anything about the organic production simply by consuming the product (Grunert et al., 2000; Bonroy and Constantatos, 2008). Since intrinsic quality cues cannot communicate credence quality attributes (Northen, 2000), organic food products lack intrinsic quality cues that consumers may use to differentiate between organic and conventional food. In fact, organic production might even have a negative effect on the intrinsic quality cues, since organic production might lead to products that are smaller, blemished and uneven in shape (Northen, 2000).

3.2.1.2.1 Extrinsic quality cues in organic food

Since organic food is difficult to tell apart from comparable non-organic products based solely on intrinsic quality cues, the extrinsic quality cues play an important role for differentiating organic products. One example of an extrinsic quality cue is to label organic products with certification symbols (Bonroy and Constantatos, 2008). In order to prevent mistrust and confusion about organic certification, regulatory bodies such as the European Union (EU) have established official organic logos, which can be used only on foods produced according to predefined standards (Janssen and Hamm, 2011). Moreover, in all European countries, voluntary organic certification logos exist. In Sweden, apart from the official logo of the European Union, the most common certification is KRAV. KRAV is distinguished from the logo of EU by stricter rules and increased control of the production process. The KRAV-certification is voluntary and of the total number of organic food products on the Swedish market, 80% has the label of KRAV, meaning more than 6000 products (KRAV, 2011).

In markets where these certifications are of essential importance (such as for organic products), there is also a risk of potential fraud, since there might be producers that want to take advantage of the organic claim even though do not follow organic production standards. Hence, consumers' trust of such certifications is a critical issue for goods with credence quality attributes to successfully compete in the market. This is especially important when the credence quality attribute is accompanied by a price premium, as in the

case of organic food (Bonroy and Constantatos, 2008). However, the organic labeling and certifications in Europe is somewhat surrounded by skepticism and uncertainty (Hughner et al., 2007; Midmore et al., 2011; Aarset et al., 2004; Padel and Foster, 2005; Lea and Worsley, 2005). For instance, Padel and Foster (2005) argue that consumers to a great extent lack trust in organic certifications. In addition, Aarset et al. (2004) found distrust towards the certifications as well as the regulatory systems ensuring that organic production standards are met for organic food. In Sweden, the national certification KRAV is perceived as trustworthier than the EU certification. However, even for the KRAV label, only 40 % of the Swedish consumers express a trust in the certification (TNS SIFO, 2010).

The level of a consumer's overall knowledge of a product is also a critical factor for the success of organic food, since it has an effect on the use of both intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues (Rao and Monroe, 1988). Consumers with high knowledge of a product category are better acquainted with the cues they need to use, intrinsic or extrinsic, in order to predict the quality of a product. They will also analyze information efficiently and not experience any information overload. On the other hand, consumers with low knowledge are likely to behave as in an environment of low uncertainty. This implies that they are likely to reject all alternatives in a choice situation of products (Chocarro et al., 2009). Within the field of organic food, researchers have proven that there exists a certain lack of knowledge and understanding regarding the certifications and what the term "organic" actually implies (Hughner et al., 2007; Midmore et al., 2011; Aarset et al., 2004; Padel and Foster, 2005;). For instance, Midmore et al. (2011), found that the knowledge of how organic products are produced and processed is low both for regular and occasional consumers. The lack of knowledge is considered to be one of the main barriers for consumers not buying organic food (Demeritt, 2002).

3.2.1.3 The social dimension

The social value dimension can be defined as "the utility derived from the product's ability to enhance social self concept" (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 211). Sheth et al. (1991) found that choices regarding products that are highly visible, such as for example clothing

and cars, often are driven by social value. However, Vindigni et al. (2002) argue that also the food market, due to the rising popularity of for example cooking-themed magazines and television shows, can be seen as affected by a social comparison process. In addition, Ruiz de Maya et al. (2002) point out that grocery shopping takes place in public, where other people can see what products the consumer chooses.

The research of Ruiz de Maya et al. (2002) and Vindigni et al. (2002) suggest the idea that social norms would have an influence on buying behavior in the food market. Social norms are a phenomena implying that people should behave or not behave in certain ways. Failure to comply may have social consequences (Biel and Thøgersen, 2007). It is generally accepted that norms lead to conformity, and that there is often a strong correlation between the normative beliefs people have, and their actual behavior (Bicchieri and Muldoon, 2011). For example, social norms are found to have a high importance regarding environmentally friendly behavior (Biel and Thøgersen, 2007).

However, the impact of social norms on buying behavior appears to vary somewhat between countries. Ruiz de Maya et al. (2011) investigated organic food consumption in different countries in Europe, and found that for example in Spain, consumers relied more on individual assessment when making purchasing decisions regarding organic food. In Denmark and Sweden however, organic consumers were found to be very aware of their social group and concerned with maintaining their status quo within the group. (Ruiz de Maya et al., 2011).

Closely related to social norms is the concept of social identity. Social identity is constructed by a variable set of norms that are associated with a particular role (Bicchieri and Muldoon, 2011). For instance, a teacher will act in accordance with what the reference groups that are relevant to them expect of a teacher, in order to be able to validate the teacher role as a part of his or her identity. McCracken (1986) was one of the early scholars to research the subject, finding that consumption creates a movement of value from goods to individual. In other words, aside from functional value, products carry symbolic meanings that through consumption can be transferred from the good itself to the consumer's identity. This is

often discussed in relation to brands, as brands can evoke deep meanings for consumers (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). However, consumption does not necessarily need to be branded in order for the identity factor to influence consumer decisions. For example, Sparks and (1992) found that identification with 'green consumerism' had a significant independent effect on consumer behavior regarding organic vegetables. Those who saw themselves as 'green consumers' were thus more likely to actually purchase organic foods (Sparks and Shepherd, 1992). This illustrates that consumption does not need to be branded in order to potentially have a social meaning.

3.2.1.4 The emotional dimension

The emotional value dimension refers to the "utility derived from the feelings or the affective states that a product generates" (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 211). In general emotion theory, emotions can be defined as "special perceptions which inform us about the actual body status and its modification due to internal or external stimuli and feelings such as mental representation of bodily changes, including thoughts" (Damasio, 2003 in Ferrarini et al., 2010, p. 720). This definition applies well to food consumption, as it concerns bodily stimuli. There are however many other views on what emotions are, and there has been much debate on how they should be defined.

Perhaps as a consequence of the debate on how to define emotions, consumer research investigating emotions has sometimes been criticized due to high levels of intangibility and subjectivity (Schifferstein and Desmet, 2010; Desmet, 2007). Nevertheless, products have been found to evoke a wide spectrum of emotions in consumers and despite the criticism, emotions have to a large extent been studied within the field of consumer research (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1999). Examples of product aspects that can elicit emotions are sensory qualities, functionality, social effects of using the product, associated memories, or imagined effects of owning or using the product (Schifferstein and Desmet, 2010). Examples of product-related emotions exist in abundance, such as anger due to a malfunctioning printer, or the joy (or possibly pain) of wearing a new pair of shoes for the first time.

Desmet (2007, p. 379) argues “Ignoring the emotional side of product experience would be like denying that these products are designed, bought, and used by humans”.

A separation is sometimes made between product emotion and consumption emotion. Product emotion is described as “all emotions experienced in response to, or elicited by, seeing, using, owning, or thinking about consumer products” (Desmet, 2007, p. 379). Consumption emotion refers to “an emotional reaction that one has in response to a product in a consumption situation” (Richins, 2007, p. 400). Consumption emotion is thus a narrower concept, encompassed by product emotion. We find this separation relevant, as it allows us to separately examine the way emotions matter in both pre-purchase and purchase situations (product emotion), and more specifically during consumption (consumption emotion).

One of the frameworks suggested for approaching product emotions was provided by Norman (2004), who investigated it in the light of different levels of information processing. The most basic level is the reactive one, where no emotions are involved and actions are based on automatic, reflexive responses, for example pulling your hand away from a hot stove. The next is the routine level, which concerns established behaviors, and contains emotions based on expectations, that are not consciously processed. The highest one is the reflective level, which refers to intellectually based emotions that can be associated to for instance self-image and satisfaction (Norman, 2004 in Desmet, 2010).

The level of consumption emotions experienced depends on what type of product category is concerned. Three types of categories are recognized by Richins (2007), mundane, extraordinary and conditional products. Mundane products, as the name suggests, are usually routinely used and are unlikely to evoke emotions. Examples include toothpaste, flour and paperclips. The results of using these products are usually predictable, and they only create emotions if unexpected effects are experienced in the consumption, or if design features succeed in making these products extraordinary. Extraordinary products, in contrast to mundane ones, are highly likely to create consumer emotions. These products are either purchased only on rare occasions, for example cars, or contain high levels of

differentiation, such as fashion apparel. They are often expensive, and/or closely related to self-image, self-expression or status. The conditional products are found between the mundane and the extraordinary products, and their tendency to evoke emotions depend on the consumer and the situation. For instance, a bottle of wine can be a routine Friday purchase of a familiar brand, or it can be a carefully selected vintage to be consumed on a special occasion. (Richins, 2007)

Food appears to be a rather popular category to research in the light of emotional consumption, and perhaps that is not so surprising, considering what a major role food plays in our daily lives. Ferrarini et al (2010, p. 720) state that “food and drink consumption is not only a physical experience that involves smell, taste and appearance [...] but also – and mainly – a cognitive and affective experience”. King and Meiselman (2010) investigated emotions involved in food consumption, and realized that it is mainly a positive experience. They also found that emotional responses to a certain food product are more positive among users than among non-users of the product. Organic food on the other hand, has rarely been researched in the light of consumer emotions. This is noted by Aertsens et al. (2010), who suggest it as an interesting area for future research.

3.3 Involvement

The interest in the concept of involvement grew substantially in the 1970s when it was concluded that it was potentially an important part of consumer behavior (Mitchell, 1979). Since then, the body of literature as well as the understanding of the concept has been growing (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009). The concept of involvement from a consumer perspective refers to “feelings of interest, concern and enthusiasm held toward product categories and brands” (Beharrell and Denison, 1995, p. 24). It can also be linked to the personal relevance a consumer denotes to a product, where high involvement products can be seen as reflectors of the consumer’s self-identity and an integral part of one’s life. Hence, whether or not a product is associated with involvement is not objective but rather subjective (Ekström, 2010). Moreover, involvement examines the degree to which consumers engage themselves in the various aspects of the consumption process, for

example advertisements, the purchasing act and the products themselves (Broderick and Mueller, 1999). It can be used to explain various types of consumer behavior, such as the extent of information search, the length of the decision-making process and switching among different brands (Beharrell and Denison, 1995).

In the literature, various ideas exist on how to distinguish between different kinds of involvement. Finn (1983), identifies three different kinds of views on involvement, namely the stimulus-centered, the subject-centered and the response-centered orientations. The stimulus-centered orientation regards involvement as a means of the characteristics of the products. Put differently, involvement is believed to be created by the characteristics of the product. On the other hand, the subject-centered orientation suggests that consumers differ individually in terms of involvement. Depending on the interest in the product category in question, some consumers tend to be more actively involved than others. Finally, the response-centered orientation focuses on the level of involvement the consumer has with the outcomes associated with a product or service (Finn, 1983). Most researchers today however agree that the degree of involvement depend both on the subject and the stimulus (Ekström, 2010).

Another way to separate different kinds of involvement is to consider it in terms of enduring or situational involvement (Houston and Rothschild, 1978 in Beharrell and Denison, 1995). As the names suggest, enduring involvement is more permanent and constant over time, whereas situational involvement refers to interest evoked by a particular situation (Richins et al, 1992). For example, while an enduring involvement might be an overall interest in organic food, situational involvement in organic products can be caused by in-store stimuli such as a special in-store display or a promotional offer. These kinds of involvement do not necessarily relate only to positive opinions of a product. For instance, de Matos and Veiga (2005) stated that in a situation where a product gains negative publicity, situational involvement arises for the information itself, and enduring involvement arises for the product that is the subject of the negative news.

Different involvement levels have been found to have effects on various aspects on consumer behaviour. One example is how it affects consumer's assessment of prices. For instance, Zaichkowsky (1988) found that consumers' usage of price in their product evaluation varied according to their involvement level. While high involved consumers were found to place little emphasis on price as a cue, low involved consumers to a large extent used the price of a product in order to evaluate it. Involvement has also been found to be negatively correlated with price sensitivity (Ramirez and Goldsmith, 2009), meaning that when highly involved with the products, consumers tend to be less concerned about the price (Smith and Carsky, 1996).

Moreover, high involvement tends to make the consumer prone to put more time and effort into the information search and the evaluation of alternatives (Drichoutis et al., 2007). Another potential outcome associated with high involvement is that consumers are more likely to perceive differences in product attributes (Drichoutis et al., 2007). Products that are associated with low involvement are a challenge for marketers, as the consumers often shop these products according to habitual behavior and are likely to spend little to no time on information search and product evaluation (Beharrell and Denison, 1995; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009). There are however ways for marketers to increase consumer involvement. These include linking the product to an involving issue or personal situation and hence increasing the personal relevance, designing emotion-laden advertising or adding product features to make it more involving (Kotler, 1997).

Traditionally, grocery shopping has been considered a routine activity in the body of research, and as such it is often regarded as a low involvement type of shopping situation (e.g. Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009; Beharrell and Denison, 1995; Kuenzel and Musters, 2006). The views does however differ somewhat between researchers, and some have found indications that certain aspects of grocery shopping could actually rather be seen as a high involvement activity. For example, Kuenzel and Musters (2006) found that everyday food products fall in different involvement categories, meaning that some food categories was considered as more involving than others. Beharrell and Denison (1995) came to the same conclusion, finding that fresh meat and dairy products generated as high involvement

as car insurances and restaurant visits. Involvement in food products has sometimes also been found to vary based on demographic variables. Bell and Marshall (2003) found that older individuals as well as females tend to be more involved in their grocery shopping. In line with these findings, Drichoutis et al. (2007) discovered that younger consumers with high education and high income are less likely to be highly involved with food.

Despite the exceptions described above, the general view remains that food products are most often considered to be low involvement goods (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009). However, in the case of organic food, values such as health consciousness and environmental concern are involved. As these issues are often linked to high personal relevance for consumers in the western societies, they render an extra value-laden layer beyond the immediate product attributes (Hughner et al., 2007). This evokes the question as to whether organic food products should really be bundled with regular food products when it comes to involvement (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009). For example, some research has found that “ethical” products, including organic food, generate high involvement due to strong engagement from the consumers (Alexander and Nicholls, 2006). This applies well to the *regular* consumers of organic food, since these tend to purposefully seek information and compare the available alternatives when shopping for food (Jensen et al., 2011). However, whether or not it also applies to *occasional* consumers is not as clear.

4. Empirics and Analysis

In order to put the empirical data into context, we have chosen to present it conjointly with the analysis. This chapter will have a separate examination for each value dimension, as well as for involvement, with an additional conclusion of each major section where the findings are presented.

4.1 The economical dimension

As presented in the theory chapter, the economical value dimension consists of ‘give’ components, i.e., things the consumer have to give up in exchange for a product or a service (Zeithaml, 1988). The discussions on economic value mainly revolved around price in all of the interviews, other types of sacrifices or risks with organic foods were not as commonly perceived by our respondents.

4.1.1 Reference prices

Even though the interviewees were simply asked to give their opinions on the prices of organic foods, all but one automatically discussed it in relation to the price of non-organic products. For instance, Jenny said: *“Most of the time I think that there is a rather substantial price difference, that it is much more expensive than the other alternatives...”*. Johan expressed a similar opinion: *“Generally, I’m not that price conscious, but the times I’ve checked, it’s more expensive than regular food”*. Hence, the opinions given on the perceived price appear to be difficult to discuss in isolation from a reference price. The fact that almost all descriptions of the price of organic products were given in comparative terms supports the theory that consumers use reference prices to evaluate a given product, as suggested by Grewal and Compeau (2006). The first-hand reference price chosen by the respondents in this survey was clearly the price of comparable non-organic products. Also, as all the respondents described the price as “expensive” or “more expensive” (than non-organic food), our interviews confirmed the prevailing notion that this is how the price of

organic food is generally perceived. However, the automatic price comparison implies that the idea of organic food as expensive is relative rather than absolute.

4.1.2 Perceived price and objective price

When specifically asked of their opinions on organic food prices relative to non-organic food, everyone perceived organic as more expensive. However, few could give concrete examples of the price difference. Richard said: *“No it’s difficult, I guess it’s more of a feeling. This I can pay or this I can’t pay [...] So I guess it’s more the feeling that settles it, rather than the actual price difference”*. Richard’s answer coincides very well with Zeithaml’s (1988) distinction between objective price (the actual monetary cost) and perceived price (the consumer’s subjective estimation of the price), in that he acknowledges that it’s a feeling about the price rather than a conscious, rational evaluation of the monetary cost that decides whether or not he chooses to buy organic. However, there was no evidence on whether our consumers mainly based their purchasing decisions on perceived or objective prices. Some of the respondents mentioned times when they had checked the prices to make the decision, which rather implies that they compare actual objective prices. Yet, the fact that everyone used the word ‘expensive’, which is a subjective estimation, could be seen as an indicator of using a perceived price (Zeithaml, 1988). In reality it appears to be difficult to separate the two concepts from each other, and the mixed results suggest that both might affect the evaluation of the price.

Another noteworthy point was that no one spontaneously put the price in relation to the benefits of the products. The price was described as “expensive” in isolation from any reflection on what they would receive in return, i.e. the ‘get’ components in Zeithaml’s (1988) terminology. This supports our choice of viewing the economical value dimension as a factor that negatively influences the perceived value. Whereas Sweeney and Soutar’s (2001) original framework turned the economical dimension into one positively affecting value by discussing it in terms of reduction of costs, the empirical material rather suggests that the respondents viewed the price as a factor to discuss as a stand-alone concept without regards for product benefits. This clearly reflects Zeithaml’s (1988) perspective of

the price as a 'give' component in the perceived value construct.

Moreover, four of the respondents explicitly said that they are not that price conscious at all, but that they rather buy the product they want regardless. Elisabet said: *"Generally, I'm actually pretty ignorant about prices when I shop for food or other consumables."* Lennart similarly stated: *"I never look at the prices, if I want a cucumber, I'll buy a cucumber"*. This low level of attention to price could suggest that the consumers are highly involved in the consumption of food products, since highly involved consumers are less likely to assess the price of a product (Zaichkowsky, 1988). However, it is more likely that the low price awareness is connected to the fact that many consumers generally are not aware of prices at all within grocery shopping (Dickson and Sawyer, 1990).

4.1.3 Extrinsic quality cues – Price

To investigate whether the respondents used price as an extrinsic quality cue, we asked if they thought that the price could be an indicator of the quality. This generated very mixed responses, from point blank no's to affirmative answers. The majority did think that the price could be an indicator of the quality, however the answers often came across as somewhat uncertain, at times even reminiscent of wishful thinking. Lena, for instance, answered: *"Yes, I suppose it must, or at least I hope so [...] Maybe not always"*. Emelie was more certain: *"If you buy an organic product, you think that it's something that is of better quality than a non-organic product, that's why you are ready to pay more for it"*. In contrast, Johan for instance, was one of several who did not believe in a connection between the price and the quality: *"No, I don't think so actually. [...] often it feels like it's more expensive because they don't sell it in the same quantities"*.

The varying responses we received reflect the inconsistency in previous research regarding whether or not consumers use price as an information cue for perceived quality. Zeithaml (1988) and Dodds et al. (1991) found that the importance of price as an information cue depends on other factors. For instance, the larger the price variations within the product category, the greater the importance of price as an information cue. In the case of organic

foods, which are everyday consumption goods, the price differences within the product categories are relatively small. For instance, the price difference between different kinds of apples, or different kinds of bread, is very low compared to categories such as perfume or fashion apparel, where prices vary greatly. Thus, the generally low price variations in the food product category can be one explanation for why some of our respondents did not necessarily perceive any relation between price and quality. Another explanation is the availability of other quality cues. Theory on this matter suggests that the greater the availability of different cues, the lower the relevance of the price as a predictor of quality (Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991). As organic foods are available in the store for the consumers to look at, touch and maybe even smell prior to purchase, the intrinsic cues can easily be assessed and thus used to give the consumers an idea of the product quality. Since intrinsic cues are usually more relevant indicators of quality than extrinsic cues (Szybillo and Jacoby, 1974), this can also be a reason as to why some of our consumers did not use price as a quality indicator.

As for those who did believe the price to be an indicator of quality, there is also theoretical support. As previously mentioned, the literature on price as a cue to quality is somewhat contradictory. For instance, in contrast to Szybillo and Jacoby (1974), Veale and Quester (2009) found that price was the most important cue to assess product quality for Brie cheese, even when intrinsic cues were highly available. Moreover, it should be noted that our study did not compare the importance of different cues. Rather, the respondents were discussing whether or not they perceived a relation between price and quality. While the importance of price as a cue may decrease in the shade of other cues (Zeithaml, 1988; Szybillo and Jacoby, 1974; Dodds et al., 1991), there is no indication that it would be rendered irrelevant. This might explain why several respondents thought that the price could be an indicator of quality, even though several other cues are available for organic food.

4.1.4 Perceived sacrifices and perceived risks

Aside from the price, most of the interviewees did not perceive other sacrifices related to the purchase of organic foods. However, a few mentioned other types of sacrifices. Filip stated: *"...you can't always buy organic food in the nearby supermarket"* and Vanessa said: *"It takes more time. Our little ICA-store doesn't have a large selection of organic food, so it takes some more planning to get what you want"*. These answers correspond to Zeithaml's (1988) description of non-monetary sacrifices in the form of time, energy and effort. Since some respondents stated that some organic products might not exist in their nearby store, it would demand extra energy and effort from them if they were to buy these organic products. The majority however could not think of any potential sacrifices. Arne argued: *"In the beginning, only certain stores had organic food, and then you had to look for it. Now practically all stores have an organic selection"*.

Regarding perceived risks, Filip said: *"one might have to sacrifice the lasting quality, since organic food is not full of preservatives [...] There is also a risk of fraud [...] that the producer says that they are producing organic food when they are not"*. The risk of fraud is an interesting point, which will be further explored with the questions about trust in the quality value-analysis section. However, the majority of our respondents could not think of any risks they associated with organic foods.

4.1.5 Findings in the economical dimension

While a few interesting thoughts were mentioned regarding non-monetary sacrifices and risks, these factors did not appear to be considered very relevant since the majority did not perceive any. Instead, price was clearly the prime factor affecting the economical dimension for our respondents. The use of reference prices was widely confirmed, and the price of comparable non-organic products was found to be the main reference price used by our consumers. Generally, it seemed easy for the respondents to express their opinions on the price. Even though organic products were considered *more* expensive, the respondents rarely said that it was *too* expensive. The estimation of the price appeared to be based on a combination of comparing objective prices, and a perceived price based on subjective

feeling. Whether or not the price could be perceived as an indicator of quality varied largely among the respondents. Even though some appeared more sceptical about it, the majority still considered, if usually not with strong conviction, that the price could indeed indicate the level of quality.

4.2 The quality dimension

The quality value category referred to “the utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of the product” (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 211). The discussions in this dimension mainly revolved around different cues that consumers use to predict the quality of organic food prior to the purchase. The quality dimension also covered quality attributes, such as how organic food is experienced during consumption and what beliefs the consumers have about credence quality attributes such as health and the production process.

4.2.1 Intrinsic quality cues

As mentioned in the economical analysis, the way the goods are perceived by the consumers in the store is an important cue to indicate quality. In contrast to price, which is an extrinsic quality cue, the appearance of the products is an intrinsic quality cue, i.e. one that is a part of the physical product (Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp 1995). When asking how our respondents perceive organic food when they see it in the store, some of them first thought of packaged goods and described the design. This is not actually an intrinsic quality cue but an extrinsic, as packaging design can be altered without changing the actual product (Northen, 2000), and we subsequently asked them of their opinion on unpackaged food instead. The answers on this question were rather vague, however two general themes could be identified among the answers. The first theme was that they did not perceive organic food to be very noticeable in the store. For instance, Vanessa said: *“I don’t think that [organic products] are sufficiently visible, they blend in too much among the other products”*. The second general theme in the answers was that organic food was perceived as looking somewhat unappealing. Filip said: *“...sometimes they even tend to be worse in appearance, since many of the organic product’s lasting quality is not as long as regular products. For*

example, I've often seen that organic salsifies are mouldy". There were also respondents who had not reflected at all on the appearance of organic food in the store and could not answer the question.

The reflections on how organic products are perceived in the store suggest that the intrinsic quality cues in organic food do not suffice to make it stand out among non-organic products. This was an expected finding, since it has been proven that organic food to a great extent lacks any particular intrinsic quality cues that can differentiate it from conventional food (Northen, 2000). The view of organic food as unappealing compared to other alternatives has also been acknowledged in previous research, as Northen (2000) stated that sometimes the intrinsic quality cues in organic food might even suggest worse quality than for comparable non-organic products. As intrinsic quality cues usually are the most prominent determinants of perceived quality (Szybillo and Jacoby, 1974), our respondent's vague estimation of the appearance of organic food could be an important factor explaining why they do not buy it more frequently.

4.2.2 Extrinsic quality cues – Certifications

Like the price, certifications are extrinsic quality cues rather than intrinsic, as they are not a part of the physical product. However, they can also contribute to the assessment of perceived product quality (Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp 1995). Since organic food is often sold at a price premium, extrinsic quality cues are important as quality indicators for organic food to successfully compete in the marketplace (Bonroy and Constantatos, 2008), and considering that the intrinsic quality cues in organic food did not seem to be very prominent as indicators of quality, we found the potential effects of extrinsic quality cues to be particularly interesting. Besides the price, certifications were the extrinsic cue we chose to focus on (see delimitations for motivation).

To investigate our occasional consumers' knowledge and awareness of certifications we asked them if they could name any symbols certifying organic food. The answers seemed to illustrate a certain confusion regarding organic labels, as most consumers either could not

think of any, or named certifications that are not specifically related to organic food. Five of the respondents did mention the organic certification KRAV, but only one was certain that it concerned organic food. Moreover, in order to see if the respondents *recognized* organic certification symbols, we brought two organic food products to each interview. The products were certified with the KRAV-label and the Euro Leaf, which is the European Union's label for organic food. When being exposed to the symbols, all of the respondents recognized the KRAV-label, and the majority connected it to organic production. However, there were some difficulties in describing what the KRAV-label actually implies. Filip reflected upon this: *"Well, I don't know. At some point, I've read what it [the KRAV-label] means, but that knowledge is gone"*. The Euro Leaf was less familiar to our consumers. Seven of the respondents recognized it, and many connected it to organic production, however they were somewhat uncertain about it. Vanessa reflected: *"This is some kind of international symbol, for the European Union [...] If a product would only have that symbol, it would not tell me that the product is organic"*. This general confusion regarding the organic certifications is clearly in line with the previous research within the area, where the understandings and knowledge regarding the organic certifications has proven low among consumers (see e.g. Padel and Foster, 2005; Hughner et al., 2007; Magnusson et al., 2001).

The respondents were next questioned about their confidence in KRAV and in the Euro Leaf. Here, all respondents except one affirmed that they experienced trust towards these certifications. Richard reflected on that paradox: *"Yes I think I have confidence [in these symbols]. It doesn't feel like some kind of scam [...] even though I can't swear that I know what they stand for. So at the same time, it feels a little bit like I'm fooling myself when I think about it - I don't know what they stand for and yet I trust them"*. Despite lack of specific knowledge, it appeared that our consumers mainly experienced a high level of trust towards the KRAV and Euro Leaf certifications. This implies that there is a positive value in these certifications as extrinsic quality cues to quality, and contradicts the findings of for example Padel and Foster (2005), who found consumers to largely distrust organic certifications. Despite the apparent trust though, the uncertainty when asked to mention any organic certifications indicates that the respondents did not show any notable interest in organic labels. The trust suggests that certifications can strengthen the quality perception and thus they appear to

be important extrinsic cues for organic food. However, the apparent disinterest for the certifications undermines some of their relevance.

4.2.3 Knowledge

We also wanted to investigate our respondents' knowledge about organic foods more generally, since such knowledge has an effect on how the intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues will be used in order to evaluate the quality (Rao and Monroe, 1988). When asked to describe what they perceive that it means that a product is organic, the most common reflection concerned the use of pesticides. Filip stated: *"I perceive that it means that you use few toxins in the production."* which is in line with Joachim: *"... you don't use any pesticides or chemical toxins..."*. Animal welfare was another commonly mentioned factor. Lena reflected: *"I also believe that the animals [...] of course they can still be placed in a factory and yet be organic, but you have a feeling that they walk on a ley [...] I have that picture, slightly idyllic, a back to nature feeling"*. Arne agreed: *"It's produced in a good way, in a more environmentally friendly way, from beginning to end."* It should also be noted that it was clear among our respondents that they did not seek to extend their knowledge since they did not actively search for information in the store or by reading the product information.

Generally, even though our respondents had some thoughts corresponding to organic production, no one gave a very comprehensive description of the aspects of organic production in their answer. In the theory, Chocarro et al. (2009) discuss how the level knowledge within a product category can affect consumer behaviour. It is stated that consumers with high knowledge are more likely to analyse information efficiently and not experience information overload. Moreover, they are better acquainted with the cues they need to use, intrinsic or extrinsic, in order to predict the quality of a product. On the other hand, consumers with low knowledge are more likely to reject all alternatives in a choice situation between products. Generally in our respondents' answers, we cannot find any indication that they sometimes reject all of the alternatives in a choice situation because of their lack of knowledge. At the same time, they do not seem to be acquainted with which cues they need to use in order to predict the quality of a product. In addition, the confusion

regarding the certifications could be seen as they experience something that resembles information overload. Therefore, it seems as though our respondents knowledge neither could be described as high or low, but rather moderate.

4.2.4 Quality attributes

Whereas quality cues can be ascertained prior to consumption, quality attributes cannot (Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp, 1995). Experience quality attributes are those that can be observed during consumption, such as taste. Credence quality attributes are those that may not be known even after trying the product, such as health benefits (Northen, 2000).

4.2.4.1 Experience quality attributes – Taste

To investigate the experience quality attributes of organic food, the respondents were asked to describe how they perceive organic food when they consume it. Mostly the subjects simply stated that they did not notice anything in particular, all of them using regular food as a point of reference. Jenny said: *“I don’t perceive any difference between organic food and regular food at all, to be honest”*. This was rather expected, seeing that the claim to organic production is a credence quality attribute rather than an experience quality attribute (Grunert et al., 2000; Bonroy and Constantatos, 2008). In other words, the actual production process is not observable to the consumers neither prior to, nor after consumption, but is rather something they have to take on faith or trust (Northen, 2000). Therefore, consumers should in theory not be able to tell an organic product from a non-organic based solely on taste (Grunert et al., 2000; Bonroy and Constantatos, 2008). However, three of the respondents stated that they did notice a difference with regards to experience quality attributes. It was mainly perceived to be positive: *“I think organic food in general tastes better. It doesn’t taste rushed, so to speak”*, Lena said. Filip’s opinion was more ambiguous: *“Some [organic] products I perceive as worse [...] Then there are also [organic] products that I perceive as better than regular products”*. The fact that some of the respondents perceived organic food to be different than regular food when consuming it, contrary to what the literature suggests, is interesting. It is not impossible that the perceived difference in taste experienced by some of our respondents is due to a

psychological effect of *knowing* that the food is organic, however whether or not that is the case is not of central interest to our purpose and we will not engage further in that discussion.

4.2.4.2 Credence quality attributes – Health

Health is a credence quality attribute since the consumers cannot be certain about potential health effects even after consumption (Northen, 2002). We chose health as the main credence quality attribute to investigate, since according to several researchers, perceived health benefits is one of the top reasons why consumers buy organic food (see Hughner et al., 2007). This was reflected in our own research, as all but one stated that they to some degree believe that there is a positive health aspect of consuming organic food. Lennart argued: *“That’s where I see the main benefit with organic food, that they try to reduce the toxins and artificial ways to produce it. Then there are other aspects of course [...] but first and foremost I think that it’s healthier”*. As potential health benefits can’t be observed, this again indicates a certain trust in the products. In reality, there is no research yet which actually proves that organic food is healthier than other food (Williams, 2002, in Hughner et al., 2007).

4.2.5 Findings in the quality dimension

As expected from previous research, (see Northen, 2000), the intrinsic quality cues of organic food were perceived to be either not particularly noticeable or even described as unappealing. This implies that extrinsic quality cues are important for organic food, in order to make it stand out from other products, and to add positive aspects to the perception of the quality (Zeithalm, 1988). Organic certifications are one example of an extrinsic quality cue (Bonroy and Constantatos, 2008), and our respondents appeared rather confused regarding these. This could potentially be explained by limited knowledge about them (Chocarro et al., 2009). However, even though the respondents were somewhat uncertain about the certifications, they mainly expressed a high level of trust in KRAV and the Euro Leaf. Thus, the indifference towards, or even low esteem of the appearance of organic food, might theoretically be somewhat compensated for by trustworthy organic certifications

functioning as extrinsic quality cues to indicate perceived quality. We did find that the trust was there among our respondents, but on the other hand, their interest for certifications was found to be quite low. This was also reflected in the low level of interest for searching for information.

Regarding attributes, it appeared that credence quality attributes are more relevant than experience quality attributes for organic food. The majority of our interviewees did not perceive a notable difference from regular products when consuming organic foods, suggesting a low level of differentiation of organic food with regards to experience quality attributes such as taste. However most of them believed in a connection between organic food and the credence quality attribute health. This reflects previous research (see Hughner et al., 2007), suggesting the importance of perceived health benefits as a motivator for buying organic food. Another indicator of the relevance of credence quality attributes was noticeable during the discussions of how organic food was believed to be produced. The production process is a credence quality attribute, as consumers have no way of knowing for certain how the actual production is carried out (Grunert et al., 2000; Bonroy and Constantatos, 2008). Yet, there seemed to be a general, rather convinced belief among our respondents, that the production of organic foods is exercised in a better way than for other products, with regards to the environment and concern for the animals. Credence quality attributes therefore seem to be very important for adding positive value to the perception of organic food.

4.3 The social dimension

The social dimension referred to “the utility derived from the product’s ability to enhance social self-concept” (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 211). In this section, the discussions revolved around potential social norms surrounding organic food, which were not found to be very prominent, and also if and how organic food can affect the identity.

4.3.1 Social norms

To investigate how the occasional consumers are influenced by social norms in their relation towards organic food, we asked them what they knew about their friends' opinions of buying organic and if it is something they speak about within their circle of acquaintances. All respondents but two indicated that they had some idea of what opinions the people around them held towards organic food, even if it sometimes came across as an uncertain estimation. Jenny reflected: *"Very varying, I think that some of them are very aware and try to buy organic as much as possible, while others think that it's a waste of money"*. Only three of the respondents affirmed that organic food sometimes comes up as a topic of conversation, and no one put it as a matter they frequently discuss. *"It happens I guess, but it's nothing we focus on, more in passing, or there may be a discussion once in a while"*, Richard told us.

Nine respondents did not consider organic foods to be something they talk about. Hence, it appears that such social norms are not very strong within the circle of acquaintances of our respondents. If norms surrounding organic food had been strong, it would probably have come up more often as a topic of conversation. This contradicts the research of Biel and Thøgersen (2007), who found that environmentally friendly behaviour to a high extent is influenced by social norms. However, their study also showed that when the environmentally friendly behaviour is costly, the relevance of social norms decreases. As organic food was described as relatively expensive by our respondents, this might explain the lack of social norms surrounding occasional consumption.

We also wanted to investigate if our respondents' views of organic food had been influenced by their friends. While three persons answered that their friends had not influenced their views, nine perceived that friends or family had indeed somehow influenced them, of which seven could name one particular person. Arne had been influenced by his daughter: *"She has said that I should buy organic. She has said that if I don't find any organic eggs, I shouldn't buy any eggs at all [...] A few years ago she said that I should demand more in the grocery store [...] 'Make demands!' she said"*. Richard mentioned that his sister had influenced how he thinks about organic food: *"Yes, maybe to some extent, that it's*

made me more positive or that I think more about it myself". Like Richard, the other interviewees did not give the impression that whatever influence their acquaintances had had on them was particularly strong.

Since many respondents had an idea of what people around them thought of organic food, and some had also been influenced by them, it indicates that social factors might have some relevance regarding the view on organic products. Yet, the opinions of others did not appear to be a very relevant consideration. For example, Richard's sister seemed to have influenced Richard to a certain extent, however not enough to convince him to become a regular organic consumer. Besides the influence of friends and family, Ruiz de Maya et al. (2002) noted that there can be social effects to grocery shopping as it takes place in public, where the product choices are visible to others. However, none of our respondents stated that they gave any thought on how other people view their choices in the store. That aspect of the social dimension was therefore proven irrelevant. Again, this might be a reflection of Biel and Thøgersen's (2007) finding that norms regarding environmentally friendly behaviour are less prominent when the behaviour is costly.

4.3.2 Identity

We also wanted to investigate a potential connection between attitudes and behaviour regarding organic food, and identity. Therefore, the respondents were first asked to give their reflections on how the attitudes and purchase frequency of organic food could influence their own identity. This is in line with the idea that products carry symbolic meanings that through consumption can be transferred from the good to the consumer's identity (McCracken, 1986). Of our twelve respondents, nine thought that it said something about them when choosing organic alternatives. Regarding what it said about them, the answers were generally related to awareness and consciousness. Filip argued: *"I'd probably feel better if I would buy more organic. I would feel like a better consumer, one who's taking a larger responsibility in the society"*. Jenny also thought that it could say something about her: *"I think that it says that you care about the environment"*. Hence, the idea that products carry symbolic meanings (McCracken, 1986), appears to apply also for organic foods. Yet, social

factors are generally more relevant to consumption for products that are highly visible (Sheth et al., 1991), and the consumption of organic foods is not something that is very visible to other people, unless it's displayed on purpose. Illustrating this, regarding whether organic food consumption could affect how other people see her, Jenny said: *"I guess it could, if I talked about it a lot and really showed that I made a conscious choice and bought organic products and talked about it. Then I think it would have affected how people see me"*.

Regarding how our respondents perceive people who buy a lot of organic foods, the answers were quite similar, referring again to concern for the environment and conscious shopping, but also concern for the individual health. Joachim answered: *"I guess I think that they are more knowledgeable [...] about their health [...] and also that they have a thought behind their consumption"*. Vanessa argued that such consumers are more conscious about their shopping: *"If I see someone who buys organic goods I think that it's a person who has really reflected on his or her purchase"*. Filip however, gave an example that it's not necessarily just positive connotations that are associated with convinced organic consumers: *"It's not always positive. That depends to a great extent on that I'm strict on how things taste [...] You have a slightly prejudicious picture that it's an environmentalist. So there can exist a negative aspect of it as well"*.

It appears that from our respondents' point of view, regular consumers of organic food are associated with certain personality traits, and they are described as environmentally conscious and engaged consumers, however not only in a positive sense. This was illustrated for example through Elisabet's description: *"They're a certain type of people, I think"*. The negative sense might be explained by the potential disassociation from such consumers, since our respondents did not seem to identify themselves with regular consumers. Social identity is constructed by a variable set of norms that are associated with a particular role within a reference group. A person will then act in accordance with what the reference groups that are relevant to them expect of them, in order to be able to validate that role as a part of his or her identity (Bicchieri and Muldoon, 2011). Since most of our respondents did not identify themselves with a reference group where organic consumption is expected of them (i.e. regular consumers), it appears that consumers could

be less motivated for increasing their share of organic consumption based on identity factors.

As for how they perceived non-consumers of organic food, the responses indicated that our respondents did not have a strong opinion about it. Lennart said: *“I don’t put any values in whether people buy organic or not, I haven’t even thought about it like that”*. This further contributes to the idea that our respondents do not identify themselves with a reference group where there are norms dictating that it is expected of them to buy organic food. On the other hand, having a pronounced attitude of being against organic food was something that our respondents disagreed with. Elisabet said: *“I think it’s a shame if they would be negative about it, that I can’t understand at all”*. Filip concurred: *“If a person has a pronounced negative opinion about organic products, then I would have a negative view of him”*. This again suggests that people’s consumption behaviour regarding organic food is not seen as very relevant social factor unless they actively voice their opinions and thus make them visible. Both Jenny and Arne however pointed out that can be a matter of what you can afford. Jenny stated: *“If you have a high income and no family, I definitely think you should buy organic. If not, I would probably judge that person [...] I guess I would think that it would be inconsiderate, egotistical maybe”*. This is in line with the findings of Biel and Thøgersen (2007), where it is suggested that when the environmentally friendly behaviour is costly, the relevance of social norms decreases.

4.3.3 Findings in the social dimension

Generally, the social dimension did not appear to be a very prominent value dimension for our respondents. Organic consumption was not found to be a common topic of conversation, and to a large extent, there was a predominant sense that whether people bought organic products or not was their own business. Even though some researchers, for example Ruiz de Maya (2011) have found indication that the consumption of organic food could be influenced by social factors, we did not find support for that. Instead, our findings indicated an absence of social norms regarding organic consumption. As previously mentioned, this might be because these products are seen as an expensive type of

environmentally friendly behaviour (Biel & Thøgersen, 2007), and because they normally are not very visible to other people (Sheth et al. 1991). However, several of the respondents could mention one person in particular who had influenced their thoughts of organic food, usually someone quite close to them who was described as a regular consumer. Thus, social influence is not irrelevant, but appears to rather stem from convinced individuals than general social norms.

Regarding how organic food could affect the identity, the main theme was that of being 'good', in an altruistic sense. Again however, the respondents did not give the impression that there was a strong correlation between consumption of organic foods and identity. The reason for this could be the lack of identification with a reference group where the consumption of organic foods is expected of them. Further contributing to this idea is that our respondents did not really have an opinion about non-consumers of organic food. However, if someone made a point out of showing and expressing their opinions on organic food, this could be seen as an either positive or negative thing. This was mostly detected in their opinions of non-consumers, where many mentioned that they perceived it as negative if a person did not buy organic food and made a point out of showing it.

4.4 The emotional dimension

The emotional value dimension referred to "the utility derived from the feelings or affective states that a product generates" (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 211). Here, questions were posed regarding both the emotions involved in the consumption of organic food and in the shopping situation of such foods.

4.4.1 Product emotions

Within the emotional value dimension, we wanted to investigate if there were any product or consumption emotions involved with organic food among occasional consumers. When asked to describe any emotions they might feel in the shopping situation, all but one respondent stated that they could experience an emotional effect of choosing organic products. Most of them related to the sense of doing a good thing, or contributing in some

way. Vanessa reflected: *“I guess it’s a feeling that you’re doing something good. But I’m not sure if that’s a feeling, that you’re trying to make a better choice”*. Arne’s sense of contribution was more specific: *“I care about the animals and I want them to be better off. So therefore it’s a feeling for the animals”*. Lena on the other hand, described her emotions as more related to imagining and anticipating the consumption experience, as she was one of those who perceived a difference between organic and non-organic foods taste-wise: *“Yes, since the food tastes better [...] Then you get pictures in your head of the dish you’re going to taste [...] You get positive pictures, so I guess it’s positive”*. Both Filip and Jenny discussed that emotions could be present when they shopped for food that they were supposed to cook for someone else. Jenny argued: *“Perhaps you buy more organic food when you’re having a party [...] You don’t want to offer things to other people which are not good for the soil [...] I guess it is a feeling of guilt”*. Other respondents were more hesitant to state emotions as an influence in the shopping situation. One of them was Lennart: *“Well, emotions, I think it’s more the spur of the moment, or well, the impulse”*. Lennart’s response again illustrate the overall impression that even though our occasional consumers to some extent described emotions related to organic food, the feelings did not appear to be particularly strong, long-lasting or elaborate.

There were no overwhelming displays of emotions among any of the respondents, and it did not appear that organic foods elicit very strong feelings among them. However, the general theme of the emotions described was clearly the sense of making a good choice, or doing something good for the environment, for the animals or for someone else. The feeling of doing a good thing, or getting a better conscience can be related to self-image and satisfaction. This indicates that the information processing when buying organic foods is of the highest level, the reflective one (Norman, 2004 in Desmet, 2010). This is not unexpected, seeing that our interviewees were not regular consumers of organic food. The lower levels of information processing, the reflexive and the routine ones, only involve automatic responses and emotions based on established expectations respectively (Norman, 2004 in Desmet, 2010). Thus, these two levels relate more to habitual, regular shopping. Since our occasional consumers only buy organic food on rare occasions it is likely that those product decisions evoke a reflective level of information processing and

subsequently more conscious, intellectually based emotions. However, this effect may decline if buying a certain organic product turns into a habit. In that case, the choice of the organic product requires less reflection and is therefore most likely processed on the same, routine information level as any other habitually chosen product. Building on Norman's (2004 in Desmet, 2010) theory of emotions as a result of information processing, it therefore appears that the direct emotional response to buying a certain organic product could be stronger for occasional consumers than for regular consumers. It is however not something we can verify for certain, as our empirical material does not include regular consumers of organic food.

4.4.2 Consumption emotions

In the case of experiencing emotions in the consumption of organic food, i.e. consumption emotions, the answers were somewhat mixed. Arne argued: *"No, I wouldn't say that. It isn't like I sit and enjoy that I've bought the organic eggs for instance"*. Lena, on the other hand, could experience emotions during consumption: *"It's a feeling when you know that pesticides are not used, you simply feel more sound"*. Jenny emphasized the environmental aspects: *"I guess that I feel that I do not harm the environment [...] I can actually experience some pride-feelings, that you've done that choice"*. Joachim on the other hand, was doubtful: *"No, or in that case it would be that I possibly might feel a bit more satisfied than otherwise"*.

The consumption emotion depends to a large extent on the type of product category concerned (Richins, 2007). Richins (2007) recognizes three different product categories; mundane products are routinely used and are unlikely to evoke emotions, extraordinary products are highly likely to create emotions, and conditional products are dependant on the consumer and the situation for evoking emotions. Food products in general are not extraordinary products, since extraordinary product are only purchased on rare occasions and often expensive. Hence, we can conclude both from the literature and our mixed responses that organic foods are not extraordinary products. Moreover, organic food does not seem to fit under the description of mundane products either, since many of our respondents actually could experience emotions in the consumption of such food. Instead,

organic foods seem to be conditional products, depending to a large extent on the consumer whether or not she or he will experience emotions.

According to the research of King and Meiselman (2010), emotional responses to a certain food product were found to be more positive among users than non-users of the product. As our respondents are occasional consumers and thus fall somewhere in between users and non-users, this could help explaining the mixed responses we gained. For those who did describe positive emotions, these largely appeared to stem from the belief that organic consumption was healthier and better for the environment. Thus, the positive emotions for organic consumption can be related back to our discussion about credence attributes.

4.4.3 Findings in the emotional dimension

In the shopping situation, nearly all of the respondents said that they could experience emotions, often related to the self-image and satisfaction. These are intellectual concepts, indicating that the information processing when buying organic foods is of the highest level, the reflective one (Norman, 2004 in Desmet, 2010). Still, even though nearly all could experience emotions in the shopping situation, the emotions were described rather vague and doubtful, suggesting that organic food does not elicit emotions to any larger extent among our respondents.

With regards to feelings during the consumption of organic food, the answers varied to a large extent. This inconsistency in the answers indicates that organic food is a conditional product where the emotions involved to a high extent depend both on the consumer (Richins, 2007). However, conditional products also depend on the situation, which we could not find any support for in our answers. In those cases where consumption emotions *were* described, they often related to credence attributes, for instance positive feelings based on that the organic food was perceived as healthier and/or better for the environment.

4.5 Involvement

Involvement refers to the feelings of interest and enthusiasm towards for instance a certain product category (Beharrell and Denison, 1995). This section concerned the level of involvement among our respondents, both for grocery shopping in general and for organic food. By analysing the concept from different approaches it became clear that our respondents have quite low involvement in their food-shopping.

4.5.1 Approach to grocery shopping

To investigate the general involvement in grocery shopping among our respondents, we asked them to describe their usual approach to it. It appeared that all of our occasional consumers normally enter the store with a preconceived general idea of what products they are going to buy. Lena said: *“I prepare a list at home on what I need, then I go and shop [...] I rarely do spontaneous purchases”*. Elisabet on the other hand, did not prepare a list, but instead said: *“I usually go to the same stores, so I know, I make the rounds and just look. And then I see, ‘oh right, that’s what I was going to buy’ when I look at the shelves”*. The interviewees reported that they do not deviate much from their pre-planned product purchases in order to consider other alternatives, and that they do not search much for information in the store.

As stated in the main body of research, grocery shopping has traditionally been considered a low involvement type of shopping situation (e.g. Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009; Beharrell and Denison, 1995; Kuenzel and Musters, 2006). Despite some research indicating otherwise (see Beharrell and Denison, 1995), our findings correspond more to the main theory, as the way our respondents described their grocery shopping approach indicated rather low levels of involvement. For instance, they tended to have a preconceived idea of what they are going to buy, whether manifested as a physical list or a mental notion of what to purchase, from which they rarely deviated notably. Moreover, shopping for food was generally described as a rather routine process which, according to Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2009), is typical for low involved consumers.

4.5.2 Comparing and evaluating alternatives

Concerning how the respondents compare different products in the grocery store, nine of the respondents stated that they do not make any active comparisons. Arne argued: *“I’d never hold two different alternatives in each hand and actively compare them. I see a product, then I go for it”*. Habit was also mentioned as an explanation for their lack of tendency to compare and evaluate products. For instance, Filip argued: *“Often, it’s based on habit [...] In fact, I don’t compare products that often. That’s probably the reason why I don’t buy organic food more often”*. The answers clearly indicated that whether it concerned choosing between products in general or between an organic and a non-organic product, the consumers in our study spent little to no time and energy on evaluation of alternatives. Since high involvement tends to make consumers prone to spend much time and effort into the information search and evaluation of alternatives (Drichoutis et al., 2007), this further supports the idea that our respondents are not highly involved. Regarding the habitual tendencies, that is also a typical behaviour for low involved consumers. Instead of spending time on evaluating and comparing potential alternatives, low involved consumers often just pick a product based on habit (Beharrell and Denison, 1995; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009), which seems to be the case with our respondents.

Corresponding to this, we also found indication that once the consumers had started choosing an organic variant of a particular product, they tended to stick with it. One of the persons who mentioned this was Johan: *“Whether it’s organic or not, well that depends on if I’ve switched to organic the first time I chose it”*. Hence, among some of the respondents, the habitual behaviour has also manifested with regards to organic products. This indicates that at some point in time, they have actually thought about their choice and evaluated the options. Joachim’s thoughts reflect this idea: *“But sometimes [...] there are products that I want to use for the zest, where I know that there are risks. For that kind of product I’ve ended up always buying the organic alternative. Then I don’t have to reflect upon it in the store. I think it turns into a habit”*. What might have stimulated these changes of habit is hard to know, as they could have been caused by many different factors, for instance that the

normally chosen product was out of stock, a spontaneous impulse, a successful marketing effort as described by Kotler (1997), or a temporary increase in involvement as will be discussed in 4.5.5.

4.5.3 Stimulus-centered involvement

Two ways of separating different kinds of involvement were described in the theory. The first one distinguishes between stimulus-centered, subject-centered and response-centered involvement (Finn, 1983). Here, we did not perceive response-centered involvement as relevant to our research, since it is focused on the involvement with the outcomes of the products. Thus we perceive it to be better corresponding to more durable products. Therefore, we have excluded it from our empirical analysis and focused on the other concepts. Moreover, the second way of separating involvement is between enduring and situational involvement (Houston and Rothschild, 1978, in Beharrell and Denison, 1995).

The stimulus-centered type of involvement refers to how the product in question can invoke involvement due to its characteristics (Finn, 1983). To investigate this, the interviewees were asked to describe if and how they considered organic food to be engaging. For the most part, the respondents' view on this indicated that organic products did not particularly evoke their interest. Joachim argued: *"They are just placed there on the shelf, you don't really see where they come from"*. It should be noted that the stimulus-centered type of involvement is difficult for a single consumer to reflect upon, considering that their general estimation of how involving a certain product is, is inevitably influenced by their own personal involvement in the product, i.e. their subject-centered involvement. For instance, a person who is not at all interested in football might describe football as an uninvolved sport, even though a large amount of people would probably disagree. Therefore, we noticed that it was difficult to discuss involvement in organic food with the individual participants on a stimulus-centered level - when asked to describe whether they thought organic food was engaging, they quite understandably just gave their own personal opinion on it. Arguably, stimulus-centered involvement is therefore better estimated through looking at a whole body of consumers, and investigating to what extent the

collective group appear to be involved in the product concerned. For example, if the majority of a population feel a personal (subject-centered) involvement in watching football, this would imply that football due to its characteristics is a generally involving sport (stimulus-centered involvement). It was apparent in our interviews that the subject-centered involvement in organic food was low among most of our respondents (which will be discussed more in detail below). This leads us to conclude that in the group we investigated, the stimulus-centered involvement regarding organic products was therefore also low.

4.5.4 Subject-centered involvement/Enduring involvement

As just mentioned, the subject-centered involvement appeared to be mainly low among the participants in our study. We consider enduring involvement, which refers to a long-standing, consistent involvement in a given type of product (Richins et al, 1992), to be quite similar to subject-centered involvement and have therefore chosen to analyse them conjointly. Describing their interest in organic food, nine of our twelve respondents did not perceive themselves to be very interested. Emelie said: *“Well, it is not a really big interest, it’s not as if I know all the certifications and know what all the symbols mean. So I guess I’m not that informed”*. This corresponds to Joachim’s answer: *“I’m not very interested in it. I have so many other things in life that demand time and interest”*. Hence, since the majority of our respondents have a rather low general interest in organic food, both their enduring involvement and subject-centered involvement could be described as low (Finn, 1983; Richins et al, 1992). Only three respondents stated that they felt interested in organic food, for example, Richard considered himself to be increasingly interested: *“I guess I think it gives me an opportunity to affect the environment in general, and perhaps also my own well-being, by choosing more organic products that are better for me”*. The reasons given for being interested were mainly related to environmental or health-related consequences of choosing organic products, hence just as for product emotions, involvement seems to also relate back to the credence quality attributes.

4.5.5. Situational involvement

To investigate potential situational involvement, we asked our respondents whether there was anything that could temporarily increase or diminish their interest in organic food. Three of the respondents stated that discussions about organic food could increase their interest, and Johan gave another example of social interaction that could have an influence on the interest in organic food: *“Well if someone is serving me something that tastes better than other things, surely I would buy that the next time”*. Media was commonly mentioned as an example of something that could both increase and diminish the respondents’ interest in organic food, depending on the nature or the reporting. Jenny described how it could increase her interest: *“Perhaps if it would be apparent in media [...] if the discussion would be brought up more in media, then I believe that I would become more interested”*. On the other hand, potential revelations that organic food is not better than other food or that it doesn’t meet the production standards the consumers expect from it, were mentioned by seven of the consumers as a factor that could reduce interest. Filip said: *“It could be different scandals around some certification which arose through some documentary or review program”*. Even though media was described as something that could temporarily increase or decrease the respondents’ interest in organic food, this does not necessarily mean that the following involvement in organic products is situational. According to de Matos and Veiga (2005), in situations with negative media publicity, it is rather the involvement with the information itself that is situational. On the other hand, the effect on the involvement for the concerned product is rather viewed as enduring.

4.5.6 Findings in involvement

The main conclusion following our analysis on involvement, also suggested in our findings from some of the value dimensions, is that occasional consumers in our study clearly were found to have a generally low involvement in organic food products. This low involvement also seems to apply to their grocery shopping in general, as the participants described their shopping behaviour as largely routine. They did not express any particular interest in organic food, and for the most part, they based their decisions on habits or impulses rather than actively comparing and evaluating alternatives. Their low interest in organic food was

noticeable from both the stimulus-centered and the subject-centered perspective, and correspondingly, their enduring involvement was also very low. However, based on the findings on situational involvement, there were some indication that media coverage, or discussions with other people were situations that potentially could increase their involvement.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter our conclusions with this thesis is presented. We will begin with a discussion of our findings, based on our purpose and theoretical framework. These findings will then be summarized into a conclusion. Finally, the theoretical and managerial contributions will be presented, along with suggestions for further research.

5.1 Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the perceived values and the level of involvement associated with buying organic food among occasional organic consumers in Sweden. Our method used for investigating this purpose was to conduct qualitative interviews with twelve respondents, in an age span from 24-64, from three different cities in Sweden. To investigate the perceived value, we used a framework inspired by Sweeney and Soutar (2001), depicting four different dimensions of perceived value; economical, quality, social and emotional value. It is important to remember that the economical dimension was the only one that concerned 'give' components, thus it had a negative effect on the perceived value estimation. The other three dimensions concerned 'get' components, which could add in a positive manner to the perceived value. Involvement was investigated both in terms of the respondents' general approach to grocery shopping as well as their involvement in organic food. In order to investigate that, we used the perspectives of both subject-centered and stimulus-centered involvement (Finn, 1983), and enduring and situational involvement (Houston and Rothschild, 1978 in Beharrell and Denison, 1995).

Our research suggests two potential explanations for why occasional consumers only purchase organic food rarely, namely low involvement and insufficient perceived value. While we recognize that other factors could also explain their lack of interest in organic food, for instance loyalty to other brands, we perceive these to be two important potential reasons why occasional consumers generally opt out on organic products.

When investigating the 'get' components in the perceived value-construct, it appeared that the most relevant dimension for adding value to organic food was the quality dimension. Regarding the quality attributes, on one hand, we found that the consumers mostly could not tell any difference between the taste of organic and non-organic food. Thus, the experience attributes did not seem to add much perceived value to the organic products. The credence attributes on the other hand, were notably emphasized by our consumers during the interviews. Most of them related organic production to environmental benefits, such as reduced use of toxins, or to better treatment of animals. Additionally, all but one believed that organic food to some extent had certain health benefits. Generally, there appeared to be a sense of trust that organic production actually is carried out in a better way. We also found that the trust towards organic certifications was high, even though our consumers rarely looked for them.

The social dimension did not appear to add much value to organic products. We did not find any indication of social norms surrounding organic food among our consumers, nor was organic consumption important for maintaining their social identity. Generally, the choice of whether or not to buy organic products was described as something individual and mainly private. In the emotional dimension however, we found some indication of value for organic products. Even though the emotions were not described as very strong, several consumers indicated that they felt that they were doing a good thing, or contributing a little when choosing organic products. The presence of emotions seemed to be more prominent when making the choice rather than during consumption, and the feelings mainly stemmed from the credence attributes, i.e. the positive emotions were related to perceived health- and environmental benefits of organic food.

On the other hand, there was also a 'give' side of the perceived value construct. Our research indicated that the price was a very relevant aspect affecting the value negatively. The price of organic food was unanimously described as expensive, and we also noted that it seemed easy for the respondents to express their opinions on the price. This suggests that the price is a factor they are well aware of regarding perceived value for organic food. The price was often automatically compared to that of non-organic products, and described as

'more expensive' rather than just 'expensive'. Even though this suggests that the price estimation is relative rather than absolute, it still implies that the price of organic products is perceived to be rather high.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to measure perceived value in concrete, reliable terms, and that was not our purpose with this research. Our findings suggest that organic products are perceived as being better for the health and environment, which could give the consumers some positive emotions and thus add positive value. However, the organic products were also generally found to be more expensive. We can therefore conclude that it is possible that the higher price cancels out the perceived benefits. This would result in a perceived value that is equal to, or lower than the perceived value for comparable non-organic products, which could be a reason why occasional consumers usually opt out on organic food.

We also found that the occasional consumers in our research were characterized by low involvement. They did not appear to hold much enthusiasm or interest for the products, nor did they spend time on information search and decision-making, and their shopping behaviour was described as mainly habitual. This low involvement applied to the respondents' approach to grocery shopping in general, and we found no indication that organic products would elicit a higher level of involvement than other products. Thus, the reason for not buying organic food could also be that the occasional consumers are not involved enough to even consider choosing organic alternatives rather than their habitual products when in the store.

We consider the relation between perceived value and involvement to be very interesting, and were surprised at the lack of previous research investigating these two concepts conjointly. It is established in the literature that the extent of the product evaluation in a category is linked to the level of involvement (e.g. Drichoutis et al., 2007). However, we have found no more extensive investigations on how involvement can affect the consumers' assessment of perceived value. Product decisions for low involvement goods are quick (e.g. Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009), and it is therefore hard to establish what moves through the consumers' heads. Thus we cannot with certainty establish whether it is low

involvement or insufficient perceived value that is the main cause for why occasional consumers opt out on organic products. Based on our research, we would however consider that both are highly likely to be contributing factors for why occasional consumers rarely buy organic products, and hope to see future research investigating the matter further.

5.2 Conclusion

Our research investigated perceived value and involvement for organic food products among occasional consumers. The findings suggest that both low perceived value and low involvement could be reasons why occasional consumers often opt out on organic food. The perceived value was investigated through a four-dimension framework, where findings indicate that the quality and emotional dimensions add some value to organic food, while the social dimension did not add any relevant value. The economical dimension affected the value negatively, and the price for organic products was considered to be relatively expensive. When investigating involvement, we found that it was low for grocery shopping in general, and equally low for organic products.

5.3 Theoretical contributions

The research we conducted concerned occasional consumers of organic food. Our focus on the Swedish market differentiates our study from previous research. Additionally, we have found no previous studies investigating the perceived value of organic food among occasional consumers in a holistic, multidimensional way. Nor does it seem to exist any research specifically investigating the involvement for organic food among occasional consumers. Our research therefore contributes to the body of research by providing a broad, comprehensive perspective on the perceived values and the involvement that occasional consumers experience for organic food.

Additionally, our study investigated perceived value based on contributions by several different researchers. The framework used for this thesis was mainly based on the four value dimensions described by Sweeney and Soutar (2001). However, it was further

developed to better suit our research, the main difference being that we viewed the economical value dimension as negatively influencing the perceived value. This was inspired by for instance the work of Zeithaml (1988). Therefore, the resulting framework used in this thesis offers a new way of investigating perceived value in a multidimensional perspective.

5.4 Managerial contributions

As occasional consumers do not buy organic food very frequently, from a managerial perspective it is interesting to know how to potentially increase their share of organic consumption.

Since the price of organically produced food is generally somewhat higher than that of regular food, it is important to also communicate a higher value to the consumers, so that they find the price difference justified. Our research of occasional consumers indicates that the main values they see in organic food are perceived benefits for the health and the environment. We also noted an emotional benefit of buying organic, as consumers felt that they were doing a good thing. These benefits are potential advantages of organic food compared to non-organic, which might be useful for marketers of organic food to keep in mind when communicating with the occasional consumers.

We also found that the trust in organic certifications is high among the occasional consumers, but that their interest for certifications, and for organic food in general, is rather low. Their involvement in organic food did not appear to differ much from their involvement in grocery shopping in general. The high trust in organic certifications could be a strong advantage, if the marketers managed to increase the interest for, and involvement in organic products. In order to do this, organic products need to be differentiated from non-organic ones. Again, this could be attempted by a focus on communicating health- and environmental benefits of organic food, as these were the ones the occasional consumers found most important.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

We consider occasional consumers of organic food to be a highly interesting group to study, both from a managerial and from a theoretical standpoint. They are a large group of consumers with a positive attitude towards organic food, and can therefore be considered potential buyers, provided that marketers succeed in targeting them efficiently. Also, the discrepancy between their attitudes and their behaviour render them interesting for studies on consumer behaviour. Despite this, we found the body of literature investigating occasional consumers of organic food to be rather meagre. As our own research were focused on mapping the bigger picture for the perceived values and the involvement among occasional consumers of organic food, we see several areas that could be investigated more specifically.

- In this thesis, we only investigated certifications and price as extrinsic cues. In order to gain a more comprehensive knowledge regarding how occasional consumers assess the quality of organic foods pre-purchase, future research could focus on other extrinsic cues, such as packaging and level of advertising.
- In order to understand what implications involvement has on consumer behaviour, another area for future research could be what effect the level of involvement has on the perceived value.
- Since this thesis is qualitative and therefore only covers a small sample of occasional consumers, in order to get a more comprehensible picture of this consumer group, quantitative research could also be useful.
- Since the data collected for this thesis consisted of interviews, another suggestion for future research is an observational research strategy, aiming to study if the in-store behaviour of these consumers is corresponding to how they describe it.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – The interview guide

Economical

- Hur upplever du priset på ekologiska varor?
- Hur upplever du priset på ekologiska varor jämfört med icke-ekologiska varor?
- Anser du att priset på ekologiska varor säger något om kvaliteten?
- Vad anser du att det är man betalar för när man väljer ekologiska varor?
- Anser du att det krävs extra uppoffringar för att kunna handla ekologisk mat?
- Finns det några risker du förknippar med att köpa ekologisk mat?

Quality

- Hur upplever du ekologiska varor när du ser dem i affären? Vad lägger du märke till?
- Hur upplever du ekologiska varor när du konsumerar dem?
- Känner du till någon/några symbol/symboler som certifierar ekologisk mat i Sverige? Vilka?
 - Vad upplever du att dessa certifieringar innebär?
 - Hur skulle du beskriva ditt förtroende för denna/dessa symbol/symboler?
- Vad anser du om produktinformationen på ekologiska varor?
- Vad uppfattar du att det innebär att en produkt är ekologisk?
- Hur upplever ekologiska varor ur ett hälsoperspektiv?
- Vad har du för uppfattning om hur ekologiska produkter är producerade?

Social

- Beskriv hur ni pratar om ekologisk mat i din bekantskapskrets?
- Vilka åsikter tror du att din bekantskapskrets har om att handla ekologiskt?

- Upplever du att dina vänners åsikter kring ekologisk mat har påverkat din egen? I så fall, hur?
- Upplever du att det säger något om dig själv om du väljer ekologiska alternativ? I så fall, vad?
- Reflekterar du över hur folk uppfattar dina inköp i affären? I så fall, hur?
- Anser du att konsumtion av ekologiska varor påverkar hur andra uppfattar dig som person? På vilket sätt?
- Om du inte alls handlade ekologiska varor, tror du att det skulle påverka hur du uppfattas som person? På vilket sätt?
- Hur uppfattar du en person som handlar mycket ekologiskt?
- Hur uppfattar du en person som inte handlar ekologiskt?

Emotional

- Upplever du några känslor med att handla ekologiskt? På vilket sätt?
- Upplever du några känslor med att konsumera ekologiskt? På vilket sätt?
- Upplever du att du *bidrar* med något om du handlar ekologiskt? På vilket sätt?
- Beskriv hur känslor påverkar din konsumtion av ekologiska livsmedel.

Involvement

- Hur söker du information om de olika produktalternativen när du gör dina val i matvaruaffären?
- Hur jämför du olika produkter när du gör dina val i matvaruaffären?
- Hur går du tillväga när du gör dina livsmedelsinköp?
- Beskriv hur du reflekterar över om du ska välja ekologiska livsmedelsprodukter?
- Beskriv hur ekologiska livsmedel engagerar dig?
- Beskriv hur du upplever att du personligen är intresserad av ekologiska livsmedel?
- Finns det något som tillfälligt kan öka ditt intresse för ekologiska livsmedel?
- Finns det något som tillfälligt kan minska ditt intresse för ekologiska livsmedel?

Appendix 2 – Article

(Intended for Financial Times, UK)

Why do consumers opt out on organic food?

Most consumers have been found to have a positive attitude towards organic food, yet only a small group of dedicated consumers buy it regularly. The large majority instead consists of occasional consumers, who only choose organic on rare occasions. A recent Swedish study puts the occasional consumers of organic food in the spotlight.

The concern for the environment is an issue that has been rooted deep in the discourse over the last couple of years, and the interest shows no sign of declining. Consumers in the Western world are increasingly aware of the consequences of their consumption patterns, and several industries place heavy focus on the development of a more environmentally sustainable consumer solutions. In the food business, organic alternatives are taking up more and more space on the shelves and in Europe, the market for organic foods has had an annual growth rate of approximately 10% in the previous years. But while the organic food sector is growing, it is mainly a smaller, devoted customer segment that pushes up the sales. On the UK market, it has been found that 23% of the consumers are accountable for 84% of the total sales of organic foods. Meanwhile, there is a large group of consumers who mainly tend to stick with the regular alternatives.

A recent Swedish study from Lund University takes a closer look at these so called occasional consumers, who have a positive attitude of organic food and yet do not buy it frequently. Two potential reasons for why they opt out on organic food are suggested. First of all, organic products were found to be perceived as expensive compared to regular products. The study investigated potential value-adding benefits of organic food to see if these could compensate for the price difference. It appeared that the occasional consumers could experience some benefits of organic products, both related to the environment and to their own personal health. This in turn inspired feelings of making a good choice, giving the organic consumption an added layer of emotional benefits. However, while these findings indicate that occasional consumers do indeed see an added value with organic food, they were simultaneously found to be very aware of the price difference. This indicates that the price may cancel out the benefits associated with organic food, thus resulting in an insufficient perceived value for the consumers.

The study also investigated the involvement of the consumers when shopping for food products. Results indicated a low level of involvement among the occasional consumers, not only for organic products, but for grocery shopping in general. Low involvement makes consumers less prone to spend time on comparing and evaluating alternatives, thus they are more prone to make decisions based on habit and previous experience. Therefore, it is possible that the occasional consumers don't even consider the organic alternatives in the store, but rather tend to stick with the products that they are used to. Low involvement was

therefore suggested as another potential reason why the occasional consumers don't put their money where their at least generally positive attitude is.